READING 'SILENCES' : TRACING WOMEN'S 'SELF' AND 'VOICES' IN U.R. ANANTHA MURTHY'S *SAMSKARA*, GOPINATH MOHANTY'S *PARAJA* AND MAHASWETA DEVI'S *RUDALI*

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DECLARATION

I, **Anjali Daimari**, hereby declare that the subject matter of the thesis entitled "Reading 'Silences' : Tracing Women's 'Self' and 'Voices' in U.R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara,* Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* and Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* " is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to any body else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University / Institution.

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Anjali Daimari

Anjali Daimari

CONTENTS

dedicated to my niece baby akanksha,
our bundle of joy

If I might but be one of those
born in the future ; then perhaps
to be born a woman will not be
to be born branded.

Lyndall, in Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* (1883)

And the world plays its game with
only those players who are present ;
those who are absent are forgotten
they do not exist.

Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* (1945)

CHAPTER I

Introduction

"Those who are able to read their world and then have voice within it are positioned to have a certain modicum of power within that world and over their destinies," say Gary A .Olson and Lynn Worsham in the introduction to their work *Race, Rhetoric and the Post-colonial.*[1] Infact, beyond the categories of the title of their work, it is common knowledge that man and groups of men have controlled the destinies of others – women and other marginalized groups – over centuries in constructing and controlling the domain of discourses in its discursive formations. However, some of these practices have been contested and challenged by those who had lost their freedom, identity, history and self -possession. The alternative and contestatory discourses have made it possible for the voiceless to speak and to gain agency. Feminism is one such discourse of dissent and resistance and has attempted to enfranchise the marginalized, or to put it in other words, to rescue women from the misprison of a male truth and restore agency to them. Infact the feminist struggle has been to interrogate male hegemony and deconstruct notions of law, rationality and universalism. A woman, therefore, has to reinvent herself in a language that is fundamentally controlled by men in order to assert the autonomy of her selfhood and identity.

Traditionally, man has controlled the domain of the discourse and

trapped woman inside a 'male truth.' Such a position in its formation not only has constituted patriarchy as the dominant discourse but considered it as axiomatic. Feminism exposes the patriarchal premises and prejudices in order to map the space available to women in literature. For centuries women have been culturally and socially denied their autonomy of selfhood and identity. Further, they have to suffer a kind of linguistic violence for language is used as a weapon to further marginalise women, forcing them into silence. Womens voices either in literary / creative articulations or in social sphere have been silenced as they are considered as objects of men's desire.

Feminism and feminist literary criticism are often defined as a matter of what is absent rather than what is present. In mapping absences, redefining the lack, feminism has developed through a series of creative oppositions, critiques and counter-critiques, while challenging and interrogating male positions, expanding its own agenda. Hence there is no one 'grand narrative' that homogenise feminism as such but many narratives that are grounded in specific cultural-political conditions. The diversity within feminism is now well-established so much so that it would be appropriate not to speak of 'Feminism' but to speak of 'Feminisms." [2]

Notwithstanding the current debates on feminism, while considering the institution of woman's discourse one is propelled towards theoretical

feminism, which provides the framework for any critical analysis from a feminist prespective. Theoretical feminism, one cannot deny, is mostly Western. However one cannot ignore its relevance while yet admitting its exclusivity. Valuing the theoretical does not deny other discourses, instead it underlines the fact that feminist theory might best be viewed as one legitimate move in a wider feminist endeavour.[3] Therefore, even while considering the institution of an Indian woman's discourse, which is situated in an entirely different socio-cultural matrix, the Western feminist theory can be safely applied. No doubt, we might find ourselves in an uneasy relation but the basic tenets of feminism are as much relevant to us in India as those in the West. It is not 'theory' itself we should be wary of but particular forms of theorizing which operate to reinforce the statusquo rather than challenge its operation.[4] Over the years, Western feminist criticism is becoming more aware than ever that a critic and the text both need to be understood in relation to their locations within a cultural formation. The imperatives of an Indian woman's discourse thus need to be carefully placed in relation to the Western feminist theory so as to maintain its authenticity in the context of its own socio-cultural space.

To begin with, it is conventional to distinguish the two waves of feminism, the first wave spanning the period 1830-1920 and the second wave from 1960 to the present. First wave feminism, from the beginnings of

liberalism in the West in the 18th century until the advent of the contemporary Women's Liberation Movement in the late 1960's, was predominantly liberal in character.[5] Since its inception, liberal feminism has been concerned with the rights of the individual to political and religious freedom. Until the advent of second wave feminism, liberal discourse consistently spoke of 'man'.[6] In liberal thinking, rationality is placed in binary opposition to the body. In other words, the mind is conceived as distinct from the body and superior to it. Until well into the twentieth century all women and most men of colour in the West were forced to fight against their exclusion from the rights and duties of liberalism. The feminist battle for inclusion within liberalism was waged for 300 yrs. From Mary Astell's appeal in the 1700's for women's education and emancipation from the patriarchal family to the present, liberal feminists have fought to extend the benefits of liberalism to women and to achieve for them suffrage, education, access to the professions and property rights.[7] In this struggle they have argued for women's equality with men. They argue that women are equally rational and equally capable of holding public office and administrating property. To make these arguments, liberal feminists have inevitably played down women's differences from men. They have argued that sexual difference should not determine how one is regarded as a human being. Liberal feminism thus tended to focus equality of opportunity within existing social relations.[8]

The failure of much of liberal ferminism up to 1968 problematizes, categories such as the individual, freedom and choice while challenging the deeprooted structures of contemporary capitalist societies -- particularly the sexual division of labour. Indeed, the tendency within liberal feminism to perpetuate the definition of the private sphere as an area of individual choice led to a failure to politicize specific areas of women's oppression within the family. The perceived limitations of liberal feminism proivided an important impetus for the development of more radical forms of feminism over the last thirty years.

Second-wave feminism,[9] which developed in the late 1960's, fundamentally transformed the domain of the political. It's most famous principle, ' the personal is political', was symptomatic of an opening up to public and political scrutiny of areas previously seen as personal. Second wave feminism challenged the public / private divide and in the process reinstated the importance of the body in sexual politics. Women's exploitation and oppression were seen as all - pervasive and intrinsic to all aspects of contemporary society. Much of the early theoretical and political impetus in second-wave feminism came from radical feminism. Radical feminism turned its attention to the body as the site of women's difference and oppression. It reinstated the centrality of the body in politics, attempting to both expose and counteract the exploitation of women's bodies and to give new, positive meanings to female difference. In opposition to Marxism,

radical feminism regards women's oppression as the primary and fundamental form of oppression. Gender is seen as an elaborate system of male domination of women's minds and bodies which is at the basis of all social organisation. 'Patriarchy' is the term used to signify this universal system of oppression :

> Patriarchy is the power of the fathers : a familial-social, ideological,political system in which men -- by force,direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs,etiquette, education, and the division of labour -- determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.[10]

Patriarchy thus is a system of domination which pervades all aspects of culture and social life and is to be found in all cultures and at all moments of history.

Since the publication of the influential radical feminist texts of the late 1960s and 1970s, there has been a fundamental shift in much feminist theory and criticism. One of the objectives was to unmask the patriarchal colonization of women's minds and bodies from what the theorists termed as patriarchal discourse. For a proper and systematic study of feminist criticism it is worthwhile to follow it within the frame work of two schools : the Anglo-American feminist criticism and the Anglo-French feminist criticism. While the Anglo-American feminists focussed more on questions of representation and genealogy the Anglo-French feminists have been occupied with the "theory" of the role of gender in writing. Kate Millet's

Sexual Politics (1969) focusses on the images of women in mainstream literature. Millet's analysis openly posits another perspective from the author's, and shows how precisely such conflict between reader and author/text can expose the underlying premise of a work. Millet's importance as a literary critic lies in her relentless defence of the reader's right to posit her own viewpoint, rejecting the received heirarchy of text and reader.[11] The main thesis of Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968) is that Western Culture at all levels is permeated by a thought of 'sexual analogy'. Ellmann points out that men have traditionally chosen to write in an assertive, authoritarian mode while all the time confining women to the language of sensibility. While exposing the 'phallic criticism', she writes how "Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women."[12] In a particular section in her book, Ellmann sums up the eleven major stereotypes of femininity as presented by male writers and critics : formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy, and finally ' the two incorrigible figures' of the Witch and the Shrew'. Ellmann suggests that male reviewers just cannot attach the same degree of authority to a voice they know to be female.

Ellen Moer's *Literary Women*(1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) marks the coming-of-age of Anglo-American feminist criticism. All the three books strive to define a distinctively female tradition in

literature on the grounds that as Elaine Showalter puts it, "the female literary tradition comes from the still evolving relationships between women writers and their society."[13] For these critics, it is in other words society, not biology that shapes women's different literary perception of the world. Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* was the first attempt at describing the history of women's writing as a 'rapid and powerful undercurrent' running under or along side the main male tradition. As it mapped a relatively unknown territory for the first time, it received wide acclaim. Women's writing, she demonstrated, drew upon women's experiences and also on a literary subculture of women writers that the mainstream was hardly aware of. Moer's book infact touched on almost every theme that was to be elaborated and refined in the subsequent women's writing : the exclusion of women writers, the need to find new strategies to open up canonical texts for feminist readings, the idea that a knowledge of feminist history was crucial for an understanding of women's writing, and the suggestion that women writers had shared a subculture that they often secretly kept alive. In a *Literature of their own*, Elaine Showalter sets out to describe the female literary tradition in the English novel from the generation of the Brontes to her time and to show how the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture. In efforts to fill in the terrain between the 'literary landmarks', she uncovers three major phases of historical development claimed to be common to all literary subcultures. She elaborates three phases : the phase

of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles; the phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy ; finally a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. These three phases have also been termed as 'Feminine', 'Feminist' and 'Female' respectively. Showalter's major contribution to feminist criticism is the emphasis she places on the rediscovery of forgotten or neglected women writers.

In their influential work *The Madwoman in the Attic* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar set out to explore anew a "distinctively female literary tradition" and develop a theory of "female literary response to male literary assertion and coercion." Gilbert and Gubar's enquiry shows that in the nineteenth century the patriarchal ideology presents artistic creativity as a fundamentally male quality. They opine that since creativity is defined as male it follows that the dominant literary images of femininity are male fantasies too. Women are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness, instead must seek to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them. Gilbert and Gubar clearly demonstrate how in the 19th century the 'eternal feminine' was assumed to be a vision of angelic beauty and sweetness.

The Anglo-American feminists fronted by the 'gynocriticism' of Showalter thus stressed the study of women's writings in order to learn 'what women have felt and experienced', and also that this experience is directly available in the texts written by women. They reject theory as a male invention that can only be applied in men's texts. They encourage the study of women's writings in order to find a female tradition in literature. The feminist struggle, they foresee, must both try to undo the patriarchal strategy that makes 'femininity' intrinsic to biological femaleness, and at the same time defend women precisely as women.

Whereas the Anglo-American feminists were concerned with study of women's writing, the Anglo-French feminists were more concerned with 'writing' in general. In this they were influenced by French theories. Major theorists of the Anglo-French school of feminism are Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. French theory has contributed powerfully to the feminist debate about the nature of women's oppression, the construction of sexual difference and the specificity of women's relations to language and writing.

The single most distinguishing feature of feminist scholarship has been its overtly political nature and feminism's commitment to material and social change has played a significant role in undermining traditional academic boundaries between the personal and the political. Feminist

theory is traditicnally characterized by its interdisciplinarity – its transgression of the usual subject divisons (literary, historical, philosophical, psychological, anthropological, and sociological). As has been already mentioned, in the 1960's the general concern among feminists was finding a female tradition in literature and exposing the stereotypical ways in which women were represented in mainstream literature. In the 1970's the concentration was more towards finding a woman's language. Notable shifts have taken place since the early years of second-wave feminism. Since the early 1980's the pace of debate and range of research have been intense. What is distinctive in recent feminist work is not only the presence of the theoretical, but also the nature of the theories. Feminist theoretical endeavour has increasingly challenged the dominance of materialist theoretical perspectives, focusing in their place on processess of symbolization and representation.[14] The search for depictions of women that escape the straitjacketing of already-existing symbolic forms has led to analyses of the relation between images and social representation, identity and the upholding of social order . Questions of vision, power and knowledge are also evident in redefinitions of women's relation to 'the gaze'.[15]

This theoretical restlessness apart, one cannot but overlook the contradictions within feminism. There has always been a contradiction between feminism's theoretical refusal to countenance master narratives and the

political ascendency of certain canonical texts. Feminist theory in the 1960's, 70's and early 80's was predominantly Western and motivated by white / heterosexual interests. More recent feminist writing has tended to be overtly critical of this exclusivity of focus. Mobility of theory between disciplines should not blind feminists to the relative immobility of theory across more geographical boundaries. Voices from elsewhere is still far from reality. Grappling with this issue, in the 1990's feminists have widened this debate. At the present time feminists are concerned with both representation and method : who speaks, in the name of whom and in what voice. Bell Hooks[16] expresses concern to avoid assimilation of particular forms of dominant feminism. Gayatri Spivak articulates this exclusivity of focus of Western Feminism : "in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged *as a woman*". [17]

However, epistemological, ontological and questions of representation still serve as key loci of feminist concerns and at the same time also form the significant grounds for dispute between feminists. The disputes or fragmentation within feminism is largely viewed as symptomatic of rather than problematic for feminist endeavours. It only tells of the dynamic nature of feminism and its openness to address issues relevant to our times.

The need of the hour is to re-negotiate questions of gender relations, patriarchy, self, identity, which have always been central to feminism. As feminism has generally been Eurocentric, it has became necessary to negotiate the issues from other locations. Situation of women cannot be said to be the same everywhere. Women's experiences differ. Patriarchies differ and cannot be said to be universal. Other factors affecting the lives of women, like caste, colonialism, racism, have been rendered invisible in Western feminism. Therefore, keeping in mind the location of diverse women, feminists are re-opening the questions concerning a woman's 'self', 'identity' or in other words, subjectivities. A move in this direction has implied a need to look at texts that take shape at the margins.

Since the study undertaken relates to texts situated in Indian social reality from a feminist perspective, it is worthwhile to examine the beginnings of feminism in India.In India, too, feminism could be traced back to the 19th century which expressed itself in the form of reform movements. Feminist consciousness in India was a direct result of India's confrontation with the West. In her essay "The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness", Bharati Ray states that "the crucial juncture or the historical point from which feminist consciousness began to be fashioned arrived with the freedom struggle."[18] Prior to the freedom struggle, at the beginning of the 19th century a whole lot of reform activities were taking place to alleviate the condition of women.

Sati was abolished, widow remarriage permitted and women's education introduced. These reforms nevertheless were initiated under British influence, who wanted to exploit the low status of women to expand their own interests. The main purpose behind the reforms was in no way to attack the prevalent patriarchal system, but rather to improve the position of women within the patriarchal framework and make them more capable of fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers within the family.

The 'woman' question provided a convenient tool to establish and assert the moral superiority of the colonial rulers over the colonized. The colonized elite sought to defend their culture by projecting a 'glorious' past when the position of woman was high.[19] There followed a strategic reconstruction of the 'glorious' woman of the ancient period. Placed within the two opposite models - the Western model and the Indian ideal - Indian women were expected to combine in themselves the womanly qualities prized both in the 'modern' West and in the 'ancient' East. The models of both the women of the 'glorious past' as well as the Victorian England was of course, idealized.

While 19th century contradictions were not resolved in the 20th century, new forces and influences were released to shape the contours of women's consciousness. Spread of women's education no doubt generated new ideas. But the crucial difference in the shift in women's images, ideas

as well as life-situations was made during the freedom movement. Even as the designs of the Britishers was exposed to their dissillusioned allies, in the fight for freedom the co-operation of women was sought. The nationalist appeal was to the indigineous Indian concept of woman as the embodiment and transmitter of tradition. The worship of the motherland was made synonymous to worship of mother-goddess and by invoking the religious sentiments women were won into the movement. [20]

It has often been argued that women's political participation was merely an extension of their domestic role. Nevertheless, tremendous changes did occur in women's perceptions during this period. They did step out from the cloisters of their homes into the male world of politics and power. The age-old notion of women's total inferiority to men began to be slowly eroded. Women had proved that they were capable of fighting alongside man. The protest that was made against British imperialism was also directed at least partially against the unfair patriarchal structure which benefitted half the people at the expense of the other half.

As men were pre-occupied in their struggle against colonialism women were questioning their own role within patriarchy. Susmita Debi articulates aptly the rise of feminist consciousness during the national movement:

I do not suggest that the term femininity connotes some

> particular characteristics of women. Most women in our country live in an unnatural ambience. They have a separate existence isolated from men. This is what I call femininity. This is what has kept women as women and not allowed them to develop as human beings... All the energies of women, their intellect, their strength, their skill, are devoted to catering to the comforts of men... In their desires or aspirations, in fact, in everything that women wish to do or accomplish, they meet with resistance at every step.[21]

One of the debilitating effects of colonialism in India was colonisation of the minds. The British rulers were convinced that Indian literatures contained neither the literary nor the scientific information required for the moral or mental cultivation so essential if good government was to be desired and appreciated.[22] Imperial interests clearly underlay the fashioning of the literary curriculum. Gradually as the new powers staked their claims over the land and over the minds of the people, not only individual works but whole literary traditions were delegitimated and marginalized. Colonial restructurings of gender and curricular institutionalization of literature worked to undermine the authority of Indian literatures and undercut the societies that gave rise to them. In opposition to this, Oriental scholarship reaffirmed the significance of an Indian tradition, but it was a highly restructured version of the past. Historians have pointed out that the Indian past, reconstructed and reempowered by such scholarship, was not only an idealized paradise untouched by the disturbing changes taking place in European society that the Romantics longed for, but also a brahmanic one in which the Indian

society and its history was reduced to what could be found in the ancient sacred texts. As a consequence more recent literatures that emerged from historically changing and secular contexts were marginalised. [23]

Whereas Colonialism idealised the Victorian woman, Orientalism idealised the subservient woman of the scriptures. Women were to find their ideals in either of the two. As Tharu and Lalitha opine, most of women's writings were lost to these two waves. 'Woman' as such was caught between myth and reality. In Indian Literatures in English, we might not find representations of different sections of women. But literatures in translation do offer us a stupendous body of work, in which to see how women articulate and respond to ideologies from complex and decentered positions. Writers are clearly imbricated in the ideologies of their times. Patriarchies take shape and are transformed in specific historical circumstances. Not all literatures written by women are feminist or even about woman. As not all literatures written by men can be said to be unfeminine. However, by a reading of the literatures in translation we do get a picture of Indian social reality, simply because most of these literatures

take shape besides the canon. Therefore, a study of women's representation in such texts is a telling of Indian woman's reality.

The present study therefore attempts to trace women voices in

literature in translation in order to locate women's 'self' and 'identity'.The question of 'self' and 'identity' has always been in a state of flux, constituted and reconstituted. But a woman's identity is sought to be generally universally fixed and it is patriarchy in different forms that defines the roles a woman has to play. Woman is defined as an 'essence' and biology determines her situation. Feminists reject this notion of woman as an essence or a product of biology. This is well articulated by Simone de Beauvoir when she says "Woman is not born, but becomes a woman." Thus women have questioned the male defination of woman. The questions that feminists ask are -- What is it that constitutes the 'self' of a woman ? How can she determine her 'self' located within the framework of patriarchal power ? Questions such as these are relevant even today and so the study explores such questions with reference to Anantha Murthy's [24] *Samskara* (1965), Gopinath Mohanty's [25] *Paraja* (1945) and Mahesweta Devi's [26] *Rudali* (1980).

Samskara, Paraja and Rudali, are English translations of regional texts. All the three writers are Jnanpith award winners and have been widely read in India in the regional languages as well as in translation. Undoubtedly, there are still reservations in the academia whether to nomenclature such translated texts as Indian English Literature. Debates still continue over this issue.But not going into the intricacies of this debate, it needs to be pointed out that *Samskara* has found its way in the curriculam and is widely discussed. Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* too is subject to many feminist readings. I

steer clear out of this debate although questions may arise as to the validity in selecting such texts for study. The purpose behind taking translated texts for analysis is that texts written in Indian languages convey a reality which is more telling than texts written by Indo-Anglian writers, who are more informed and self-conscious about Western Feminism. The reality they represent is mimetic. Vernacular voices on the other hand, are more grounded in the social reality and the discursive social practices. Two of the writers selected are male writers against one female writer. An author speaking through the voice of the other gender opens up the problematic of 'sounding differently.' A comparative study of men's and women's writing is essential opines Myra Jehlen in order to locate " the difference between women's writing and men's study that no study of only women's writing can depict."[27] The feminine voice that is represented in the texts by male authors speaks because it purportedly emerges from a female body that gives it life and currency. Examined within the cultural discourse of the period, woman's voice is seen to be imbricated in female sexuality, just as silence is 'bound up' with sexual continence. Some of the questions that obtain in the context of locating the 'self ' and tracing women's voice are - How much space is given to a woman in a narrative ? How is she portrayed ? Are the woman voices if any, interrogative or affirmative ? How is resistance articulated in silence ? How does the 'self' locate and signify itself ? In the context of these questions, the present study explores what happens to women char-

acters in both male and female texts, taking into account representations of high-caste, low-caste, dalit and tribal women. Caste and class are equally important categories of differentiation like gender. Either through speech or silence the women characters do register some form of communication. While reading the silences or voices of women characters in the texts already mentioned, the objective is to re-orient the critical assumptions about these texts from feminist perspective.

The introductory chapter looks into theoretical aspects of feminism and defines the scope of the study. It also focuses on the need of taking translated texts for the purpose of analysis.

The second chapter, "Locating the 'Self' in culture" traces the philosophical tradition of the 'self'. It is understood that the concept of 'self' has been a contentious issue in the philosophical domain. However, for self's location in culture, the self is seen in a process of negotiation that constitutes itself. An attempt is made in this chapter to resituate the question of identity in the sphere of contemporary culture and examine the shifting terrains of critical theory in placing and displacing identities.

The third chapter, "Tracing the 'Voices' of women in *Samskara*, *Paraja* and *Rudali*" begins with the development of novel in India and goes on to analyse the three texts in order to locate the 'Voices' of women.

The fourth chapter, "Reading Silences : Marginality and Resistances",

tries to read the nature of woman's voice. Women are silenced and even when semiotically they are voiced,the muted voices of women turn into a 'cry'- a cry of resistance or may be a discourse of loss rather than restoration. Voices are suppressed and silenced and when voiced become fragmented and meaningless.

The study is concluded with the insights that are gained from the previous chapters.

Endnotes

1 Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial* (New York : State University of New York Press, 1999), p.xi.

2 Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds. *Feminisms* (New York : OUP, 1997),p.3.

3 Ibid.,p.5.

4 Ibid.

5 Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference* (U.K. : Blackwell Publishers, 1999),p.13.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p.15.

9 Second-wave feminism, see Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds. op.cit., pp.3-5 and Chris Weedon, op.cit., pp.19-20.

10 Patriarchy, quoted in Chris Weedon, op.cit., p.20.

11 Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London : Methuen and Co. Ltd.,1987),p.25.

12 Mary Ellmann, quoted in Toril Moi, op.cit., p.30.

13 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton, N.J.:Princeton University Press, 1977),p.12.

14 Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds. op.cit., p.7.

15 Ibid.

16 Bell Hooks, in her essay "Feminism : A Movement to End Sexist Oppression " in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds. op.cit., pp.22-27.

17 Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak in her essay "French Feminism in an International Frame" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds. op.cit.,p.53

18 Bharati Ray, in "The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929" in Bharati Ray, ed. *From the Seams of History* (New Delhi :OUP, 1997), p.177.

19 Ibid., p.180.

20 Ibid., pp.181-182.

21 Susmita Debi, quoted in Bharati Ray, op.cit., p.214.

22 Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds. *Women Writing in India Vol.I.* (New Delhi : OUP, 1999, fourth impression), p.9.

23 See Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds. op.cit., pp. 10 -11.

24 U.R. Anantha Murthy (b. 1932) is one of India's major modern creative writers. As an outstanding creative writer, critic, editor and teacher, U. R. Anantha Murthy has had a seminal impact on Kannada literature and culture. In the course of a very distinguished academic career he has received numerous fellowships and has lectured at institutions all over the world. He has been the president of Sahitya Akademi and was awarded the Jnanpith Award in 1995. A radical of the Lohiaite School, his works are primarily an enquiry into the nature of the self in a situation that dramatizes the contradictions and paradoxes of a society at a crucial phase of transformation. His first collection of short stories *Endendu Mugiyada Kathe* was published in 1955. *Bavali* his first book of poems was published in 1963 and *Samskara* his first novel, published in 1965.

25 Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1992) is a major Indian novelist who wrote in Oriya. He wrote more than twenty novels and dozens of short stories. He was also a prolific translator of literature into Oriya. His novels are based on the life-style of the primitive tribes, the Kondhs

and Paraja's of Orissa, as also the middle class society of Oriya villages and small towns. *Paraja* and *Amrutara Santana* are his major novels on the tribal theme and *Mati Matal* is a classic of the eternal Indian village. He was given the Jnanpith Award in 1974, the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955 and Padmabhushan in 1981.

[26] Mahasweta Devi (b.1926) is one of the boldest of Bengali female fiction writers. In a long and chequered career, in her own words, she has been a school teacher, a dealer in soap dyes, a failed exporter of monkeys and a roving reporter for rural Bengal for the daily *jugantar*. In 1956, she became a professional writer. She has to her name 41 novels, 15 short story collections besides a number of plays and children's stories and innumerable newspaper articles. In her works she focuses on "class exploitation" in which "the underclass is exploited– both men and women." A 'committed' writer, for her, familiarity with the documents and fidelity to her experiences is important. Her first book *Jhansir Rani* was published in 1956. She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Aranyer Adhikar* (1970) .Some of her other works are *Hajar Churasir Ma*, *Amrita Sanchay*, *Andhar Manik* and *Rudali*.

[27] Myra Jehlen, quoted in Toril Moi, op.cit., pp.80-81.

CHAPTER II

Location of 'Self ' in culture

The conception of the 'self', over the centuries, has been explored by philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and others, in various ways. The nature of 'self' is such that it has eluded a single homogenous definition. If the question has stayed the same, the answers have changed over time. The OED offers one tantalizing glimpse of a possible definition of 'self'. The dictionary maintains:

> Self first appears as a living formative element about the middle of the sixteenth century... The number of self compounds was greatly augmented towards the middle of the seventeenth century, when many new words appeared in the theological and philosophical writing, some of which had a restricted currency of about fifty years (1645-1690).[1]

Beyond merely offering a definition, this observation delineates the possible origins of the word 'self'. The *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* defines the self as " the 'I' experienced by an individual," adding that " In modern psychology the notion of self has replaced earlier conceptions of the soul." The concept of 'self', thus, is said to have altered its meaning through time. The alterations in meaning are attributed to logical process of human development or fall (from ancient times to modern period) and it is assumed that the phenomenon of the present can be explained and made meaningful by tracing the philosophical tradition and exploring the shifting notions of 'self'.

The seventeenth century is often identified by historians of Western Philosophy as the great divide, the point from which rationality could serve as the foundation of the self-determining individual .[2] There was an increased sense of the self being connected to natural and moral philosophy as well as society and culture. Christian belief presumed the category of the person, which denoted

someone who possesses an immortal soul ; while Roman law presumed that civil society consists of individuals endowed with agency, hence responsibility. Since the medieval society rationalized the maintenance of order in terms of Christianity and jurisprudence, this society in some sense, acknowledged the reality of individuals. The use of the word 'self' in the 17th century had a theological dimension. When philosophers like Descartes and later John Locke discussed what they meant by a 'person' or 'self', their views were understood at the time in theological terms. Locke was much criticised when he detached the question of personal identity from the theology of the Trinity and associated it with consciousness.

The Renaissance signalled a truly decisive breakthrough for individualism. Liberating itself from the chains of custom, conformity and the Church, mankind took a fearless leap forward into self-discovery and self-fulfillment.[3] The literary and scholarly movement called humanism rejected the theological dogma of man as a loathsome sinner required to abase himself before

God, and began to take delight in man himself, the apex of creation, the master of nature, the wonder of the world. According to Jacob Burkhardt, " in the Renaissance, man became a spiritual individual and recognised himself as such."[4] The rise of self-awareness or subjectivity was reflected by the rise of genres like autobiography, journals, diaries, portraits, essays and philosophical treatises.

