Chapter I

Introduction

Myths can be dated back to the beginning of human civilization. Myths are nothing but stories that deal with several aspects of nature, human life and environment such as - creation, natural phenomena, and the heroic deeds of gods as well as of human beings. Myths can also be said to deal with the evolution and establishment of human societies that attribute meanings to customary practices and traditions. Literature, a much more sophisticated human endeavor came into existence at a later stage of its (human) development. Literature has borrowed its raw material from the immediate surroundings of human/social life. Hence the history of nexus between myth and literature has been one of long standing relationship.

Human society has, for the past several thousand years evolved as a patriarchal /predominantly male oriented system. Though studies of feminist anthropology try to trace an origin of female gods and matriarchy that pre-existed, but which later on was usurped by male gods and patriarchy, the fact remains that a history of nearly five thousand years and more of human civilization is strongly flavored by male thinking. Almost every line of thought in every walk of life, in human society, has come from men. If one goes by the Western and Eastern worlds of civilization, one cannot but take into account the influence of The Bible and The Ramayana/The Mahabharata,
upon the system of societies that has been prevailing since time immemorial and one that without doubt has been and is male dominated. As a result, women in literature, as in mythology, are either absent or have been largely misrepresented with negative portrayals. Though literature has often borrowed stories from various cultural myths, using them as an important device for developing literary plots and themes, feminists in particular have deployed patriarchal myths in their works so as to rework, reconstruct and recreate such myths to contest problems of domination and gender inequalities. It is against this background that the present research has been undertaken to study how the select postmodern feminist writers dismantle patriarchal myths that are against women and reassemble them in their fiction for feminist purpose, thereby contributing to a style of writing, illustrative of *écriture féminine*. The study is expected to prove a modest contribution to the ongoing research in feminist studies, by opening up new areas of thought to the woman reader and researcher.

**Myth-Definitions and Theories:**

The word ‘myth’ comes from the Greek word ‘mythos’ which means ‘story’. Like most stories, myths are an attempt to make meaning out of human experience. Myths tell us how things in the world began. They go back to a time before history and often explain happenings in the world for which people can find no explanation other than a supernatural one. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* defines myths thus: “Myths are specific accounts
concerning Gods or superhuman beings and extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is altogether different from that of ordinary human experience” (793). Myths are said to have occurred in the history of all human traditions and communities and is a basic constituent of human culture. People in every culture or tradition have developed myths and are hence reflective of that particular groups of people, community or culture. “Myth is at varying levels of consciousness and degrees of articulateness, a way of describing the foundations of social behavior” (Righter 10). Myths therefore tend to present the model for man’s behavior. The world of myth, then, becomes a continuous source of knowledge needed for crucial problems in man’s existence, as that of war and peace, life and death, truth and falsehood, good and evil etc. in this sense, myths become narrative patterns that give significance to our existence. According to Mircea Eliade, there are certain characteristic qualities of myth as experienced by archaic societies. One – it constitutes the history of acts of divine beings, two – such history is considered true to reality, three – myth is related to creation, of how things came into existence (how a pattern of behavior, an institution, a manner of working were established) constituting the paradigm for all significant human acts, four – that by knowing myths one knows the ‘origin’ of things and hence can control and manipulate them at will and finally one ‘lives’ myth when one recollects or re-enacts it (Eliade 18-19). In other words myths fulfilled an indispensable function in primitive cultures in expressing, enhancing and
codifying beliefs, and in laying down practical rules for the guidance of man (20). Thus myths serve to instruct and guide by providing models for human society, offering wisdom and knowledge about why things are as they are. Myth is said to make unique use of language that describes the realities beyond our comprehension, thereby expressing truths of the human condition in metaphor and symbolic language. As Mark Schorer points out,

Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experiences intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life; that is which has organizing value for experience.

(Schorer 355)

Myth’s primary function, hence, as Stephen C. Ausband in his book *Myth and Meaning, Myth and Order* argues is to reinforce order. Myths are nothing but “tales which demonstrate the order that a man or a society perceives in natural phenomena” (Ausband 2). The role of mythology lies in making the world coherent and meaningful by demonstrating or imposing order on it (2). Myths being one of the oldest elements of human heritage belong to a pre-literate and pre-historic era, keep recurring through all ages and also form part of the present. It is characterized by a stable yet protean nature, as Roland Barthes describes myth, “myth is not defined by the object of its message but by the fashion in which it presents it. There may be formal limits to myth but not ones of substances.” (qtd. in Righter 11). This quality of myth endows it
with flexibility and adaptability that enables creative writers to transpose/rewrite and therefore transplant them in various cultures and media. He defines myths as best thought of as a type of speech, with no fixity of concept and which can come into being, alter, disintegrate and disappear completely. (Sellers, *Myth* 6-7). To Ernst Cassirer, “Myth is a non-discursive, densely imagistic language . . . at once more archaic and vibrant” (qtd. in Ruthven 745). He treats myth as a primordial symbolic form that is primarily emotional in origin while its function is essentially social and practical in that it serves to promote a feeling of unity and harmony between the members of a society. According to Mark Schorer, “myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend” (Schorer 356).

In his study of myths, Claude Levi-Strauss highlighted the various parables that formed the common structure/format among myths from across the world and how throughout the world myths resembled one another to an extraordinary degree (Kluckhohn 47). He defines myth as a strongly structured story, that myth is language and forms part of societies, the unraveling of which will reveal the working of the human mind. Another significant contribution to the study of mythology came from Sir James Frazer whose monumental work *The Golden Bough*, belonging to the myth and ritual school of interpretation, explains mythic narratives in terms of rituals or
ceremonies. Frazer privileges the fertility myth as the key to all other mythologies, because it deals with the story of the dying and reviving god. Joseph Campbell considers myth and ritual as a second womb. They are embodiments of civilization which protect the individual while he matures psychologically and socially. In his work *The Hero with a thousand Faces*, he makes a comprehensive attempt by bringing together various mythic components from different cultures, in an effort to define the essence of a hero in any tradition. He finds a common pattern of the hero who goes beyond the bounds of ordinary mortality in order to become mythic hero. He calls this pattern as ‘monomyth’. Just like dreams, myths also arise from the subconscious mind of man that deals with hopes and fears that have been scarcely articulated (Ausband 14-15).

