

FEMINISM: ONE ASPECT OF FOURTH WORLD LITERATURE & CULTURE

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Abstract

Literature and literary discourses are located in essential ways to place. Myriad opinions and theoretically updated notions too seem determined to state the same. However textual explorations carrying place specific connotations and denotations have found an interactive relation between place and literature. The co-opted mutual dependency procures space to creative quests yearning to conceptualise to cater to innovative ideas in literature. It further strengthens nostalgic resonances identifiable through literary discourses streamlining the relation of place/local with literature. If literature invokes place, the signifiers embedded in textual representations in relation to place/local supply ample voice/to voice for the place/local. India writes in English to announce its articulating abilities in a medium, initially exported to its territory to be experimented upon. India laboured/s through its literary quests to acknowledge the significance of English not only for Britain but for all. The requisite signifiers signifying prominence to local are primarily the cultural dynamics aligned to identify a particular culture assigning relevance to primary quests and concerns otherwise secondary to global. As a result writers are continuously multiplying their range to represent their legitimacy through localisation in literature from periphery to core of academia.

Key words: English, India writes, Local, Localisation, Literature, Place, Narratives, and Discourse

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Feminism is the name given to a political movement that gathered momentum in 1960s giving a call for 'liberation' of women from certain forms of gender-based discriminations that deprived women of the opportunities for self-promotion and equality with men simply because they were women. But the awareness that women are unjustly discriminated against and their inferior status against men has been deliberately constructed can be traced much earlier. This phenomenon of the twentieth- century is a crystallization of all forms of social-political and psychological awareness that patriarchal society with its various structures and organisations is essentially hostile to women's freedom and interested in keeping them subjugated in order to perpetuate the patriarchal power and authority.¹

The various feminisms, however, share certain assumptions and concepts that underlie the diverse ways that individual critics explore the factor of sexual difference and privilege in the production, the form and content, the reception, and the critical analysis and evaluation of works of literature.

The basic view is that Western civilization is pervasively Patriarchal –ruled by the father that is, it is male-centered and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic. From the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophic writings to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm, hence as an Other, or kind of non-man, by her lack of the identifying male organ, of male powers, and of the male character traits that are presumed, in the patriarchal view, to have achieved the most important scientific and technical inventions and the major works of civilization and culture. Women themselves are taught, in the process of being socialized, to internalize the reigning patriarchal *ideology* and so are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination.²

It is widely held that while one's sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender—of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in Identity and behavior—are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir put it, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ... which is described as feminine” By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative; the feminine, by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional.

The further claim is that this patriarchal ideology pervades those writings which have been traditionally considered great literature, and which until recently have been written mainly by men for men. Typically, the most highly regarded literary works focus on male protagonists—Oedipus, Ulysses, Hamlet, Torn Jones, Faust, the Three Musketeers. Captain Ahab, Huck Finn, Leopold Bloom—who embody masculine traits and ways of feeling and pursue masculine interests in masculine fields of action. To these males, the female characters, when they play a role, are marginal and subordinate, and are represented either as complementary to or in opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. Such works, lacking autonomous female role models, and implicitly addressed to male readers, either leave the woman reader an alien outsider or else solicit her to identify against herself by taking up the position of the male subject and so assuming male values and ways of perceiving, feeling, and acting. It is Mien held, in addition, that the traditional aesthetic categories and criteria for analyzing and appraising literary works, although represented in standard critical theory as objective, disinterested, and universal, are in fact infused with masculine assumptions, interests, and ways of reasoning, so that the standard selection and rankings, and also the critical treatments, of literary works have in fact been tacitly but thoroughly gender-biased.