Renaissance humanists were much concerned with self-knowledge. 'Know thyself'- they re-iterated in different languages. It was Rene Descartes (1594-1650), who staked out a new role for the individual by making the basis of his *Discourse on the Method* (1637) on the proposition : *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am): my own consciousness is the one thing of which I can be sure, and hence the one fixed Archimedean point in the Universe. [5] Not God, or nature, but the ego, the conscious self, thereby becoming the source of understanding, and so of everything else.[6] Descartes' vivid use of 'I' in his philosophy establishes a point of departure from the early conception of *self*. His *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason*, first published in 1637, is remarkable for the directness and persistence with which sentences begin with 'I'. Descartes' method to arrive at human knowledge and understanding was in a form of biography: he stressed what 'I' have concluded was a new foundation for truth. The point is not that Descartes was egotistic but that he chose 'I' as the hero

of the story. He invited readers to reflect as he had done, to find in their own 'I' the grounds for truth. This differed from the language of earlier scholastic philosophy, in which the personal 'I' was used in disputation but only to serve deductive argument or textual exegesis, that is, to serve an impersonal subject. Medieval and Renaissance Aristotelian philosophers considered reason and morality as general conditions of being not as personal acts. Descartes' 'I am, therefore I exist' rings down the centuries as an individual assertion.[7]

It is significant that when Descartes turned inward to examine his individual mind as a source of knowledge, he represented this as an individual act, not an act characteristic of life in a certain community of people. He stressed self-examination as an individual act as opposed to a social performance. Yet it must be questioned whether Descartes really did have a modern sense of the individual 'I'. The style in which he presented himself was heavily rhetorical. Further, when he wrote about his 'I', he referred to the soul as a thinking substance and denoted something universal while characterizing it by a reasoning nature. He did not necessarily refer to an individual conciousness. Descartes claimed, for example, that the soul necessarily always thinks but he did not claim that an individual soul is always conscious. Descartes used the Latin word *cogitare* equivalent to the French word *penser* when he discussed the soul's qualities,

rather than words equivalent to the modern English word 'consciousness'. All the same, Descartes is considered the first philosopher to probe into the mechanisms of the mind. The question who we were, now hinged upon how our thinking processes worked. With Descartes, identity became a matter of the intellect. The reference to 'conciousness' as the defining characteristics of the self came into existence later; in the English speaking world, this came after the work of highly influential English philosopher John Locke (1632 -1704).[8]

In the second edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694) Book II, chapter 27, of 'Identity and Difference,' Locke declares that 'self is not determined by Identity or Diversity of Substance, which it cannot be sure of but only by identity of consciousness.' By equating the soul with such an evanescent entity as consciousness Locke seemed to annihilate it completely. Never had such awesome responsibility been imposed on individual experience. To make this revolutionary assertion, Locke pushed his language beyond its existing limits. According to OED, he was the first person to use 'consciousness' in the sense of totality of the impressions, thoughts and feelings, which make up a person's conscious being. Locke thus advocated that the identity of a self or person required consciousness. [9]

Descartes' understanding of the uniqueness of human interiority invited later introspective philosophers to probe further the mechanism of the

mind. Locke argued in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that the mind is not like a furnished flat, prestocked with innate ideas, but like a home gradually put together from scratch out of ceaseless mental acquisitions. The self is thus the product of experience and education : "of all the men we meet with, " the English empiricist insisted, "nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education. " We are what we become. Different parents, different surroundings, different stimuli will produce different selves. Identity is thus unique, but contingent, the product of perpetual accidents. By implication Locke thus gave his philosophical blessing to human diversity, change and progress, and it is no accident that he became the philosophical mascot to that archetypal eighteenth century fictional autobiographer of indirection, the eponymous hero of Laurence Sterne's novel, *Tristam Shandy* (1759-1767). The new Lockian psychology awakened a bold mission of man making himself – viewed both as the producer but also as the product of social development and civilizing process.[10]

The rise of the rational 'self' led to a corresponding decline in religious belief. Reason came to triumph. As the developing scientific methods began to take hold of philosophy , an understanding of man as rational, autonomous and in control of the universe emerged. Drawing on Francis Bacon's championing of science as the key to human progress, many philosophers spoke of man as the author of his own destiny. Man was no longer to be pictured as an Adam, created by God with all his faculties fully implanted ; rather the new Enlightenment myths favoured the model of the self-made man. New prominence was given to dynamic and evolving notions of consciousness, built upon Locke's suggestion that the mind began as 'white paper or wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases.'[11] Interaction with nature and the restless dialogue of needs and wants gave man the capacity to progress towards perfectibility.

'Self' was not a happy topic in the eighteenth century. It was fraught with anxieties at the theoretical and existential levels. It was the age of Hume, Rousseau, Adam Smith, Kant, Mary Wollstonecraft. Formerly a sin, self-centredness was being transformed into the *raisond'etre*, the pride and glory of the modern psyche.

The individual occupied the centre stage in many other domains of eighteenth century thinking. As the autonomous bearer of rights he became

the basic building block in political liberalism that rebutted old Divine right and absolutist theories with the declaration that the individual was prior to the state. It was during the eighteenth century that the novel established itself as the literary vehicle for the minute exploration of intense inner consciousness, particularly when cast in the form of first person narrative. Enlightenment economic theories also considered the private property holder as the basic unit in an economic order - the possessive individualist or Robinson Crusoe figure. Finding classic expression in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), political economy envisaged the market place as an arena of sovereign operators, each pursuing personal profit through cut throat competition. The greatest happiness of the greatest number was Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian formulation. The eighteenth century thus marked a spectacular reversal of the old theology. The Church rejected selfishness as sin but self-love and social commitment were considered the same, as sung by the poet Alexander Pope in this age. Enlightenment propagandists and philosophers like Bernard Mandeville and David Hume contended that the rational hedonism of *homo economicus* was good for the individual and for society at large. Mandeville revelled in the paradox that private vices were public benefits. The virulent critics of the age however considered it as nothing but its own antithesis. They saw it as an age marked by ever greater material inequality, moral and sexual depravity, and the shameless pursuit of the lowest forms of gratification.Never had man been so

alienated from his true self and destiny from other men and indeed from nature. Incapable of being whole human beings, of exercising their bodies and minds completely, and living in complete harmony with themselves and others, the highest ambition of men and women was to acquire and display. They lived outside themselves and existed only in the gaze of others. Hume how ever reacted strongly to those who eulogized the ancient past to see the age in which they lived as dismal. He viewed the 'self' as a kind of theatre 'where several perceptions successively make their appearance, pass, repass, glide away and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations.' The individual's limited sympathies for the welfare of others, he argued, can be fully accounted for in terms of a self interested beholder's response to the poses and demands of others.[12]

While the eighteenth century was an age of Enlightenment emancipationism, the subsequent crisis of this rationalism is clearly expressed in the age that followed it, i.e, the Romantic Age. While the novel of individual development such as Fielding's *Tom Jones* depicted a sense of history as the progressive realisation of rational order, the French Revolution (in works such as Blakes *French Revolution* 1791 or Wordsworth's *The Prelude*1850) became the motif of a shift in historical thinking. The violence and disorder which followed from this break with the past provided post -Enlightenment literature with an image of history as an apocalyptic break that could not be explained as another moment in reason's continued revelation. History

was needed to be rethought. Whereas the eighteenth century had proposed a reassuring, 'enlightened' model of the psyche, stablized by reasoned definition and exhibiting all the cohesion of a well-tuned visible mechanism, the nineteenth century found itself wrestling with alternative perspectives that granted space to mystery and imbalance. The hallmarks of Romantic thought were its accentuation of unconstrained impulse, its delinking of the Subject from the religious concept of 'self' and its de-emphasizing of rationality as the shaping principle of art.[13]

Inspired by the revolutionary era, Romanticism in literature and the arts pitched individualism on to even higher plains. The Revolution fostered the sense in writers of the early Romantic period that there was a great age of new beginnings and high possibilities. Many writers viewed a human being as endowed with limitless aspiration toward the infinite good envisioned by the faculty of imagination. "Our destiny", Wordsworth says in a visionary moment in *The Perlude*, "our beings heart and home/ Is with infinitude, and only there," and our desire is for " something evermore about to be."[14] "Less than everything", Blake announced " cannot satisfy man."[15] Humanity's undaunted aspirations beyond its assigned limits, now became humanity's glory and mode of truimph, even in failure, over the pettiness of circumstances. Romanticism idealized the outsider, the Bohemain artist, the Byronic rebel, bardic visionaries and even victims like Dr. Frankenstein's

monster. Romantic social critics loathed bourgeous respectibility. The world was too much with us, Wordsworth complained ; urban man was alienated; and communing with nature was the way to get back in touch with one's self. The odyssey of self-discovery became the key Romantic metaphor, with its wanderer protagonist finding spiritual epiphany through ardous effort. Romantic love privileged the heart ; 'sensibility' became essential to goodness and beauty ; and in the cult of the man and lady of feeling, every sigh,blush and teardrop proved the exquisite tuning of the superior soul. Life must be a journey of self-discovery. That could be bitter - a *Win'terreise* ; but the road was not to be refused. In their comparable ways, Schiller and Shelley, Coleridge and Chateaubriand, Holderin and Hazlitt each espoused a creed of the sacredness of individual development, in pursuit of what Keats called the 'holiness of the hearts' intentions. Self- development was thus assuming a religious ethos.[16]

In their search for 'self', the Romantic writers turned towards nature. To a remarkable degree external nature - the landscape, to gether with its flora and fauna - became a persistent subject of poetry. While many major poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, set out from and return to an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape, the outer scene is not presented for its own sake but only as a stimulus for the poet to engage in the most characteristic human activity, that of thinking. Representative romantic works are in fact poems of feelingful meditation

which, though often stimulated by a natural phenomenon, are concerned with central human experiences and problems. Wordsworth's emphasis on childhood reacted against the scientific and rationalist view of nature as a mere object. Wordsworth asserted, in what he called 'Prospectus' to his major poems, that it is "the Mind of Man" which is "My haunt, and the main region of my song." Romanticism gave vent to a language of feeling rather than to the language of reason as articulated by Wordsworth, that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". The materials of a poem come from within, and they consist expressly neither of objects nor actions, but of the fluid feelings of the poet himself.[17]

It was Jean Jacques Rousseau who succeeded in giving philosophical statement to an emergent language of feeling - a solitary self seeking authentic expression in environments resistant to impress and within which persons are seen to struggle, not so much to win approval, but to realize themselves. So conceived, this individual establishes his authenticity and moral freedom by making contact with an inner voice rather than responding to the wills and expectations of others. Taking a solitary stand,Rousseau wrote in the first page of his autobiographical " Confessions" : " I know my own heart ... I am made unlike anyone I have ever met. I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different." [18] This claim was a departure from the dominant 18th century conception of personality as theatrically plastic. It soon became a model

of Romantic identities and for the practices of representing 'self' which would characterize both autobiography and biography, narrative history and the modern mind.

Immanuel Kant[19] entered into the debate with the publication of his *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. Kant provides an understanding of the self based on a revised concept of rationality contextualizing the understanding of consciousness. Dissatisfied with Descartes' argument " I think, therefore I am" and with the doctrine of the soul that flowed from it, Kant felt that the certainty of self-knowledge had been wrongly described "It is true, however sceptical I may be about the world, I cannot extend my scepticism into the subjective sphere (the sphere of consciousness): so I can be immediately certain of my present mental states. But I cannot be immediately certain of what I am , or whether indeed there is an 'I' to whom these states belong. These further propositions must be established by argument, and that argument had yet to be found, Kant contented.[20] Kant goes on to find out what is the character of this immediate and certain knowledge. The distinguishing feature of 'my' present states is that they are as they seem to me and seem as they are. In the subjective sphere, being and seeming collapse into each other. In the objective sphere they diverge. The world is objective because it can be other than it seems to me. So the true question of objective knowledge is : how can I know the world as it is ? I can have knowledge of the world as it seems, since that is merely knowl-

edge of my present preceptions, memories, thoughts and feelings. But can I have knowledge of the world that is not just knowledge of my point of view ? It follows from this theory that the 'forms of thought' that govern the understanding, and the apriori nature of reality, are in exact correspondence. Almost all the major difficulties in the interpretation of Kant depend upon which of these two proposition is emphasized – The world as we think it is, and determines the *apriori* nature of the world ? Or is it the world that determines how we must think of it ?

The starting point of all Kant's philosophy is the single premise of self-consciousness, and the first two of his three *Critiques* concern themselves respectively with the questions : " What must a self-conscious being think ?" and "What must he do?" Self consciousness is a deep phenomenon with many layers and aspects. It is not every being that can know his own experience but it is only such a being who can pose the skeptical question : 'Are things as they seem to me (as my experience represents them)?' Kant maintains in the 'Analytic',what he calls "I think" or the unity of apperception, is the ultimate condition of experience, in the sense of being the logical subject of experience or the point to which all experience relates. All experience is experience for a subject ; whatever thoughts or feelings I have, I must be capable of recognizing my thoughts or feelings. But the subject here referred to is not something substantial, it is merely a logical require-

ment, in that nothing follows about the nature of my soul or self from the fact that I say 'I think'. So, far from being "an abiding and continuing intuition" for Kant the "representation 'I'... (is) simple, and in itself completely empty ... We cannot even say that this is a concept, but only that it is a bare consciousness which accompanies all concepts. Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts." The same view is expressed in an earlier passage in the *Critique* where Kant says that "in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself but (I am conscious) only that I am . This representation is a thought, not an intuition." Thus when the question " who are 'we'?" is posed, Kant means the term 'we' to denote indifferently any being who can use the term 'I' : anyone who can identify himself as the subject of experience. According to him, " the unity of consciousness precedes all data of intuition." We know the world within a framework of space, time and substance. They are however creations of our intuitions or reason without which we could not comprehend the world. Independent reality, what Kant called 'thing in itself' is forever beyond our knowledge.[21]

Hegel critiqued much of what Kant said. He did not agree to Kant's 'thing-in-itself' concept and set out to develop a new method. Hegel's, concept of 'self' is seen in the context of history and consciousness. In his own

introduction to *Philosophy of History*, Hegel clearly states his view of the direction and destination of all human history : "The history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom."[22] This sentence sets the theme of his entire work. He provides the most celebrated example of a historiography which combines both teleology and an attempt to understand the past. Only with Hegelian history does the past possess its own specific form of truth. Truth becomes dependent upon historical context, while history is not just a series of events but now forms a context, horizon or 'world' according to which events, meaning and truth are explained. It enables them to transcend in a positive manner the hostility of the natural world because there is something positive beyond the natural world. This Hegel asserts that what happens in history happens necessarily. Hegelians are made wiser by the past and ready to find rationality in a world that is the result of practical adaptation rather than deliberate planning. Hegel, unlike the rationalist historians, did not see religion as a form of mystified superstition, rather, for Hegel, religion possessed a truth of its own. Human beings, he believes, are also spiritual beings and it is this spirituality which enables them to transcend in a positive manner the hostility of the natural world because there is something positive beyond the natural world. The idea of God represented a form of being which transcended the merely day-to-day existence of ordinary life. When individuals participate in religions they do so because they can sense a form of spirit which is beyond their own limited experience. But this sense of transcedent spirit is destined

to be more authentically understood as human history itself. Eventually, according to Hegel, consciousness will understand that ideas of 'God' are actually ways representing the human spirit in an external form. Religion, therefore, is 'true' in so far as it provides an accurate picture of the way in which individuals relate to spirit, but these representations must be understood as stages on the way to a more rational historical awareness . The goal of all history, for Hegel, is historical understanding. By recognizing the development and becoming of spirit, human life will no longer posit an external goal or value. Cultures will not be directed to a transcedent God but will see that historical development is the true aim of spirit. Earlier historical period will be recognized as stages on the way to historical becoming. Only when humanity recognizes that God is a projection of its own spirit can philosophical awareness take place. The goal of Hegel's history was to recognize all spiritual creations as human. Unlike those who conceived of religion as error, Hegel recognized that religious culture was true for its time and that such a history of representations would need to have taken place for ultimate rational self-awareness to be eventually realised. Hegel thus in a way shares with the Enlightenment the belief that the goal of history is reason and that reason will manifest itself as the overcoming of error and will issue in absolute self-understanding.

Hegel's notion of self-consciousness is also important because in

different ways it has influenced both Marxist and existentialist thinkers. Self-consciousness, he maintains cannot exist in isolation. If consciousness is to form a proper picture of itself, it needs some contrast. It requires an object from which to differentiate itself. I can only become aware of myself if I am also aware of something that is not myself. Self-consciousness is not simply a consciousness contemplating its own soul. Although self-consciousness needs an object outside itself, this external object is also something foreign to it, and a form of opposition to it. There is therefore a peculiar kind of love-hate relationship between self-consciousness and the external object. Hegel's central point is that self-consciousness demands not simply any external object but another self-consciousness. One way of explaining this is to say that to see oneself ,one needs a mirror-- to be aware of oneself as a self-conscious being, to see what self-consciousness is like. An alternative explanation is that self-consciousness can only develop in a context of social interaction. A child growing up in total isolation from all other self-conscious beings would never develop mentally beyond the level of mere consciousness, for self-consciousness grows out of a social life. Thus, according to Hegel each person needs the other to establish his own awareness of himself. 'Self' in other words can be understood only in context with an 'other.'[23]

Darwin's[24] theory of the evolution was a major discovery in the nineteenth century. No doubt biological Darwinism was the outstanding achievement in that century and is now the foundation of large regions of biological theory. Darwin's theory is an example of scientific innovation that has had reverberations into the farthest reaches of human thought. The theory of evolution by natural selection did not occur to Darwin in an intellectual vacuum. Most important of his cosmological beliefs was uniformitarianism, the belief that nature operates everywhere and always by the same sorts of law. This view Darwin had imbibed from Lyell's *Principles of Geology.* More than a century after Darwin's death, his theory of evolution continues to influence scientific thought, but there is still skepticism and unease about the validity and significance of Darwin's contribution to knowledge and philosophy.

The significance of Darwin and his philosophy lies in its opposition to traditional Aristotelian views about things happening not by chance but for ends. Darwinism in the broader sense was the major philosophical problem of the later nineteenth century. Darwin's theory of evolution engendered doubts about the truth of religious beliefs and humanity had to endure one of the greatest outrages upon naïve self-love. Man had reconciled himself with the finding that he was a mere descendant from the animal world, with animal nature in him, his peculiar privilege of having been specially created being robbed by science. Pre- Darwinian biological theory was strongly influence by the view that all living things are patterned after an eternal idea or archetype. This was held not only for the species but also for other taxonomic categories and for anatomical structures as well. One

of the achievements of Darwinism was to break the hold of this notion on taxonomic and anatomical theory. Darwin's opinions on the origins of man were a threat to the deepest level of Christian doctrine, till man's uniqueness could be given a new theological interpretation. The edifice of traditional theology was touched at other points. Early 19th century theologians placed heavy weight on the co-operation of science and religion. The clergy-man-naturalist was a familiar figure. It was thought that the intricacy and systematic interconnections of nature exhibited the handiwork of God ; to study them was an act of piety. William Paley's *Natural Theology* is a good example. By hindsight this attitude appears curiously self-defeating and vulnerable. The religiously inspired examination of organic adaptation was precisely one factor that led to Darwin's account of the origin of adaptation. His theory made the last citadel of divine teleology in nature untenable except, of course, for a few holdouts ; but it was also widely interpreted as refuting all natural teleology, especially by the German materialists. Theology in the middle half of the 19th century was especially vulnerable to Darwinism, on a second point , namely its extreme Biblicism and even further, its literalism in Biblical interpretation.

The intellectual compromise that gradually emerged had its repurcussions on 'man' and his relation to nature. The problem consists in admitting that man is part of nature and that he is indeed, even in his spiritual aspects, the outcome of an evolutionary process. The problem of divine nature

that is both perfect and yet incomplete is one contemporary heritage of Darwin.

'Self' being a contentious issue, needs to be examined from Karl - Marx's[25] perpective, a philosopher who left behind him a legacy of social understanding of Western philosophy. A reading of Marx however needs to be dealt with carefully as his writings have been interpreted in a variety of ways. Three basic features of Marx's thinking need to be kept in mind for any discussion of Marx: *Base and superstructure* ; *Class struggle and conflict* ; and *Capitalism and revolution.* Class structures are defined through the relations of production ; that one class, the unproductive one, extracts the surplus value of the producing class. This exploitative relationship is taken as the crucial antagonism in each mode of production although it takes a variety of forms in the different stages of this historical narrative. The causes of the transformations of productive relations and forces in each stage of history (from antiquity to feudalism to capitalism) are located within the economy (the base or infrastructure). Political, social or cultural transformations are often characterized as a process through which underlying economic contradictions and conflicts are played out (within the superstructure) as a more visible manifestation of class struggle. The operation of the forces and relations of production in capitalism creates a polarized social order in which intermediate social classes (shopkeepers and peasants)

are forced through processess of monopolization into waged labour creating a proletariat which, if it became cohesive and conscious, could transform capitalism into communist mode of production. It is this stage of historical development which Marx believed would resolve these conflicts and contradictions.

Within Marx's materialistic approach, human beings are conceived as creative creatures whose search for fulfillment can only be achieved by liberating their labour power from exploitative control. Much then hinge on the broad distinction between social relations within which human beings engage in useful work and exploitative social relations. For Marxists, it is the institutional separation of non-economic relations from exploitative economic relations that is the distinctive feature of the capitalist mode of production. In capitalism, exploitation takes place at the point of production outside cultural concerns, like the rest of the superstructure. In this story of historical change, capitalism is unique in being organised in such a way as appearing to segregate cultural life from economic life. The mission of Marx was to attempt to demonstrate the close connections between economic exploitation and all those spheres of existence defined as the superstructure. Unfortunately, at the end of *Das Kapital* where Marx promises to flesh out these connections, the manuscript breaks off in a somewhat final way. His followers have been trying to fill in the gaps in this grand narrative ever since.

The 'self' or human consciousness in Marxism is thus constituted by an ideology that is, the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive, and by recourse to which they explain, what they take to be the reality. An ideology is, in complex ways, is the product of the position and interests of a particular class. In any historical era, the dominant ideology embodies, and serves to legitimize and perpetuate, the interests of the dominant economic and social class.

The quest for the ultimate self seemed to make a crucial breakthrough in the hands of Sigmund Freud.[26] It was he who not only theorized the conscious but also the unconscious. Psychoanalysts argued that the rational understanding proudly cultivated by Renaissance humanists, Descartes prized *ego cogitans*, was not after all master in its own house, not the real thing. What truely counted was what had hitherto remained remained concealed, an unconscious, profoundly repressed and hence expressed only in foreign tongues or obliquely and painfully by means of illness, hysteria and nightmare. Freud thereby opened up new horizons of selfhood, or rather delved into the psychic ocean, uncovering submarine population of dark desires and dangerous drive. Self-discovery had become a journey into inner space. In order to have a fuller understanding of Freud's concept of 'self' it is necessary to know his concept of the *id*, *ego* and the *superego*. In Freud's view, *id*,is the unconscious, which cannot be considered a separate self because, creating a self is a piece of be-

coming conscious. Although the drives of the *id*, Freud maintained certainly are in some important sense mine, they are not part of my ego or self until as they are taken up by consciousness. *Ego* is the self or attaining of consciousness. The *superego* acts as overseer of the *ego*. The *superego* is always close to the *id* and can act as its representative vis-a-vis the *ego*. According to Freud, the capacity to recognize subjectivity and the capacity for language is both correlated with and definitive of consciousness. A subjective point of view is a subjective point of view for the same reason [redacted] that a language is a language - namely it is capable of representing the world as being a certain way whether or not the world is in fact that way ; both a subject and a language must be capable of representation at a distance and, more importantly, they must be capable of misrepresentation. Acknowledging subjectivity and using a language as a language both presuppose the recognition of this possibility– the possibility of misrepresentation itself. It is the recognition of this possibility that, for Freud, seems to constitute the essence of consciousness.

This interpretation of consciousness helps to explain Freud's shift from the conscious / unconscious constrast toward the *ego/id* contrast : If the emergence of consciousness is equivalent to the emergence of a recognition of one's own subjectivity, it is also equivalent to the identification and delineation of a self or an ego. The *id*, in contrast, is an assortment of desires

wholly directed toward their objects and wholly oblivious to their subjective character. In attaining a sense of self,that is, in attaining consciousness, or attaining an ego, boundaries between myself and other things must be drawn. Fixing the physical and the psychological boundaries of a self, however, is a complicated and ongoing process. Desire is possessive, seeking to incorporote things we like onto ourselves, while disowning things we dislike, seeking to expel them from ourselves. We tend to attribute desirable features to ourselves(we "introject" them) while attributing undesirable features to things outside ourselves (we "project" them). When I take a whole person rather than a selected aspect of some person as the object of my desire, the possession or incorporation of that object requires the internalization of a whole personality ; satisfaction of my desire thus requires that I fantasize the internal presence of the desired person rather than merely the desired properties of that person. The result is the internal presence of not only the loved but also the hated aspects of the internalized other, in imaginatively acquiring that which I desire, I may also consign myself to the continued presence of much that I despise.

The internalization of another does not necessarily give rise to a superego. The internationalization of an other will amount, rather to a kind of merger with that person. No doubt this internalization of an other may lead to some internal conflict given the fact that people differ in their desires

and personalities. But Freud explicitly rejects the idea that the contrast between conscious and unconscious mental states, for example, could be understood on the model of two interacting selves, for in his view, the unconscious, or *id*, is not a self at all. Although the drives of the *id* certainly are in some important sense mine, they are not part of my ego, or my self until as they are taken up by consciousness. To the extent that an internalized other is unconscious, its opposition to oneself will amount to a rebellion against the regimentation imposed by consciousness ; for consciousness is simply the agency through which previously unconscious material confronts the reality principle, and through which prudence is enforced.To the extent that an internalized other is conscious, on the other hand, it will amount to a set of second order desires regarding one's conscious, first order desires. In either case, the internalized other retains its otherness only in so far as it directs its desires toward aspects of one's self rather than toward objects in the external world,hence, a *superego*. The *superego* is precisely that part of a person that remains opposed to or critical of the *ego*.

Friedrich Lange, [27] a teacher and radical, who wrote about Darwin, Engels and Freud, also speaks of the ego. Vision, Lange, says is inseparable from interpretation. Lange addresses the crucial question not just how do we see but where is 'I' or "the ego" in the psychological process of seeing. What is inner and what is outer ? And he also wants to know in the light of these observations how materialism might go

forward without returning to idealism. Lange confronts the materialists with something he classifies as 'unconscious thinking' and is not sure whether or not it can be explained away as a phenomenon of a merely corporeal nature. Lange explores the interlocking questions how what we know we are seeing and how we know we are ourselves. Materialism and realism he suggests, have to be understood as involving codes of seeing.

> The idea of the Ego is meanwhile, as it is originally with man quite inseperable from the idea of the body ; and this body is the diorama body, the retinal picture body, fused with the body of the sensations of touch, the sensations of pain and pleasure.[28]

The fictional aspect of the unity of the person is also stressed by Lange. According to him, somehow our sense of seeing connects with our sense of ourselves as unities; so we are able to see, as though from one visual and psychological place ; but despite the fusion of the functions of the sensoria, nevertheless, he maintains the enigma remains : 'how out of the multiplicity of the atomic movements there arises the unity of the physical image.'[29] This is the central mystery.

The individual in existentialism is always in crisis. The central existentialist doctrine is that men are nothing except what they choose to become, their essence consists in what they choose to know, under what aspect they choose to see the world. One of the greatest existentialist philosophers was Sartre.[30] His philosophical culture appears to have been formed almost entirely within the tradition of continental rationalism and

idealism-- the line of thinkers that leads from Descartes to Kant and then from Hegel to twentienth century phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. While Sartre's deepest interest is in individual human beings, his effort to understand them, to form a general concept of human being, has nevertheless been heavily dependent on a number of other such conceptions, among them the Christian, the Cartesian, and the Hegelian theories of man. All of these Sartre for one reason or another rejects, but he does not regard them as just unfortunate philisophical mistakes. Instead they express in his view an aspiration of human beings that runs so deep as to be virtually definitive of what it is to be a human being : the aspiration to found one's own individual being in a rational necessity of some sort. Sartre's whole philosophy can be seen as an attempt to describe a mode of being– human – whose essence is just this aspiration, which he thinks is necessarily doomed to failure. This combination of a rejection of all forms of rationalism, theistic and otherwise, with a recognition of the permanent validity of the demand they express may fairly be regarded as the most characteristic feature of Sartre's thought. It is also the key to his moral philosophy, the fundamental imperative of which is to recognize and accept this unresolvable contradiction that defines human nature.

In *La Trancendance de L' ego* Sartre dwells on the 'self'. According to him, the 'self', unlike pure consciousness, does not disclose itself

exhaustively to immediate intuition and for precisely this reason belongs to the objects that transcend consciousness-- in the world. Since the world is constituted by the intentional acts of pure consciousness, the self must be treated as the result of a synthetic act of organization of this kind and not as itself the agency by which these syntheses are made. If the self forms part of the world as Sartre claims to have shown, then it cannot be isolated from history either. The 'ego', according to Sartre, is not located within, but outside of consciousness. It is, neither in the formal nor in the material sense, immanant to consciousness. The Ego or self is transcendent to consciousness and does not inhabit consciousness. Its abode is outside consciousness. So far the 'other' is concerned, Sartre sees in the 'other' not a fellow creature but an enemy, against whom one must maintain oneself. Like Heidegger, Sartre is much concerned with the meaning of human existence. Both speculated about being and nothingness in a somewhat abstract way that run against the central existentialist concern.

Depending on who one believes in, modernity is identified with both making and unmaking of the self. One story about modernity would be to identify it with the apprehension of the self's autonomous self-grounding, the positive precipitation of the act of expelling all in authenticity and error from the self. According to the other story, the absence or impotence of God, the Church, the king, tradition, makes the modern subject more liable to come apart

at the seams than everbefore. The very strength of the modern self is an epistemized self, its will to self is a will to self knowing, even in its most radical assertions of the need to go beyond merely rational or cognitive categories.[31] Alongside 'self's' visualistic paradigm, French thought has produced an increasing philosophical interest in those relations between the self and its environments. There is a shift from the 'self' to the 'subject'. The work of Lacan and Foucault provide signal examples of this phenomenon.

In Lacanian psycho-analysis [32] the subject is produced through social signification. Desire is the effect of the subjects' symbolic structuration. Because subjectivity is achieved by the recognition of the self as a signifier (I), the subject is always dependent upon a system of differences which it cannot master. Those differences (as language) which exceed the subject produce an originary lack or absence which constitutes the subject as such. Desire, the search for pre-signification unity, or the overcoming lack, must therefore always fail within the structure of signification. Lacan emphasised what was outside symbolic structuration ; the real was always felt as an absence, a gap or tear in the symbolic order. We may have no unmediated access to what his outside structure may be but it is precisely this lack of distance which constitutes us as desiring subjects. The object of desire can, therefore, never be fully presented. As a consequence, the subject is forever

distanced from the fulfillment of desire. Interpretation or the analysis of desire is infinite. Lacanian criticism, accordingly shows the way in which any representation of the self as an unified entity proceeds by marking or misrecognising its desire -- a desire, which, by definition, can never meet with adequate representation – precisely because the self or subject is always in excess of any representation. Lacan does not describe the biological origin of the human subject and its passage to culture. Rather, he argues that the subject is the effect of positing its origin. That is, it is through representing our origin, say, biological that we become social/cultural.

Lacan's theory of the individual also sees the subject as constructed in language. This confirms the decentering of the individual consciousness so that it can no longer be seen as the origin of meaning, knowledge and action. It is only with its entry into language that the child becomes a full subject. In order to speak, the child has to differentiate between 'I' from 'you'. The mirror phase, in which the infant perceives itself as other, an image, exterior to its own preceiving self, necessitates a splitting between the I which is perceived and the I which does the perceiving. The entry into language necessitates a secondary division which reinforces the first, a split between the I of discourse, the subject of utterance, and the I who speaks, the subject of enunciation. Thus, there is a contradiction between the conscious self, the self which appears in discourse and the self which is only partly represented there, the self which speaks. The unconscious

comes into being in the Gap which is formed by this division. The unconscious is constructed in the moment of entry into symbolic order, simultaneously with the construction of the subject. Entry into the symbolic order liberates the child into the possibility of social relationship but at the same time a division within the self is constructed. The subject is thus the site of contradiction, and is perpetually in the process of construction, thrown into crisis by alterations in language and in the social formation, capable of change. And in the fact that the subject is a process lies the possibility of transformation.