Campbell’s interpretation of myth is based on Freud’s psychological theories of myth that is based on the supposition of some universal characteristics of the human psyche which may be revealed through myth. However it is Carl Jung who took Freud’s probing of mythic origins several steps further by suggesting that man is born with an inherited disposition to behave and think in certain ways. The key to his theory of myth lies in his idea of the collective unconscious, whence we share certain primordial shapes or images of thought which he terms as ‘archetypes’. The collective unconscious as Jung postulates are images of the world within which are motives and symbols of universal human history and experience, or archetypes. These are
what he calls as archaic remnants of primordial images which are an “unrepresentable element of the instinctual structure of the human psyche” (qtd. in Rochelle 18). According to Jung’s definition, myths are the “narrative elaboration of archetypal images” (qtd. in Rochelle 19). Myth, then, becomes the “indispensable intermediate stage between unconscious and conscious cognition” (qtd. in Rochelle 19). While individual myths have the potential to reveal some hidden aspect of the human psyche, mythology on the whole becomes a mirror of the unconscious. In other words, myths are nothing but the expressions of the archetypes which are inherent in us in the realm of collective unconscious, otherwise referred to as the common realm of darkness. The chief use of myth lies in its ability therefore to reveal the existence of the unconscious-

Myth thus expresses truths of human condition in metaphoric and symbolic language, and it is only in this language, in the narrative of the myth, that these truths can be understood. They open the door through story, through language, to the latent potentialities of the human psyche- an enormous, inexhaustible store of ancient knowledge concerning the profound relations between god, man and the cosmos. (Rochelle 19)

It is through the manifestations/ articulations of these archetypes (mythic elements/ symbols) from the unconscious to the conscious mind that universal
knowledge becomes individual knowledge that lends to adequate understanding of the world.

Another significant contribution by Jung in his study of archetypes and mythological imagery is his theory of ‘individuation’ a psychological process of growing up of an individual that differentiates him from rest of the members of the society/community. It may involve, in other words, the process of integration of anima/animus, male/female, shadow/self, positive/negative, masculine/feminine etc that makes the person as a psychic whole since the human psyche is said to be bisexual. Individuation, therefore, according to Jung, is a necessary process for the psyche to become whole through realization of the individual’s innermost uniqueness in order to become one’s own self as differentiated from a collective/group identity. This theory of individuation by Jung is of great interest to feminists wherein they argue that Jung’s definition of the human psyche and its development has been ‘male’ in character i.e., in describing purely the male psyche, Jung has failed to describe the female psyche in itself, even if defined, it is, however, only in terms of opposition to the male psyche i.e., in terms of ‘not I’. Like Jung, Northrop Frye is an outstanding archetypal critic. In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye defines myth as a simply story, plot or narrative. Myth, to him forms the basic structuring principle of Literature, in terms of identifying literary genres or types corresponding to four archetypal seasons as that of comedy with the
mythos of spring, romance with summer, tragedy with fall and irony with that of winter (Guerin et al. 190-191).

**Myth and Literature:**

The Classical or Graeco-Roman mythology refers to the mythology and the associated poly-theistic rituals and practice of classical antiquity. The Roman religion converged with Greek over time, beginning when Greeks first colonized Italy in the eighth Century BC. The two traditions had converged to the point of near identity by first century BC. Greek myths are primarily known from Greek Literature. The oldest known Greek literary sources are Homer’s epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* which focus on events surrounding the Trojan War. Homer’s contemporary, Hesiod’s poems *The Theogeny* and *Works and Days* contain accounts of the genesis of the world, the succession of divine rulers, succession of human ages, origin of human sufferings and also the origin of sacrificial practices (“Greek Mythology”).

Greek mythology has had extensive influence on the culture, the arts and the Literature of Western Civilization and has remained part of Western heritage and Language. Poets from the ancient times to the present have derived inspiration from Greek mythology and have discovered contemporary significance and relevance in Classical mythological themes. In the fifth century BC, tragedians like Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus used the ancient tales (from Homer and Hesiod) repeatedly to explore the forces and passions that rule human behavior. However, Greek mythology seemed to lose
its sacred power with the onset of philosophy, with philosophers like Plato and Euhemerus, demythologizing myths by rejecting “narrative ‘mythos’ in favor of rational logos” (Coupe 104). The Gods and Goddesses according to Euhemerus were once human beings, who were so venerated by their peoples after their deaths. Plato used myth or story to express truth which can be expressed only through the symbolic and metaphoric power of language. In other words myths are allowed “to speak of those things which cannot be dealt with directly” (qtd. in Rochelle 14). Plato never used myth in its religious sense; rather, he used it as a way to express in language the inexpressible (Rochelle 15). When Greek mythology started losing its power and vitality over the imagination, it was easier for Christianity to grow its roots.