A major interest of feminist critics in English-speaking countries has been to reconstitute the ways we deal with literature in order to do justice to female points of view, concerns, and values. One emphasis has been to alter the way a woman reads the literature of the past so as to make her not an acquiescent, but (in the title of Judith Fetterley's book published in 1978) *The Resisting Reader*: that is, one who resists the author's in and design in order, by a "revisionary rereading," to bring to light and to counter the covert sexual biases written into a literary work. Another prominent procedure has been to identify recurrent and distorting "Images of women," especially in novels and poems written by men. These images are often represented as tending to fall into two antithetic patterns. On the one side we find idealized projections of men's desires (the Madonna, the Muses of the arts. Dante's Beatrice, the pure and innocent virgin, the "Angel in the House" that was represented in the writings of the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore). On the other side are demonic projections of men's sexual resentments and terrors (Eve and Pandora as the sources of all evil, destructive sensual temptresses such as Delilah and Circe, the malign witch, the castrating mother). While many feminist critics have decried the literature written by men for its depiction of women as marginal, docile and subservient to men's interests and emotional needs and fears, some of them have also identified male writers who, in their view, have managed to rise above the sexual prejudices of their time sufficiently to understand and represent the cultural pressures that have shaped the characters of women and forced upon them their negative or subsidiary social roles; the latter class is said to include, in selected works, such authors as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Samuel Richardson, Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw.³

Joan Kelly in her book *Women, History and Theory* traces a solid, four-hundred-year-old tradition of women thinking about women and sexual politics in European society before the French Revolution: However, two names figure most prominently in any discussion of the

powerful defence of women's struggle for equality John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* and, Mary Willstone craft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Both books revealed the utter injustice in keeping women oppressed by advancing arguments that were essentially biased and exposed the pretentious nature of social constructions. Mill believed that 'the liberty of the individual is absolutely necessary for the development of the society' and viewed women's freedom as an essential condition. He pleaded for their right to enter any profession or trade and their right to vote. Mill regarded family as a corrupting influence rendering girls miserable and abject and boys selfish. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the earliest 'crusades for the emancipation of women devoted all her life and energies to protest against institutions that crushed women's identity. She strongly put forward that women were exploited and victimized every where by virtue of their sex which was sought to be supported by gender-biased men construction of false scholarly pleas. On her ideas it is not difficult to find influences of the thoughts of William Godwin, a radical thinker whom she married and John Locke whose commitment to reason and 'natural behaviour' gave strength to her opinions. As one critic says 'The underlying logic runs like this: all people—regardless of class or gender—are equally open to reason and therefore have an equal right to be treated rationally'. She was deeply concerned about their rights and education which women must fight to possess—"I wish earnestly to point out in what true dignity and happiness consists, I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both or mind and body [and]to show that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being regardless of the distinction of sex". Undoubtedly these two thinkers brought into focus women's problems in a forceful manner giving a new perception of realities and pressing upon all the need to review the matter drastically. The third significant work is Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* which constitutes two-part lecturer delivered by her in two colleges in Cambridge. She dwells at length upon various things that a woman in English society has been deprived of simply because she is woman, even the entry to the library of the university, if she is not escorted 'properly' ! It is this image of woman's dependence on man for almost everything sustained by the society which she protests against. It is a beautiful book written in a style that gives expression to the submerged agonies of a wounded self Woolf's book represents the perception that "there 'is something wrong with society's treatment of women". With time feminism became a potential ideological-political force revealing as its strength a number of diverse ideologies and theories that represented various angles of looking at the problem. From being a strictly political movement, it offered a new unfettered scope to probe all the relevant social aspects, and psychological dimensions. Virginia Woolf's book underlines the acute sense of being excluded and marginalized which is what becomes a big theme with the feminist writers of the period following 1960s. The names of Lisa Tuttle, Alison Jaaear, Elaine Showalter, Donne I lawxhurst, Sue Morrow, fleleneCixons, Susan Unbar, Charlotte Bunch, Kate Millen. Julia Kristeva. TorilMoi, Alice Jardine, Karen Offen and Cynthia Ozick, come to mind when one thinks of the great things being done to change radically our perception of woman's place in society and her life. Particularly active has been the period after 1970s when revolutionary transformations were being inaugurated in philosophical and sociological fields in the wake of post-modernist thinking leading to changes in literary theories too. It is not

surprising that these larger changes came to influence feminism also, adding to its strength and providing newer insights, expanding its own and making it more pluralistic; there emerged many forms of feminism—the Marxist, the Derridaean the post- structuralist, the Lacanian, the psychoanalysis. the hermeneutical, the linguistic, the new-historicist. and so on.