Bakhtin[33] approaches the problem of the 'self' and 'other' in terms of one's own speech and the 'alien word of the other.' One's distinctive use of language is thus a critical sign of oneself. It is what makes 'one' other to all others and individual to the self. But the world of the 'self' also expresses a world view. Although one creates oneself through one's own use of language it is indeed the other's language that forms the self, since an utterance is formulated only in the light of another's speech. For Bakhtin, not only does the subject lend specificity to his utterance, but so does another's anticipated or infact articulated reaction, so that the single utterance is penetrated by the speaker's sense of the other, which contributes to establish particular focus of meaning. The consciousness of the 'self' thus spans two worlds : the outer, determinedly its relevant temporal and spatial co-ordinates, its place in the world and the inner where it attempts

to find its 'place' with its self. From the perspective of the self, then,the other exists only within the single outer plane of time and space. There is no way, clearly, for the 'self' to experience directly the inner plane of the 'other'. Yet paradoxically ; it is only the 'self' that is capable of actualizing or giving form to the (outer and inner) world of the 'other' on another plane entirely : the fictional or aesthetic.

Martin Heidegger [34] brought about a major change in hermeneutic thinking. What Heidegger discovers is that the Western Ontotheological tradition from Plato to Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietszche has been essentially a metaphysical tradition in which, essence precedes existence. As such it has been a tradition that has reified being, transformed verbal being to nominal being, into a super thing at best, which contains and determines all other 'thing' (seiende) thus relegating becoming to the realm of the apparent. Simultaneously, in disclosing the temporality of being which the logos as Word or Presence encloses, i.e, covers over and forgets his '*destruktion*' of the tradition points to a hermeneutics of being which is capable of the surpassing of metaphysics, a post modern hermeneutics of discovery, in which a disclosed temporality is given ontological priority over Being.

Heidegger was concerned with ontology. In his early work he devel-

oped, what he called an " existential analytic" which analyzes the basic structures of Being -in- the world (*Dasein*) as against a human essence already expressed in, or signified by human history, independently, of any social and cultural determinants. Most particularly, the existential analytic is not an analysis of the life- conditions of the post Cartesian man of reason, indeed, it is intended to describe what reason itself presupposes. In Heidegger's terms, *Dasein* is the structure within which Being manifests itself among beings. *Dasein* cannot structure a being that is an end in itself, because the question of understanding Being is itself essential or, rather "constitutive" of Dasein. Thus Dasein is also a form of fundamental "transcendence" just because no fixed or limited project or object can satisfy the questioning of Being. For Heidegger, 'Being' was not itself a given, rather it was revealed in Dasein's engagement with the world. It requires what he would come to think of as 'opening' or 'clearing' in the practices by which societies and lives were constructed. This aspect of Heidegger's thought broaches what might be called an ontology of ethics, that Foucault implies as a practice that produces an individual's way of life or selfhood.

However, *Dasein* is constituted by anxiety at the instability and chanciness of its own being, by an experience of nullity and meaninglessness most intensely expressed in death's simultaneous necessity and arbitrariness. This anxiety seperates *Dasein* from other beings in the

world : it is individualized, as Heidegger puts it , in its anticipation of death. In his later work, '*turn*'(Kehre), Heidegger formulates what he calls " withdrawal of Being" or forgetting of Being : The forgetting of Being occurs within a historical process ordered by a will to power, and the primacy of rationality and use value. Yet, for Heidegger paradoxically, the forgetting of being belongs to Being -- which, indeed, discloses itself by withdrawal. Furthermore, Heidegger suggests that thought is not primarily concerned with the human,for him, to believe that man exists at the centre of things is to forget the question concerning the truth of Being. Humanism is a metaphysics in that it replaces concerns for Being with an interest in man and the whole apparatus -- representations, most of all -- that permit man to frame the world as what Heidegger calls a 'standing reserve' -- therefore humanity's control and use. Since this forgetting is characteristic of metaphysics in general, Heidegger argues that it is in his own thought that the death of humanism can be glimpsed. In intellectual historical terms, Heidegger opens the way for Foucault's claim that he, foresees the 'death of man', as well as the ways in which the humanist subject 'man' is, in fact, the effect of administrative and governmental agencies.

J.N.Mohanty, [35]a most influential expositor of Husserlian phenomenology, develops his concept of self also on the Husserlian model of *Sachen Selbst*, the matter at hand. According to him, a person is a being with a very

complex structure consisting of layers of selfhood. Mohanty proposes to unravel these layers. In Mohanty's usages, the first person pronoun 'I' stands for the person I am, for myself, and refers to my ego. There is no standard way of distinguishing between these. The subject, for him is the source of intentional acts such as perceiving, believing, thinking, imagining, also hoping, desiring, loving and hating. By 'subjective', he means that it is chacterized by intentionality. The subjective, in this usage, is not coextensive either with 'consciousness' or with the mental. My body is subjective in the sense that its movements are characterized by intentionality. The idea of the ego is the idea of my interior mental life in its solitude, cut off from my involvement in the world and society. The self is the ego 'clothed with the garments of society.' It lives, acts, and grows in the real time and history. Persons are selves 'whose identities have achieved expression.' A person is thus, he concludes, also a subject, an ego, and a self. Without being a subject, without having the possibility of that reflective loneliness which is the testing of an ego, and without enjoying social and historical identity which belongs to a self, a person would not be a person. But again a person is more than any of these.

Speculations of postructuralists like Derrida and Foucault on the issue of 'self' have been significant. These philosophers have challenged the Renaissance idea of 'self' as a core inner personal identity. Rather

they have explored the possibilities of locating 'self' in the linguistic system. Through the approach called *deconstruction* Derrida [36] has begun a fundamental investigation into the nature of the Western metaphysical tradition and its basis in the law of identity. Superficially, the results of this investigation seem to reveal a tradition riddled with paradox and logical aporias. For example, he cites the case of Rousseau's philosophy. Rousseau argues at one point that the voice of nature alone should be listened to but he also draws our attention to the fact that nature in truth is sometimes lacking such as when a mother cannot produce enough milk for the infant at her breast. Lack now comes to be seen as common in nature. Thus self-sufficient nature, Derrida shows, according to Rousseau, is also lacking. Lack in fact endangers nature's self sufficiency -- that is its identity, or as Derrida prefers, its self- presence. Nature's self-sufficiency can only be maintained if the lack is supplemented. However, in keeping with the logic of identity, if nature requires a supplement it cannot also be self sufficient : for self-sufficiency and lack are opposites ; one or the other can be the basis of an identity, but not both if contradiction is to be avoided. This example is not an exception. The impurity of identity, or the undermining of self-presence is in fact inescapable. Human beings require the mediation of consciousness, or the mirror of language in order to know themselves and the world, but this mediation or mirror have to be excluded from the process of knowledge; they make knowledge possible,

and yet are not included in the knowledge process. If they are, as in the philosophy of the phenomenologists, they themselves (consciousness, subjectivity, language) become equivalent to a kind of self-identical presence.

The impetus of deconstruction is not simply to show that philosophically the 'laws' of thought are wanting but rather the tendency evident in Derrida's *Oeuvre* is a concern to generate effects, to open up the philosophical terrain so that it might continue to be the site of creativity and invention.

Derrida coined the word *differance* in the height of his researches into the Saussurian and structuralist theory of language. While Saussure had gone to great pains to show that language in its most general form could be understood as a system of differences, 'without positive terms', Derrida noted, that such an implication was neither appreciated by Saussure himself or latter day structuralists. Difference without positive terms implies that this dimension in language must always remain unperceived, for strictly speaking it is unconceptualisable. With Derrida, difference becomes the prototype of what remains outside the scope of Western metaphysical thought because it is the latter's very condition of possibility. Difference is not an identity; nor is it the difference between two identities. Difference to Derrida is difference deferred.

Derrida accepts Saussure's position that meaning is the product of the differential relations between signifiers, but he goes beyond Saussure in claiming that the temporal dimension cannot be left out of account. Structuralism posits that it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as 'I',as the subject of a sentence. It is in language that people constitute themselves as subject. Consciousness of 'self' is possible only through contrast, differentiation ; 'I' cannot be conceived without the conception 'non I', 'you' and 'dialogue'. The fundamental condition of language, implies a reversible polarity between 'I' and 'you'.

Post- Saussurean linguistics, however, implies a more complex relationship between the individual and meaning, since it is language itself which by differentiating between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning. Derrida says that, for Saussure 'language is not a function of the speaking subject.' This implies that the subject (self - identity, self-conscious) is inscribed in the language, that he is a 'function' of the language. He becomes a speaking subject only by conforming his speech to the systems of linguistic prescriptions taken as the system of differences. Derrida goes on to raise the question whether, even if we accept that it is only the signifying system which makes possible the speaking subject, the signifying subjectivity, can we conceive of a nonspeaking, non-signifying subjectivity, 'a silent and initiative consciousness? 'The problem here, he concludes is to define conscious-

ness - in- itself as distinct from consciousness of something as distinct from consciousness of self. If consciousness is finally consciousness of self, this in turn implies that consciousness depends on differentiation, a differentiation between 'I' and 'you', a process made possible by language.

In his three volumes of the *History of Sexuality,* Foucault focusses on the part played by sexuality in constructing the individual through networks of power and knowledge. According to Foucault, the discursive construction of the private subject is achieved through various social practices of self-observation and personal introspection. In his *Discipline and Punish* ,Foucault too argued that modernity is characterised by a shift in power relations, no longer subject to public and corporeal forms of discipline. The modern subject is produced as the effect of procedures of 'self-discipline'. Foucault as well as Roland Barthes and Derrida has questioned the whole notion of the unified subject, the center, the self. His statement "Man is an invention of recent date soon to be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" celebrate the death of man and decenters him. [37]

Althusser, the Structural Marxist critic, confronts the problematics of 'self' in his highly influential essay *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses* (1971). Ideology argues Althusser, constitutes individuals as subjects. Ideology suppresses the role of language in the construction of the subject.

People 'recognize' (misrecognize) themselves in the way in which ideology 'interpellates' them or in other words, addresses them as subjects, calls them by their names and in turn 'recognizes' their autonomy. As a result, they 'work by themselves', willingly adopt the subject positions necessary to their participation in the social formation. The subject is not only a grammatical subject, 'a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions' but also a subjected being who submits to the authority of the social formation in Ideology as the Absolute Subject (God, the King, Man, conscience). [38] 'The individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection?'[39] Ideology thus interpellates concrete individuals as subjects, and bourgeois ideology in particular emphasizes the fixed identity of the individual. Furthermore, the Althusserian notion of a subject as a product of ideology precludes traditional notions of intention, experience, authorship, desire of feeling, for such notions are referred back to the ideological structure. By accepting Althusser's stringent anti-humanism, subject unity is seen as nothing more than the production of discourse ; all analysis of ideology is taken place immanently from within the structure of ideology. As Althusser argues, " ideology has no out side, but at the same time it is nothing but outside."[40] That is, ideology presents itself as nothing other than the real, - what is obvious, already there- pure and pre-given outside ; as such then, ideology is an immanent system in which its

ground – the subject – is already one of its effects. References to seemingly non-discursive factors, such as bodies, desire or experience, are seen from this point of view as further essentialising manoeuvres of bourgeois ideology.

Raymond Williams, the cultural materialist critic, brought the question of culture and experience in the construction of 'self'. Culture in William's sense is not just a way of seeing or the collection of meaningful practices which map a society as a whole way of life, but includes both material conditions and the way in which those conditions are lived. With his notion of 'structures of feeling', Williams effected an inclusion of the subjective dimension of human life within the socio-historical dynamic of culture.[41] In so doing, Williams was at once undertaking a traditionally Marxist manoeuvre : taking a supposedly apolitical or universal phenomenon(experience) and demonstrating its historical specificity and contigency. At the same time, however, William's use of experience also reacted against traditional Marxism that had emphasised individual experience or feeling as bourgeois or mystificatory. Williams' theory of 'structures of feeling' engages, in a debate which is crucial for both conventional Marxist literary theory and the subsequent trajectory of cultural materialism : the politicisation of everyday life and the question of the individual or subject.

Traditionally, Marxist theory has set itself against individualism. The idea of the individual as an inherently rational, self-determining and essentially equal pre-social unit is argued to be ideological in so far as this seeming autonomy belies the market forces of capital which determines the individual's existence. Against the public life of market society, capitalist ideology posits a private sphere : a domestic realm where emotions, morality, reason and autonomy could be cultivated. To this extent, ideas of the individual feeling and private experience are 'bourgeois' and represented a shift in value away from feudal society's emphasis on social order, duty, obedience and just heirarchy. But this liberated site of individual bourgeois freedom is as Marxist critics argue actually political. Accordingly, Marxist literary theory sought to demystify the realm of private experience by showing its historical and political character.

Instead of dismissing the private sphere as an illusion of ideology, Williams' idea of structures of feeling accepted the experience of privacy and sought to understand this experience as culturally significant. His work can be compared to Foucault's later work on the subject and sexuality. For Foucault the positing of an ethical substance which in certain modern practises – such as confession , pshchoanalysis and the human sciences– enables a 'subject' to be constituted. This subject is an effect of practices and the network of power within which these practises are formed. According

to Williams, subjects or individuals are specific phenomena characterised by their place in an entire culture. The value of Williams' definition of culture lies precisely in its recognition of the diversity within social wholes, where different structures of feeling are understood as different modes of life and practices. It follows from his definition of culture that different cultures will construct different 'selves'. The concept of 'self' is also culturally determined.

Central to cultural materialism's post- Marxist theorisation is the problematisation of political identity. Questions of gender, race and sexuality have meant that classes can no longer be seen as coherent groups united by a general consciousness or worldview, for differences cut across these already differentiated groups in a number of ways.[42] In addition to the multiplication of differences among individuals, it has been argued that they are also non-self-identical, 'split' or divided.[43] The theorisation of the split subject and its politicisation has been undertaken within cultural materialism primarily by questioning the production of sexuality and desire. Marxist theory was characterised by a changing but critical relation to traditional individualism. Althusserian Marxism intensified the critique of bourgeois individualism by regarding any subject position as an effect of ideology. Cultural materialism has drawn upon theories of the sexual construction of the subject to criticise traditional theories of humanism. For Belsey, the value of Lacanian psychoanalysis lies in its disruption of the unified subject, a subject

whose function is inherently political. What psychoanalysis' theory of the unconscious provides is a way of understanding a subject constructed by a process beyond its immediate self-understanding. But Belsey sees these processes as political, rather than existential or to do with desire. By arguing that the unconscious is not a timeless pre-discursive given but the effect of the construction of culturally specific notion of the subject, Belsey can at once use Lacan's theory of the subject while at the same time arguing for its specifically patriarchal character. Besides Belsey, many cultural materialists have employed both Lacan and Foucault within the same framework of criticism.

Jonathan Dollimore has also investigated the production of the modern subject from a Foucaultian perspective. In particular, his focus on sexual 'dissidence'– the forms of subjectivity marked as 'other' or deviant – demonstrates the ways in which desire is produced through specific forms of discursive legitimation and exclusion. Terry Eagleton, in his essay "Self-Undoing Subjects"[44] traces the different philsophical perspectives of the

'self' or 'human subject' but fails to come to terms with its various notions. The whole concept appears a conundrum without solution. In his opinion once we cease to think of autonomy as purely individual affair, and grasp the decentring of the subject as a transitive social action rather than some curious ontological condition, the terms of the problematic are swiftly altered.

A self-determining human subject is not one who miraculously conjures up him/her- self out of nothing.He or she is rather someone who has been able to negotiate his or her freedom within those determinations set upon it both by nature, and the right to self- determination of others. The autonomy of the human subject simply means that it is determined in such a style as to be able to react back upon those determinants and make something new and unpredictable out of its encounter with them. It is part of the nature of such a subject that it must either continually make something of what makes it, or go under and this is just another way of saying that its nature contains an enormous hole where, if it is to survive at all, it must implant itself in culture and history .

Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* published in 1980 marked New Historicism's focus on the theme of self-fashioning. The new historicists reacted to the previous historical narratives. In Marxist and new-Marxist histories the transition from feudalism to capitalism was marked by the 'rise' of the bourgeois individual. According to this picture, pre-modern societies were characterised by a heirarchical system of feudal relations where selves were solely defined by their social role. Capitalism, on the other hand, placed an emphasis upon individuals rather than communities, and upon competitive interests and social contracts rather than upon reverence and divine right. Instead of accepting the idea of the seamless

'emergence' of individuals, new historicists sought to show the contradictions and ruptures of historical change. Through a study of More in *Renaissance Self Fashioning*, Greenblatt demonstrates the ways in which conflicting notions of the self as both authentic individual essence and social performance are manifested. Ideas of self-hood were highly problematic and needed to be worked out and contested. Running against the Marxist and humanist idea of a human spirit which would be alienated or dehumanised by modernity, the idea of self--fashioning showed the inextricable link between the formation of subject and power. There are no presocial selves who are then governed by a repressive or dominating authority. On the contrary, the self is the product of power. In the *Renaissance*, Greenblatt argues, it was the ability to produce the most persuasive or captivating fictions or performances of self which was the most efficacious form of social and political power.

Renaissance Self-Fashioning is typical in its stress upon the instability or ambivalence of any performance of subject identity. Greenblatt suggests that there can be no general or transhistorical theory of the subject; rather each act of critical investigation seeks to determine the particular subject - formation at work in any text or performance of texts. The concept of self- fashioning is therefore a general explanation of how texts and cultures interact, at the same time as it works to undermine any general

theory of culture. Self-fashioning takes a number of forms due to its intimate connection with the modalities of power. Despite the fact that the idea of self-information through power gained a general critical currency, Greenblatt's own work turned away from the centrality of the question of the subject towards the process of representation of which selves were the effect.

The social structures in which contemporary selves are constituted are profoundly different to cultural forms of the pre-modern world. The development of modernity has involved a rejection of the certainties of tradition and custom – the worldview that there is an essential, internal order to culture. [46] The culture of modernity is a form of world-construction marked by the rejection of fixed, traditional boundaries.[47] Selfhood and personal identity become increasingly precarious in conditions of modernity, as the individual loses all sense of cultural anchorage as well as inner reference points. Christopher Lasch detects a 'culture of narcissm' at the heart of modern of culture in which selfhood contracts to a defensive core. [48] The result is that personal life turns inward upon itself : a narcissistic pre-occupation in which self becomes central to psychic survival, a pre-occupation that reinforces capitalist consumption and manipulation. Modern social life according to Jurgen Habermas, has become increasingly subject to administrative and bureaucratic control and this has led to crushing of individual creativity and autonomy.[49] Instead of assingning persons to pre-ordained roles, as in

pre-modern cultures, modernity suceeds in leading human subjects into creative and dynamic making of self-identity and the fashioning of life-styles according to personal preference. But the modern way of life also has a darker side. In its attempts to legislate rational order, this century has regularly been destroying individual particularity and human life. Implicit in the foregoing theories of modernity, there is the suggestion that individuals have within themselves an authentic capacity for self-definition and the subjective organization of meanings. in each person there is the struggle to negotiate the opportunities and dangers of modernity in terms of an ongoing, enduring sense of 'self' ; to respond to the continuities and discontinuities of contemporary social processes in terms of one's own distinctive subjectivity.

The new postmodern 'self' decentres old versions of autonomy by explaining that the inner-self is composed by cultural constructs that even shapes what counts as 'inner'.[50] Modernity linked responsibility with rationality, autonomy and unity. The autonomous, inner-self was responsible for intention and motivation. In contrast, the postmodern story explains that the 'self' lack such an autonomous inner core and instead makes decision in the context of a finite variety of possiblities presented in a particular context. However this position does not liberate citizens from their responsibility,for cultural patterns do not determine choices,but only provide parameters

for them.The Self, while given its basic structure by the culture, has choices to make. It selects aspects of the culture that are mixed and matched to compose a self. The composition of this self is not unitary and fixed but is put together for moments and events. Thus it decentres the autonomous inner being, a central feature of the modern "self",without giving up individual choice.The postmodern "self" is thus a dependent self made by others in contrast to the modern man, who makes himself all by himself.

In the postmodern narrative,[51] existence is a linguistic event and selves are made through symbolic moves.The text of one's life is also a communicative act and tells a story. The collapsing of the inner /outer dimension of the modern self makes way for a postmodern self that is composed out of cultural symbols:words,images and metaphors.Rather than focussing on the proposition, "I think, therefore I am," postmodernism suggests "I speak, therefore I am," and to extend it " we speak, therefore we are". Communication presupposes others and creates the possibilities for connections that go beyond the material exchanges and body-to-body interaction. The self includes not only the body, but symbols that enable body to connect with others. The postmodern figure is encouraged to work with others and to acknowledge how he himself or she herself is at the same time like the other and different from them. She is different not so much because of an inner secret self, but because of the diverse social contexts that compose

that self.No longer does experience set each individual apart because it serves as the means by which individuals develop a variety of selves. Postmodernism made the fragmentary self attractive. The fragmented self can play contradictory roles. No longer are citizens stuck with a singular identity, but can be many things at once. The postmodern self cherishes mixing cultures and supports continual changes in philosophical and ideological consistency.

S.P.Mohanty[52] offers a critique of postmodernist position of identity which demonstrates a general skepticism towards experience. The antifoundationalist thesis Mohanty has tried to retrieve from postmodernism brings into focus the accurate and damaging critique that postmodernists can make of identity politics, but by itself it does not entail either of the two extreme conclusions to which their skepticism can lead. The naturalist-realist account of experience, he defends, is neither foundationalist nor skeptical. It maintains that experience, properly interpreted can yield reliable and genuine knowledge, just as it points out instances and sources of real mystification. Central to this account is the claim that the experience of social subjects has a cognitive component. Experiences can be 'true' or 'false', can be evaluated as justified or illegitimate in relation to the subject and his world, for 'experience' refers very simply to the variety of ways humans process information. Mohanty opines that it is on the basis of this revised

understanding of experience that we can construct a realist theory of social or cultural identity, in which experiences would not serve as foundations be cause of their self evident authenticity but would provide some of the raw material with which we construct identities.

Mohanty's post positivist approach thus points that instead of conceiving identities as self-evidently based on the authentic experiences of members of a cultural or social group or as equally unreal to the extent that they lay any claim to real experiences of real people because experience is a radically mystifying term, we need to explore the possiblities of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of objective social location.To do so,a cognitivist conception of experience is needed, a conception that will allow for both legitimate and illegitimate experience, enabling us to see experience both as real knowledge and social mystification. Whether we invent an identity -- femininity, masculinity, black or white or we actively choose one on the basis of our political predilections, our identities are ways of making sense of our experiences. Identities are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in a specific way. It is in this sense that they are valuable, and their epistemic status should be taken seriously. In them, and through them, we learn to define and reshape our values and commitments,we give texture and form to our collective future. S.P.Mohanty shows how both essentialism of identity politics and skeptism

of the postmodernist position seriously under read the real epistemic and political complexities of our social and cultural identities.

Paula M.L.Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia in their work *Reclaiming Identity* address the question of identity from a post positivist realist framework, building on the alternative concept of identity forwarded by S.P. Mohanty. Evaluating the trend of identity debates over the last two decades, Paula M.L.Moya[53] observes that much of what has been written about identity during this period seeks to delegitimate, and in some cases eliminate, the concepts itself by revealing its ontological, epistemological, and political limitations. Therefore, the editors along with the authors of the work intend to reevaluate and reclaim identity even while trying to rescue identity from the disrepute into which it has fallen. Their response is a critique of the essentialist and postmodernist ideas of identity, which they show to be conceptually flawed. These critics contend that a theory of identity is inadequate unless it allows social theorists to analyze the epistemic status and political salience of a given identity and provide it with the resources to ascertain and evaluate the possibilities and limits of different identities.

The authors undertake the task of reclaiming identity because 'identities' are evaluatable theoretical claims that have epistemic consequences. Although increasing numbers of theorists have voiced their concerns about

the poverty of the opposition between essentialist and postmodernist approaches to identity, the editors of *Reclaiming Identity* note that no one has offered a richly elaborate alternative theoretical framework that can transcend it. They claim that their work represents the first co-ordinated effort to present an alternative theoretical approach to identity.

The 'self' becomes an even more complex issue under colonialism.[54] Identity is understood in terms of an 'other', however, not in the sense that Bakhtin or Barthes used the 'self-other' dichtomy. Barthes refers to reciprocity : 'in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the other... I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being as subject.' Such a reciprocity allows mutual relations between self and other in which both may at various times willingly function as objects for the other. But in colonial societies, the participants are frozen into a heriarchical relationship in which the oppressed is locked into a position by the assumed moral superiority of the dominant group, a superiorty which is reinforced when necessary by physical force. Colonial societies realize their identity in difference rather than in essence and thus colonial identity is constituted in terms of binary opposites -- colonizer/colonized, master/slave, domination/ dominated, centre/margin, etc. Power rested in the hands of the colonizers who in order to consolidate their domination induced its subjects to initiate the forms and values of the dominant culture. Colonialism is thus a

colonisation of cultures and minds of the colonised which resulted in a crises of identity.

In postcolonial literary theory the question of 'self' and 'identity' still forms the basis of its main practitioners Said, Spivak and Bhabha, whom Robert Young in *Colonial Desire* describes as 'the Holy Trinity' of postcolonial criticism. Edward Said's *Oreintalism* (1978) in many ways is considered the precursor of postcolonial criticism. According to Said, 'ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely the considerations of power, also being studied.' In *Oreintalism* he delves on the issue of identity in terms of East-West dichotomy. In Said's view, *Oreintalism* (in the sense he uses) operates in the service of West's hegemony over the East principally by producing the East discursively on West's self-image as a superior civilization.[56] It does this primarily by distinguishing and then essentializing the identities of East and West through a dichotomizing system of representation most evident in the regime of stereotype, with the aim of making rigid the sense of difference between the European and Asiatic parts of the world.[57] As a consequence the East is characteristically coded negatively in oreintalist discourse as variously -- voiceless, sensual, female, despotic,irrational, backward. By contrast, the West is characteristically represented in positive terms, as masculine, democratic, rational, dynamic and progressive.

Leela Gandhi [55] in her work *Postcolonial Theory* discusses post-colonialism and its oppositional stance against the traditional humanities. As a new field of study, postcolonialism endeavoured to foreground the exclusions and elisions which confirm to the privileges and authority of canonical knowledge systems, and second, to recover those marginalised knowledge which have been concluded and silenced by the entrenched humanist curriculum. Like feminism, which has posed a challenge to the universalist assumptions of gender-based or 'phallocentric' knowledge systems, and attempted, in turn, to make both ways of knowing and the things known more representative, post-colonialism offers a critique of seemingly foundational discourses.Unlike feminism, however, it directs its critique against the cultural hegemony of European knowledge in an attempt to reassert the epistemological value and agency of the non - European world. Postcolonial studies claim that the entire field of the humanities is vitiated by a compulsion to claim a spurious universality and also to disguise its political investment in production of 'major' or 'dominant' knowledge. An oppositional critical discourse like postcolonialism counters the exclusiveness of humanist thought through an attempt to make the field of knowledge more representative. According to Gandhi, this project relies upon two types of critical revaluation or 'showing'. First, it takes upon itself the the self-important function of revealing the interests which inhabit the production of knowledge. Second, the investigative function

of oppositional criticism also draws attention to, and therby attempting to retrieve, the wide range of illegitimate, disqualified or subjugated knowledge. She quotes Habermas who describes this function as 'emancipatory knowledge interest' which takes the historical traces of suppressed dialogue and reconstructs what has been suppressed.

In the shifting terrains of 'self' it is worthwhile at this point to consider the feminist perspective,for the question of identity is central to feminism. While the story of 'self' dates back to the Renaissance, the quest for women's 'self' is of recent origin. This speaks of man's domination of woman which have had so long rendered her impossible to determine her 'self'.

The feminist agenda, therefore, has been to extricate woman from patriarchal customs, prejudices and constructs , so that a woman discovers her own self independent of patriarchy.

It was the Enlightenment ideals of equality and freedom that inspired early feminists such as Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Harriet Taylor to centralise the issue of women's difference.[58] In creating the idea of individual agency for man, liberalism offered women a way to challenge patriarchy's denial of agency to women, a challenge that carries into contemporary feminism as well. Thus from the beginning of liberalism in the West in the eighteenth century until the advent of the contemporary Women's

Liberation Movement in the late 1960s, feminism in the Western world was predominantly liberal in character. Feminism concerened itself with the rights of the individual to political and religious freedom, choice and self-determination. The liberal feminists believed that only when women were granted suffrage, education, access to the professions and property rights, women's equality with men could be achieved. Thus though the first seeds of feminism were sown by the early mothers, their attempt for women's liberation however was limited within the existing social relations.

It was in the 1960s, for the first time since the women's vote was won, feminism again surfaced as an important political force in the Western World. The 'new' feminists were politically committed activists who were not afraid to take a stand and fight for their views. A whole range of works were written articulating women's concerns that formed the basis for the explosive development of second wave feminism. The goals of the feminist critics have been to expose patriarchal premises and prejudices in order to promote re-evaluation of literature by women. While trying to contstuct identity, feminist critical theory interrogates the signifying and universalist assumptions of patriarchy, its ideological formations and authority. The Anglo-American and French feminist theorists emphasized the difference between men and women and asserted for separate and distinct sexual identities. Inspite of some of their differences, they unanimously emphasize women's

subjectivity and autonomy of self-hood.

What feminists such as Showalter and Holly failed to grasp was that the traditional humanism they represented was in effect part of patriarchal ideology,[59] for its centre is the seamlessly unified self – either individual or collective – which is commonly called 'Man'.[60] History or the text becomes nothing but the expression of this unique individual : all art becomes autobiography, a mere window on to the self and the world, with no reality of its own. According to French feminists Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, this integrated self is in fact a phallic self, constructed on the model of the self-contained, powerful phallus. Gloriously autonomous, it banishes from itself all conflict, contradiction and ambiguity.

Kate Millet's[61] theory of sexual oppression as a conscious, monolithic plot against women leads to a seductively optimistic view of the possibilities for full liberation. For Millet, woman is an oppressed being without a recalcitrant unconscious to reckon with ; she merely has to see through the false ideology of the ruling male patriarchy in order to cast it off and be free. In her preface to *Thinking About Women* 1968, Mary Ellmann says that she is "most interested in women as *words*."[62] Her main thesis in her work is that Western culture at all levels is permeated by a phenomenon she labels 'thought by sexual analogy.' She observes that our perception of

the world is influenced by sexual differences so much so that a woman introjects within herself what a man tells her what she is. In her work she sums up the eleven major stereotypes of femininity as presented by male writers and critics. Ellmann's point is that men have traditionally chosen to write in an assertive, authoritarian mode, whereas women have been confined to a language of sensibility. A woman's self can emerge only when women start to write subverting the authoritarian modes of writing. Ellmann suggests, male reviewers just cannot attach the same degree of authority to a voice they know to be female.