In the first and second century AD, Christianity was just another minor cult. But in the first century AD, by the time of Ovid, since there was no single cult that dominated Roman religious traditions, Ovid with his re-discovery of classical antiquity, gave new lease of life to the tales of Homer and Hesiod. It is only, however by the beginning of the third century BC, after Constantine had declared Christianity as the official religion of his empire that the new religion triumphed. But the new religion carried seeds of the classical pagan mythology in its stead. The Book of Genesis for instance written during the sixth century BC re-creates the ‘Enuma elish’, or Babylonian creation myth. As Laurence Coupe notes,
Genesis envisages creation as being effected by Yahweh all at once, out of nothing. The earlier myth, which assumes an initial polytheism, is thereby superseded; monotheism is asserted . . . . The old cosmology lingers between the lines of the new narrative; myth is hidden within myth. (Coupe 109)

There are several parallels that can be drawn between the classical mythology and that of biblical mythology like that of the Flood, the myth of redemption and deliverance in the figure of Christ, creation of Eve etc.

During the Renaissance, there was once again heightened interest in Classicism which encouraged writers to look for parallels between pagan morality and Church doctrine. Ovid’s poetry greatly influenced the imagination of poets and dramatists like Petrarch, Boccaccio and Dante in Italy. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* argues Coupe, “is not only an extension of biblical myth, it is a unique mythopoeic achievement” (112), wherein Dante put Virgil, the pre-eminent among the pagan moral philosophers as a guide through Inferno and Purgatory, right up to the gates of Heaven. There is reconciliation between Classical paganism with fourteenth century Christianity. The English imagination too was deeply influenced by Greek mythology, starting from Chaucer and Milton and Shakespeare continuing up to the twentieth century. By the end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, Romanticism initiated a surge of enthusiasm for all things Greek including Greek mythology. Romantic writers regarded poetic myth as
a well spring of human knowledge and new translations of Greek tragedies and of Homer inspired contemporary poets like Keats, Byron, Shelley and Tennyson. While American authors of the nineteenth century- Thomas Bullfinch, Nathaniel Hawthorne held that the study of Classical mythology was essential to the understanding of English and American Literature. In the twentieth century classical themes have been reinterpreted by writers like Eugene O’Neil, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce. It would be of use at this point to look into the term ‘mythopoesis’. The term mythopoesis is, a technical term for imagination at work. Poesis is neither more nor less than making; a poet, etymologically is a maker; and poetry is, quite literally make-believe. The term “fabulation” . . . used to designate storytelling faculty, should make clear how the function of myth making relates to other forms of mental activity. (Levin 105)

In other words, ‘mythopoesis’ can be applied to the process of recreating stories from the past. A mythopoet or mythmaker hence is one who can be said to weave “the strands of Greek myth into a fabric of his own design” (Brown 5). Since myths have come down to us through the ages through literary sources, one cannot deny the symbiotic relationship between both myth and literature. In traditional literatures, myths have been used in the allegorical sense, like Dante’s Divine Comedy and Spenser’s The Fairy Queen, Blake’s Vision of the Daughters of Albion and Songs of Experience.
Previously in the seventeenth century, Milton chose to rewrite the Bible in *Paradise Lost* in order to retell the story of man’s first disobedience so as to show the justice of Providence. Holding a humanist belief in reason, and in the didactic role of the ‘word’, Milton types the sexes traditionally but allegorically (‘He for God only, she for God in him’), while Adam likes cosmology, Eve prefers gardening. For the Romantics, the glory of Greece surpassed the grandeur of Rome, and Keats’ *Odes* turn Greek myths into new English Myths. His “sources were mythological dictionaries and the works of earlier English poets” (Brown 430). During the Victorian period, the new genre, the novel, became a handy tool for recontextualizing Greek myth, for both men and women writes like Hardy, Emily Bronte and George Eliot. Mostly these writers show affinity to Greek literature through borrowings from Greek tragedy. They succeed “in reanimating its tradition by grafting them on to the fates of ordinary characters such as Jude, Heathcliff and Maggie Tulliver” (437).

In the twentieth century, Greek myth has been appropriated and used in a variety of ways by writers. The quest for myth in modernists like Lawrence, Eliot and Joyce proceeded from the conflicts of the time. Myth is used by these modern writers as an energizing and organizing principle that might provide a sort of cure for the spiritual vacuum, a condition that prevails in modern civilization. The search for myth is a search for order in the modern desolate world. While Joyce’s mythic method involves a parallel use of myth,
Eliot uses myths or myth fragments thereby assigning to them meanings of his own choosing. In other words, these modernist writers attempt at finding an underlying meaning in an increasingly fragmented world.

Postmodernism with its concerns of political and social responsibility gave a new lease of life to mythic tradition in literature. The mythic method of the modernists of ordering or giving shape and meaning to a fragmented world is displaced by a growing insistence that there is no order, no shape or significance to be found anywhere. The postmodernists differ largely from the modernists in their use of myth. While the modernists use myth in terms of universal/instinctual truth, the postmodernist tend to deconstruct myth, looking at it as a language that like all languages, “speaks its speakers rather than the other way around” (Cowart 72). Postmodernist writers tend to rewrite classical and biblical myths, hence giving them a proletarian and more politicized idiom. Writers like Tony Harrison and Tom Paulin in recreating old myths make them inhabit present form. In other words, myths are used to represent concerns of working class culture more prevalent in the later twentieth century, in order to highlight the problems of the oppressed groups. African and American writers like Toni Morrison, Phillis Wheatley and Norman Loftis use classical myths to narrate their own experiences (Morrison’s Beloved portrays the dreadful dilemma of slave mothers forced to kill their children recalling the horrific act of Medea), thereby allowing those myths to acquire a contemporary edge. Loftis’ Black Anima seeks to
destabilize the cultural hegemony of Greek myth and replacing it with an alternative African myth kitty (Brown 447). Carol Ann Duffy’s *The World’s Wife*, a collection of monologues by the wives of famous men, many of them characters from Greek myths is modeled on Ovid’s *Heroides* wherein mythical women like Dido and Ariadne write letters complaining about their ill treatment at the hands of men, high-lighting the feminist angle to the use of classical myth (449).