Literary Feminism

Feminist literary criticism has found tremendous strength and impetus in various social, political and cultural movements that originated in our times and exercised decisive influence on our thinking. With culture studies enabling a freer and more liberal interaction between disciplines of different kinds, it was inevitable for the literary critics also to put major literary works and characters under close scrutiny from the feminist view point. B.K. Das says, "Feminist literary criticism primarily responds to the way woman is presented in literature". As Elaine Showalter's essays make it clear, there are two ways of presenting woman in literature: *i)* menwriter's portrayal, and *ii)* women writer's portrayal. In the latter also the predominant ideological constructs influence the writer's perceptions and choices of narrative. One has to read the earlier texts very closely and cautiously. Though Simone de Beauvoir is regarded to have pioneered the feminist standpoint in her *The Second Sex*, today feminist criticism has shown remarkable maturity and diversification. It is characterized by such different stances as vociferous aggressiveness to everything male. to noisy assertion of total identity by cutting woman off completely from the surroundings and the past (because they all reflect 'male constructs'), to generous concessions and a call to ally with the larger social discourse (because a downright offensive or isolationism won't do). All these attitudes get reflected in the divisions and 'schools' in which today's literary feminism is divided. Thus one sees a Marxist brand of feminism, a structuralist feminism, a psychoanalytical (Freudian and Lacanian) feminism, a post-structuralist feminism as well as a linguistic feminism. They only point to a rich and very active playground of ideas and theories that literary feminism has become. It explores and examines all aspects of the socio-cultural constructs in which women get portrayed in literary works, and seeks to deconstruct them in order to bring to the fore the systematically evolved genderist/sexist biases.

Important among modern critics are Katherine R. Roger (*The Troublesome Helpmate*. 1966), Mary Ellmann (*Thinking About Women*, 1968), Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*. 1969), Pam Morris (*Literature and Feminism: An Introduction*, 1993), Helen Cixous and Catherine Clement (*The Newly Born Woman* La Jenne Nee. 1975), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, 1979), Toril Moi, (*Sexual/ Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 1985). Elaine Showalter (*Women's Liberation and Literature*, 1971), Elizabeth Wolgast (*Equality and Rights of Women*, 1980). Julia Kristeva. (*Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. 1980) and a few others.

Two Modes

Feminist criticism can prosper on two solid modes: i) evolving an ideological base in the role of **woman as a reader** in order to give a woman- specific interpretation to texts; ii) feminist or **woman as writer** which is also called gynocritique enabling us to create experiences. categories and structures of writing which have been deliberately supported by patriarchal enterprises.

Women as a reader is a liberating act. In the words of Adrienne Rich it facilitates our understanding of how woman has been trapped in subtle constructions of language. genre, characterization etc. by men. Such a reading breaks all such constructions. It is an invigorating experience moving in ever-widening circles. As Annette Kolodny says; this act treats texts from a new angle. identifying a sub-text that has lain hidden, and releasing significances and meanings which remained suppressed within various literary—cultural discourses. Kolodny privileges this exercise which she calls 'playful pluralism'. but Showalter fears that this might make us ignore the need to build up a 'basic conceptual model'. She says that the feminists' job is not just to indulge in re-interpretive acts but our sights are set beyond, on creating a theory that would clearly define our tasks for us. Only from that position can we address the basic feminist issues and understand the place and position of women.