In *Mad Woman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate how in the nineteenth century the 'eternal feminine'was assumed to be a vision of angelic beauty and sweetness. The ideal woman was seen as a passive, docile and above all selfless creature. Gilbert and Gubar opine that " to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead." Further they maintain that dominant literary images of femininity are male fantasies. Women are denied the right to create their own images of the feminine, instead must seek to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them. The authors of *Mad Woman in the Attic* see the problematic of a woman artist's self-definition under patriarchy :

> For the female artist the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between her self and herself.[63]

Elaine Showalter provides to some extent in her work how a woman's self could be relocated. She has coined the word 'gynocritics' that is to turn to the study of women's writing, not just to learn what women have felt and experienced , but also that this experience is directly available in texts written by women. She rejects theory as a male invention that can apparently be used on men's texts. 'Gynocritics' frees itself from pandering to male values and seeks to "focus... on the newly visible world of female culture."[64]

While the Anglo-American critics tried to look at women as represented in literature, French feminist criticism is more theoretically driven. One of the foremost French feminists is Simone de Beauvoir whose *The Second Sex* was an epochal work. Beauvoir's [65] main thesis in this work is that throughout history women have been reduced to objects and a 'woman' has been constructed as man's other, deprived of the right to her own subjectivity and to her own actions. Beauvoir shows how these fundamental assumptions dominate all aspects of social, political and cultural life and equally important, how women themselves internalize this objectified vision, thus living in a constant state of 'inauthenticity'. Beauvoir's famous statement, "One is not born a woman, one becomes one," shows her uncompromising refusal of any notion of a female nature or essence. It is Beauvoir's statement which has made later feminists to look upon woman not in terms of biology but as a construct.

Influenced by Derrida, Helen Cixous shows how Western philosophy and literary thought have always been caught up in an endless series of heirarchical binary oppositions that always in the end come back to the 'coupling' of male/female. The hidden male/ female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm. Cixous locates death at work in this kind of thought because in order for one term to acquire meaning, it must destroy the other. Victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity. Under patriarchy the male is always the victor. Cixous passionately denounces such an equation of femininity with passivity and death as leaving no positive space for woman : 'Either woman is passive or she doesn't exist."[67] Her whole theoretical project is an effort to undo this logocentric ideology. Her endeavour is to proclaim women as the source of life, power and energy and to hail the advent of a new, feminine language that ceaselessly subverts those patriarchal binary schemes where logocentricism colludes with phallocentricism in an effort to oppress and silence women.

In defining a seperate 'identity' for woman, she advocates 'ecriture feminine'i.e, writing with the body. She says : A woman must write herself : must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies... Woman must put herself into the text as into the world and into history by her own movement."[68]

She rejects the Freudian and Lacanian models which privilege the phallus in the formation of sexual identity. She urges women to break the parameters of masculine definitions and to express themselves in writing. Certainly the 'self' predominates in her narrative. In *From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History* she writes explicitly of the 'self' as one 'that has come to be reconciled with the difficulties of the world. But it is not given, it must be formed."[69]

Julia Kristeva refuses to define a 'woman', rather she prefers to see her as a position – that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order. This relational 'definition' allows her to argue that men can also be constructed as marginal to the symbolic order. Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows us to view the repression of the feminine in terms of positionality rather than of essences. What is percieved as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies. Refusing to define woman she says : "In woman I see some thing that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies."[70]

Thus from an assertion that real concrete women share an essential 'womanness' which is to be celebrated and emancipated to the theoretically sophisticated but politically challenged notion of contingent, fluctuating post-gendered subjectivities, the issue of subjectivity has become of vital signifi-

cance to contemporary feminist debate. As Denis Riley says " Women is indeed an unstable category, that this instability has a historical foundation, and that feminism is the site of the systematic fighting out of that instability."[71] In attempting to define what might constitute a woman's 'self', what matters most is not shared transcendent essence, but politically determined perceptions of pertinent similarities and differences. Identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them.

Western feminism has more or less limited itself to the white woman's concerns. Contemporary feminism therefore sees the need to study the other feminisms as well. Experiences of woman differ and so it is problematic to talk of a universal 'woman'. Western Feminism had not taken note of class, caste, colonialism, ethnicity and a whole range of other structures of domination that determine the lives of women in Third World countries and also other marginalised groups.[72] Postcolonial feminist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak observes that in order to learn enough about Third World woman and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogenity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman.[73] Third World feminists therefore do not talk of 'identity' but multiplicity of identities. As Spivak [74] says, "As subject woman must learn to speak 'otherwise'...The focus should not merely be 'who am I ?' but 'who is the other woman?' 'How am I naming her ?' How

How does she name me ?"

Spivak is concerned throughout her career with the less priviledged constituencies which have no choice but to remain located in the third world. To describe these social formations, Spivak adapts the term 'Subaltern' from Gramsci, in whose writing it signifies subordinate or marginalised social groups in Europe. Spivak's analysis is directed especially at the predicament of the female subaltern whom she represents as doubly marginalised, no matter where she is located, by virtue of both relative economic disadvantage and gender subordination. A principal concern of Spivak's is whether the subaltern can speak for him or her-self or whether subaltern is condemned only to be known, represented and spoken for in distorted or 'interested' fashion by others. In reaching the unequivocal conclusion that 'there is no space from which the subaltern can speak' (i.e. make her experience known to others in her own voice) there is some convergence with oreintalism's conception of the colonized as the 'silent interlocutor' of the dominant order. The subaltern, thus, according to Spivak, has no 'identity' as such since she does not have a voice.[75]

According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty,[76] the main problem with the approach of many Western feminists to Third World issues remains in their lack of awareness of the persistence in their work of colonialist modes of representation. In her influential essay 'Under Western Eyes'(1991),

Mohanty addresses this problem while also examining the work of Western feminists. According to Mohanty, any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of 'Third World feminism' must address itself to two simultaneous projects : the internal critique of hegemonic 'Western' feminisms, and the formulation of autonomous, geographically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies. The first project she sees as one of deconstructing and dismantling; and the second, one of building and constructing. She is of the view that unless these two tasks are addressed simultaneously, 'third world' feminisms run the risk of marginalization or ghettoization from both mainstream and Western feminist discourses. Mohanty argues that much Western Feminist writing about Third World women 'discursively colonize(s) the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing / representing a composite, singular 'third world woman'- an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse." The composite image which emerges from this writing is one of Third World women as victims of male-control and of so-called traditional cultures and religions. Specificity, history and difference disappear and Western feminism functions as the norm against which the Third World is judged. The answer to representations of Third World women as passive victims lies in detailed attention to social relations in Third World contexts. Mohanty argues that Third World women, like Western women,

are produced as subjects in historically and culturally specific ways by the societies in which they live and act as agents. Thus, for example, rather than portraying women as victims and perpetrators of patriarchal practices, attention needs to be given to the specific contexts in which women live, the indigineous meaning of particular practices and how women in the Third World fight against them.

Even as the 'self' has been a contentious issue in the philosophical domain, it needs to be seen how the 'self' negotiates within culture, which is a structure in itself. In order to know what do we mean when we say 'culture', we need to look into the various definitions of culture. 'Culture' is an important, but can be slippery, even a chaotic, concept. It is at one and the same time a mark of distinctions and of assumptions upon which such distinctions are forged. To understand culture we have to recognize the way in which its meaning is tied to historically and socially specific situations. This involves a careful analysis of the practices and life styles of those involved and how people make sense of their own condition. Culture is a 'suturing' concept : it indicates a space within which competing visions of the role of human existence can be played out, all of which seek to fix the meaning of culture.[77] In short, the concept of culture is an open window through which we can identify the assumptions, values and classification systems at work. From anthropological and sociological perspectives, the

study of culture involves the exploration of the representations and lived experiences of everyday life. By looking at the lived experiences of other cultures, their rituals, family structures, courtship patterns, etc. we can begin to identify what is so distinctive about our culture. Anthropology thus directs us to the study of culture as concerning the everyday lives of a community, group or society.

Sociologists assume that human behaviour is largely directed and determined by culture. Norms, values and roles are also culturally determined and socially transmitted. From this perspective gender roles are also culturally determined and socially transmitted. Further, gender roles are products of culture rather than biology. Inequality between the sexes results from socially constructed power relationship. According to sociologist Sherry B. Ortner,[78] it is not biology as such that ascribes women their status in society but the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology. Thus she hopes that if this universal evaluation changed, then, the basis for inequalities would be removed. She expresses that in every society a higher value is placed on culture than on nature. Culture is the means by which man controls and regulates nature. Thus according to Ortner, the universal evaluation of culture as superior to nature is the basic reason for the devaluation of women. Culture is seen as man's invention to legitimize their own superiority over woman. If we go by the different theoretical

views that 'self' or 'identity' is a cultural construct and different cultures construct different selves, it still would hold even if culture is a male prerogative. If cultures are 'constructs' invariably the dominant class will legitimize their own superiority over the weaker class.

However, to look at 'culture' just as a way of life would be to simplify the complexity of the term. 'Culture' is not just restricted to the sphere of anthropology and sociology, but the concept of culture has been a part of literary enquiry since the time of Mathew Arnold and F.R. Leavis. More recently, the concept of culture figures in cultural materialist and new historicist criticism. Arnold and Leavis differentiated between high culture and low culture. In other words, their definition of culture implied a hierarchy. Leavis,[79] in developing the culture and society tradition of Mathew Arnold, argued that the survival of intellectual refinement and high culture in the arts, literature and philosophy depended upon definite mechanisms for sustaining the distinction between high and low (or popular) culture. In these approaches, cultural knowledge is seen as being transmitted through the 'authoritative' voices of those willing and able to act as the embodiment of cultural heritage. It was the 'critic' who acted as the custodian of all that is good and worthwhile in culture. For Leavisites, it was the 'intelligent few' who should make wise judgements for the 'unintelligent many'. The role of the custodian of culture could only be given to

those who possessed the ability and training for a 'discerning appreciation of art and literature' and were in a position to make up their own minds on what is valuable in culture. According to him, everyone else lacks the capacity of judgement and therefore should accept the second hand judgements of those custodians of culture. In this way a division of culture is created between valuable culture which should be preserved and passed on to future generations, and the rest of cultural experience which he regarded as shallow and escapist,undermining the active use of the mind. This concept of culture is a crude one because it adopts the view that people are easily manipulated. Culture, thus , for the new critics was that which resisted anything other than purely aesthetic forms of justification.

Recent literary criticism has taken on a broader definition of culture. Culture, according to Raymond Williams, is "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language."[80] In his *Culture and Society*, he had identified four kinds of meaning attached to the word 'culture', referring respectively to : an individual habit of mind ; the intellectual development of a whole society ; the arts ; and the whole way of life of a group of people.[81] It is precisely because of Williams' redefinition of culture as 'a whole way of life' that the concept of experience can no longer be seen in an ideal or non-material sense. To the contrary, because culture is defined by Williams as an entire complex of practices, significations, institutions,

material forces and personal responses, the problem of relating lived experience to a politico- economic reality is circumvented. Experience itself is already a part of a larger cultural context. According to Williams, because culture is a dynamic whole which includes practices, economic conditions and most importantly, forms of communication, the nature of culture will have its specific structures of feeling and its particular configuration of dominant, emergent and residual features. His insistence upon experience avoids the monolithic or totalising emphasis of notions like world-view or class consciousness. Culture, in Williams' sense, is not just a way of seeing or the collection of meaningul practices which enable a society , as a whole way of life culture includes both material conditions and the way in which those conditions are lived. For Williams, culture is dynamic and this dynamism is revealed in the historical complexity of any given culture which contains dominant, residual and emergent elements.[82]

Clifford Geertz and Mary Douglas offer the anthropological view of culture. While the discipline of anthropology has usually been associated with the study of other cultures, the location of English literary texts within the framework of anthropological theory enables a study of English literature as a specific and determined practice with its own culture and history. As a result the meaning of a text is no longer referred to supposed universals such as 'the human condition' or 'aesthetic value'. Such literary

philosophical concepts are now seen as specifically located in culture.

According to Clifford Geertz[83] there is no single feature, or essence, which would unite all cultures , but there is a collection of different characteristics which create cultural configurations in different ways. He calls these groupings cultures because some share certain characteristics (such as writing) while others share other features (religion, ethics). There is no single feature which they all share but they are recognised as instances of 'culture' because the term 'culture' could be understood through its various uses. Geertz argues that cultures cannot be reduced to coherent patterns and that there is not a simple underlying pattern which produces behaviour. Rather behaviour itself operates by its own mechanism irrespective of any psychological context. Doing away with the universal notion of mind which would, then be ordered by social patterns, Geertz posits that cultural 'control mechanism' produces varieties of behaviour . Culture is a way of doing things, a form of achievement or a mode of activity rather than an internalised pattern or scheme. Human life,according to Geertz, is nothing apart from its way of behaving. In Geertz's scheme of culture, it is not a rigid set of pre-given rules which are then followed. His model of culture should not be explained through some external cause. Behaviour is a complex phenomenon with its own inherent logic; an event is not just the result of a given tradition imposed upon individuals ; behaviour possesses

its own plan or 'recipe'.

Drawing from Geertz's view of culture, the new historicists consider texts as culture. Cultures are not ideal or psychological entities like a 'world-view' or 'mind set'.Cultures are not used to relate texts to worlds because cultures are already texts, persons, practices and rituals. The text is not an expression or reflection of its world; it plays an active part in producing and acting within that world. Because the idea of culture sets texts along practices, rituals and disciplines, it enables critics to consider a text according to any number of variables. Different critics have defined culture in different ways which have indeed opened a negotiation between literature and culture. Though the new historicists believe that culture is not some pre-given patterns which influence a way of life, yet in postcolonial criticism and feminist criticism it is still considered as a weapon of power that legitimates its superiority over the dominated. For Bhabha[84] the postcolonial perspective attempts to revise those nationalist or 'nativist' pedagogies that set up the relation of Third World and First World in a binary structure of opposition. In the *Location of Culture*, he asserts that the postcolonial condition is emblematic of the heterogeneity of contemporary culture, not simply a marginal aspect of it. What characterizes the contemporary cultural moment we inhabit is a recognition that notions of unitary identity are no longer viable. If his project of critique has involved interrogating

and destablising fixed ideas of identity, the title of his book, the *Location of Culture* invites an examination of how he wishes to resituate the question of identity in the sphere of contemporary culture. What he offers is a celebration of the liminal identity associated with the postcolonial condition.

In post colonial terms, culture is legitimized by those in power to suppress the subjects. In feminist theory, women are subjugated by men through the medium of culture. Culture operates in such a manner that young girls from their childhood are trained to conduct themselves according to social norms, values and practices.Women thus, absorbs social expectations, and infact experience them as their own; so power, in a sense, does not operate coercively but from within. The images of women as represented in diverse cultures are stereotypical. The stereotypes are internalised by women who have been made to feel, " This is perhaps how we really are."[85] Thus a fractured 'self' of a woman is constructed through the gaze of the other. John Berger puts it aptly in the following words :

> Men look at woman. Woman watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of woman to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male : the surveyed female.[86]

Cultures, however, are not homogenous whatever might be the definitions. And, different cultures produce different selves. Even within feminism

women from one culture differ from another culture. Therefore, to identify the 'self' of an Indian woman, one has to contextualize her location in social and historical settings which undoubtedly affect the nature of her embodied experience as well as her articulation. Issues such as caste, class and the role of community become paramount in the construction of her 'identity'. To locate the women's 'self' in a complex, fractured cultural representation as ours is not an easy proposition but nevertheless it opens up questions that need to be challenged.

Endnotes

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Chapter III

Tracing the 'voices' of women in U. R. Anantha Murthy's *Samskara*, Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* and Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali.*

A reading of Indian novels in perspective requires a knowledge of the rise of the novel as a genre in India. Such an exercise would certainly help in situating the texts under study in their socio-historical contexts. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her works *Realism and Reality* [1] and and *The Twice- Born Fiction* [2] has very ably traced the development of novel in India. There were a number of factors that shaped the growth of this genre in the mid-- nineteenth century. Besides the political and social situation of India as a colonized country and the indigenous narrative traditions of an ancient culture ; the impact of English education and exposure to Western literature were by far the strongest influences at work. The first novels in India in Bengali and Marathi were written much later than the novels in English. Eighteenth century in English literature marks the emergence of novel as a new form and there were many economic and political factors as well as metaphysical assumptions about man's relationship with time, with nature and with other human beings that led to its rise. One of the marked features of the English novel at the time of its inception was realism. It was realism that made this genre so welcome and popular. Marking a radical break from the epic and romance, novel dealt with real people in real situations. Many theorists suggest a close link between the rise of individualism and the rise of the novel, probably because both in a way made human

beings realize their unique potential.

A novel is necessarily bound by its historical and cultural conditions and is generally a product of a specific environment in a particular society at a given point of history. However, a whole new world was available to educated Indians in the middle of the nineteenth century through their study of English literature. It became difficult for them to portray their own society which was a contrast to the society they read in the novels. The novelists did not know how to convey the Indian experience in a genre that had as its theme marriage, intrigue, individuality. Early English novels like *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722), *Pamela*(1740) show how the central character is in each case an active rather than a passive agent challenging his/ her fate. The Indian novelist had to operate in a tradition-bound society where a man's profession and not his marriage was his personal affair. His life was mapped out by his family or his community or his caste. In the rigidly hierarchical familial and social structure of nineteenth century India, individualism was not an easy quality to render in literature. The early novelists found it difficult to reconcile with the two sets of values- one obtained by regarding an alien literature and the other available in life. Meenakshi Mukherjee quotes two passages from two nineteenth century novelists to capture their predicament. The author, in his introduction to the Marathi novel *Manjughosha* (1868) wrote :

> Because of our attitude to our marriage, and for several

> other reasons, one finds in the lives of us Hindus neither interesting vices nor virtues, and this is the difficulty which we find in trying to write novels. If we write about the things we experience daily, there would be nothing enthralling about them, so that if we set out to write an interesting book we are forced to take up with the marvellous...[3]

The second passage quoted from the dedication to O. Chandu Menon's Malayalam novel, *Indulekha* (1888), captured more directly the problems faced by an Indian novelist having to write in a form that required individualism as a value while his society denied it.

> my object is to write a novel after the English fashion, and it is evident that no ordinary Malayalie lady can fill the role of the heroine in such a story. My Indulekha is not - therefore, an ordinary Malayalie lady.[4]

The novelist thus writes a novel that does not reflect a society known to him. The writer of *Indulekha* transcends his limited model through a firm grasp of the milieu and time to which he belongs. *Indulekha* as an early novel was thus a projection into the future where the author envisions a society in that a woman like Indulekha could choose her own partner.

One of the recurrent subjects in the English novel was the man-woman relationship. However, an Indian writer living in a society bound by restrictive conventions of marriage found little scope to develop this theme. Where girls were married off by their parents before puberty and marriage was a social institution, there was no chance of a premarital love of the kind

depicted in the English novels being read by the educated Indians. Love could be shown in an indigenous setting only in historical romances where the demands of realism were absent. The other alternative was a depiction of illicit love, but this involved the attendant problem of juxtaposing individual aspirations with the stability of the social order. The novels of Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-94) at times dealt with this conflict between rebellious passion and the accepted social norm, but even he had to accede that the demands of social order were higher than even artistic integrity.

The question of time is important within the narrative structure of a novel. The novelist has been increasingly less concerned with the unchanging moral verities and their presentation in a timeless setting and more with the precise location of historical man in the flux and flow of society. In the Indian context, mythic time was indispensible to kavya works but in terms of the novel this was not given precedence understandably because the nineteenth century Indian writers were influenced largely by western concepts. Not *Brihatkatha*, *Kadambari* or *Kathasaritasagar*, but Scott's and Thackeray's novels were their conscious models. However, traces of puranic tradition, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are identifiable in the early Indian novels.

Realism is the marked characteristic of the novel and it means reflecting a particular world-view at a certain phase in human history. The

fidelity to actuality involves a focusing on the immediate, the here and now, detailing out the visual world, depicting specific human action and its verifiable consequences. Indian literature did not have any tradition of this variety of realism because it was based on a different view of reality. Interest in physical reality on the part of the Indian novelist often ended in giving descriptions that were far from real. To describe a beautiful woman they would rather allude her beauty to the Sanskrit Kavya convention. A realistic presentation of actual people or objects, interiors or buildings, was either absent or rare. The reality they represented was hardly the reality represented by Defoe or George Eliot, Balzac or Tolstoy. English novels emphasizing moral qualities were more popular among the Indians rather than amoral realistic settings of Defoe and Fielding. And this interest feeds into the writing of novels in India as well.

Thus the Indian novel was a direct result of the English novel in many ways so far as its features are concerned. However, in its early years the Indian novel was so much influenced by its English counterpart that it was difficult to differentiate between what was Indian and what was Western. Unlike the English novelists who wrote about their actual experiences, the Indian novelists could not express their own reality in their novels. The early novels were imitative and there was no conscious attempt to finding a new orientation to the writing of fiction in India. Early works like *Yamuna Paryatan* (Marathi , 1857) or *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (Bengali, 1858) were not considered

as 'novels' although in these works the beginnings of a new literary form could be recognised. The word *upanyas* for novel is a Bengali derivation, first used in 1862 in Bengali by Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay when he named a volume containing two tales set in the past as *Aitihasik Upanyas* (Bengali, 1862). By the time Bankim Chandra Chatterjee began writing his novels in the mid-1860's, the term *upanyas* was already well established in Bengali and about to be taken over in Hindi as well, as is evident from the title *Manohar Upanyas* of a work of fiction published in 1871. In Marathi the word for novel was *kadambari* nomenclatured perhaps after Banabhatta's *Kadambari*. The use of this word dates to the year 1829 and therefore the Marathi word for novel predates the Bengali *upanyas*. In Urdu it is *naval*, in Gujrati *naval-katha* and likewise almost every Indian language has a name for the novel as the genre became popular. Whatever the differences in terminology in the Indian languages, the thematic and formal aspirations of the Indian novel were the same as those of the English novels read by pioneering Indian novelists. Moreover, many of the early novels such as *Deurani Jethani Ki Kahani* (Hindi), *Tabut-un-Nusuh* (Urdu), *Mirat-ul-Arus* (Urdu) were written under the English patronage. In almost every major novel of the nineteenth century, behind the obvious European influences, there can be found the bedrock of a different narrative structure and value systems. The conventions of Sanskrit literature and puranic traditions unconsciously influenced the Indian writers.

While differences in literary trends in different languages are considerable, certain common patterns also become perceptible in the development of these patterns in different regions. There was a sudden spurt of long narrative fictions in most Indian languages in the second half of the nineteenth century, whether these were called upanyas, kadambari, naval-katha or novel.The full development of the Indian novel as a whole may be divided into three large stages : historical romance, social or political realism and psychological novels showing an introspective concern with the individual.

Bankim Chandra wrote historical romances in Bengali and his influence was evident in the early historical novels of Hindi in which Kishorilal Goswami led the field for a long time. The first of his long series of historical novels, *Labangalata* (1891), appeared almost at the same time as Devaki Nandan Khatri's *Chandrakanta* and together they launched this particular phase of the Hindi novel which continued well into the twentieth century. In Marathi, Hari Narayan Apte was the first to establish himself as a widely read novelist. His first novel, *Maisorcha Wagh* (1890), was a translation of Meadows Taylor's *Tippoo Sultan*, but later on he found his themes in Shivaji's life and times in novels like *Gadh Ala Pan Simha Gela* (1906). Likewise historical novels were written in Marathi, Malayalam and Kannada. The historical romances created a glamour of the past incorporating characters from history. Thus the characters were far removed from the nineteenth century

reality of the readers.

The novel of social realism was ushered in sometime during the twenties by Munshi Prem Chand in Hindi and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in Bengali. They dealt with everyday problems of the rural community, and their immense popularity marks the next phase of development in the Indian novel. The writers concerned themselves with the contemporary public issues, whether social or political. The National movement for independence offered them rich and ready material as well. In Bengali well-known writers were Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra, though both dealt with different aspects of the upheaval. Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (1916) and *Char Adhyay* (1934) and Sarat Chandra's *Pather Dabi* (1926) are novels in this mode. In other novels like *Palli Samaj* (1916) and *Arakhaniya* (1916) Sarat Chandra dealt with superstitions and orthodoxy in village life. Prem Chand dealt with the problem of prostitution in *Sevasadan* (1916), while later in *Karmabhumi* (1932) his theme was Gandhian ideology. Social problems and politics have always been difficult to separate in India and many of the novels written in the 30's dealt with this subject. Some such novels were Bhule Bisre Chitra (Hindi;1959)and *Kanchan Mruga* (Marathi;1931).

The initial vogue of the historical romance was obviously associated with the awakening of Indian nationalism. During the height of British rule, the safest form of patriotism open to Indians was the celebration of

past glory. As nationalist feelings came to the forefront of Indian life in the 'twenties and 'thirties, it was no longer necessary for novelists to make their heroes sufficiently removed in time ; the scene could now be shifted to the contemporary battles and agitations. Even the purely social reform novels were inflamed by politics since any desire to improve the lot of the people was bound to be linked with political independence.

While the vogue of the historical novel and the era of social reform fiction can be traced quite distinctly in most Indian literatures, the third phase is not so clearly seen because in some languages it is still in the process of emerging. In Bengali fiction the trend towards introspection started in the late thirties and it could be traced in the early works of Buddhadev Bose. In Hindi, Agyeya is the most powerful representative of this shift of emphasis from the public issue of society to the private agonies of the individual, while novels like Ilachandra Joshi's *Jahaz ka Panchi* (1955) or Naresh Mehata's *Dubte Mastool* (1954) give further evidence of this shift. Marathi novels of Mardhekkar and Vasant Kanetkar also illustrate the changes over-taking Marathi fiction towards probing analysis of the inner life of the human beings.

Modernism in the West was not without its impact in novel writing in India. The period after the World Wars saw a radical change in Western art, philosophy, literature and culture. Thinkers such as Nietszche, Marx, Frazer

questioned the certainities that had supported traditional modes of social organisation, religion and morality and also the traditional ways of conceving the human self. The catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in the moral basis, coherence, and durability of Western civilazation and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the post-war world. Writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and T.S. Eliot came up with works which were innonative and reflected the spirit of the age. The modern artists set out to create ever-new forbidden subject matter by violating the accepted conventions not only of art but of social discourse. The artists represented themselves as 'alienated' from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy.

Modernity in India was no doubt influenced by Western modernism but it was not the same. The idea of modernity emerged in Indian Literature from the inner urge of the literary community to create alternative models and free the canon from traditions dominating for centuries. The move in the twentieth century was towards the ideological and psychological reality. The new content of this literature grew out of the writer's understanding of the social reality and his response to the fast changing world. In negating and critiquing the past concerns with spirituality and nation building, the Indian modernists launched an existential search for a new set of values. A modern writer carved out a distinct identity for himself in a new style. The search for authenticity was more vital. In his view only those values were authentic

which were real and relevant in the existential sense. The period also witnessed the most engaging debates regarding style and diction in different literatures. Most important to these writers was to explore the possibilities of existing genres, while creating new forms of expression. They continued to experiment with meters and narrative structures.

Indian modernism indeed followed two parallel paths. Influenced to a large extent by Eliot and Yeats, Indian poets in different languages were successful in setting a new idiom of poetry that was artificial and elitist. Eliot was so popular among these poets that each vernacular literature witnessed more than the translations of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. However, the impact of modernism in Indian fiction was momentous. It provided the Indian novelist a basis and opportunity to rediscover him/ herself as a concerned individual in his/her reality. She refused to live in the cloistered world of isolation and suffer the artificial pang of existential angst.

The modern movement ushered in a way of interrogating tradition and practices with a vision to change the society. Without the pretensions of reformers, they wrote with an objective of 'showing' the prevailing social situation being part of it. Premchand was at the forefront of this movement. Although he is classified as a commited writer with leftist leanings, he is indeed the very authentic voice of the Indian reality. Premchand was followed by a host of writers who were committed not only to ideology

but to issues as social justice, equality and raised their voices against class and caste discriminations. Anantha Murthy, Gopinath Mohanty and Mahesweta Devi not only continued to make social issues as the theme of their fictional work but also experimented with language and narrative style. In the hands of these generation of writers, novel as literary genre made tremendous progress.

Samskara

Samskara was originally written in Kannada in 1965 by U.R. Anantha Murthy. It was made into a film in 1970 directed by Girish Karnad and translated into English by A.K. Ramanujan in 1976. Soon after its publication, the novel became enormously popular with general readers and critics in both its original and translated form. However, the novel also generated criticism for the writer as he was accused of attacking Brahminism. Anantha Murthy's subject in *Samskara* is revolutionary. A brahmin himself he questions the very basis of Brahminism. He exposes the contradictions within Brahminism as a discourse.

The event in the story is a death by bubonic plague of a Brahmin, Naranappa, a breaker of taboos of the agrahara. His death brings in its wake the question of the rites of burial of a Brahmin. The crux of the problem is the dilemma in performing such a man's rites. While the Brahmin elders confer on how to dispose off the renegade's body without inviting excommunication, the reader is on a detour having a close look at the flow of life of the community as well as the dilemma of the village acharya,

Praneshacharya. Praneshacharya turns out to be the main protagonist as the story revolves around how he is going to solve the problem at hand.

Written in 1965, the novel is set at a period of transition, when traditional India had already come in contact with the modern world with the advent of colonialism. In Naranappa, the rebel Brahmin and his followers we find Brahminism's collusion with modernity. There are enough evidences within the text which suggest that Anantha Murthy's *Samskara* is a rewriting of Brahminism into modernity. Anantha Murthy's critique of Brahminism is unquestionable but what needs to be seen is how far has he succeeded in handling the women characters in the novel, in articulating women's voice, because critics have not taken note of it. The narrative opens up ample scope for a feminist reading.

The setting of the novel is a Brahmin village or 'agrahara'. Anantha Murthy captures very vividly the lived life in the brahmin village of Durvasapura. Everything about their existence appears to be 'routine' and this is brought into focus at the very outset when we are introduced to the spiritual head of the community, Praneshacharya: "A routine that began with the bath at dawn, twilight prayers, cooking, medicines for his wife. And crossing the stream again to Maruti temple for worship. That was the unfailing daily routine..." (p.1)*. Not only the life of the acharya, but the whole colony seemed

*
All textual references are taken from U. R. Anantha Murthy, *Samskara*, Translated into English by A.K. Ramanujan (Delhi : OUP, 1992, fourth edition).

to be ordered by rituals and festivals and seasonal food variations. There were vows to be kept in each month and the occasional feasts for death, marriage and initiation. "The brahmin's lives ran smoothly in this annual cycle of appointments" (p.16). Besides, there appeared to be a uniformity in all the brahmin houses, both in their interiors and exteriors. The people who resided were all of Brahmin lineage.