Myth, therefore, in the Postmodernist sense has come to represent the ‘other’. As Coupe observes, their ethics of ‘otherness’ operates at three levels-

- Firstly the myth recalls and projects an ‘other’ world.
- Secondly, the myth reminds us that there is always something else, something ‘other’, to be said or imagined.
- Thirdly, the myth, as a play of past paradigm and future possibility, gives expression to the ‘other’, to those persons and causes excluded from the present hierarchy. (196-197)

Hence the modernists search for a unified meaning and ordering structure in a myth is undermined by the postmodernists by questioning its authenticity and authority. In sum, the modernists who were disillusioned by war used myth as a tool to impose order upon the disordered world. Their approach appears to be a movement form chaos to order, whereas the postmodernists problematize and interrogate the discourse of myth. Postmodernists like
Pynchon for instance subvert privileged myths thereby upsetting a literary hierarchy that privileges classical and biblical myths.

**Myth and Language:**

Language is the primary medium of verbal communication among humans either through the spoken or through the written mode. It serves to express /share one’s thoughts and ideas with other members of the society and is therefore interactive by nature. It is in other words a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* discusses how society and language are mutually indispensable, for, “human society in any form even remotely resembling what is known today or is recorded in history could be maintained only among people speaking and understanding a language in common use” (654)

Anthropologists speak of relations between language and culture, in that, culture is understood to be a very wide area of human life and behavior. Language then is presumed to constitute the most important manifestation of culture. It is said to be acquired and imbibed by the individual only as a member of a given society, along with other aspects of that society’s culture in which he/she is brought up. Language hence must have developed only in a social setting. Since language is something that is acquired /learned, it can be argued that:
Language is transmitted culturally . . . if language is transmitted as part of culture, it is no less true that culture as a whole is transmitted very largely through language . . . the fact that the mankind has a history in the sense that animals do not is entirely the result of language.(655)

Since culture involves for most part with learned behavior that is transmitted by vocal instruction and not just imitation, it is important to realize that without language there would be no community at all and no culture. The anthropological linguist Edward Sapir says, “The ‘real world’, is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group” (652). Allan Gullette in his article “Myth, Language, Thought and Reality: An Extension of the Whorfian Hypothesis”, discusses how the structure of man’s language influences the manner in which he understands reality and behaves with respect to it. Language contributes to the forming of worldviews like concepts of time and matter which is a way of actually organizing experience in order to make it intelligible, and which plays a significant role in the development of the respective cultures. Such worldviews are taken to be final, and as ‘real’ for these are not only upheld but constantly reinforced by language (Gullette). Ernst Cassirer in his book Language and Myth speaks of how the dawn of language is actually the dawn of the truly human mind. Susanne Langer points out in her Preface to Cassirer that according to him
language as man’s prime instrument of reason reveals his mythmaking tendency more than his rationalizing tendency. Cassirer posits the view that language not only articulates but also establishes mythological concepts. Human intelligence begins with conception in the first place and is then followed by expression. The primitive human world has used language on the one hand for conception while on the other it has used myth for expression. It is language that takes man from the mythmaking phase of human mentality to the phase of logical thought and the conception of facts, for language stems from the intuitive drive to symbolic expression that also produces dream, myth and ritual. Cassirer also speaks about the importance of ‘name’ in savage societies, where the function of names was not for the purpose of mere appellation but were physical proxies for their bearers:

The essence of each mythical figure could be learned directly from its name. The notion that name and essence bear a necessary and internal relation to each other, that the name does not merely denote but actually is the essence of the object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in the name — that is one of the fundamental assumptions of the myth making consciousness itself.

(3)

The word which denotes that thought content, hence, is not a mere conventional symbol, but is merged with its object in an indissoluble unity.
Referring to The Bible, Cassirer substantiates further as to how the ‘word’ of God separates light from darkness and produces the heavens and the earth. However, “the names of earthly creatures are no longer given directly by the creator but have to wait their assignment by man. ‘And whatsoever Adam called every living creature that was the name thereof’ ” (83). Names are the very essence of mythic symbols constituting a spoken word and which by a mere act of speech or by just knowing the word gives a person the power of using it. Cassirer’s key contribution therefore to the study of myth and language rests on a theory that involves prelogical conception and expression and their final culmination in reason and factual knowledge.

Northrop Frye expresses a similar view when he speaks about how language has developed through a gigantic cycle where the word evokes the thing, to the times where the thing evokes the word. His book, The Great Code: The Bible and Literature discusses how ‘Word’ “was the creative agent that brought the thing into being” (18), that the verbal culture of a pre-discursive society consisted largely of stories that tell a society what is important for it to know, whether about its gods, its history, its laws, or its class structure(33). According to Frye, the statements, “The Bible tells a story” (32) and it “is a myth” (32) essentially mean the same. To him myth “. . . means first of all, mythos, plot, narrative, or in general the sequential ordering of words” (31). He identifies two basic functions of myth, in that, its primary use is that of a verbal sequence and its secondary use is that it has a
social function and authority. The bible hence is endowed with such cultural importance that it is the “single most powerful influence in the imaginative tradition of Western art and literature” (33). Myths again do not exist in isolation, rather are interconnected forming part of mythology, linked to a complex cultural history, and therefore, together serve to create a sense of canon, out of the qualities derived from their social function. Claude Levi Strauss in his structural analysis of myth explains how the structures of myth provide the basic structures of understanding cultural relations. These relations appear as binary pairs or opposites. In her article “*Claude Levi Strauss: the Structural Study of Myth*”, Mary Klages discusses how Strauss “insists that myth is language, because myth (as story) has to be told in order to exist” (Klages). According to Strauss every culture organizes knowledge into binary opposite pairs of things which form the basic structure for all ideas and concepts in culture (Klages). Marina Warner too describes myth as “a language of the imagination, with a vocabulary of images and syntax of plots” (Harries18). Since myth is made in and by language- (a social institution that classifies or orders reality for its users), so as language, constructs a reality through classification/naming. And classification through language (grammatical in nature) is not neutral or a simple act “but a powerful means by which to create a world — that of unequal power relationship” (Birch 26).