The Issue of Textuality and Sexuality

One of the major jobs for feminists is delineated by Sandra Gilbert who says that it is necessary to see feminist endeavour in relation with larger critical-theoretical happening, and decode and demystify the hidden issues. The relation between textuality and sexuality that has been comprehensively examined by new critical strategies, needs to be reviewed and revised by women. This, then, justifies the forays of the feminists in psychoanalytical areas. Since modern literary theories are dominated by male force, it is necessary to 'revise' and 'correct' them. There is a tendency among the feminists to *feel* that once they get the approval of the prominent male critics they become prominent themselves. The reason why the 'neofeminist' reformists have stopped being radical is that they have been in a way joined by the 'male masters'.

Showalter, opening the debate, calls upon the feminists to decide whether they wish to be mere revisionists or do more fundamental work of building up a viable revolutionary theoretical framework that would truly facilitate articulation of women's expression. She is not pleading for a fatal separation from the dominant criticism; yet the focus should always be on building up of a strong feminist critical theory that would account for all the functions connected with literary texts.

Defining Feminism:Gynocritics and Women's Text

A number of feminists have concentrated, not on the woman as reader, but on what Elaine Showalter calls gynocriticism — that is, a criticism which concerns itself with developing a specifically female framework for dealing with works written by women, in all aspects of their production, motivation, analysis, and interpretation, and in all literary forms, Including journals

and letters. Notable books in this mode include Patricia Meyer Spacks' *17:e Female imagination* (1975), on English and American novels of the past three hundred years; Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), on major women novelists and poets in England, America, and France; Elaine Showalters *A Literature of Their Own: British Women; Novelists from: Brontë to Lessing* (1977); and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). This last book stresses especially the psychodynamics of women writers in the nineteenth century. Its authors propose that the "anxiety of authorship," resulting from the stereotype that literary creativity is an exclusively male prerogative, effected in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected a monstrous counter-figure to the idealized heroine, typified by Bertha Rochester, the madwoman in Charlotte Brontës *Jane Eyre*; such a figure is "usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage."

One concern of gynocritics is to identify what are taken to be the distinctively feminine subject matters in literature written by women—the world of domesticity, for example, or the special experiences of gestation, giving birth, and nurturing, or mother-daughter and woman-woman relations—in which personal and affectional issues, and not external activism, are the primary interest. Another concern is to uncover in literary history a female tradition, incorporated in subcommunities of women writers who were aware of, emulated, and found support in earlier women writers, and who in turn provide models and emotional support to their own readers and successors. A third undertaking is to show that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experience, or "subjectivity," in thinking, feeling, valuing, and perceiving oneself and the outer world. Related to this is the attempt to specify the traits of a "woman's language," or distinctively feminine style of speech and writing, in sentence structure, types of relations between the demerits of a discourse, and characteristic figures and imagery. Some feminists have turned their critical attention to the great number of women's domestic and "sentimental" novels, which are noted perfunctorily and in derogatory fashion in standard literary histories, yet which dominated the market for fiction in the nineteenth century and produced most of the best-sellers of the time; instances of this last critical enterprise are Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) on British writers, and Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (1978). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have described the later history of women's writings in *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth century*.⁴

American and English critics have for the most part engaged in empirical and thematic studies of writings by and about women. The most prominent feminist critics in France, however, have been occupied with the "theory" of the role of gender in writing, conceptualized within various *past structural* frames of reference, and above all Jacques Lacan's reworkings of Freudian *psychoanalysis* in terms of Saussure's linguistic theory. English-speaking feminists, for example, have drawn attention to demonstrable and specific evidences that a male bias is encoded in our linguistic conventions; instances include the use of "man" or "mankind" for human beings in general, of "chairman" and "spokesman" for people of either sex, and of the pronouns "he" and "his" to refer back to ostensibly gender-neutral nouns such as "God,"