Inspite of this uniformity and smoothness, what we read is an uneasy calm. Far from being smooth the world in which the Brahmins live appears to be claustrophobic.[5] The details emphasize the sterility of this ritual bound existence. Although the Tungabhadra river runs behind the houses, the flowing water seems to have no relation to the enclosed lives of the Brahmins.[6] Time stands still here and kinships and hostilities continue for generation. Garudacharya, shirking from a relative's duty to perform Naranappa's burial rites recalls an ancient feud : " Between Naranappa and me, it's true, there's a bond of kinship going back several generations. But as you know, his father and I fought over that orchard and went to court ... So we swore we'd have nothing between us for generationsto come ..." (p.5). Within the village even there is hostility between the two sets of Brahmins - the Smartas

and the Madhvas – each waiting for an opportunity to smear the other, even to the point of blaspheming their respective genealogies. Human relationships are graded and merits measured according to a prescribed scale. A Brahmin co-habiting with a low-born prostitute may be condoned, but not if he has eaten food cooked by her. A man neglecting his wife at the time of her death may be pardoned, but not if he has omitted performing the annual rites of his dead parents. In this agrahara, all decisions are made according to an inviolable code made centuries ago. Anantha Murthy depicts a decadent structure which once jolted out of it's groove cannot be reintegrated again. The community wakes up to a new challenge how to handle the death of an unbrahminic Brahmin. The very basis of Brahminism, which for centuries have unquestionably continued in its rituals and practices suddenly become unsettling. The arena of conflict shifts to the mind of Praneshacharya, the most conscious point of the community's existence, thus interrogating what he symbolizes.

In the first section of the narrative, the action is presented largely in terms of the different voices of Brahmins who discuss their relations with others in the village in terms of property and filial disputes. Naranappa obviously becomes the point of reference whose life and actions even after death

haunt the Brahmins. It is a community presumably united in it's belief in the Ancient Law Books, but their voices belie this unity. [7] In the discourses of the Brahmins we read the insecurity of the agrahara. Although they gather to discuss the rites of burial, their discussion digresses in ways that only serve their greed, jealousy, self - interest, family feuds and class divisions. The Brahmins are more concerned in not losing their Brahminism in the act of burying a Brahmin, who never lived the life of a Brahmin. The spiritual head of the agrahara,Praneshacharya lays before them the problem at hand - " who should perform the rites? The Books say, any relative can failing that, any brahmin can offer to do them" (pp.4 - 5).Both Naranappa's relatives Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya immediately find excuses to free themselves from the fear of performing the burial rites. Even the other Brahmins Dasacharya, Durgabhatta and Padmanabhacharya decline, citing one reason or the other. The Brahmins instead of finding solution to the problem delved into Naranappa's associations with low-caste women and Muslims and his wilfull ways and questioned his Brahminic identity. Garudacharya, Naranappa's relative , while recognizing the Ancient Law Books and the acharya as the true dispenser of authority, washes his hands off the burial citing the irrepairable differences he has had with Naranappa, further saying. "Lets set aside the question of whether I should do the rites. The real question is :is he a brahmin at all ? What do you say ? He slept regularly with a low-caste woman ..."(p. 5). Lakshmana and Padmanabhacharya

agree to Garuda at once, Lakshmana adding that "he even ate what she cooked"(p.6) and Padmanabhacharya chipping in with "And he drank too. Besides drinking, he ate animal flesh" (p.6). Thus, from burial rites their conversation shifts to question of identity,in this case their Brahminic identity. It is ironical that the very Brahmins who are questioning the Brahminic identity of Naranappa are themselves susceptible to the same question as is revealed in their conversations hereafter. The question that the narrative posits is who after all is a true Brahmin ?

As their conversation turns to a question of identity, it is interesting how it leads them to trace the identity of their ancestors. What comes across is also the divisions that exist within Brahminism. In this agrahara dominated by Madhvas there resided a Brahmin from the Smarta sect, who never lost any opportunity to check and measure the rival sect's orthodoxy. He was Durgabhatta and while the others were questioning Naranappa's Brahminic identity, he had no doubts about it, citing their ancestors as examples : " O no, a brahmin isn't lost because he takes a lowborn prostitute. Our ancestors after all came from the North...history says they cohabited with Dravidian women. Don't think I am being facetious. Think of all the people who go to the brothels of Basrur in South Kanara"(pp. 5-6). The purpose of their gathering takes a backseat as the Brahmins become engaged in a war of words concerning their respective sects. Stung by Durgabhatta's attack to their sect, Garuda on his part turns his attack on Shankara, the

founder of the Smarta sect : "Shankara, your great founder, in his hunger for full experience, exchanged his body for a dead king's and enjoyed himself with the queen, didn't he ?" (pp.6-7).

As the argument of the Brahmins lead to a maligning of their genealogies, Praneshacharya interrupts knowing full well that the protection of the entire agrahara was now on his shoulders. While Praneshacharya had answers as to how Garuda could absolve his feud and perform the rites of burial, he could not answer with certainty how someone could actually perform cremation rites of someone like Naranappa who abused Brahminism. He was ironically certain of the fact that "he may have rejected brahminhood, but brahminhood never left him. No one ever excommunicated him officially. He didn't die an outcaste, so he remains a brahmin in his death" (p.9). Retaining their own Brahmin identity became more important to this community of Brahmins. Unwilling to lose their identity in the act of performing the rites, they are afraid of "sullying" their brahminhood by letting someone else do it. Unsure of what to do next Praneshacharya seeks to find answers in the Law Books.

Towards the end of the first section as Chandri, the low-caste mistress of Narannappa, is brought to the scene, we are taken closer into the sham of this Brahminic community. She gives up all her jewelry to meet the expenses of the rite. All the brahmins who had refused to perform the rites were now afraid

that the attraction of gold might tempt others to do what so far they had disagreed upon. The duality within the Brahmins is exposed as they are caught between their lust for gold and retaining their brahmin purity. "But in the heart of everyone of them flashed the question : if some other brahmin should perform the final rite for Naranappa, he might keep his brahminhood and yet put all that gold on his wife's neck "(p.10). The new reason inflamed further the jealous hatred among Lakshmana and Garuda and afraid that someone else might be tempted to agree, every brahmin present "vied with the others in lurid account of Naranappa's misdeeds - things done not to them but always to others"(p.10). In the course of their conversation, the Brahmins also reveal the divisions that exist within Brahminism which re-inforce the question of who is a true brahmin and what kind of Brahminism were they trying to maintain. Within the text we come to know of the Durvasapura Brahmins who were Madhvas and the Parijatapura Brahmins who were Smartas. The Smartas were not considered orthodox brahmins and "not quite out of the upper set, their lines being a little mixed" (p.12). The brahmins of Parijatapura were "pleasure-lovers, not so crazy about orthodoxy and strict rules" (p.13) but they were rich. At one point Dasacharya had suggested that the brahmins of Parijatapura could perform the rites being close friends of Naranappa but when the question of gold ornaments came up, there were yet others who thought otherwise.

The dialogic mode of presentation conveys a sense of the insecure

ritual economy. Rituals, dharma, Ancient Law Books are the regulators of behaviour but in this decadent agrahara the ancient laws don't seen to hold good anymore. The Brahmin world is shown to be disintegrating as it can not keep younger generation Brahmins like Naranappa and Shripati in its fold. The insecurity is manifested in the Brahmins looking upto their acharya as perhaps the last hope of their Brahminhood. In the conflict between tradition and modernity, significantly it is the figure of the Muslim and women who are scapegoated. The patriarchal nature of Brahminism becomes evident not only in the attitudes of the other Brahmins, but also in Naranappa and the protagonist Praneshacharya. Although the theme of the novel is death of a Brahmin the novel is more about Brahminism. The narrative alternately turned into a quest - a quest of self-discovery. What is intriguing is that the quest displaces the dialogic formation turning monologic in that it marginalises the voices of women and others considering them as incidental not central to the formation of the quest.

At the beginning of the novel, Praneshachara is very much a part of the agrahara. To the people living in the agrahara, Praneshacharya embodied the true spirit of Brahminism. They believed he had all the answers to their problems. "We don't have to advise our great Praneshacharya. He knows all about alliances and misalliances, has studied it all in Kashi, he knows all the scriptures, earned the title Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning."(p.6). But once the Naranappa issue comes to the foreground, Praneshacharya knows

that the ground is slipping under his feet. He is confronted with the question: if he rejects his brahminhood what remains of his self ? Delving deep into the scriptures to find a solution, Praneshacharya is more bothered about guarding his reputation," He sat there thinking, 'Whatever one loses, one shouldn't lose one's good name, it can never be retrieved" (p.46). He weighed everything in terms of victory and defeat. For him getting the right answer was also proving Naranappa wrong, who always challenged his Brahminhood. Naranappa was a threat to his Brahminhood and the old questions come back to him as he questions why in the first place he did not excommunicate Naranappa. Praneshacharya is forced to realise that : "There was a time when the brahmin's power of penance ruled the world. Then one didn't buckle under any such threat. It's because the times are getting worse such dilemmas torment us"(p.47). "Its hard to know the inner workings of dharma... the inner meanings of dharma are inscrutable" (p.48).

As a last resort, Praneshacharya goes to the temple of Maruti but his desperate wait did not yield any answer. He leaves the temple reminded of his duty toward his wife . What strikes the reader is Praneshacharya's devotion to duty. Brahminism appears to be a role acted out by Praneshacharya. Whether it is looking after his wife or finding solutions to the problems of the agrahara , Praneshacharya is governed by the Brahminic code and operates mechanically. The tension within Pranesh is how well he could maintain this code in the face of transition. At this point in the novel the

shell of custom and ritual breaks as in the forest, in the dark, the Acharya, the upholder of Brahminism, finds himself in the arms of a woman-- "the Sanskrit formula of blessing got stuck in his throat" (p.63). In Chandri, he finds a release from the structures that imprisoned him for so long. Hereafter, he can no longer fit into a stratified and coded existence of the agrahara. His encounter with Chandri wakes up his other self and challenges his social self. There is no social niche he can occupy and his actions and speech can no longer be determined by the expectations of society.[8] When he sets out on his journey in the third section of the novel he is really in search of the residual self that remains after the outer shells are discarded.[9] Pranesh's reply to the hopeful Brahmin's "I'm lost, I couldn't get Maruti to say anything. I know nothing. You do whatever your hearts say" (p.78) is the beginning of the deeper conflict within ; a conflict between authority and identity. His words show the universal problem of a man who has equated himself with a particular role for so long that the role becomes his self, and without the role he feels lost. As he makes the journey in search of new identity he finds it difficult at times to be himself. "When you shed your past, your history, the world sees you as just one more brahmin. He was a little disturbed by the thought"(p.93). It is interesting that his journey has no destination but when confronted by Putta, he answers that he was going to Kundapara - the place where Chandri was said to have gone.

What we read here infact is that after his first experience with Chandri, Praneshacharya wanted more of this pleasure and it was only an inversion of his early code. What he had preached against before, he was now willing to put it into practice. In order to do that he had to move out of the agrahara. "He was entering another cave of self-deception "(p.92). Inside the agrahara, existence is codified but beyond lurks the unknown,a space where rules do not apply.

Throughout the novel, action is presented in terms of the different voices of Brahmins and the narrative is centred first around the community of Brahmins and then dominantly around the Brahmin Praneshacharya. What *Samskara* projects is a patriarchal form of Brahminism. Within this Brahminism, women's place is almost non-existent and they are relegated to a sphere where myths, rituals and customs bind them in such a way that it renders them impossible to emerge. The novel is also about Brahminism's collusion with modernity. In this collusion young generation Brahmins like Naranappa and Shripati are swayed by modernity and pose a threat to the rigid Brahminism of Praneshacharya, but the winds of change offer no hope for a change in women's situation. Both tradition and modernity have been embedded in India to patriarchal ideology. All around a woman are forces, not merely of surveillance but of patriarchal rituals of pleasure and desire that try to keep her precariously poised on a razor's edge. Where reality itself is gendered, can women expect for an escape ? Myths of Indian womanhood act on the

reality of the lives of the women of India and are, in their turn, acted upon by the same reality. The myth of Indian womanhood has naturalized not merely gender oppression, but has encoded the programme for caste and class oppression as well. Brahminic patriarchal ideology is all too dominant in *Saṃskara* in spite of its success as a revolutionary work. Semiotically, Naranappa stands both as lack and as the other. In this structure if he weakens Brahminism from within, he also strengthens the bonding of the marginalised such as the Muslims and the Dalit women whom he has given some status from without. This semiotic structure undercuts and challenges a conventional interpretation of the text. Women's presence in the text is no better than an absence. Women occupy the peripheral spaces and appear only in their familial spaces and only in their caste-related identities. They do not rise above their stereotypical and mythical roles of submissive wives, mothers, mistresses and prostitutes. Women are classed and considered as caste and communal subjects undergoing through a process of privileging and deprivileging that foregrounds their identities. In *Saṃskara* we find different groups of women : Brahmin women, low-caste women and women in the Scriptures. The text provides an interesting space from where to locate the nature of women's representation and trace their voices.

A novel on Brahminism, at the outset, invites us to examine the status of women within the Brahminic discourse and women outside it. Since

women are rendered voiceless within the narrative it is only through the Brahmin's voice that Brahmin women are represented. There is no place for women within the Brahminic discourse. A Brahmin woman is supposed to be the perfect adjunct to a Brahmin man, a shadow of his person. Either she is there to enhance her husband's status or she is a medium for a man's salvation. While Lakshmana fully agrees with wife Sitadevi regarding Chandri's jewellery and felt the rightness of his wife's words, he did not want his status as a husband to be lowered in public. So he snarled, "You shut up now . Why are you prating in an assembly of menfolk ?"(p.14). Lakshmana's words articulate women's position in the community. A Brahmin wife's place is forever confined within the private sphere of the household. She cannot participate in any discussion and her role is limited to observing the rituals of dharma and procreation. Praneshcharya's devotion to Bhagirathi is a part of his religious routine and she is only used as a medium for attaining his salvation. While the Brahmin men discuss the problems arising out of Naranappa's death, brahmin wives are shown to be positioned in the periphery, the place prescribed for them. " The brahmin wives had come in through the backdoor into the middle hall, unable to contain their curiosity, afraid their husbands might do something rash"(p.4). However, there is hardly anything that these wives could do as they remain where they are in the narrative, and they do not come out of their stereotypical roles. The Brahmin wives are more concerned in protecting their husbands prestige and their sons. Interestingly, the Brahmin women are shown

to lead a very passive and inactive life and pushed almost to oblivion. In a particular place they are mentioned in the context of observing rituals : "Only women bent on earning merit, uttering the names of gods...were his (Praneshacharya's) audience now"(p.26). At other places she is mentioned as keeping fasts and offering vows to the goddess for the preservation of the husband and the son : "Sitadevi had offered vows to the goddess: 'Give my husband peace, may his love be constant for his son' And had given up her food even on Saturday nights"(pp.27-28). These women are considered either too pious or greedy as exemplified in Lakshmana's wife Sitadevi. Otherwise they are simply non-entities. Their Brahminic identity while on the one hand makes them believe that they are superior, in reality Brahminism conversely negates their superiority.

While Brahmin women do not figure in the Brahmin's discourse, women outside Brahminism become the subject of their discussion. While discussing Naranappa's burial rites, the Brahmins' question his Brahminic identity because of his relations with "a low - caste woman." The low-caste woman is seen as a threat to Brahminism. Disregarding Chandri's presence, the Brahmins discuss her relationship with Naranappa in sexual terms. Garudacharya, noticing Chandri nearby, says boldly : "He (Naranappa) slept regularly with a lowcaste woman..." (p.5).Durgabhatta as well as Praneshacharya maintains that a brahmin remains a brahmin inspite of his relations with a low-born prostitute. This suggests that a low-caste

woman can be used any time for a Brahmin's pleasure but his Brahminhood never leaves him. Thus, a low-caste woman in a brahminic discourse remains only as an object of pleasure and denied her subjecthood. Her identity as a whore, a mistress, a prostitute is legitimated within the Brahminic discourse. Beyond that a low-caste woman has no existence. Chandri becomes an object of sexual pleasure both in the hands of Naranappa and later in the hands of Praneshacharya. Women like Chandri, are also pushed to oblivion once their sexual roles are fulfilled. Thus, both Brahmin women and low-caste women become victims of Brahminic patriarchal ideology. If the traditional brahminism of Praneshacharya is patriarchal in its adherence to customs and rituals, the liberal Brahminism of Naranappa too is no less patriarchal because in both instances women are exploited and oppressed and denied their self-hood. Brahminism in full force burdens and silences women.

If women's representation is negated in the Brahminic discourse, within the narrative, women are presented as representative of class -- the Brahmin woman and the Shudra or the low-caste woman and in binary oppposites such as sexless/sexual, passive/active, spiritual/physical, respectively. There are two classes of women in the novel -- the Brahmin and the low-caste women. Whereas the Brahmin women appear in the novel as wives of their Brahmin husbands, the lower caste women appear as mistresses of the Brahmins. The Brahmin wives Bhagirathi, Sitadevi, Anasuya

are never considered as individuals. They occupy very little space in the novel and even in those spaces where they appear are portrayed as sexless, unappetizing, smelly, invalids at best. The Brahmin's themselves consider their wives as "barren" . Says Naranappa to the Acharya . "O Acharya, who in the world can live with a girl who gives no pleasure -- except of course some barren brahmins !"(p.21). He considers his wife as a 'hysterical female'. Bhagirathi, Praneshacharya's wife is an invalid, " a dried up wasted peapod," who in her paralytic state can only think of her husband's joy and her barren womb ; "Being married to me is no joy. A house needs a child. Why don't you just get married again ?"(p.1). For a Brahmin woman her highest attainment of life is motherhood and a life without a child is shown to be lifeless. This is also articulated by Sitadevi, Garuda's wife. Even Praneshacharya who once considered his wife as "sacrificial alter" for his sacrifice notices her "sunken breasts, her bulbous nose, her short narrow braid"(p.76) and is disgusted with it. Lilavati, Shripati's wife too is portrayed as sexless, a woman who, "when her husband came at night to embrace her ...would come crying to her mother ..."(p.32). Shripati has the same opinion about Brahmin women as Naranappa. "Which brahmin girl,– cheek sunken, breast withered, mouth stinking of lentil soup which brahmin girl was equal to Belli ?(p.37). The Brahmin women are thus represented as passive characters with no function whatsoever in the novel's plot. As a class, they remain ritualistic given to chastity, sativa and penance. The Brahmin woman is confined in

her image as buttressed by myth, legend, religion and tradition. Colonised by her caste, the Brahmin woman is rendered immobile and is silenced under the burden of patriarchy. She looks down upon the lower-caste women and joins their oppressors in doubling the exploitation of the lower-caste women. They have appropriated the patriarchal system of belief to denigrate the lesser women, unaware that they themselves are also the victims of the same set of values.

If women of the upper-caste are represented as sexless, ritualistic and upholders of patriarchal values of purity and penance, the lower-caste women appear in opposites. Chandri, Belli, Padmavati are the lower-caste women mentioned in the text. While they are good enough to be mistresses of Brahmins they do not qualify to be their wives. All the low-caste women remain unmarried and they appear only as instruments of sexual pleasure. Chandri, Padmavati and Belli's role in the novel is only to satisfy the male desire. They are portrayed as mere sights for the male gaze. Naranappa's relationship with Chandri is just for " a little bit of pleasure" (p.21). "Naranappa had guzzled at her body like a ten year old, tearing and devouring like a gluttonous bear at a honeycomb"(p.45). She'd wasted ten years of her life with Naranappa and in the end " though she had got everything, yet had nothing"(p.54). If Chandri is devoured by Naranappa physically, she also becomes the object of Durgabhatta and Shripati's lustful desire in their thoughts. While the Brahmins are engaged in discussion over Naranappa's rites

of burial, Durgabhatta ogles Chandri : "He sat unconcerned in his place, ogling Chandri. For the first time his connoisseur eyes had the chance to appraise this precious object which did not normally stir out of the house, this choice object that Naranappa had brought from Kundapara... Look at those breasts. In sex she's the type who sucks the male dry"(p.8). Out caste or lower-caste women are endowed with a greater sexual vitality than their high-born counterparts. The sensuousness of women like Belli who are outside the agrahara occur again and again, sometimes even extended to by mythic references to Urvashi, Menaka and Matsagandha-temptresses of the sages. Shripati is charmed by Chandri's beauty, " a beauty beyond compare"(p.38). He is surprised "that no one's eye had fallen on Belli." He had taken on Belli at the river when she had come to get water and alludes her beauty to Shakuntala. After hearing the Acharya speak of Shakuntala's beauty, he couldn't get over Belli " as she stood in the moonlight bouncing her breasts, the colour of earth– she'd looked like Shakuntala herself "(p.39). In contrast to his frigid wife who would tighten and twine up her thighs when he approached her, there was always Belli in the outcaste hutments : "her body...the colour of the earth, fertile, ready for seed, warmed by an early sun"(p.37).

Naranappa kept Chandri as a mistress, Shripati made love to Belli, Praneshacharya too is sexually initiated by Chandri, Padmavati is the pros-

titute who has Brahmin clients. All these low-caste women are good enough only to the point of sex. This is articulated by Shripati : "Belli was alright for sleeping with, she was no good for talk. If she opens her mouth, she talks only ghosts and demons"(p.41). In other words the Brahmins "measured and judged all the low-caste women." Low-caste and outcaste women are hallowed and romanticized by their references to classical heroines like Shakuntala and Menaka. While on the other hand, their bodies appear no more than just objects and have no equality of status with socially constructed respectability. They remain as creatures of pleasure not fit enough to be the Brahmin's wives.

Low-caste women are under constant male gaze as contrasted to the Brahmin women. Outside caste, a lower-caste woman perhaps enjoys more freedom than a Brahmin woman but her life is a hard struggle in which she has to constantly negotiate the thorny terrain. As she traverses the public space, she is prone to sexual violence. A low-caste woman's mobility makes her more susceptible to exploitation. Belli freely moves in the Brahmin agrahara but this poverty stricken girl soon becomes an object of male gaze. Her poverty is used as a gaze. "It's amazing that no one's eye had fallen on Belli ; she walked around everywhere in rags, picking up manure. But then it wasn't surprizing either. How can brahmin eyes see anything, dimmed by looking for meals everywhere ?"(p.38). A low-caste woman in her search for subsistence has to guard herself from sexual exploitation.Her poverty makes her

an easy prey for her captors as women are converted into no more than commodities.

However, a low-caste woman, even in her limited space enjoys more individuality than her upper-caste counterparts. Padmavati, the prostitute in Kundapara, has an individuality of her own. Outside society, outside class, she has a liminal existence. But in her profession she enjoys the freedom of choice. She is the master of her own body and is selective about her clients. Says Putta to the Acharya. " Don't think that the woman's a common prostitute. No, Sir. No lowcaste man has been near her. And she isn't the kind of spirit that'll accept any ordinary brahmin either. Not for money, not for a few coins...She has an estate. Even the ancient sages would fall for her, she's like that" (p.125). Chandri comes out as a stronger individual trying to subvert the heirarchical discourse of Brahminism, trying to offer an alternative. Chandri and her ilk like Belli and Padmavati express themselves through their body. Rendered speechless, they let their bodies do the talking. They celebrate their sexuality and encroaching upon Brahmin territory, they create their own space.

Both the class of women -- Brahmin and low-caste -- occupy very little space in the novel and are represented through male eyes. If they are presented as extremes, they end up being two extremes of the same pole. Under patriarchy, both sets of women characters are drawn negatively, although the low-caste women is shown to enjoy more mobility than a higher

caste Brahmin woman. The Brahmin wives cannot give voice to their oppression, silenced by their caste and the low-caste women if we consider them as the 'subaltern', have no language to speak in. Either ways, women are silenced.

Indian womanhood has been imaged after women in the Scriptures. Men often cite the scriptures to legitimize their authority on women and justify male domination. Caste and class interests are serviced by the myth of Indian womanhood drawn from the mythology of Hindu scriptures. To establish its regime of caste, class and gender oppression, men often take recourse to the scriptures. In *Samskara* the Brahminic discourse often refers to women in Scriptures. Durghabhatta, in order to justify a Brahmin's liaisons with lowcaste women and prostitutes cite how history will bear testimony to the fact that their brahmin ancestors cohabited with Dravidian women. Thoughts of Belli make Shripati go into a trancelike state where he could see visions of Goddess Lakshmi waking up her Lord Vishnu with her morning song. He remembers of all the heroines in the legends and how "there isn't a sage who doesn't fall for some woman"(p.38). He is reminded of the temptress Menaka, who destroyed the penance of Sage Vishvamitra. Praneshacharya's expositions of the Puranas do not have any religious influence on young men like Naranappa and Shripati. Rather they consider his phrasings as evocative and in them the divine transforms into the mundane. Praneshacharya's depiction of Kalidasa's Shakuntala arouses the desire within Shripati for Belli.

Naranappa was the first one to be moved after hearing Praneshacharya's description of Kalidasa's heroine Shakuntala. Seeing an outcaste woman bathing in a river under moonlight "He (Naranappa) fantasied she was the Shakuntala of the Achari's description and this pure brahmin youth made love to her right there-- with the moon for witness"(p.25). After his sexual experience with Chandri, Praneshacharya likens all female beauty to the "beauty of Goddess Lakshmi, queen and servant of Lord Vishnu. All sexual enjoyment was Krishna's when he stole the bathing cow girls' garments, and left them naked in the water"(p.77). Durgabhatta compares Chandri to Matsagandha while Praneshacharya refers to her as Urvashi. What is significant is that the women in the Scriptures are portrayed as angelic, evocative, conoisseurs of beauty but interestingly they do not transcend to be divine. This reflects the ambivalence of Brahminic discourse. While women are expected to subscribe to myth of womanhood where the given values are purity, chastity, self-sacrifice, men on their part, to justify their promiscuity evoke a totally different image of women in Scriptures. Thus, even the women in Scriptures are subjected to the object of lust in Brahminic narrative.Reference to Urvashi, Menaka and Matsagandha are made as 'temptresses of the sages.' The apsaras stand outside social and ethical parameters and embody in them the feminine essence unfettered by familial relationships. Therefore, they are constantly referred to in the context of the low-caste

women, who are also outside the agrahara and unfettered by familial relationships. Just as women in the scriptures do not form the object of the Brahmin's worship, women in brahminic discourse also do not form objects of worship. Praneshacharya's devotion to his wife Bhagirathi cannot be interpreted as an act of worship. His is a devotion to duty and his devotion does not elevate her status as a woman.

Perhaps the only woman character in the novel who offers a challenge to the patriarchal Brahminic ideology is Chandri. Chandri is a low-caste woman, who, when the novel opens, is introduced as the mistress of Naranappa. Chandri makes her presence felt not through her voice but through her actions. In an indirect suggestive way Chandri becomes the protagonist of the novel as in the end it is Chandri who is sought after. Chandri's role in the novel is functional. She is the bridge between the rebel brahmin Naranappa and the traditional Brahmin Praneshacharya. It is she who links the two combatants. She embodies in her a natural wholeness and an instinctive spontaneity which Praneshacharya can never achieve. By her sexuality she has tamed both the Brahmins- Naranappa and Praneshacharya. Thus, she is instrumental in the process of initiation of the Brahmins. By virtue of her profession she is both outside structured society as well as recognized by it. She is linked to the river Tunga, which flows through the village and is unshackled by it. "How can sin ever defile a running river ? It is good for a drink when a man is thirsty, and it is good for washing god's

images with. It says yes to everything, never a no"(p.44). She sees the hunger in Praneshacharya -- in the literal and physical sense- and feeds him. She feeds him banana and then gives him access to her body, opening out a new world of naturalness and wholeness to the Acharya. Chandri is untroubled by this act of hers even as the Acharya is stricken by his conscience : "She was a natural in pleasure, unaccustomed to self-reproach" (p.68). Whether as a mistress of Naranappa, or a momentary companion to Praneshacharya, Chandri is explicit in her action. She knows that she is outside the stratified society and by virtue of her caste status she makes the most of this space which she enjoys. From her location even without a voice she can assert herself, through her action. Hers is a language of sexuality and through it she creates a discourse, in that, she interrogates both kinds of Brahminism.

Chandri's presence in the narrative is also made by virtue of her beauty. The Brahmins are disturbed by her beauty. "Chandri was utterly beautiful, beyond compare"(p.38). Not only men, but even the Brahmin women consider her beauty disturbing. Frigid and withered, the Brahmin women fail to excite the imagination of their starved husbands and so they fear the earthy Chandri would seduce their husbands. Separate sets of values are laid between women of upper-class and lower-class. While in a Brahmin woman pati-vrata, satitva, chastity are instilled, in a low-caste woman beauty, sexuality, eroticism are preferred. Chandri, therefore, uses

her beauty to trap the males for her own ends. It is Chandri who makes the first move towards Praneshacharya thus fulfilling in her a desire to have such a relation with a holy man like the Acharya :"A great good fortune had suddenly rushed into her life" (p.68). "There was also a hope in her that his touch might bear fruit in her body. And a gratefulness that she too might have earned merit"(p.67). Chandri has thus taken on the Acharya in her own terms and this is also an expression of her individuality.

Chandri rises above her elemental nature and demonstrates a humane nature when unmindful of the horrid stench, she takes upon herself the responsibility of burying the rotting corpse of Naranappa. While the Brahmins including Praneshacharya fail to find a solution to bury Naranappa's corpse, it is Chandri who puts an end to this crisis. " She was grief-stricken that she'd left the body orphaned, unprotected, the body of the man who'd antagonized the whole agrahara for her sake"(p.69). Thereafter, taking the help of Ahmad Bari, a Muslim fish merchant, she cremates Naranappa. Chandri, in this instance too speaks through her action. Not bound by any rules, outside the brahminic code, she does what was most practical for her to do.