Language, hence, is a form of social practice, a social process, a social phenomenon that is not ‘natural’ in the usual sense of the word but is a
‘naturalized’ process of activity, whereby fixed meanings, (for instance of ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’) are imposed on words and which can be understood not in isolation but only in relation to other words and that over a course of time stand to gain commonsense effect. It is through language that myth comes alive. Since Language is a form of political and social control it is never neutral or ideologically innocent, “but designed to convey particular kinds of knowledge to achieve certain effects, usually power and domination” (Webster 66). Meaning system (fixed meaning of words), is sustained by power which is an effect of ideology, and mythological discourses are nothing but verbal structures in which archetypes appear and are a means through which ideology is pervasively present in language. The exercise of power (suppression of women) is achieved through ideology and more particularly through the ideological workings of language (Fairclough 2). Ideology is closely linked to language because using language is the commonest form of social behavior (as we have already seen), language therefore contributes to the domination of women by men. It goes without saying then that patriarchy designates the world view, the order in which we live and in which language is integral. As Dale Spender argues in her book *Man made Language*,

people who have the power to name the world are in a position to influence reality. Names are used to construct male supremacy and female subordination. The dominant group has put into these
names but also what it has left out. God is thought of in purely masculine terms. (Spender 165)

Religious myths having encoded false names (for women), continue to inform our thinking thereby,

denying positive symbolism and imagery to women long after they have been intellectually repudiated and within the structure of those myths women have been named as that which is not male, not divine, not normal, not central. (169)

Myths are believed to represent ‘natural’ relationships between men and women, while in fact perpetrate “patriarchal norms and values that function within specific social contexts, concealing the conflicting interests which make up that particular socio-historical constellation” (Haase 132). Myth therefore gains currency as naturalized timeless truth though it is but only a cultural construct. Mythical patterns of representations of women aimed at contributing to the cultural binary organization and hierarchy of gender to the extent that women failed to value themselves. To Roland Barthes, social division is inscribed in the use of language involving a process of ‘selection’ and ‘exclusion’ which in turn divides up the world in ways we cannot see beyond, thereby exercising power over us (qtd. in Moriarty 12). Myth as a linguistic manifestation hence is a “discourse that creates its effects of truth by the linguistic or rhetorical means” (12). Myths are stories that carry a message “not just any message but a message produced by a certain signifying
mechanism” (22), that at once serves to conceal the operation of socio-economic structures which lie underneath it, and therefore, “what is presented as natural is in fact what conforms to a particular ideological world view, serving particular social interests” (21). Michael Moriarty in his book *Roland Barthes* discusses the views of Barthes on myth and language, as posited in his *Mythologies*. Barthes declares myth as a “theft of language” (qtd in Moriarty 24), in so far as it turns the arbitrary sign into a natural one through persuasion. In other words in the process of connecting with certain habits of thought that is so basic to culture, myth “seeks to ground political and historical situations and ideological alignments in the realm of the natural” (25). As far as women are concerned, they are the ideological targets of gender stereotyping wherein patriarchy uses mythical stories to pass off culturally founded truths as natural. Negative images of women throughout a male dominated history of religious, political, social, cultural and literary areas of human life have come to persuade through such myths that women are inferior to men. Language classifies man as subject and woman as object. As Dale Spender points out, language has been used by men to serve their own ends. It serves, to structure thought and reality so that the speakers of the language can ‘see’ men only in superior position and women in an inferior one. Male supremacy is at the very core of language, thought and reality and it has been allowed to develop in this
way by precluding women from the process of legitimating any positive names they may have for themselves and for their existence. As a muted group, the meanings females may have generated have been systematically suppressed. (Spender 170)

She also observes that women have been the muted group as far as the written word goes. If at all women could undo those images of male creation, images that not only reflect but reinforce the existing social arrangements, then women need to find their voice. She insists that women need to break the semantic rules of language, because in a patriarchal society as she points out, we make sense of the world by dividing it into male/female, right/wrong, superior/inferior, and while we continue to divide the world according to these man made rules we contribute to our own muted state. Our oppression makes sense because of the reality we have had imposed upon us. (189)

Since women have been encoded as invisible in language, the ensuing knowledge that is constructed by the same power also tends to reflect this invisibility (162). Women literally become non-existent in such a reality. Mythical and literary discourses rather than merely being expressions of social reality are in actuality social practices, which are carriers of male/masculine ideology. When feminist writers deconstruct male perceptions and writings about women or (non-men), they tend to question the very “assumptions at the base of the text in order to question the ideology ‘behind’ those texts” (Birch
In a linguistically constructed world realities are textually constructed as in myth and literature as well as myth in literature. Therefore, the text which is a product of the social process is not simply words but a product of ideological discourse, because “it includes signifying practices and structures of representation” (13). The text becomes the site for analyzing the effects of language that in turn “can be a powerful method for understanding the ways in which all sorts of realities are constructed through language” (20). Since language is manipulated so as to name male sexuality as ‘real’ and female sexuality as the ‘lack/other’, it becomes necessary for women to find their own voices, find their own language (if only through writing their texts). As David Birch points out in his book, *Language, Literature, and Critical practice*,

feminist writers redraw the circle for us, shift the relationships of centre and periphery, of authoritative word and marginal silence . . . . This is not just aimed at demythologizing negative images of women; it is the development of a feminist poetics. (19)

Feminist writers, hence, use male scholarship against itself by turning the text as a site for re-negotiating new meanings for the already established gendered text. In the process they break the notion of determinate meanings attached to such texts and posit the idea of multiple truths on the one hand. On the other hand, they deconstruct not only the text but also the philosophies and institutions on which these texts are built or founded and finally through the
process of deconstruction the feminist writers engage themselves in the process of reinterpretation/re-visioning of male discourses (Birch 11).