"human being," "child," "inventor," "author," "poet". The radical claim of some French theorists, on the other hand, whatever their differences, is that all Western languages, in all their features, are utterly and irredeemably male-engendered, male-constituted, and male-dominated. Discourse, it is asserted, in a term proposed by Lacan, is phallogocentric; that is, it is centered and organized throughout by implicit recourse to the phallus (used in a symbolic rather than a literal sense) both as its supposed "logos," or ground, and as its prime signifier and power source. Phallogocentrism, it is claimed, manifests itself in Western discourse not only in its vocabulary and syntax, but also in its rigorous rules of logic, its proclivity for fixed classifications and oppositions, and its criteria for what is traditionally considered to *be* valid evidence and objective knowledge. A basic problem *for* the French theorists is to establish the very possibility of a woman's language that will not, when a woman writes, automatically be appropriated into this phallogocentric language, since such appropriation is said to force her into complicity with linguistic features that impose on females a condition of marginality and subservience, or even of linguistic nonentity.

To evade this dilemma, Helene Cixous posits the existence of an Incipient "feminine writing" (*écriture féminine*) which has its source in the mother, in the stage of the mother-child relation before the child acquires the male-centered verbal language. Thereafter, in her view, this prelinguistic and unconscious potentiality manifests itself in those written texts which, abolishing all repressions, undermine and subvert the fixed signification, the logic, and the "closure" of our phallogocentric language, and open out into a joyous freeplay of meanings. Alternatively, Luce Irigaray posits a "woman's writing" which evades the male monopoly and the risk of appropriation into the existing system by establishing as its generative principle, in place of the monolithic phallus, the diversity, fluidity, and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure and erotic functioning of the female sexual organs and in the distinctive nature of female sexual experiences. Julia Kristeva posits a "chora," or prelinguistic, pre-Oedipal, and unsystematized signifying process, centered on the mother, that she labels "semiotic." This process is repressed as we acquire the father-controlled, syntactically ordered, and logical language that she calls "symbolic." The semiotic process, however, can break out in a revolutionary way—her prime example is avant-garde poetry, whether written by women or by men—as a "heterogeneous destructive causality" that disrupts and disperses the authoritarian "subject" and strikes free of the oppressive order and rationality of our standard discourse which, as the product of the "law of the Father," consigns women to a negative and marginal status.

Four Models

It is possible to understand feminist writings with the help of Four Models that Showalter establishes indicating the female difference: Biological, Linguistic, Psychanalytic and Cultural. each seeking to 'define and differentiate the qualities of the woman writers and the woman's text.

Woman's Writings and Woman's Body

Biological difference between man and woman has been the ground on which differential constructions have been built throughout man's history. Scholars in the past found an easy way to propound the theories of women's weakness and inferiority (both physical and mental), need for man's protection and patronage, segregation of women from certain domains and activities and various other cleverly devised structures of exploitation. "Victorian physician believed that women's physiological functions diverted about twenty percent of their creative energy from brain activity"

Making biological difference a base once again feminists reverse the theories, rejecting the woman-as-subordinate construction and use this base for erecting massive theoretical framework that privileges women's experiences. The crucial difference is that today's biologically oriented feminists wish to regard female body as a resource, of creativity. extending its range from limitations imposed on them by society. Rejecting all the cultural and psychological assumptions that woman's biological difference handicaps her in her creative writings too, Gilbert, Gubar and Auerbach point out that the difference rather should be considered a special asset denied to men. Her physical difference enables her to experience, feel and think differently. "In order to live a fully human life, we require not only control of our bodies we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicalitySo there is a kind of celebration of woman's body as a source of imagery in writers like Alicia Ostriker". This wonderful sense of living and feeling has unfortunately remained mute in men's literature, even women were denied expression to their distinctive feeling. Gynocritics must bring to light these mute or dark areas and establish them as no less inferior to those of men. Naturally, such writings make body a source of imagery, rejecting all prescriptive taboos of the male discourse.⁵

Women's Writing and Language

This model seeks to find out whether men and women use language differently. The differences that are seen in various aspects. biological, social, cultural. etc. are ultimately embedded in language. Feminists of different hues and colours have all shown interest in language, some of them seeing a deliberate sexist language or "oppressor's language" getting evolved. Scholars like Carolyn Burke find the shaping of linguistic categories, vocabulary and usage very potential in creating consciousness and vision of reality. It is for this reason that French feminists give linguistic study priority over other considerations, and emphasize need to develop 'woman's language'. Using men's language is like using a foreign language. "Thus has grown the revolutionary idea of parole de femme strongly advocated by Annie Leclerc aimed at making a final breach with the "dictatorship of patriarchal speech".