Towards the end of the novel, Praneshacharya discovers Chandri as an individual. After his wife's death, he can no longer live in the agrahara and his legs take him to a journey, which many interpret as a journey in quest of

an identity shorn of Brahminism. Praneshacharya has already experienced Chandri physically and even his journey can be interpreted as a quest for Chandri, who, we are told at the end of the second section, fades away to Kundapara. Chandri has always been in Praneshacharya's unconscious throughout the novel, but it is only towards the middle that their meeting is realised. Besides, their union does not take place within the agrahara but in the forest-- outside the limits of stratified society. The author has chosen the 'silent' encounter between Chandri and Praneshacharya and that too in a neutral place, where Praneshacharya is perhaps free from the prying eyes of his caste -cousins. Voices have to be muted for this union to take place, because Chandri is a low-caste woman -- a woman looked down upon. A subaltern, Chandri has no voice and so the author lets an encounter take place – but an encounter without words. Chandri's disappearance thereafter is also a narrative ploy on the part of the author, because in the event of a Brahmin acharya's union with a prostitute, the author finds it difficult to provide her a space sanctioned by the Brahmins. Anantha Murthy's existential text fails to provide any viable subject position for woman. The attempt at portraying interiority in a male subject does not suggest the possibility of any interiority for woman.

Within the text the women and the minorities are spoken of in the same vien. There are references in the narrative of Muslim women who enamour Brahmin men and in burying Naranappa, Chandri also takes the help of a Muslim. Naranappa himself threatens the acharya's threat of excom-

munication by vouching to become a Muslim. " Try and excommunicate me now. I'll become a Muslim, I'll get you all tied to pillars and cram cow's flesh into your mouths and see to it personally that your sacred brahminism is ground into mud"(p.11).The Muslims are occasional references and alluded to for the Brahmin's convenience. No wonder, that it is a Muslim who helps Chandri, united as they are in their marginalisation.Women and the minorities, outside rigid formations and part of a hitherto acceptable liminality, is threatening.

Once Chandri's function is over she fades away -- fades away without any sentimentalism. She perhaps disappears as she has to move on in life to find a means of survival – perhaps in a world where she would rightfully belong. In this sense, her disappearance is necessary for the author because within the framework of his world, he does not find a suitable place for woman like Chandri. Within the text Chandri is allowed no conflict, no inner space, no speech, no dreams, no desires and no self. But despite the limitations of a patriarchal society, Chandri carves an identity of her own. A whore, a mistress, through her body she speaks a language of rebellion. Her action is undoubtedly revolutionary, subversive and outside male defination of the 'perfect female'. Her body language articulates a resistance to patriarchy's defined role of a 'virtuous' woman. By stepping outside the set norms of the society, she has freely encroached upon a Brahmin territory. In

her silence, if she is identified with the subaltern, in her actions she proves her femininity. It leaves a question to be answered, had Chandri been voiced what would have been the nature of her voice ? How would Anantha Murthy have handled her ? Infact, in Chandri's silence, it is clear that the oppression of Indian women continues without end.

Paraja

Written in Oriya in 1945, Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* is a classic of modern Indian fiction. Mohanty was a prolific writer and he has written more than ten novels and many volumes of short stories. Most of his writings are in his mother tongue Oriya and only a few have been translated into English. *Paraja* was translated into English by Dr. Bikram K. Das and published in 1987. As was the trend in the second stage of novel's development in India, Mohanty's writings too are pre-occupied with social issues and everyday problems of the rural community. He was a writer to whom social commitment came naturally. Having worked as an administrator in the backward tribal areas of Orissa, he found materials for his novels in the simple life of the tribals. From his first hand experience he saw the exploitation of the innocent tribals and this find expression in his novels. Like all his other novels, *Paraja* is also an indictment of social oppression and abuse.

Paraja is the story of a tribal family, their sufferings and struggles, in their fight for survival. It is a story of exploitation where the agents of exploi-

tation are those who wield authority. It is also a story of how a tribal way of life is encroached upon by an entire ethos of a materialistic civilization. Weaved into this story are characters whom Mohanty has met and known, a landscape that he was familiar with. "He has known the sounds and smells of the jungle he so lovingly evokes ; what is more , he has obviously suffered and exulted with Sukru Jani and his tribe, drunk rice beer with them, sung their songs, danced at their harvest festivals and starved with them when rains failed".[10] Sukru Jani is the main protagonist of the novel and the story revolves around him, his two sons Mandia and Tikra, and his two daughters Jili and Bili. Sukru Jani's wife is already dead when the novel begins. Initially the family leads a happy existence. They are simple people with simple needs and have enough for a peaceful living. They live in the hamlet of Sarsupadar and belong to the Paraja tribe. But as the novel progresses the happiness of Sukru Jani and his family are shortlived. The blissful innocence of tribal existence cannot endure ; it is foredoomed. Even as we are brought close to lives of Paraja men and women, at work or at play we are warned " The disapproving eyes of a modern society were a million miles away." [11] The disapproving eyes soon appears to trap the tribals in all their innocence. The novel traces the saga of exploitation of the tribals like Sukru Jani and how a once happy family slowly disintegrates by its impact. Things change in the tribal world beyond comprehension of the simple people and before

they realise, their lands are seized, they are transformed into bonded labourers and their daughters are commodified. Sukru Jani and his children can only gape and sigh as the world under their feet slips away. Their happiness is turned to grief, free men become slaves and young girls become commodities and sexually exploited.

The novel brings into conflict two world views and two value systems. While the tribal world view aspires to a life of harmony and joy, the other world view interrupts it by its machinations propelled by greed and suppression. In the conflict of contesting world views : one almost prelapserian and other dehumanising, Mohanty builds up his narrative. The description of the landscape, the social practices of the Parajas move beyond anthropological reporting and naturalises the broader issue of domination and subordination. Self and other binary dichotomy is conflated with a subtle implication, that in free India the process of colonisation with its brutal force is still on.

The situation of the Paraja tribe becomes a mirror image of the idyllic life that the dominant discourse corrupts and disrupts as the other is rendered vulnerable for its modes of social protection and preservation and are very tenuous. The conflict between the dominant and the dominated, authority and identity are not confined to the tribal vs non-tribals in Orissa

only ,it rings loud as a matter of concern throughout the world.

The issue pertinent to this study is what happens to women characters in the scene of exploitation and what is the nature of exploitation.Since the novel is about a tribal way of life,we also get a glimpse of how tribal women are represented in literature and the narrative provides ample scope to study a tribal woman's life in contrast to non—tribal woman.However, an understanding of tribal way of life is important for a proper reading of tribal woman's life in her context. The opening chapters of the novel take us close to the Paraja tribe. Mohanty gives a detailed description of the village where Sukru Jani lived. " The hamlet consists of two cluster of thatched huts huddled together under the shade of some trees"(p.1)*.In one cluster lived the Paraja tribe and in the other the Dombs lived. Every Paraja hut was "flanked by patches of green - tiny squares of land sown with maize, chillies or tobacco and fenced in by hedges of the wild tania shrub. Beyond the hedges are fields of mandia, olsi and kandula , different kinds of millet which form the staple food of these tribes"(p.1).Sukru Jani's hut has a single room divided into three compartments. The central compartment is used

* All textual references are from Gopinath Mohanty, *Paraja*, 1945, Translated into English by Bikram K. Das (New Delhi : OUP, 1994, fourth impression)

both as a living room and as a store. The store is full of food-grains which suggests the prosperity of this family. Sukru Jani "never lacked" the simple needs of his family. Roles are defined for the girls as for the men. Jili is cooking the evening meal and both Jili and Bili are waiting for the pot to boil when we are first introduced to them. Jili is seventeen years and Bili just fourteen. They sit out side the porch waiting for their father and brothers to return home after their days work of hoeing on the hills. "In the evening the family crowds round the fire in a happy circle"(p.7).

The scene shifts from the family to the tribal world at large in the subsequent chapters and we are taken close to the life of the community. The Paraja community has a seperate bathing pool of their own and most of Paraja women bathe here in the open. The passersby are usually oblivious of the bevy of beauties bathing in the open, which is a telling of this tribal custom. "While the girls (Jili and Bili) were bathing in the stream, two men of the Paraja tribe could be seen going up the mound that overlooked the pool" but as they went "they looked neither to right nor to left"(p.8). It is in this 'watering-pool' that most of the girls meet where 'joking and making fun of people',spills into peals of laughter. "Not concerned with such matters as the clearing of jungle and the planting of millet"(p.13) the girls enjoyed their freedom. Laughter was something which came "naturally to them "(p.13). The girls do not suffer from any sense of shame and inhibition as they bath na-

ked in the open casting off their clothes. Besides, in this tribal society girls and boys could mingle freely. Courting between young girls and boys had the sanction of the community. The dormitory system was prevalent among the Parajas: "In the centre of the village was a hut which served as a dormitory for all the unmarried girls in the village, while a little way off was the men's dormitory. It was an ancient Paraja custom for all unmarried boys and girls to sleep in their respective dormitories, rather than in their parents' homes" (pp.14-15). Thus young people slept every night in their dormitaries away from their parents, with no taboos or restraints imposed upon them. Eloping was also not uncommon. Boys and girls in love had the inalienable right to elope, which they often did. The traditional concept of protecting women was not there because the tribal sense of enjoyment is vastly different. Teasing among the young was a part of life. The Paraja boys would play on their dungudunga and seduce their loved ones, singing ancient ballads and composing new ones. The songs sung are usually overt with meanings as this was one of the ways how young people courted. In the novel two young couples Jili-Bagla and Kajodi-Mandia are shown to be indulging in this custom.

However, the bliss of the tribals do not last forever as their actions become susceptible to new authorities of power. "The man of the hills cannot comprehend any situation until he feels the full impact of experience"(p.42).

"It never occurred to Sukru Jani to question his belief in his birth right, or to reflect that one did not become the owner of something merely because one could see it everyday before ones eyes. He had never worried about the legality of his actions ; yet here he was , up to neck in trouble "(p.42). Sukru Jani was was found guilty for felling trees from the Raja's property. It never occurred to the simple Sukru Jani that they were committing a crime having taken permission from the Forest Guard. But permission by word of mouth had no evidence as the Forest guard denies it and thus trapping the innocent Sukru Jani. By thwarting the Forest Guard's desire for his daughter Jili, Sukru Jani had to face the consequences. This was exactly what Kau Paraja had told Sukru Jani when he had gone to his place to ask for Jili at the Forest Guards orders : "When they ask for something,it has to be produced --even if it's our wives and daughters ; or else they'd have us all in handcuffs on some excuse or another in no time at all ?"(p.30). This is just the beginning of Sukru Jani's sufferings as this leads him to become a goti to meet the expense for his bail. Subsequently, both his son's end up as gotis of the Sahukar. The dreams of Sukru Jani shatter before his eyes as they get caught in the unending web of exploitation.

Mohanty portrays two worlds in *Paraja* the primordial and elemental way of life of the tribals and civilizing and exploitative world of the Forest Guard, the Sahukar and the Supervisior. The tribal world is shown to be in conflict with the new world that encroaches upon their territories and to

their lives. The tribal ethos, customs, traditions and values stand in contrast to the mainstream discourse. Mohanty's *Paraja* is a working on the theme of how alien factors disturb the dynamics of tribal discourse. However, the tribal discourse is also not free from scrutiny. What strikes the reader in the otherwise simple life of the tribals is that even in this society the sphere of work is demarcated for boys and girls. Women like Jili and Bili are given the sphere of kitchen and work related to it, whereas a man's sphere of activity is outside. The masculine/ feminine paradigm works in tribal culture as well. Jili and Bili are described in feminine terms : "Her raven-black hair is oiled and combed into a smooth, slanting bun into which she has stuck a red flower. Her sister sits by her side. She too has a red flower in her hair"(p.2). Mandia Jani and Tikra are on the otherhand described in masculine terms. Mandia is "strong and robust, with the face of a child' while Tikra is " wide-eyed and hurried in his speech"(p.7). In the Paraja village the memorial to the dead is also suggestive of this masculine/feminine dichotomy : 'a stone planted vertically for a man and laid flat for a woman'(p.6). A reading between the lines suggest that patriarchies operate even in an otherwise free tribal society.

The tribal way of life is better understood when it is contrasted with the non-tribal world. Within the text Mohanty delineates this contrast and the narrative is a telling in many ways of this contrast especially in the treatment

ment of women characters. Although the novel revolves around Sukru Jani and the exploitation of the tribals at large, yet in the limited spaces they inhabit the women characters open up for a re-reading of tribal representation of women and their representation outside their community. Tribal society is a permissive society where it's women enjoy more freedom and mobility than her non-tribal counterpart. As has already been mentioned courting between young boys and girls is legitimated by the community. Therefore, a girl exercises her right to choose a partner. Moreover, the custom of bride-price is different from the dowry custom because here it is not the girl but the boy's family that has to pay to the brides family. The traditional concept of protecting women was not there among the Parajas. The girls had the liberty to indulge in jokes, move out of their homes. Even sex is not a taboo within this community. Within their own community Jili and Bili can freely move about, bathe in the open, sleep in the dormitory, make fun of men without any fear and inhibition. In all their activities they seem natural and spontaneous. But the permissiveness of the tribal society for their women is restricted within their own community. Outside the community the tribal women are protected. When Sukru Jani is told by Kau Paraja that the Forest Guard wanted his daughter Jili, his anger is aroused and he becomes protective about his daughter. The Forest Guard does not belong to his world and so he has to guard his daughter against his evil designs. Similarly, towards the end of the novel when Jili moves in with the Sahukar, Sukru Jani is grim because "the honour of his tribe had been outraged"(p.310). A girl going outside the

tribe is an act of humiliation and violation of a social code. "All doors were closed to Jili" after her relationship with the Sahukar was made public.

Thus, whereas a tribal woman is granted freedom within her own community, the society does not give her the freedom outside of it. A woman's role and place in other words, is defined by the society-- whether tribal or otherwise. The tribal world is possessive about its women. While the tribal man excercises his control over his woman he does not give that right to others. Within the community sex is not a taboo and is not a thing to be sold. "Young people slept every night in their dormitories, away from their parents, with no taboos or restraints imposed upon them"(p.17). The dormitory system is an indication that sex among them was not uncommon. "If something went wrong, the elders would sit together...and the culprits would be penalized by having to offer four annas' worth of liquour to all the villagers" which would be followed by song, dance and drink "so the matter would end"(p.17). "This was the only punishment for the indescretions of youth" (pp.17-18). Outside the tribal community, in the hands of the Forest Guard, Sahukar and Supervisor, sex becomes a commodity to be bought for a price. Women are debased and devalued in this sex market. Money becomes the bargaining point. The Forest Guard takes advantage of Sukru Jani's vulnerability and considers Jili, his daughter as a mode of exchange. Under the burden of economic vulnerability Jili is rendered speechless and she cannot tell her father about the incident of the Forest Guard. Sex when

forced, becomes oppressive for women.

Sukru Jani no doubt resists and protects his daughter from the Forest Guard, but not for long because both Jili and Bili fall into the hands of first the Supervisor and then the Sahukar. Once their father and brothers become gotis, the condition of Jili and Bili become pathetic. Their foodstock runs out and in their hour of need even their own community deserts them. "They were never asked for subscription for village festivities...Ever since Sukru Jani and her brothers had gone, the village looked on them with disdain, as though they were destitute widows living in misery. No eager young men lounged before their door now with songs of invitation"(pp.117-118). Jili is deserted by Bagla who marries her friend Kajodi. Stricken with grief, dejected in love, driven by hunger, the two girls make their way to the Dooars with dreams in their eyes that "life in the camp would be one long holiday, with dancing and music and liquour enough to drown in ! And the young girls would have young men in abundance to pay them court. Money was almost a minor temptation"(p.203). However, Jili and Bili's dream soon turns into a nightmare once they move out of their village to the town. Money which was a minor temptation when they started out, becomes the bargaining point and the major attraction in their new habitation. Life in the camp does not turn out to be 'a long holiday' but a sinking deeper into their already miserable existence. Once outside their society, money becomes tempting. Body becomes their value as sex is the first thing to be sold out. Young and

beautiful, Jili and Bili become the object of the Supervisor's pursuit and lustful desires. Under compulsion of economic pressure, Jili and Bili end up trading their bodies. Jili's sexual exploitation continues as she also falls into the hands of the Sahukar. This is the sad truth of a woman's reality, suffering under immense exploitation. Body becomes the site of exploitation and exchange. When sex is commodified, it crosses the boundary of caste and class. Whereas the Sahukar does not mind a little bit of sex with a tribal girl like Jili, he cannot think of legitimating the relationship in marriage. In matters of marriage and social status, caste and class become determinants. Economic marginalisation as seen in *Paraja* throttles the women's voice. Neither the tribal world nor the Sahukar's world is an idealised one for women. The tribal world is also shown to be patriarchal and marginalises its women in the absence of male members. The attitude of the community here, as elsewhere depended entirely on the known extent of one's possessions and in this context, the quantity of grain one possessed. If the tribal society would have supported Jili and Bili perhaps they would not have had to look for ways outside the community to earn their livelihood. Deprived in their own community of the means of subsistence they move out, only to be doubly exploited. Any kind of negotiation for tribal girls outside their community is sex. It is only their sex that the outside world recognises. Bereft of any other mode, the girls Jili and Bili trade their sex for their livelihood. Sex is thus put in the counterpointal location of the two cultural values – the tribal

and the non-tribal.

Paraja shows that for a woman nothing is ideal, but comparatively the status of a woman is better in a tribal society. In a tribal society, sex once sold out is not a problem to be received again. This is a positive thing about this community. In the tribal world there is no concept or myth of 'fallen'. This stands in stark contrast to the Hindu culture where a sexually promiscuous woman is considered an outcaste. This is evident in Nandibali's relationship with Bili. He has no objection in taking Bili as his wife and the bond they share is one of love and understanding. In contrast, Jili's relationship with the Sahukar from the outset was artificial. For him Jili was like any other girl to be used and discarded. He never gave her the place of a wife and his evil intentions get articulated when Jili's father and brothers approach him seeking their land back :

> Yes, Jili ! And isn't there another called Bili at home still ?
> Bring her to me. I've taken the land ; I've taken one sister ;
> and I shall take the other too. I shall take your wives...(p.372).

In the Sahukar's gaze the tribal women have been commodified. The absence of non-tribal women in the narrative haunts the reader about the voicelessness of women in such a society.

Outside the women's issue what the novel attempts to focus is the social organisation and the oppressive mechanisms of control. Goti or

bonded labour is a dehumanised mechanism of control. It is slavery. Economic condition may be its cause but the very practice snatches away all freedom of a bonded labourer as he is treated like an object. The owner of a bonded labourer is in fact the master of his body and physical function. This evil practice puts the Sahukar in a privileged position and he not only steals the property of Sukru Jani but takes possession of his children's life. If a male bonded labourer is put to inhuman physical condition, a woman who is taken as a mistress not a wife from among the tribals could be a female goti for satisfying the owner's sexual lust. Here again her body is owned on a price.

From this follows a kind of paradigm that while privileges the dominant, deprivileges the subordinate. Money economy it appears is shattering for the tribals who lived under barter system of economy. In tribal society the exchange value of sex is a kind of barter. The barter economy does dehumanise and denude exchange of honour. But money economy is more powerful, it tramples one's honour. This economy has given rise to other systems of control such as law, property rights, etc. In a tribal world justice is instant and direct. But the elaborate mechanism of civilized control has little respect for age old taboos and customs. This conflicting point indeed further polarises the values of a tribal world with that of the non-tribal world. Law, courts, etc, part of the non-tribal world are symbols of a written culture in contrast to an oral world. Literacy (not the traditional learning), law and

money combine together to subvert the values of an oral society. The narrative reaches its climax when Sukru Jani murders the Sahukar. Ideologically, Mohanty at this point might have put into perspective the annihilation of class enemy of course not working towards a classless society. Because the murder semiotically, on the one hand, implied direct/ instant justice of eliminating the evil from a tribal position, on the other hand, it implicates the dispensasor of justice as a criminal who is tried according to written law. This semiotic fracturing does not allow a conclusion that is ideologically coherent as two systems of social values come into conflict. In the process the weaker one suffers. Justice delayed is justice denied. One of the parallels to the story which could be referred here to is Mrinal Sen's film *Mrigaya*. In *Mrigaya* Ghinua goes to the police station with his prize hunt, the head of the Sahukar only to learn that he has committed a crime.

The novel has been successful in bringing to the fore the contestations of many a binary oppositions without working towards any solution. Indeed, the narrative remains open ended admitting various readings of the text. As the present study is concerned with tracing the women voices in the novel, it is in a sense limited in the absence of representations of non-tribal women. However, it is evident that the novelist, as a male writer taking refuge under realism has not been able to delve deep into the emotional and psychic challenges the tribal women confront. The silences of Jili and Bili are total both under the tribal and non-tribal situation as they lack agency.

The only agency that foreground the development of their characters is to listen what men speak and follow it. In their songs and dances they might have spoken of their heart but in the societies they lived in, no one is concerned to the meaning of those words and rhythms. Their articulations die out into silence under the oppressive mechanism of social control. Both sisters become 'subalterns' as they represent doubly marginalised positions.

Rudali

Rudali published in 1980 is a powerful short fiction by Mahasweta Devi. Originally written in Bengali, *Rudali* has been translated into English, adapted into a play and has also been made into film in Hindi. A journalist, creative writer and an activist, all three roles seem to inform her writings making it difficult to conventionally categorize her work in a definite genre. Many critics infact refuse to consider *Rudali* as a work of fiction preferring to call it antifiction. Their objection perhaps is because in *Rudali* Mahasweta Devi has intentionally constructed a text which defies the formal characteristics of a work of fiction. As a woman writer, perhaps, Mahasweta Devi's strategy is not to conform altogether "to the generic prescriptions of the male canon. In another context Judith Gardiner says "female identity is a process."[12] "One reflection of this fluidity is that women's writing often does not conform to the generic prescriptions of the male canon". [13] The roving female identity cannot be captured within one genre. At one and the same time therefore, a woman's text can blur different genres in keeping with the "continual crossing

of self and other."[14] In *Rudali* Mahasweta Devi writes about real people learnt at first hand from her travels in the Palamou village :

> The background of *Rudali* extends much beyond. I have travelled the whole of Palamou extensively by foot. I have seen all kinds of exploitation including bonded labour...A good number of my stories including 'Bichan','Shikar', 'Jagmohan's Death', 'Shishu' and 'Rudali' are placed in this particular locale.[15]

Mahasweta Devi, therefore, presents reality as perceived by her –real characters with real life-stories.

Rudali is an ironic tale of exploitation and above all of survival. The exploited are the lowcaste ganjus and dushads and the exploiters are the rich malik-mahajans. It is Mahasweta Devi's powerful critique of an exploitative and repressive socio-economic and religious system. The story revolves round the character of Sanichari, who within the story's time frame has been a mother, a grandmother and has nurtured three generations. She is a lowcaste woman, belonging to the ganju caste. Sanichari turns out to be the main protagonist of the story as she adapts, survives and manipulates the very system that oppresses her and her likes, thereby attaining agency.

Mahasweta Devi usually writes from a class point of view, "stories of people's struggle, their confrontation with the system."[16]. *Rudali* is also the story of people's confrontation with the system. In the very first part of the

story we are brought close simultaneously to the life of the protagonist Sanichari as well as to the life of the community. Sanichari, who takes on the exploitative system is one of/ with the community. The individual is not highlighted to the exclusion of context. The opening of the narrative situates Sanichari in a depriving socio-economic context that makes poverty visible in its bareness: "In Tahad village, ganjus and dushads were in the majority. Sanichari was a ganju by caste. Like the other villagers her life too was lived in desperate poverty" (p.54)*. Poverty is a condition Sanchari like others of her community are born into.Poverty becomes a measure of class, caste and gender oppression.

A look at the 'events' in Sanichari's life shows a direct connection between the personal events and the exploitative system. Every death is mediated by the religious demands that follow for rituals which further impoverish the already poor. Stricken by any deaths in the family, followed by the expensive death rites, Sanichari is rendered poor and helpless. Her helplessness and poverty is capitalised by the malik-mahajan Ramavaatar Singh, who exploits the ocassion to force her into bonded labour. Sanichari was so pre-occupied performing one death rite after another that "there was no

* All textual references are from Mahasweta Devi, *Rudali*, 1980, Translated into English by Anjum Katyal (Calcutta : Seagull Books,1997).

time to cry." Emotions become secondary and strategies of survival become primary. There is a continuous suturing of her private life to the socio-economic situation. Pre-occupied with ways of keeping the stomach fed Sanichari slogged in the fields. Her suffering is endless as she is deserted by her daughter-in- law and grandson. If through all her sufferings, the support of the community was constant, what comes out starkingly is also the oppression of the malik-mahajans. Ramavatar's oppression is a constant presence in the narrative.[17] He embodies a system which dehumanizes, brutalizes, invading the most private space of an individual.[18] In the process private emotions are trampled as even grief is distorted in the desperate struggle for survival. Grief is turned into a commodity and mourning into labour. The malik- mahajans hire rudalis to cry for their dead which enhances their social prestige. With few other alternatives open for them, women like Sanichari and Bikhni exploit this market to their advantage for survival.

Though ideologically, Mahasweta Devi refuses to be labelled a feminist, feminism informs her writing. There is no doubt that the text privileges class over caste and community yet it has a special significance when read as a feminist text. It is a discourse of women's struggle against exploitation and a discourse of empowerment. It is a story of how women regroup to

use their constrained resources in the midst of exploitation to find modes of survival. Sanichari, the protagonist of the story is a break from the stereo-typical roles in which women are generally confined to in India in life as well as in literature. As a wife, a mother and a grandmother Sanichari is an exception to the traditional Indian conception. Sanichari does not come acr-oss as a docile, ritualistic and passive Indian wife. Rather she is conceived as an equal partner to her husband. After her mother-in-law's death, she leaves her child at home to work for the security of the household. The work she engages in, is generally associated with men. "Sanichari laboured hard for the sake of a little security in her household. She would go off to the malik's house where she would split wood, gather fodder for the cows, and in the harvest season work alongside her husband in the fields" (p.56). Sanichari's sphere of activity is not circumscribed within the four walls of the house. Even after her husband's death she works in the mahajan's fields where her fellow labourers were males. Her place is thus not demarcated from the males. What Mahasweta Devi shows is that among the lower-castes there was equality of status between men and women. It goes to her credit that she is able to bring such a woman in the written domain. The same equality however is not manifest among the upper-caste men and women,

because the few women who appear are definitive or their roles as wives and mothers. They are steeped in mutual jealously, spiteful gossip and one upmanship, over and above internalizing the class values and attitudes such as pride in display of wealth and power.

Sanichari is a powerful creation by Mahasweta Devi. Although Sanichari is just an ordinary woman when the story begins she rises above her ordinariness manipulating the system that exploits her type using the very system to her advantage. She exposes the hypocrisy of the exploiters. We first notice Sanichari's cunningness when she manages to get her debt waived from Ramavatar Singh choosing a perfect time for the same. Her debt to Ramavatar Singh might never have been paid off, but for her scheme. On the deathbed of Ramavatar Singh's uncle, a calf's tail was placed in the dying man's hand to help him cross the Baitarani river into the afterlife. At that time Sanichari was looking after the calf. In the presence of Ramavatar's peers and kinsmen Sanichari pleaded to Ramavatar that her debts be waived. Ramavatar had to bow to her pleading, Sanichari succeeding in her scheme. Ramavatar, however, had to face the criticism of the other jothedars for this act.

If *Rudali* traces the empowerment of women, it also provides a strong statement on women bonding. Women bonding is rarely to be found in texts by male writers. There is the subtly naunced closeness between Sanichari and Bikhni which is especially poignant, as such friendships are rarely detailed in literature. The two women meet at that point in their lives when they are free from all familial bonds. "They eyed each other closely before each relaxed in the realization that the other was no better than herself" (p.65).

Bikhni's husband is dead and due to differences with her son, she leaves her home for a life without shelter. Bikhni adapts herself to her new situation in Sanichari's place and they are shown to complement each other. Bikhni managed the housework but housework did not just include everyday chores of cooking, cleaning and washing clothes, it also meant digging the land and tending a vegetable patch. Women like Bikhni and Sanichari are shown to easily fit into different roles according to the demands of the occasion. Sanichari initiates Bikhni into the profession of a rudali and together they form a formidable duo. Bikhni "visited the market and the shops near the bus-stop and brought home news--who was on his deathbed, who gasping his last in which malik's house"(p.74). When Dulan suggests forming a union of rudalis and randis, Sanichari was apprehensive but it is Bikhni who at once accepts the idea, herself taking the initiative to get the prostitutes with them . She says : "It's the women who are ruined by the malik-mahajans who turn into whores (p.80). She opens Sanichari's eyes to the fact that prostitutes are women like like them who have been forced into prostitution compelled by trying circumstances. Whether it is 'rudalis' or 'randis' women have become victims of institutions and systems created by men and therefore by uniting the women, could rub salt into the eyes of their

perpetrators.

Mahasweta Devi presents a humane picture of prostitutes in *Rudali*. While dwelling on a trodden area, she depicts them with a difference in treatment. Within the narrative the prostitutes are not condemned nor are they treated as outcastes. When Sanichari's daughter-in-law became a prostitute "no one mentioned that Buddhua's wife had become a whore " (p.62). Mahasweta Devi portrays them with a sense of understanding. She exposes the circumstances and the system that makes young girls like Parbatia and Gulbadan take to prostitution. Refusing to submit to the harsh conditions at home, Parbatia ends up being a prostitute, the only choice available for a low-caste woman. Similarly, Gulbadan is forced into the flesh-trade after her natural father refuses to own her, being the child of his relationship with a prostitute. The malik-mahajans treat the low-caste women as objects of pleasure to be used and discarded at their leisure. Gambhir Singh has no qualms about Gulbadan submitting to the lustful desires of his nephew. Considering the market place a better option, she resigns herself to a life of prostitution.

While critiquing the system that turns young girls to prostitutes, Mahasweta Devi traces the history of prostitution. Dulan becomes the mouthpiece of the writer as he holds the upper-class mahajans squarely responsible for this class of women : "It's the malik-mahajan's who've turned them

into whores, ruined them, then kicked them out, isn't that so ?"(p.90). At no point in the narrative the prostitutes are treated as the 'other'. Sanichari's initial inhibitions are discarded when she is made to see the truth of their situation. The prostitutes are poor working women trying to earn their livelihood as everyone else, as much victims of exploitation as everyone else. Prostitution is shown as just one type of exploitation amidst a myriad of exploitations that low-caste men and women are subjected to. Parbatia is a good example of this exploitation. She escapes from a severely circumscribed, poverty-ridden existence, leaving behind all duties and responsibilities driven by hunger. She runs off only to be back in a few year, a down-on-her luck prostitute in Tohri. At the end of the story she is drawn back into the fold by her mother-in-law, who beckons her to join the community of rudalis. The text closes on a positive note for the outcaste and marginalised women with Sanichari organizing and training them into a group. Parbatia and Gulbadan are gathered into the space of the narrative, included.