**Women, Myth and Literature:**

Myths are generally said to be patriarchal constructs that have been designed to perpetuate phallocentric systems which privilege some and exclude others. Ken Dowden rightly points out in his book, *The Uses of Greek Mythology* that “... mythology is by and large a man’s mythology, describing a world from a man’s point of view. Women are seldom considered in isolation from men and seldom have scope for action on their own initiative” (Dowden 161). And since myths have been a vibrant mode of cultural activity in human society, they serve to reflect the customs and traditions of a given society. The Eastern and Western societies of the world being basically patriarchal, dominated by men, also reflect throughout their myths in classical mythology starting from *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, how women have been represented with gender specific roles as passive and obedient. Be it Pandora or the biblical Eve, Penelope or Persephone, Demeter or Sita, Medusa, Cassandra or Athena, they have been represented either as commodities, as symbols of rape, or blamed for the problems of the world. In other words, while men stood out for their strength, women have been portrayed negatively for curiosity, trickery, and foolishness or as temptresses. Myths not only reflected the society but also served to perpetrate male ideology of what was female or feminine and ascertained that
women were pushed to the periphery. Feminists are of the view that systems of female oppression have been perpetuated through myths which form the vehicle for legitimating social institutions. Feminists, therefore emphasize the understanding of origins of social practices in order to understand how to intervene and change them. The central focus of this study is the feminists’ revisioning/reinterpreting of the male discourse of myth in fiction thereby deconstructing/reconstructing the representation of women in their own terms, through appropriating the ‘word’ and hence ‘creation’. Since myth, like language is a set of signifying practices which is constitutive of reality, a reality of set gender and sexual roles for women, feminist writers question the very basis of this reality in order to expose the hegemony that lies underneath these phallocentric discourses. And since feminists belonging to the west have been much more vociferous (than women from the east) in their struggle for liberation, with their contribution to feminist literary theories and criticism being significant, this current study is based on the predominant Western cultural representation (mainly Christian) representation of women.

The creation of Eve as an archetypal woman (as the mother of all beings) in the *Book of Genesis*, is responsible for confining women not only in Western Cultural history, but across the world, solely to the role of giving birth. Her creativity lies in as much as the function of procreation, whereas men’s creativity is signified as giving ‘birth’, as being progenitors of immortal things (writing/ books) etc. Alan W. Watts in his book *Myth and Ritual in
Christianity discusses on how with a fascinating unanimity the myths (creation myths) across the world inform us “that the world proceeds out of the invisible and the unknown by articulation, by the power of the Word or Logos” (Watts 69). In Christianity, it is the ‘word’ of God that separates light from darkness, heaven from earth, and chaos from order. So too in Hindu mythology, everything is called into creation, “into being by vak, which is speech, or shabda, sound” (69). The Chinese tradition speaks of Tao, the formative principle of the world that originally meant “speech” (69). As against procreation that is subordinate, creation being ultimately logos or reasoned thought is considered superior. Myths have become an important tool in the hands of patriarchy whose power of the word is synonymous with the power of creation, specifically the creation of a subordinate ‘Eve’. This is achieved through the power of classifying systems, purely a phallogocentric system that generates binary oppositions- of male/female, masculine/feminine, good/bad, man/woman, by such cultural myths of patriarchy always ensuring a subaltern status for women. According to Ursula. K. Le Guin ‘Language’ is ‘father tongue’ that announces itself as the voice of Reason. It plays God and speaks with a forked tongue of dichotomy such as subject/object, self/other, mind/body, active/passive etc. and it speaks one way and authoritatively (Le Guin, “Bryn Mawr Address”).

Through these male-created myths women have become bearers of traditional ideology of love/nurturance/domesticity and at worst are
conditioned to become passive victims. Feminists, like Cixous, argue that when women begin questioning these male-created myths, and look beyond these, they would discover that there is no truth or validity in what has been previously told. Myths, through the medium of language play a major role in the articulation of social practices and hence like language is a product of male ideology; a construct that needs to be renegotiated and changed in terms of what is ‘female’ and ‘feminine’. Fictional representation of women down the ages too has been endorsing the mythic versions of gender and sexual roles. Since, like myth, fiction mediates through language, it is through language that imagination constructs/reconstructs the ideology of patriarchy. The mythic and the literary are so much integral that myths, as Lawrence Coupe points out, “form an important element of literature and that literature is a means of extending mythology” (Coupe 4). Literary works so employing myths can, therefore, be called mythopoeia. Feminist mythopoeic novels, hence, become a potent discursive site to question and subvert the phallic ideological structure of language and culture and hence reality. Women’s fiction represents an experience that is radically different from men’s as women’s growth towards individuation is conditioned by patriarchy’s prescriptions concerning gender. As Annis Pratt suggests, “when we seek an identity based on human personhood rather than on gender, we stumble about in a landscape whose signposts indicate retreat from, rather than ways to adulthood” (Pratt 6). Radical feminists hence believe that masculinity and
femininity are oppressive social constructs that prevent women from realizing their true natures and desires.