It will not do to speak as men do, **to use** their language. Xaviere Gauthier and others observe that at the moment women have to choose between remaining mute and out of the historical process. and speaking in the language created by men and thus joining them. The need is to create a third option, a language that would disrupt male-dominated speech. This would deconstruct the phallogocentric structures.

Since ancient times anthropologists, sociologists and cultural scholars have been interested in woman's language. Herodotus and later on Robert Graves **The White Goddess** discovered that women within the dominant discourse were found to invent a secret language of their own, which was not shared with men. This has created the myth of woman's mystique.

There is a parallel between the problems facing the newly independent colonies and that of women. After independence the colonies must choose is psychologically closer. Women have also now before them the choice of creating a language that would be nearer their personal identity. This political gesture, though easy to explain, poses one of the several problems riddled with difficulties while the newly independent colonies have a choice between two or more clearly distinct languages, the question of 'women's language' concerns with evolving a 'different style'. Since sexes are not preprogrammed to develop structurally different linguistic systems, the issue involves factors such as style, semantics, strategies, devices, images, etc. A significant work in this area is Mary Halls **The Way Women Write**. Writers like Virginia Woolf commented sharply upon the traditional linguistic taboos imposed upon women and society's feeling of outrage if women spoke as they felt. It is this reality which is at the bottom of the issue regarding for women's language.

Women's Writings and Women's Psyche

The most essential and basic difference between men and women is perceived in psyche –“in the relation of gender to the creative process”. It is shaped by the body, the growth of language, and by 'sex-role socialization'. French feminists have centred their studies on Freudian, neo-Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories, seeking to uncover the role of Oedipal phase and fantasy about genitals. Cora Kaplan, for instance, finds the phallus as a signifier central in language. These theories see women at disadvantage for which psychoanalysis has the term 'lack'. A monumental work in this field is **The Madwoman in the Attic** by Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar who accept Harold Bloom's Oedipal model that shows woman as displaced and disinherited in the continual history of fight between fathers and sons. In the females of the nineteenth-century can be found many allusions, suggestions and symbolic references to the latent conditions of isolation, loneliness and sickness. Miller counters Freudian theory which asserts that women's unsatisfied desires and dreams are mainly erotic and these desires and dreams shape their texts and plots, whereas male desires and dreams are egoistic. Miller feels such distance is genderist and gynoeritical study reveals "a repressed egoistic/ambitious fantasy in women's writing as well as in men's". Apart from Freud Jung's theories and Eriksonian perceptions have also been studied by critics like Annis Pratt, Ann Douglas and others. Most of these serious studies have revised the Freudian assumptions and seek to develop an independent feminist theory. Nancy Chodorow's **The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (1978)** has had tremendous influence on women's studies. In this work she develops the theory of gender identity and differentiation which set in at the pre-Oedipal stage. While a boy has to learn his identity negatively as 'not-female', a girl has a particularly easy growth as she can identify herself positively with her mother. It is in the post-Oedipal phase that cultural and social

constructions of differentiation are imposed on her. She foresees a change in sex-difference perception in a situation where men share with women the responsibilities of parenting.