The situation of the upper-caste women does not miss the ironic vision of Mahasweta Devi. They appear in their roles as wives and mothers and remain so unable to extricate themselves from what culture and tradition have introjected in them. Privileged by their catse, the upper-caste women

are made to suffer under the burden of their caste. Nathuni Singh does not spend any money in trying to cure his mother but prepares to spend thirty thousand for a sensational pyre ! A system where mothers of sons are valued and respected, Nathuni Singh's middle wife feels devalued being the mother of a girl. Even the wealth of her father cannot win her the respect of her co-wives who are mothers of sons. Internalising the values of their caste, these women become victims of oppression. The net- working, the bonding shown among low-caste women is found to be absent among the upper-caste women.

In their quest for survival, the marginalized women characters find bonding in sorrow-- a sorrow without tears. The ending of the text is a truimph of the theme of survival, a truimph of the movement started by Sanichari. Sanichari turns the ritualized, commercialized system of lamentation not just into a means of survival, but an instrument of empowerment, a subaltern tool of revenge. Not only is Sanichari empowered but within the text she helps other women as well to gain agency. Gulbadan is present in the last scene as a rudali turning lament into a mockery as she casts a sneering wink at the nephew over her father's corpse. It is Sanchari, fully alive to the ironic overtones of this system of lamentation, who urges the prostitutes to use it as a means of revenge. By the end of the text, the custom of rudali has

been politicized as it turns out to be an agency of empowerment. The text literally closes on the clamouring, jubilant cries of the disempowered and the outcaste, banded together to invert a howl of grief into a howl of truimph.[19]

If the 'cry' is used as a subaltern tool of revenge, the sharp, observant eyes of the subaltern keep the privileged in perspective. A major narrative tool used to this end is the construct of the character of Dulan. Dulan embodies the resistant will, the sharp intelligence, the irreverence, the cynicism and the cunning that the subaltern uses to subvert the total control of the masters. [20] He is the oral narrator of their history, the one who constantly questions authority and power relations and teaches others to be critical of the dominant. It is Dulan who at every stage contributes to the growing empowerment of Sanichari, who shows her how to adapt and cope. Dulan succeeds in diverting Sanichari's mind from helpless despair (mourning her fate, her dead husband) to a realization that actually she is angry about the unfairness of her situation –and then he presents her with a survival strategy, a way of turning the situation around so that she is using the system instead of just being used by it.[21] Throughout, Dulan's is the voice stripping away sentimentality and blind prejudice in favour of adaptation and rational argument. His is the voice that criticizes, accuses and condemns the upper

classes, highlights their moral corruption, greed and hypocrisy. By doing so he is helping maintain a critical perspective on the system, and in effect politicizing the community. He refuses to believe or allow them to believe that there is anything ordained or natural about their situation.

Dulan helps keep memory alive, reminding the community of a past in which they organized themselves in resistance, a past of heroism and courage. He talks to them about the militant rebel tribal leaders, of tribal uprisings brutally repressed by the Rajput soldiers sent by the raja of Chottanagpur, who burned entire villages and murdered the innocent, etc. He politicizes the Rajputs and coming from one of them his analysis carries greater impact. Similarly, he analyses for Bikhni, Sanichari and his wife how the malik-mahajans create prostitutes by keeping women and then casting them off, thereby forcing them into the market place. He explains that whores are not a seperate caste, but merely poor women like them who are forced to earn a living. He establishes that the exploitation of the poor by the rich takes many forms, that the prostitutes too are victims, and should not be treated like outcastes and untouchables. Dulan proposes solidarity rather than prejudice. [22]

In addition to Dulan, the narrator's voice also offers a subaltern view

of local politics and the hypocrisy of the privileged class. For example, the episode in which Lachman Singh makes his appearance beside the murdered corpse of his kinsman Bhairab Singh is recounted by the narrating agent, focalized through the observing village community. This entire passage employs a 'no comment' technique, using an ostensibly objective 'reporting' mode to expose the hypocrisy and corruption of 'the masters.' In a single passage the author spotlights their criminality, greed, vicious discrimination against the lower castes, power to manipulate police and investigative procedures, infighting, and the determination with which they close ranks in the face of a possible threat. [23]

The subaltern can only keep the privileged in perspective, because the subaltern has no voice. They may not be colonized, but nevertheless repressed. Since the subaltern has no voice, he/she has no identity. In *Rudali* the author has tried to create women's presence but the exploitative system represses women's voice. As a result voices are muted. The voices, when articulated turns out to be a 'cry'- a cry of survival- a 'cry' without tears. *Rudali* is a telling of women's exploitation as even grief, one's most private emotions, is turned into a commodity.

Endnotes :

1 Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality* (New York : OUP, 1985), pp. 3-16.

2 Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* (New Delhi : Heinemann, 1971),pp.18-24.

3 Quoted in Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, op.cit., p.7.

4 Ibid., p.8

5 Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, op. cit., p.167.

6 Ibid.

7 Nalini Natarajan, "Gender, Caste and Modernity " in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan," ed., *Signposts : Gender Issues in Post Independence India* (New Delhi :Kali for Woman,), p.156.

8 Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, op. cit., p.168.

9 Ibid.,p. 169.

10 Translator's Introduction, Gopinath Mohanty, *Paraja*, 1945, Translated into English by Bikram K. Das (New Delhi : OUP, 1994, fourth impression), p. vi.

11 Ibid., p.vii.

12 Judith Gardiner, quoted in Elspeth Probyn, "Materializing Locations Images and Selves" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires eds., *Feminisms* (New York :OUP, 1997), p.127.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 See "The Metamorphosis of 'Rudali'" in Mahasweta Devi, *Rudali*, Translated into English by Anjum Katyal (Calcutta : Seagull Books, 1997), p.24.

[16] Ibid., p.16.

[17] Ibid., p.4.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., pp.23-24.

[20] Ibid., p.9.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., pp.6-7.

[23] Ibid., pp.5-6.

Chapter IV

Reading 'Silences' : Marginality and Resistances.

Women have long been pushed to the seams of history.[1] The marginalization and oppression of women both in mainstream history and society has been a political act. [2] Steeped in oblivion, made oblivious of their strength, women have long been silenced. Women writers have therefore sought in their works to rewrite history, revise and rethink their positions and reconstruct their identities in order to break the prolonged silence that has overpowered them for a long time in literary history. Images of women in literature have been male representations, controlled as it is by masculine economy. Representations of women have as such become misrepresentations and therefore, to rescue women from the misprison of male truth, the feminist agenda has been to interrogate male hegemony, to challenge the male constructs and to construct a positive representation of femininity. Feminism attempts to find an alternative language for women that would be a 'unique woman's language.'

In its search for a 'unique language', feminists had to first confront the question of identity in order to reconstruct a seperate identity for woman. Feminist critical theory therefore interrogates the signifying and universalist assumptions of authority. In insisting a tradition of their own, among other issues, feminist theorists mostly focus on women's literary productions, women as represented in literature and as readers. It questions socio-his-

torical and ideological conditions in which literary production and consumption take place. Underlining the fact that aesthetic value is not universal, and does not reside in the text, but is historically and culturally determined, feminist theory considers patriarchy's essentializing assumption as relative, not absolute or axiomatic. Hence, feminist theory stresses for the deconstructive and the political to go hand in hand. It opposes sexism, where women write as a biologically oppressed group, and endorses feminism as a part of political project, to raise and transform consciousness.

Feminist literary discourse stresses on the autonomy of self hood. While the Anglo-American feminists and French feminist theorists differ significantly in their approaches, they unanimously emphasize women's subjectivity and autonomy of selfhood. To them all, patriarchy is a monolith that resists interrogation and denies woman her self-expression and 'identity'. While the American approach addresses real readers and situations, the French polarise feminist issues into body and language. Cora Kaplan, the British Marxist feminist critic addresses some of these problems by constantly interrogating her own political ideologies--Marxist and Feminist-illustrating the gaps and contradictions in the way these ideologies are presently constructed. Inspite of the so called 'gaps and contradictions' the objective of feminist theory / theories in setting its agenda, can claim a large measure of validity.

The question of identity has always been central to feminism though feminist accounts of identity are in a state of flux. A confusion over questions of identity pervades contemporary feminist theory. Nevertheless, multiplicity of definitions and formulations become crucial to realize the identity of 'woman'. An introductory women's studies text book offers this definition of identity :

> Our identity is a specific marker of how we define ourselves at any particular moment in life. Discovering and claiming our unique identity is a process of growth, change, renewal and regeneration throughout our lifetime. As a specific marker, identity may seem tangible and fixed at any given point. Over the life span, however, identity is more fluid. [3]

Identity is fluid but we can neither defend or dispense with identities. William Connolly in *Identity / Difference* (1999) states "Identity requires difference in order to be, and it conveys difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty."[4] He continues, "My identity is what I am and how I am recognized rather than what I choose, want or consent to. It is the dense self from which choosing, wanting and consenting proceed. Without that density, these acts could not occur ; with it, they are recognized to be mine."[5]

The question pertaining to feminism is : What is it that constitutes the self of a woman ? How can a woman determine her 'self' or 'identity'

located as she is within the framework of patriarchal power ? The nature of womanhood is constantly defined in terms of male desire and male imagination. She has always been the object of male subjectivity and is defined in terms of her relation to the male needs in any society. Her social role and position is also assigned by patriarchy. Women have been forced into a position of passivity. A woman's identity is sought to be fixed and understood in terms of her gendered being defined essentially by her sexuality and reproductive value. Patriarchal societies continue to fix gender roles and prescribe behavorial norms that are often discriminating against women. A woman's 'self' is thus not allowed to emerge. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar compare the male act of imprisoning the female in his writing as an act of killing :

> He both silences the female, and 'stills' her - in essence, he 'kills' her. Woman has been killed into a 'perfect image' of herself by successive male authors. That perfect image is in effect, a male dream of female perfection. [6]

Male ideology justifies the position of woman and legitimates it. It defines a woman's place, how she should think, act, feel as a woman and so maintains her subordination and justifies her exploitation.

Feminists, however, have objected to the male definition of woman and challenged the universalist assumptions of patriarchy. Feminist discourse is a discourse of critique, an op-positional discourse, a discourse of engage-

ment and activism.[7] Female sexuality is revolutionary, subversive, heterogenous and 'open' in that it refuses to define female sexuality. If there is a female principle, it is simply to remain outside the male definition of the female. There has not been much examination of how women's identity and nature of their self is constituted within the categories such as woman's actual experience. Woman's experience of their bodies, sexuality and their self can be the basis upon which a feminine understanding can be built.

The Anglo-American criticism fronted by the 'gynocriticism' of Elaine Showalter, concentrates on the specificity of women's writing, on recuperating a tradition of women authors, and on examining in detail women's relation to culture. In dispute with this however is the slightly later and more theoretically driven French feminist criticism, which draws especially on the work of Junlia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

These critics emphasise not the gender of the writer (female) but 'writing effect' of the text (feminine). Alice Jardine has named it, in contradiction to 'gynocriticism'- 'gynesis' : the textuality of 'woman', rather than an emphasis on specific 'woman'. Helen Cixous argues for a positive representation of femininity in discourse she calls '*ecriture feminine*'. Her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" is a celebrated manifesto of "women's writing" which calls for women to put their 'bodies' into their writing. Cixous advocates : "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the

immense resources of the unconscious spring forth."[8] Since writing is the place where subversive thought can germinate, it is especially shameful that the phallocentric tradition has for the most part succeeded in suppressing women's voice. At the heart of Cixous theory is her rejection of theory. Women's writing, according to her, 'will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system.' Such transgression of the laws of phallocentric discourse is the woman writer's special task, and having always operated 'within' male dominated discourse, she needs to invent for herself a language to get into the 'inside'. Cixous' approach is essentially and strategically visionary imagining a possible language rather than describing an existing one.

In the shifting terrains of feminism, the location of the woman's 'self' has become important. Women writer's have sought in their works to rewrite history, revise and rethink their positions and reconstruct their identities in their attempts to break the prolonged silence that has overpowered them for a long time in literary history.

At the heart of the Anglo-American approach is a unified 'self'- either individual or collective - which is commonly called Man. French Feminists Luce Irigaray and Helen Cixous argue that this integrated 'self' is infact a phallic self, constructed on the model of self-contained powerful phallus.[9] Gloriously autonomous, it banishes from itself all conflict, contradiction and

ambiguity. In this humanist ideology the 'self' is the sole author of history and literary text. Whatever may be the differences between the first-wave and second- wave feminists, these critics unanimously deplore the patriarchal premises and emphasize on the construction of woman's identity. They refuse to accept woman's identity as 'given' but rather consider it as a 'construct'.

The issue of subjectivity continues to be of vital significance to feminist debate.Denise Riley rightly opines that 'women' is indeed an unstable category, that this in stability has a historical foundation, and that feminism is the site of the systematic fighting out of that instability.[10]

This is echoed in the words of Julia Kristeva, "In 'woman' I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies."[11] Identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them. In the case of woman, ideology goes far, since their bodies as well as their minds are the product of patriarchal manipulation. Women have been compelled in their bodies and minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the 'idea' of nature that has been established for them, Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement "one is not born, but becomes a woman" shatters the biological interpretation of history produced by the class of men. 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 and describes it as 'feminine'. Beauvoir is clear that one 'becomes' a woman, under a cultural compulsion to become one.

Materialist feminist approach posits that in order to constitute themselves as individual subjects of history, woman as a class should first have to kill the 'myth of woman', the mark imposed by the oppressor. Women will have to abstract themselves from the definition 'woman' which is imposed upon them. Helen Cixous is of the view that in order to assert her *self* woman has to write but "defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded - which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist."[12] But it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallocentric system and take place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination. It will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions, border runners never subjected by any authority.[13] But one can begin to speak, begin to point out some effects, some elements of unconscious drives, some relations of the feminine Imaginary to the Real, to writing.[14]

Drawing on theories like psychoanalysis and deconstruction, the feminist critics have emphasized on the body, language and writings of women, which become indispensable in the constitution of 'self'. The feminists endeav-

our to define a new paradigm that eschews modernist dichotomies and articulate a new conception of knowledge of the self. A new paradigm would have to take into account the experiential dimension of woman's identity and an understanding of the necessary distinction between the epistemological analysis of identity in everyday life. The social construction of identity must be a central element of the new paradigm that feminism is constructing. But the parameters of that social construction must be carefully delineated. Feminists must adopt theories of identity to their specifically feminist concerns.

The first task for feminism then, in order to reclaim the 'voice' of women is to dismantle patriarchy. Patriarchal discourse situates woman outside representation : she is an absence, negativity, the dark continent, or at best a lesser man. [15] Creativity is defined as male and it follows that the dominant literary images of femininity are male fantasies too. Women are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness, instead made to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them.

> Since both patriarchy and its texts subordinate and imprison women, before woman can even attempt that pen which is so rigorously kept from them they must escape just those male texts which, defining them as 'Cyphers', deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen.[16]

Gilbert and Gubar clearly demonstrate how in the nineteenth century the

'eternal feminine' was assumed to be a vision of angelic beauty and sweetness.[17] The ideal woman is seen as a passive, docile and above all selfless creature; obversely they provide the figure of the monster lurking behind the angel, a contrast to the male idealization of woman. The monstar woman refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell. In short, she is a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her. Gilbert and Gubar call this woman 'duplicitious'- one whose mind will not let itself be penetrated by the phallic probings of masculine thought. In this context they cite works from Jane Austen to Dickinson, authors who managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards. The female textual strategy, as they see it, consists in "assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing those images of women inherited from male literature especially... the paradigmatic polarities of angel and monster. "[18] The anti-patriarchal strategy is to revise the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on woman writers and to develop a 'self-image' like that of the 'monster or the raging mad woman'. Feminist critical approach thus postulates a 'real' woman hidden behind the patriarchal textual facade and the feminist critic's task is to uncover her truth.

If patriarchy oppresses woman as woman, defining all women as 'feminine' regardless of individual differences, the feminist struggle must be to try to undo the patriarchal strategy that makes 'femininity' intrinsic to biological femaleness. One of the problems of the feminist critique is that it is male oriented. If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be. There is therefore an urgent need to study women's writings, precisely in order to learn 'what woman have felt experienced'. This is what Showalter calls 'gynocriticism'. Showalter rejects theory as a male invention that can, only be used in men's texts. 'Gynocriticism' frees itself from pandering to male values and seeks to focus on the newly visible world of 'female culture'. This search for the 'muted' female culture can best be carried out by considering the socio-cultural theories to the consideration of the female author and her work. No woman, we know, is ever cut off from the real male world, but in the world of ideas we can draw boundaries that opens up new vistas of thought, that allow us to see a problem in a new way. Study of female tradition in literature is an urgent political necessity. Myra Jehlen wants women's studies to become the 'investigation, from women's view point, of everything.'[19] She recommends comparison in order to locate "the difference between women's writing and men's that no study of only women's writing can depict."[20] This view by Jehlen is in tune with Simone de Beauvoir when she refuses to consider all writings by women

as feminine texts : "In my definition feminists are women - or even men too - who are fighting to change women's condition, in association with the class struggle, but independently of it as well,..."[21]

In "Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous urges women to dismantle patriarchy through the explorations of a unique women's language, created by women and manifesting women's sexual difference. Women must come to writing in order to explode the dominant masculine text and replace it with a feminine counterpart. Woman need to write 'herself', which will allow her to carry out the transformations in her history. In order to become taker and initiator, "woman must write her self : must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies... Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement." [22] Cixous describes feminine text as being close to the voice, "very close to the flesh of the language, much more so than masculine texts,... there's tactility in the feminine text, there's touch..."[23] What Cixous tries to do is to subvert the discourse of patriarchy and reveal its contradictions. Her project involves challenging the masculine monopoly on the construction of femininity, female body and woman. Ecriture Feminism claims to offer ways in which institutions and signifying practices (speech, writing, images, myths) belonging to masculine culture can be resisted.

A woman's identity is perceived in terms of the body and women too begin to see themselves in the same way. Female body often appears no more than as a 'body for-others', socially constructed, and therefore under the constant gaze of the other. Women are merely seen as sites or symbols. Though women's bodies and their sexuality are central to the male discourse, they are never subjects of it. Women are used as extensions of man, mirrors of man, as devices for showing man off, devices for helping man get what they want. They are never there in their own right. They are allowed little or no space for an independent, self-perceived articulation. A woman's body becomes an instrument and a symbol. Woman is rivetted into a lopsided relationship with man; he is the 'one'- she is the 'other'. Women have been made inferiors and the oppression has been compounded by man's belief that women are inferior by nature. Women themselves therefore are in the best position to asses the true existential possibilities of womenhood. However, for centuries women's voice have been suppressed by man's language. If women continue to be defined by male parameters they will always remain as objects, as other, as lack and the dominant patriarchal ideology would systematically 'mute' their voices. At the crossroads of sexuality and ideology woman thus stands constituted as an object. As a subject, woman must learn to speak 'otherwise', or 'make audible [what]...[she] suffers silently in the holes of discourse."[24]

In order to retrieve the voice, feminist criticism cann't afford to settle

for mimicry of the language of the dominant. However, to retrieve the voice and articulate speech are problematic, for over centuries women have been silenced and are voiceless. In her struggle to reposses the voice snatched away from her, the task becomes formidable as she has to struggle through limitations of her social situatedness. Feminist critical theory endeavours to find a voice for woman, in order to end sexist oppression. There can of course be no homogenizing 'female voice' as experiences of women differ. All women do not share the same social status and feminism while defining a new paradigm for women should not only centralize experiences of all women but call to attention the diversity of woman's social and political reality. As a consequence of the growing influences of the postcolonial agenda, creative expression of voices hitherto silenced by the western master narrative have gained momentum since the 80's. One of the primary projects of Third World feminism was to reject the homogenizing impulses of Western feminists with regard to woman as subject of analysis. The situation of woman under colonialism and postcolonialism is bound to be different, and so writers writing from Third World and colonised history create their own space, different from the liberal white feminists. Third World feminists aim at creating critical space for non-white women's voices, and evolve a language and mode of writing which is shaped by what they believe to be their way of experiencing and thinking. These are the voices from the margin, voices which need to be articulated.

The dominant community retains the language of power in the name of 'plurality' and dictates the terms of 'difference'. The very process of inclusion implies the process of exclusion. The privileged English writer writes mainly from a privileged position and to the privileged English- speaking reader and consequently such a writer's concerns would be issues of mainstream feminism. Such a body of writing might not therefore lend itself readily to alternative feminist criticism which attempts to look at feminist writing as writing from the margin. We need a critical paradigm that would look at absences as much as presences and a critical consciousness and a corpus of feminist literary criticism, however tentative, to situate women's fiction in English in perspective. The solution perhaps is to relocate the literary text and give it a contextual meaning. We need to look at literary feminism in configuration with historical processes and the complex formations of beliefs, structures and representations which shape and permeate the literary text and determine its value and limitation.

Contemporary feminist theorists emphasize the need to interrogate the past from various ex-centric positions, identify the historical and cultural contexts in which historically privileged texts have been produced. Women belonging to minority groups, oppressed groups feel that the loss of identity which accompanied cultural imperialism can be combated by refusing to forget their language, rituals and cultural practices. Writers from these groups recognise the fact that 'naming' is necessarily biased and

that there is power inscribed in language. Language is not neutral for "systems of discourse are often synonymous with systems of power." [25] In other words, the dominant group in every society holds the monopoly of naming. It can thus embed its imperialistic designs in the very names it supplies. Western feminist discourse, from a privileged position generalises the representation of women and homogenizes the notion of the oppression of women as a group. Moreover they produce the image of an 'average Third World woman'.

Accordingly, this view posits an average Third World woman leading an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read : sexually constrained) and being in the Third World (read : ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family -oriented, victimized etc.)[26]. This image of the Third World women as represented by the Western feminists is in stark contrast to the self-presentation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.

Feminists from the Third World like Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty react to these images of Third World women represented by Western Feminists. Distinctions in representations are made on the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm of referent. Mohanty therefore says that " Western feminist writing on woman in the Third World

must be considered in the context of the global hegemony of Western scholarship -- i.e. the production, publication distribution, and consumption of information and ideas."[27] There is therefore the urgent need to move beyond Marx who found it possible to say : "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented."[28] Spivak addresses the native subaltern-- the nameless woman. According to her, the academic feminist must learn to learn from them, to speak to them, to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be corrected by the academicians superior theory and enlightened compassion.[29] In order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World Feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman.[30] The focus, according to Spivak should not be merely, who am I ? but who is the other woman ? How am I naming her ? How does she name me ? Is this part of the problematic I discuss ?[31] It is only when feminists address these questions irrespective of their spatial locations that woman's voice could be heard. While First Nations Women writers need to combat misrepresentations of their reality in history, Third World women need to combat silences and erasure.

The system of linguistic and literary conventions that constitute a literary text are said by structuralist and post-structuralist critics to be naturalized in the process of reading. Not only is the text's representation of

the world no more than an effect generated by the process of reading, but the world is itself held to be in its turn a text, that is , simply a structure of signs whose significance is constituted by the cultural conventions, codes and ideology that happen to be shared by members of a cultural community. The term 'intertextuality' is used to signify the mulitple ways in which any one literary text is made up of other texts, by means of its open or covert citations and allusions, its repetitions and transformations of the formal and substantive features of earlier texts, or simply its unavoidable participation in the common stock of linguistic and literary conventions and procedures that are always already in place and constitute the discourses into which we are born. In Kristeva's formulation, accordingly, any text is in fact an 'intertext'- the site of an intersection of numberless other texts, and existing only through its relations to other texts.[32]

Reading engages a 'text'. It is in the exercise of reading that meaning gets interpreted. However, reading is a dangerous activity because as Harold Bloom opines "We can never know 'the poem -in- itself'. All interpretation is a 'necessary misprison' and all reading is therefore misprison or misreading."[33] Different theories of reading have been propounded, some giving primacy to the reader while others privileging the text. According to Marxist tradition, our reading is based on prejudices which are linked to our position in the power relations of a society, a position that is partially known

to us. If we take the notion of Wolfgang Iser that the relation between a text and its reader(s) is a kind of self-regulatory system, we can define the text itself as an array of sign impulses (signifiers) which are received by the reader.

Reader- response critics turn from the traditional conception of a work as an achieved structure of meanings to the ongoing mental operations and responses of readers as their eyes follow a text on the page before them. In this theory, critics agree at least to some considerable degree, that the meanings of a text are the 'production' or 'creation' of the individual reader ; hence there is no one 'correct' meaning for all readers either of the linguistic parts or of the artistic whole of a text.[34]

It is necessary to read a text again and again, but re-reading is not a simple repetition of an anterior reading. Every reading is a first reading and any meaning we construct for a text on a primary reading is incomplete and inexhaustive, awaiting a subsequent reading for its completion. This subsequent reading will again be a first reading and so on. Postmodernist characterization on the theory of reading grants the reader the possibility of escape from fixed selfhood into an existence as a series of subjectivities that hinge upon personal experience of the environment.

In the midst of different theories of reading, what is necessary in

reading is not one particular theory but an amalgamation of different theories. In the act of reading, a reader can assume different positions including the author determined position. Thus, the reader leaves the passive state of silence and enters into a kind of dialogue with the text. In the entry into discourse, the reader is entering society, for he or she breaks the monologic authorial voice and collaborates with the text to produce meaning. It is here in the 'language', which is central to the civilization and society that men and women exist. The idea is that a personal self is created in the articulation or reading of a text, its phenomenological existence. This self is rather a surface with no depth, it is that which is constituted in language.

However, in the context of a woman, the creation of a 'self' while reading a text is questionable. Much feminist literary criticism has, understandably enough, been concerned with constructing a distinctly feminist discourse of the female reader. Faced with New Criticism's privileging of the text, or with the assumption of a universal (and male) 'reader', feminist critics have sought to reveal the gendered specificity of women's 'reading and writing.'[35] Often this works to reveal the embodied nature of texts ; to disturb the neutrality of the text. Absence of women's experiences in the text leaves the woman reader nowhere. Faced with this situation, feminists have tried to develop a female tradition of writers while at the same time trying to understand the male biases that go into the literary production and consumption.

Women's lives are described as a state of being and not the stuff of art.[36] A woman's life script is a non-story, silent space, a gap in patriarchal culture.[37] Patriarchy preempts any self-representation on the part of woman ; their 'meaning' is already assigned. A woman can only speak as a woman masquerading as a man (and repressing the mother) or into the silence of a patriarchal script (repressing the female).[38] Thus the only speaking position for women is when phallogocentric discourse has permitted women powerful life scripts. Disturbed by the sudden realization that women had invariably been represented in stereotypical ways by a literary heritage that claimed universality, feminist critics turned to women authors for alternative images of woman. One major emphasis has been to alter the way a woman reads the literature of the past so as to make her not an acquiescent but 'the resisting reader', that is , one who resists the author's intentions and design in order, by a "revisionary re-reading" to bring to light and to counter the covert sexual biases written into a literary work. Another prominent task has been to identify recurrent and distorting 'images of women', especially in novels written by men.

Soshana Felman [39] articulates her concern when she wonders whether even women novelists ' speak as woman or are they speaking the language of man?' Can they be said to be speaking as woman simply because they are born female? or are they 'ventriloquist dummies for the male voice'?

The situation of the woman artist under patriarchy is such that it renders it impossible for her to write in a language that she can call her own. As Gilbert and Gubar [40] opine :

> For the female artist the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and 'herself'.

They raise questions to which they do not have the answers :

> Since his is the chief voice she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view ? Or does she 'talk back' to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre insisting on her own viewpoint ?

Gilbert and Gubar further go on to show how women from Jane Austen and Mary Shelley to Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic. These authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards. For Gilbert and Gubar, the female voice is duplicitous but nevertheless true, and truly female voice.

A significant view regarding recuperating a woman's language has been expressed by Pierre Macherey. For Macherey the silences, gaps and contradictions of the text are more revealing of its ideological determinations than are its explicit statements. Terry Eagleton summarizes Macherey's

argument thus :

> It is in the significant *silences* of a text, in its gaps and absences that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt. It is these silences which the critic must *make* 'speak.'...Because a text contains these gaps and silences, it is always *incomplete.*[41]

The gaps and silences display a conflict and contradiction of meanings and therefore the significance of a work lies more in the difference rather than in the unity between / among the meanings. By studying the silences and contradictions within a literary work, a critic can link the text to a specific historical context in which a whole set of different structures- ideological, economic, social, political– intersect to produce precisely those textual structures. This renders the author's personal situation and intention as one of the many conflicting strands that make up the contradictory construct we call the text.

When Barthes advocates 'death of the author' he does not necessarily deny the authors. What he claims is that a proper theory of the text does not make its reading depend on authors as unified subjectivities or the readers' given individual characteristics. Readers make unities out of texts but a text itself is 'made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation. In terms of a theory of a text, its unity emerges in readings, and can always be reinterpreted. Writing is not the destruction of every voice but the proliferation of

possibilities of hearing. Postmodernism has certainly made us aware that we cannot locate full presence anywhere, whether in the psyche, in history, in culture, or in the text. However, presence must be distinguished from what has replaced it. Though there is no one presence behind a text, there is an infinite number of presences, or there is an infinite number of presences, or traces, in a given text. One of these presences is the author, about whom we cannot know everything. But the text is not present to us outside interpretation either. There are always questions remaining about any complex text and many 'texts' to consider.