Pratt’s book *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction* is a study of patterns of female development in women’s novels, “the tension that exists between feminine power and feminine powerlessness in the history of human culture” (167). Her analysis follows a sequential pattern of the female hero’s initiation into adulthood, personal transformation into rebirth, in various women authors. According to her only the genre of science fiction provides the scope for subversion of gender roles. A modernist writer like Dorothy Richardson’s *The Pilgrimage* however subtly employs the Demeter -Persephone myth when the female hero Miriam boldly rejects men only to find solace in lesbian relationship. She is also represented by Richardson as a woman possessing great superiority and power of mind than her male counterparts. Richardson’s contemporary Gertrude Stein explored such radical themes much before the feminist writers of the sixties and seventies. In her novel *Things As They Are*, Stein deals with women’s relationships (Helen and Adele) as a new found sexuality that goes beyond heterosexuality and despair, redefining male definition of woman.

Thelma J. Shinn in her book, *Worlds within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women*, discusses how women have been negatively portrayed or applauded in myths for their passive or submissive qualities and willing sacrifice of their sexual freedom. She
describes Mary Shelly’s novel *Frankenstein* as a “codedly female novel” (Shinn 29), wherein the Monster is likened to an alien (woman) in patriarchal society and Victor, its creator as representing patriarchy. The text is not merely a reworking of creation myth in the light of romantic ideology but an implicit critique of that ideology for its exclusive emphasis on oedipal politics and the striking absence of Eve, and of the monster’s determination of the individual spirit that dares to rival God. Shinn also points out how such re-reading of cultural myths of patriarchy brings new discoveries and the underlying patterns of classical myths might be reorganized. So far women have been treated as daughters of Eve, as sources of sin, and that exploring such myths might help us rediscover even positive models (110), in the process of “renaming the Goddess and thereby restoring a lost world” (23).

In *After the Fall: The Demeter-Persephone Myth in Wharton, Cather, and Glasgow*, Josephine Donovan analyzes the writings of the three major women writers of the early twentieth century. The author sees the Demeter-Persephone myth as central to these writers’ thematics, but interprets the myth in terms of the historical traditions taking place towards the beginning of the twentieth century America. Donovan focuses on the changing relationship between mothers and daughters, in particular upon the new woman’s rebellion against the traditional women’s culture of the nineteenth century mothers both literary and literal. Donovan, in discussing Virginia Woolf considers Demeter-Persephone myth as central to her work. To Woolf, argues Donovan, “this
myth assures the constant search of the mother for the daughter, in order to deliver her from the darkness of heterosexual rape, and restore her to her natural integrity” (161). In Woolf’s first novel The Voyage out, lesbian connection between two women is explicitly dealt with based on the classical myth. To the Light House, too, has as its central script the Demeter-Persephone myth and as Donovan comments the primary reason for the predominance of this theme was to reiterate the historical mother-daughter generational tradition occurring in women’s culture during this period (163). In other words, the use of this Eleusinian Myth served to highlight the fact that not only mothers were separated from their daughters but also women from other women.

Donovan also discuss the writings of the French novelist Colette whose autobiographical works like My Apprenticeships, appropriating the Eleusinian Myth, describe her married life as Hell and of her return to her mother’s bower as being delivered from patriarchy. It signifies the conflicting desires for autonomy on one hand and desire for the maternal erotic on the other (165). The repeated use of the Demeter-Persephone myth by women novelists shows how patriarchy attempts to destroy communication between women but still women manage to reconnect. Mythology represents a preconscious structuring of gender power. For a body of symbols, traditional myths prescribe set roles for female and male figures. French feminists like Wittig and Cixous opine that a positive reincarnation of such feminine figures helps
in writing beyond history in order to have access to the creative power of women. The use of mythological heroines in women’s writings might serve to reinforce female power and also to eradicate male figures. In fact, Cixous goes to the extent of constituting Demeter and Persephone as the “new couple”, of rebirth and of reconstruction. In other words, “mothers and daughters as women give birth to each other in the total marginalization of male power” (qtd. in Thompson 190). In her texts like *Book of Promethea* and *Soufflés*, she insists on the rewriting of mythology from the feminine point of view. Such an endeavor of reinterpreting myths helps women to analyze the Western representations of women.

In her book *Tracing Arachne’s Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction*, Kristin Mapel Bloomberg, while discussing writers like Sarah Jewett, Emma Hawkins and Edith Wharton, posits the view that “the power of the narrative is found in the power of the word as a tool to explore intellectual, psychological and social isolation of women living under patriarchy” (Bloomberg 4). Through reshaping mythic themes, these women writers create a liberatory exploration of women’s position and the limitations of women’s words under patriarchy (4). Use of classical myths is seen as a way to relocate themselves culturally and to restructure a woman-central vision. The text also highlights the fact that these women writers built their novels upon the literary-mythic foundation much before T. S. Eliot could identify the narrative strategy of mythic method in Joyce’s work.
Post-Colonial women writers are no exceptions, when it comes to the struggle to emancipate themselves from traditions of patriarchal authority. They too have broken their silence by way of fictional retelling of tales and feminist revisions of cultural myths, in order to project more authentic accounts of feminine emotional and psychological experience. The Canadian feminist writer Van Herk’s text Judith is a much more aggressive feminist fiction that engages with the kind of revisionist myth-making following the influence of Cixous’ “The Laugh of the Medusa”. The very name ‘Judith’ has biblical association with the very tone of the novel setting the scope to explore possibilities of the imagination. Her other works The Text, Peg and No Fixed Address also use biblical myths, like the story of Jael and the Homeric myth of Arachne to highlight transgressions of gender stereotypes. The Indian feminist writer, Gita Hariran’s novel, The Thousand Faces of Night, reworks the Indian mythology from the female point of view. Abounding in stories from The Mahabharata and from Sanskrit, the text seeks to subvert the male discourse of myths that represent women as being submissive. Such myths of Indian womanhood had to be recast in order to emancipate women from silent victimization. The three women characters in the novel are linked by the shared reductiveness of their gender and the highlight is the reunion of mother and daughter. The Indian diasporic writer Sunetra Gupta attempts to reverse western mythology from a post-colonial perspective through her innovative use of language and interculturality in her novel Moonlight into Marzipan.
The novel is an attempt at deconstructing stories of Western mythologies like that of the creation of Adam and Eve, the myth of Prometheus and Pandora, in the process female subjectivity and problems of language are questioned. By reinterpreting and rewriting the myth of Prometheus, Gupta creates a new version that is historicized in the post-colonial reality of the third world and situated in the gender perspective offered by women in the story. Indian feminists like their Western counterparts strongly believe that the revisioning of myths is a method of emancipation by which tradition gets reinvented and man made laws are subverted. Cultural/literary representation of women in the image of Sita or Savitri, as women known for their devotion to their husbands has been a recurrent theme. However such stereotypes have come to be questioned in recent times. The eighties has been an era of myth-busting in the Indian arena wherein feminist writers like Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapoor, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have used the archetypal image of ‘Sita’ in there works so as to rewrite women into discourses by repossessing myths in order to develop new ways of representing women.