The significance of feminist psychoanalysis for literary criticism is that there can be seen a bondage among 'daughters and sisters' to show that psychodynamics of female bonding determine relationship not only among characters but also among writers. In this connection Elizabeth Abel has done a pioneering work in collecting literary works of women from different nationalities to emphasize the consistent and constant development of certain "emotional dynamics depicted in diverse cultural situations". However, psychoanalytic investigations are hemmed in with limitations and cannot go into such complex areas as cultural, historical and social structures.⁶

Women's Writing and Women's Culture

Without considering the wider and more relevant factors of sociocultural circumstances creation of the linguistic, psychoanalytic and biological models would be severely limited. A comprehensive cultural model would incorporate the significant points of other three models too, in fact it is here that it is possible to establish links between different domains and see their significances. Women live in cultural environments which have profound bearings on the way they conceptualize their bodies and functions. -The female psyche can be studied as the product or construction of cultural forces. Even linguistic constructions are determined by these largely patriarchal cultural forces. Nevertheless, women's collective identity separately evolves under those very cultural constraints providing them a unifying relationship in their shared destiny. Thus a cultural theory foregrounds the separate women's culture, their social experiences and various ways in which they get expressed. Such a theory obviously differs from the Marxist theories of cultural hegemony.

One of the major thinkers in this field is Genda Lerner who emphasizes the 'importance of examining women's experience in its own terms'. In her opinion history has largely ignored women and their feats, their roles and attainments: there is a need to look into history all over again and focus on women-centred inquiry, and establish a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women. History would be drastically different if seen through women's eyes.

In the past, men have tried to define and delimit 'women's sphere' by constructing the sexist categories based on the irrationally imagined weakness or emotional handicaps. Thus Victorian culture drew strict lines in women's life, limiting their activities. Unfortunately in our times we are not yet totally free from these biases. It is necessary to examine the concept of women's sphere closely. It is true that women's sphere exists as separate area of cultural experience, apart from the largely shared experiences with men. Certain things are just outside male experiences; there are what Shirley and Enid Ardener call wild area. They built a model of two circles, one representing the dominant (male) group and the other muted group. This model enables us to understand how women see themselves and how they are seen by the larger group. The model also embodies attempt to accommodate female experience into

dominant culture, which is how the historical treatment of women must be corrected. Ardener's term 'muted' is loaded with unexplored meanings and suggests 'problems both of language and of power'. Though ideas and beliefs are generated and structured by both the dominant and muted groups, it is the dominant (male) group that 'controls the forms and structures in which consciousness can be articulated'. The model gives scope for women's voice to be presented and recognized in cultural history.

For some feminist critics it is this 'wild zone'—the exclusively female experience—that must be made the subject of investigation. "French feminist critics would like to make the 'wild zone' the theoretical base of women's difference". It is here that all kinds of linguistic, psychological and cultural differences are to be found.

In some American feminist writings women have been seen as representing nature's matriarchal power. In this manner comes up the feminine Utopias located in dark zone within which urban centers are located. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and Joanna Russ's *While away* are some examples. There is also an attempt to establish separate social institutions by and for women: publishing houses (Daughter's Inc). news media, the health, education, and legal systems, arts, theatre, the banks, etc.

From this angle and continuing the model one can say that there are two undercurrents of one large mainstream, rather than an inside/outside situation. This is how Ellen Moers sees it using the metaphor of mainstream and under currents. Women's territory is a long border and women's freedom an open territory, accessible and like an open sea. Feminist criticism must balance itself on this border according to Jehlen and see women's writings in relation to the male writings.

It is not just women's position that is subsumed in Ardener's model. but other marginalized entities too. The problem is multicultural and multiracial and far from simple. For instance, a black American woman writer has to wage struggle on two different fronts, namely gender discrimination and racial biases. "She would be affected by both sexual and racial politics in a combination unique to her case".

Thus Feminist theoretical and critical writings, although recent in origin, expand yearly in volume and range. There exist a number of specialized feminist journals and publishing houses, almost all colleges and universities now have programs in women's studies and courses in women's literature and feminist criticism, and ever-increasing place is given to writings by and about women in anthologies, periodicals, and conferences. Of the many critical and theoretical innovations of the past several decades the concern with the effects of sexual differences in the writing, interpretation, analysis, and assessment of literature seems destined to have the most prominent and enduring effects on literary history, criticism, and academic instruction, when conducted by men as well as by women.⁷

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