Uncertainty in interpreting a text brings great hope of women's escape from male power. For a woman, her absence is the possibility that she can yet be present in her own terms, rather than on those set by males, whose domination of women is abetted by their co-option and control of the talk, of all the cultural practice that defines what is female. This is what Cixous calls being out of the phallogocentric discourse but does not mean that such a language ever exists. If we accept Foucault's argument what is 'true' depends on who controls discourse, then it is apparent that man's domination of discourse has trapped woman inside a male 'truth'. Women in patriarchy must therefore consciously resist aping their oppressors and seek to read resistance in literature by looking for "gestures of defiance or subversion implicit in them.[42]

Western Feminist criticism has not merely developed a methodology to study women's writing and women as represented in literature but has actually shaped a new discipline and in the process created, as the object of its study, a new field : women's writing. As feminism ennumerates the themes and sets up the agenda for women's writing the world over, the present day concerns of Western feminists are writ large to encompass the world, and the world collapses into the West. The paraphernalia of European middle class woman's place is regarded as an adequate metaphor for all women's worlds. Other times and other places are only a feature of dispersal, not transformation or change. In their work *Women Writing in India* Vol I . Tharu and Lalita point out that Western feminism no doubt articulate its own solutions to women's problems but it did, in a way, that only address the contradictions principally as women from such social formations experienced. Other contradictions, which had their source in patriarchy as it was historically constituted by class, colonialism, or by caste, which would have shaped the subordination of women in India and determined her self-hood or subjectivity were simply not addressed.[43]

For an alternative feminist reading, especially here in India, we need a critical paradigm that would look at absences as much as presences, silences as much as voices. Women and the marginalized have been a concern with the Indian writers from the first part of the twentieth century. Tagore, Sarat Chandra, Chalam and several women writers themselves, reformulated the issues in different ways and women became the

most problematic and engaging theme of the century. When they wrote, the writers however were not familiar with the theories and concerns of feminism. The portrayal of women and the foregrounding of the gender questions in the first half of the twentieth century was a part of a large discourse involving one's own experience. The preoccupation with these themes was more an exploration into the Indian social reality ; its main concern being problematization of poverty, justice and exploitation. The works of U.R. Anantha Murthy, Gopinath Mohanty and Mahasweta Devi too reflect these concerns. As women rarely form an integral part of the narratives, a re-reading of texts will enable us to interrogate women's space in literature and society.

Samskara, Paraja and *Rudali* are texts written in vernacular languages and speak of women who are otherwise marginalised, women who are either low caste, tribal, dalit or prostitutes. Women in these texts represent the majority of silent women of our country whose voices have been silenced under the burden of caste, class and custom. They are silent unable to articulate the oppression that has overpowered them for centuries. Or can we subsume that 'silence' is an alternative language for woman-- a language that betrays the man-made language? An attempt is therefore made in this chapter to locate the silences in narrative and to see what these silences implicate regarding the situation

of women in India. Can we read the 'silences' as a symbol of women's domination? Or is 'silence' also an articulation -- an articulation of resistance? Either through speech or silence, the women characters do register some form of communication.

What Tillie Olsen has said in her pathbreaking first work *Silences* (1965) is of primary importance in the context of this chapter for in the words of Maxine Hong Kingston, "Tillie Olsen helps those of us condemned to silence- the poor, racial minorities, women -- find our voices."[44] Literature has unwittingly aided the conspiracy of silence, in neglecting the nature of women's lives and services. There is wide discrepancy between the life of women as conceived by men and the life of women as lived by women. The power and the need to create, over and beyond reproduction, is native in both women and men where the gifted among women have remained mute, or have never attained full capacity. It is because of circumstances, inner or outer, which oppose the need of creation. Circumstances of woman condemn her to an inferiority. Women are traditionally trained to place other's needs first, to feel those needs as their own; their sphere and their satisfaction lies in making it possible for others to use their abilities. Few women writers have become famous "not because the capacities to create no longer exist, or the need, but because the circumstances for sustained creation have been almost impossible."[45] As Olsen says " Unused capacities

atrophy, cease to be ..." [46] She observes that almost no mothers -- as almost no part-time, part-self persons -- have created enduring literature so far. Men on the otherhand have had this inestimable advantage towards productivity. She writes :

> I cannot help but notice how curiously absent both of these angels,these watchers and warders at the frontiers of the invisible, are from the actual contents of most men's books, except perhaps on the dedication page. [47]

In a significant move Olsen warns that as women 'we must not speak of writers in our century...without speaking also of the invisible, the as-innately-capable: the born to the wrong circumstances -- diminished, excluded, foundered, silenced."[48] The silences that she speaks of are ' unnatural': the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot"[49] -- the silences where the lives never came to writing. " Among those, the mute inglorious Miltons : those whose working hours are all struggle for existence ; the barely educated, the illiterate , women. Their silence, the silence of centuries as to how 'life was, is for most of humanity." [50] In a chapter " Silences -Its Varieties", Olsen discusses at length the different types of silencers of literature - the censorship silences ; political silences ; silences of the marginal ; absences that are a kind of silence; virulent destroyers; premature silences ; foreground silences and silences where the lives never came to writing.

Tillie Olsen's observations in her work can be safely transferred in analysing the texts under discussion because it provides a framework to study the various kinds of silences. In the context of Indian social reality, a re-reading of *Samskara, Paraja* and *Rudali* from this perspective enables us to see how the patriarchal structures across caste and community operate to subordinate women in the spaces they occupy and how possibilities of resistance could be read in their silences. Silence is thus seen as creating a discourse -- a discourse of marginalization and resistance.

Positioned within patriarchal structures women internalise the belief that they are no better than extensions of men. This is the oppressive reality of woman. In other words, patriarchy wants women to believe that there is such a thing as an essence of femaleness, called femininity. So women are to conform to the patriarchal standards of femininity. A woman has to be a good mother, a good wife, a good daughter, a good sister, etc. She cannot be just 'herself'. She cannot exist independent of all those other relations. She is always defined as the 'other'. Subjectivity is deemed to her and she is looked only as an 'object'. This objectification of woman have rendered her 'voiceless'. Until and unless women abstract themselves from the definition 'woman' which is imposed upon them, women's voices will remain muted. Silence and subjectivity are relational. We speak, therefore we are.

What binds *Samskara*, *Paraja* and *Rudali* together although written in diverse times is their positioning within Indian discursive reality. Besides, these texts also deal with women who live in the margins. It is therefore interesting to see Anantha Murthy, Gopinath Mohanty and Mahasweta Devi's approach in the treatment of woman as revealed in their texts, as well as independent of the authors, what do silence do to these women in general and Indian woman's reality.

In India great respect is generally given to a woman. But we need to rethink what forms the basis of this respect. Ashis Nandi in his work *Essays in Politics and culture: At the Edge of Psychology* (1980) opines that the ultimate authority in the Indian mind has always been feminine. Dwelling into past history he writes that 'though the Brahmanic tradition attempted to limit the dominance of woman in society, the pre-Aryan dominance of woman was retained in many areas of life, particularly in the symbolic system.[51] The Indian culture is therefore undeniably a 'matrifocal culture in which femininity is inextricably linked with prakriti or nature.'[52] This speaks for the respect enjoyed by women. But it would again be wrong to subsume all 'women' as winning this so called respect. It is a woman's 'motherhood' that the traditional family values and respects; her role as wife and to a lesser extent as daughter are devalued and debased.[53] Thus motherhood is manipulated by society to control a woman by forcing her to take on a maternal identity and to shape the critical public relations within the society.

This desire for progeny is a recurrent theme in many Indian texts and women across caste and class explain their existence in terms of this paradigm. Chandri in *Samskara* is a low caste woman, who is the mistress of the Brahmin Naranappa. Although, through her actions, she exposes the Brahmins, yet Chandri feels incomplete without being a mother :

> Suddenly she regretted that she was past thirty. Ten years she'd lived with Naranappa, she still hadn't had a child....She had got everything yet she had nothing.(*Samskara*,p.54)

Chandri only echoes what culture has " introjected through a long historical process of social learning, and the learning has been thorough.[54] Initiating Praneshacharya into sexual pleasure Chandri savours yet hopes of being a mother :

> There was also a hope in her that his touch might bear fruit in her body. And a gratefulness that she too might have earned merit. (*Samskara*,p.62)

The highest 'merit' for a woman in this life is believed to be attaining mother-hood and thus an Indian woman's identity centres round the figure of a mother. But even, it is not the mother of a daughter but the mother of a son who is the recipient of prestige and respect. As Ashis Nandi writes : "For the Indian mother, the son is the major medium of self expression... The woman's self respect in the traditional system is protected not through her father or husband but through her son."[55] She would go to any extent for the sake of her son. Garuda's wife Sitadevi kept fasts to reform her son :

> She'd fasted Friday nights so that her son's heart might turn good and clear...Sitadevi had offered vows to the goddess : 'Give my husband peace, may his love be constant for his son. (*Samskara*, p.27)

A woman who cannot conceive is made to feel worthless. Bhagirathi, the invalid wife of Praneshacharya, is made to feel worthless in existence in the absence of motherhood, when she tells her husband :

> Being married to me is no joy. A house needs a child. Why don't you just get married again. (*Samskara*, p.1)

The fate of a woman who gives birth to a daughter is no better. The society does not respect her and her place in the family becomes insignificant. Nathuni Singh's middle wife in *Rudali* shares with Sanichari how inspite of her wealth, she does not claim any respect in the household just because she is the mother of a girl:

> The others are given respect because they have sons. I'm the mother of a mere girl. (*Rudali*, p. 78)

By idealizing motherhood, women are systematically discriminated against. Motherhood thus becomes a site of domination which subordinates women and renders her incapable of expressing herself out of this patriarchal construct. As Maithrey Krishnaraj says in her essay "Motherhood : Power and Powerlessness," "Maternal responsibility is used as an alibi to exclude woman from power, authority, decision, and a participatory

role in public life."[56] Exalting motherhood as the sole purpose of women's existence, women are confined to domestic tasks of mothering, feeding, nurturing and caring. Women are thus silenced under the burden of motherhood.

A very familiar stereotype that appears in the texts besides that of a mother , is the stereotype of a whore or mistress. Generally, it is the upper-caste women who are portrayed in the role of mothers and wives and the lower caste women and tribal women are invariably portrayed as prostitutes and mistresses. In *Samskara* the Brahmin women are either wives or mothers but almost all the low- caste women are prostitutes. Chandri is Naranappa's mistress. She is never thought fit to be married although she is beautiful. Belli and Padmavati are also low - caste prostitutes within the text who have no other function but to satisfy male desire. It did not matter to Brahmins that these women were out-castes as long as their lustful appetites were fulfilled. As Shripati tells of Belli : "Belli was alright for sleeping with." (*Samskara*, p.41) In *Paraja* too the women who figure are objects of male gaze and desire. The Forest guard had "eyes only for the parade of bathing beauties under the waterfall."(*Paraja*,p.24) Jili and Bili are tribal girls who get caught in the web of economic exploitation. Jili becomes the victim of first the Forest guard, then the Supervisor and her exploitation is complete in the hands of the Sahukar, who keeps her in his house without marrying her. Jili

and Bili's story is a tale of how circumstances compel women to compromise with their bodies. In *Rudali* Mahesweta Devi mentions a whole randi-basti. Sanichari's daughter-in-law too becomes a whore. Dulan articulates the bare truth when he tells Sanichari " Do you think we always had so many whores ? It's these Rajput malik-mahajans who have created so many randis." (*Rudali*,p.72)

Thus it is seen that women are more or less portrayed only in terms of their relationships to men, men in a variety of situations. Constrained and constricted by customs, traditions, rituals and social institutions, women remain silent bearing centuries of oppression.

Literature has unwittingly aided this conspiracy of silence, neglect, as to the nature of women's lives and services. Throughout much of our literature fanciful constructs of the female, her character and psychology, have obscured the limitations suffered by actual women. Worse they have encouraged expectations and behaviour that only strengthen the real oppression. Anantha Murthy, in *Samskara,* has traversed upon a revolutionary subject. By making Chandri a pivotal character in the novel, he no doubt challenges the traditional role ascribed to woman. Through her actions Chandri poses a threat to Brahminism. As the Brahmins are locked in mire over Naranappa's rites of burial, "suddenly Chandri did something that

stunned the Brahmins. She moved forward to stand in the front courtyard. They could not believe their eyes. Chandri loosened her four-strand gold chain, her thick bracelet, her bangles and placed them all in a heap before Praneshacharya" (*Samskara*, pp. 9-10) saying that all those jewellery were there to meet the expenses of the rite. Chandri's act renders the Brahmins speechless. Chandri's part in burying Naranappa with the help of a Muslim is also an act of defiance of the Brahminical norms.

Anantha Murthy's portrayal of Chandri as a revolutionary woman cannot be denied, but at the same time one has to admit that he is silent about many things within the text. He is silent about the marriage of these low-caste women. All the low-caste women remain unmarried. They are fit enough to be objects of pleasure but not fit to be wives. Besides Chandri, the others occupy the peripheral spaces. Perhaps Anantha Murthy tries to expose the situtation of women like Chandri, Belli and Padmavati by showing how they only exist as prostitutes. But prostitutes and whores have always been a part of Indian myth as well as reality. In Chandri he makes an attempt to break from the fetters of tradition but at a certain stage he backs away as Chandri fades away to Kundapara.

It is not only the low-caste women who remain in the periphery but the situation of the Brahmin women is also identical. Whereas the Brahmins

engage in conversation, the wives are spatially on the periphery : their sterility is reinforced spatially. They occupy the outer fringes of the discussion. While the Brahmins sit in the inner courtyard, their wives are hidden from view. While the responsibility of women for the 'identity' of the agrahara is stressed, it is clear that the old rules no longer apply where men are concerned. Through the binary opposition between sexual 'good' wives and transgressing 'sexual' women, upper caste women's subjectivity is represented reductively. Conjugally, as Brahmin wives, they are redundant, dispensable lacking in sexual appeal. Their sterility is exemplified in Pranesh's wife, the invalid. While she is referred to as a ' good wife', in the same sentence she is also said to be a 'dry log'. The particular connection of upper- caste woman to ritual complicates the nature of her marginalization and erasure. She is in a sense the embodiment of ritual, which means that the strangle hold of ritual on the modern individual is gendered. Rituals, hence, only extenuate women's oppression by this reductive principle. Either ways, women are oppressed and shown to be subjects of their fate.

Gopinath Mohanty presents a tribal world in *Paraja*. The setting of the novel is at a period of transition when the new order is taking place but Mohanty shows how establishment of a new order do not necessarily suggest a change in the condition of women, or of the innocent tribals in general, as agents of control unite to double the exploitation. Mohanty exposes

how women become vicitms of institutions and systems created by men. Jili and Bili are sexually and economically exploited. Mohanty, a non-tribal, even when he tries to present the novel as a fight for survival, a fight against exploitation, he in no way is able to present a true picture of a tribal world. In a tribal society, a woman enjoys a comparatively better position than her non-tribal counterparts. Her sphere of activity is much more wider as she works not just in the hearth but also in the fields. She is not a domesticated woman who is confined within the four walls of the household. Surprisingly, married women do not feature in Mohanty's scheme of survival. Jili and Bili are just teenaged girls and so become easy prey of their captors. No doubt, he does give us a picture of the dormitory system prevalent among the tribals which tells to some extent the freedom that a tribal girl enjoys compared to the non-tribal girls. Mohanty fails to exploit this freedom in *Paraja* as he does not think it necessary to explore the complexities in the life of a tribal woman. Moreover, he overlooks the possibilities of resistance in tribal women,instead presenting them in the usual stereotype of exploited women, a site of pleasure. These are the absences that Tillie Olsen writes of : absences which are also a kind of silence.

In *Samskara* as it has been observed, almost all the women characters are little or not-voiced. When voiced they are only made to speak within the system that reinforce their subordinate position. Whether it is

the upper-caste Brahmin wives – Bhagirathi, Anasuya, Sitadevi or the Brahmin widow Lakshmidevamma, or the low-caste mistresses – Chandri, Belli, Padmavati - they remain in the periphery. Jili and Bili's condition in *Paraja* is also no better. Moved by hunger and poverty, the two girls are forced to prostitution -- a ready market that is always available for women's exploitation. Jili's act of moving in with the Sahukar does not register a release for her , but a sinking deeper into the abyss of silence. Billi's knowledge of her sister's step renders her helpless and quietens her. In *Rudali* despite many deaths in her family, Sanichari doesn't cry. "Preoccupied with the ways of keeping the stomach fed, Sanichari forgot to cry." (*Rudali*,p.59) The silence of these women in the midst of enormous exploitation speak of the domination of women which has continued unabetted since time immemorial. Her silence shows her failure to break out of the fetters of tradition and stereotyped role. To put it in other words, can we suggest that her 'silence' is not 'her' failure, but it is representative of the cultural conditioning of women which force her to remain within the constricted definition of men and the failure perhaps to find a 'language' which would articulate women's felt experiences.

Silences could stand for absences, could be textual and could also

stand as symbols of domination. Nevertheless, women's silence in these texts could also be read as articulations. Silence of these women while on the one hand expresses their marginalization within Indian social practise, at the same time, their silences can also read as a sign of women's resistance. Chandri's silence speaks more than words in *Samskara.* She articulates resistance to patriarchal limitations not through speech but through her actions in silence. Through her actions she resists the dominant. Chandri's sacrifying her jewels to meet Naranappa's rites of burial exposes not only the hypocrisy of the Brahmins but also the greed of their Brahmin wives. Similarly, her participation in Naranappa's burial is also rejection of Brahminical order. She celebrates her sexuality by initiating the Acharya into sexual pleasures thus using her body to speak the language of celebration. Thus Chandri's silent journey through the novel could be read as a rejection of a dominant and oppressive patriarchal language and the acquisition of an alternative language of her own. Chandri thereby converts her silence into a form of resistence.

Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* is a powerful text which subverts the stereotypes of women. Her protagonist Sanichari is a woman who betrays the male conception of a traditional Indian woman. The passive, timid, domes-

ticated mother is replaced by an individualistic, assertive, die-hard fighter for a cause. Sanichari and Bikhni are representative of women fighting against various forces of oppression. Sanichari refuses to follow the circumscribed life of domesticity in which patriarchy would have her confined. She finds an alternative source of living – that of a rudali. Sanichari who never cried or shed any tears when her own died thinks "that perhaps her tears had been reserved for the time when she would have to feed herself by selling them" (*Rudali*,p.72). Being a rudali is the only other alternative open to Sanichari other than slaving it out at the fields of the malik- mahajan and being a prostitute. Women like Sanichari have few choices to choose from. " Through motherhood and widowhood they're tied to the moneylender," (*Rudali*,p.74) Nothing had come easy for Sanichari and Bikhni. 'The daily struggle for a little maize gruel' was 'exhausting' and so Sanichari and Bikhni turn their energies towards crying for a living. Professional mourning for the unmourned dead was a regular business in big cities. "The world belongs to the professional, not to the amateur" (Rudali,p.74.) and so Sanichari and Bikhni also decide to become professionals as the occasion demands.

In the beginning Sanichari is hesitant,anxious and doubts her abil-

ity but once the decision is taken she eventually emerges as a confident woman who organizes the other marginalized women -- the prostitutes, into a body of rudalis and cries away the money of the mailk-mahajans. As Gambhir Singh dies, Sanichari initiates the young prostitutes into this profession saying : "All of you come. When you grow old you'll have to do this anyway, so while I'm around let me initiate you." (*Rudali*,p.91) By wailing for Gambhir Singh and taking their money, Sanichari tells the prostitutes that they would only be rubbing salt into the wounds of the malik-mahajan's because "it's they who've turned them into whores, ruined them, then kicked them out." (*Rudali*,p.90). As Sanichari and her ilk cry hitting their heads, " the gomastha began to weep tears of sorrow. Nothing will be there ! Cunning Sanichari !" (*Rudali*,p.90)

Sanichari's 'cry' is a metaphor of survival. At the metaphoric level, it is Sanichari's cry against the rigid forms of a society which grants no alternative space to women. Sorrow is so overwhelming that it cannot be expressed in words. The system or the perpetrators of the system have snatched away the voices of women. In the process, women are silenced and even when it is semiotically voiced as in *Rudali*, the muted voices of women turn out into a 'cry'-- a 'cry' of resistance or may be a discourse of loss

rather than restoration. Voices are suppressed and silenced and when voiced become fragmented and meaningless. Silence, thus creates a discourse of marginalisation that registers resistance and interrogate the dominant.

Endnotes

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4 William Connolly, *Identity / Difference : Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1991), p.64.

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9 Toril Moi, *Sexual / Textual Politics* (London : Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1985), p.8.

10 Denise Riley, quoted in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires,eds. *Feminisms* (New York : OUP, 1997), p. 216.

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12 Helene Cixous, op. cit.,p.278.

[13] Helene Cixous, "Sorties" in Sandra Kemp et. al., *Feminisms*, op. cit., p. 233.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Toril Moi, "Feminist, Female, Feminine" in *Feminisms*, op. cit., p. 248.

[16] Gilbert and Gubar, quoted in Toril Moi, *Sexual / Textual Politics*, op. cit., p.57.

[17] Ibid., p.58.

[18] Ibid.,p.61.

[19] Myra Jehlen, quoted in Toril Moi, op. cit., p.80.

[20] Ibid., pp.80-81.

[21] Simone de Beauvoir, quoted in Toril Moi, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

[22] Helene Cixous, quoted in Vidhu Verma, op. cit., p.278.

[23] Ibid., p.279.

[24] Quoted in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds. op. cit., p.54.

[25] See Anjali Bhelande and Pandurag, *Articulating Gender* (Delhi : Pencraft International, 2000),p.195.

[26] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes : Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires,eds. op. cit., p.95.

[27] Ibid., p.94.

[28] Ibid.,p.96.

[29] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

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32 M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Singapore : Harcourt Asia Pte. Ltd., 2000),p.316.

33 Ibid., p. 125.

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35 Elspeth Probyn, "Materializing Locations Images and Selves" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires ,eds. op. cit., p.127.

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43 See Susie Tharu and K. Lalita,eds. op. cit., pp.22-32.

44 See back cover Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York : Dell Publishing Co.,Inc., 1980, fourth printing).

45 Tillie Olsen, *Silences*, op. cit., p.18.

46 Ibid., p.19.

47 Ibid., pp.34-35.

48 Ibid., p.39.

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51 Ashis Nandi, *Essays in Politics and Culture* : *At the Edge of Psychology*,(New Delhi :OUP, 1980),p.35.

52 Ibid.

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Chapter V

Conclusion

Ideas of 'selfhood' have been highly problematic and have been contested by philosophers in almost every age. The same questions that have had set their quest confront individuals as writers or readers even today. There can be no homogenizing notion of the 'self' especially in the world that we live in. Raymond Williams has rightly said that different cultures construct different selves. We can extend this argument and say that even within one culture different selves can be produced. The question is do cultures allow a woman's 'self ' to emerge or is woman subsumed under the man's 'self '? Feminist theorists argue that women are denied the right to assert their self and autonomy. Delving into representative works of literature feminist theorists have observed that for centuries the male principle has governed the production of literature. According to Gilbert and Gubar woman are denied the right to create their own images of the feminine and are made to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them. Elaine Showalter articulates the women's situation under patriarchy thus :

> Women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity, in part because they do not see it mirrored and given resonance in literature...They are expected to identify with masculine experience, which is presented as the human one, and have no faith in the validity of their own perceptions and experiences, rarely seeing them confirmed in literature, or accepted in criticism. [1]

Feminism has therefore attempted to retrieve women's voice and

reconstruct a woman's 'identity' by dismantling tradition, authority and patriarchy that have consistently marginalised women and disenfranchised them. Under the burden of male parameters women suffer silently and are silenced. Feminism has attempted to deconstruct this 'silence' to reinvent women's 'self' - a 'self' freed from male definitions. The feminist strategy in this search has been to expose the patriarchal premises and prejudices in order to draw the space available for women in literature. Though the three texts taken for study have been written in different places, in different times, yet they do open up possibilities of re-reading them in the present context especially from a feminist perspective.

Although the image of the Indian woman has dominated literary imagination women have been depicted as stereotypes in traditional mainstream classical literature. During the post-classical period Indian woman was idealised as a devoted wife, paragon of virtue on the lines of Sita and Savitri. Modernism in Indian novel to some extent presented autonomous self-sufficient woman but this was limited in the portrayal of a selected few. The traditional prototypes still existed as Meenakshi Mukherjee expressed :

> One might argue the classical ideals no longer obtain in the Indian context. But in the actual literary practice, numerous characters are found to adhere to classic prototypes - especially the women of fiction who persistently re-enact the suffering, the sacrificing role of *Sita and Savitri.* [2]

The novels discussed in the preceding chapters are a testimony to this fact. Women continue to be represented in their stereotypical roles as mothers, wives, mistresses and prostitutes. Both tradition and modernity have been embedded in India to patriarchal ideology. This patriarchal ideology has almost reduced women to a practical non-entity, in life as well as in literature.

The concern in this thesis has been to identify the 'self' of woman by tracing their voices in the three texts -- *Samskara*, *Paraja* and *Rudali*. These three texts in a way share a similarity of subject in that the women represented in these texts belong to the marginalised group– the low-castes, the tribals and the untouchables. However, women form only a subtext in the work of the two male writers Anantha Murthy and Gopinath Mohanty. *Samskara* is the quest of a Brahmin's self-discovery and women have only been considered incidental not central to the formation of that quest. Similarly, *Paraja* too is the story of exploitation of the tribals and women's representation has been very liminal. Only in *Rudali* we can say that women form the central part of the narrative. Women who figure in these texts are representatives of the age-old stereotypes steeped in myth, popular culture and tradition. The imposed identity on a woman silences her and she is deprived of gaining any agency. In *Samskara* and *Paraja* the stories do not revolve around the women and little space is assigned to them. In *Rudali* the

protagonist is a female and it is a story of women's empowerment. However, in this text as the other two, women do not transcend the roles that have been assigned to them. An attempt is made in *Rudali* to come out of the limitations and assert woman's autonomy but women are shown to lack agency.

Samskara presents the issue of women only marginally, its main theme being Brahminical orthodoxy and the Brahminical anxiety to maintain its pretended superiority. The hypocrisy within Brahminism is exposed. Brahminism operates as a patriarchal structure to subordinate women -- both brahmin and low-caste in the spaces they occupy. Whether it is the Brahmin wives or the mistresses of the Brahmins, they become victims of an oppressive structure that crushes their individuality. Chandri, who comes out as the woman protagonist within the narrative, no doubt poses a threat to Brahminism but even here the mode of resistance is her body. It is through her sexuality that she tames both Naranappa and Praneshacharya. But her place is not legitimated in the patriarchal structure. She remains a mistress and fades away. Praneshacharya kept secret his relationship with Chandri while Naranappa, the liberated Brahmin, though makes public his liaison with Chandri, does not legitimize this relationship and give Chandri the status of a wife. The Brahminic patriarchal discourse keeps women and other marginalised groups on the margins. The author is unable to break the hold of tradition to give Chandri voice and an independent identity in the novel.

No bonding is shown between the women across caste and class. Each group of women remain in the places assigned to them by tradition, having internalised the values that oppress them.

Paraja is the story of exploitation of tribals but here too the main protagonist is the tribal patriarch Sukru Jani. Women are very liminally represented. Jili and Bili are representative of tribal girls who in their fight for survival have to compromise with their bodies. Like *Samskara*, here too body becomes the mode of exchange. For low-caste and tribal women, any negotiation with the upper-caste is the body. Body invariably becomes the site of exploitation. Women are looked upon as objects of pleasure equating them with commodities. Women bonding is shown in the relationship of Jili and Bili as they suffer silently unable to articulate their victimisation. The silences of Jili and Bili are total both under the tribal and non-tribal situation as they lack agency. *Paraja* however is conspicuous by the absence of non-tribal women characters. We do not know what happens to women in Sahukar's caste/ class.

Samskara and *Paraja* as well as *Rudali* represent the reality of women in India. However , there is bound to be a difference in descriptions, the images and comparisons, the perspectives and perceptions, when men and women narrate the same reality. It is not merely a question of two different kinds of articulations or voices but more often it is the male gaze which

frames the writer. For that matter even a woman can write about women from a male gaze. *Rudali,* however, is a story with a difference as compared to the other two texts. In Sanichari, Mahasweta Devi has attempted to create a woman, breaking the stereotypes of myth and tradition. Alone and independent Sanichari, a low-caste woman asserts herself within the limited space ascribed to her. What comes out strongly in the text is also the bonding between Sanichari and Bikhni, a bonding based on their humaneness. However, we do not see the same bonding between Sanichari and her daughter-in-law Parbatia. Bonding between them is disrupted as Parbatia takes to prostitution. Sancichari considers the prostitutes outcastes initially and it takes her a while before she realises that prostitutes are also women like them exploited by the malik-mahajans. Thereafter Sanichari is able to rope in the prostitutes in the profession of rudali - beckoning them to join as it would be a good way to take revenge against their exploiters. 'Cry' is used as a subaltern tool of revenge. Sanichari is empowered but at the same time she empowers others as well. The women in *Rudali* give voice to their anguish through their cry - a cry of resistance.

In all the three novels, women are victims of institutions which control and subordinate them. The difference is in the approach of each writer. Each writer has dealt with in the narrative of prostitution, and how low-caste and tribal women are portrayed as prostitutes. This system exposes the hyprocrisy inherent in the patriarchal Brahminic attitude to marriage

and women. While female purity and monogamy are regarded as essential features of a patriarchal family, male infidelity is excusable.

Chandri in *Samskara* no doubt has a story to tell, but she is not given any voice. She speaks through her body. The sexual encounter between Praneshacharya and Chandri takes place outside the agrahara in the silence of the forest, showing that a union between a low-caste and Brahmin can take place only in silence. Thus Chandri remains muted inspite of the fact that she is seen as a threat to Brahminism. In *Rudali* though Sanichari is depicted as an independent and autonomous woman, yet her autonomy is dependent on the patriarchal structure, because rudalis like the prostitutes are also the creations of the malik-mahajans.

In *Samskara* and *Paraja*, women negotiate with another culture--the dominant culture represented by Brahminism. The women, tribals and low-caste are representative of subordinate cultures. Within the narrative they provide an alternative discourse but under the burden of caste and class their voices remain fractured and muted. Voices are heard only at a rudimentary level. The speeches ascribed to Chandri, Jili and Bili are functional and amount to mutation. In Sanchari semiotically an attempt is made to express women's voice. She is a self-made woman and in the course of the story discovers her autonomy. Her 'cry' over death is a symbolically inarticulated expression of womanhood in India cutting across caste/ class.

At one level 'cry' is just a hired crying. It gives a kind of satisfaction to those who have hired the criers to socially exhibit the sense of loss. It acts as a source of prestige for those who hire. The criers need not necessarily feel emotionally disturbed as they are undertaking social cry as a skill to dramatise a mourning they are not part of. There is also no sentimental attachment to this cry as 'cry' is here just a commodity or a source of earning one's livelihood.

At the metaphoric level however, the 'cry' symbolizes untold pain and suffering. Written in the 'cry', it is women's anguish at her lot. Whereas she cannot cry at the death of her loved ones, ironically, she has to draw those tears for her livelihood. The 'cry' also interrogates the brahminical and higher caste practices that commodify a woman's emotions. Under patriarchy voices are suppressed and silenced and in order for the voice to be articulated it has to be hired and therefore ends in a 'cry' – a fragmented and meaningless babble but nevertheless a woman's voice.

Endnotes

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