Given this very broad perspective of myth and the use of myth in literature, by both men and women writers, the objective of this study is to argue how a cross-section of feminist writers from across the globe, as women writers share experiences and concerns about issues of gender and sexuality as repressive social constructs. The thematic affinity in their writings centers on questions of gender and sexual roles for women and the body as the site of
desire and power. To them, writing is a disruptive force that can shatter male ideology/ language and established phallocentric systems for which purpose they adopt myth as a working principle of their works. From the feminist point of view, ‘myth’ is recognized as a repressive power that does not provide scope for holistic development, rather subjugates women, marginalizing them in a male oriented society. Femininity as it exists in patriarchy is a male-defined concept and that sexual difference is inscribed in language while mythical discourses are carriers and perpetuators of such differences. If women are to break the language in myth, which is not a neutral medium but an instrument of patriarchal expression, they need to discover an alternative non-phallic form of femininty for which writing becomes an important tool in this process of discovery. Women need to put the unthinkable and unthought about themselves into words. This is where the concept of *écriture féminine* comes in handy.

*Écriture féminine* is the name given to a particular approach of critical writing by women, derived from the feminism of contemporary French critics such as Julia kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. This particular brand of radical feminism believes that there is an area of textual production that can be called feminine and which is disruptive of masculine language. It aims at challenging the specific identity given to women within the masculine structures of language and power. First used by Cixous, the term appears in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”, wherein she explains that it places
experience before language and privileges nonlinear, cyclical writing. Elaine Showalter too defines it as, “the inscription of the feminine body and female difference in language and text” (*The New* 249). The core argument of this dissertation hence, is to show how the select postmodern women writers subvert the repressive powers of myth in their fiction, through which their writings are said to be experimental and illustrative of *écriture feminine*. In the process, they challenge the creator(s) of Eve, whom they uncreate in order to re-create.

The dissertation undertakes to examine the select works of the following postmodern women writers such as Angela Carter (1940-1992), Arundhati Roy (1961- ) Monique Wittig (1935-2003), Joanna Russ (1937- ), Fay Weldon (1931- ), Margaret Atwood (1939- ), and Ursule Le Guin (1929- ) and Kate Millet (1934- ). Their select texts, *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), *The God of Small Things* (1997), *Les Guerilleres* (1971), *The Female Man* (1975), *The Life and Loves of a She Devil* (1983), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and *Sita* (1977), respectively, are found to contain within themselves the articulation of the French feminist concept of *Écriture feminine*. The deliberate and conscious use of myth in their texts is an appropriation of the very act of creation, in order to challenge and recreate Eve, revisioning her in varied dimensions, hence deconstructing the man made ‘woman’. Though belonging to different countries viz – Angela Carter and Fay Weldon (English), Kate Millet, Ursula Le Guin and Joanna Russ
(American), Margaret Atwood (Canadian), Monique Wittig (French), Arundhati Roy (Indian), these radical feminist writers have been grouped together on the basis of their preoccupation with gender and also their particular style of writing, under the broad spectrum of postmodern feminism that draws on psychoanalysis, deconstructionist and poststructuralist concepts in order to expose patriarchy as an ideology that permeates every area of culture. They share a mode of writing that subverts and undermines as well as deconstructs the determinate meanings of ‘self’/‘text’ by erasing boundaries between oppositions and dichotomies. Another common feature is the fact that all these women writers including Arundhati Roy have imbibed the Western patriarchal / Christian conception of the female / feminine, which they seek to deconstruct through the appropriation and subversion of patriarchal myths in their select works. The writers have been analyzed on the basis of their thematic affinity in terms of their treatment of gender concepts in their respective texts.

The dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The introductory chapter gives a general survey of various theories and definitions of myth touching upon the key contributors like Eliade, Jung and Frazer. It also traces the connection between myth and literature right from Homer and Hesiod whose works have been the chief sources of mythological stories. The chapter also traces the use of myth in literature down the ages to the present including the allegorical method, the mythical method and the postmodern usage. The
nexus between language and myth is also established in this chapter. It also deals with how patriarchal myths have perpetrated negative representations of women with particular reference to the creation of Eve. There is a brief discussion on the use of myth by women writers like Mary Shelley, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Dorothy Richardson and Helene Cixous and other postcolonial writers. It also fixes the context for the current study of select writers and their works, of how they re-envision women through their particular style of writing that can be termed *écriture feminine*, in the process of deconstructing patriarchal myths.

Chapter-II attempts at deriving an ethics towards feminine writing so as to uncreate / re-create eve, the archetypal woman. It traces how patriarchy since ancient times has created women to hold an inferior status using language as a medium of myth. Male ideology has been perpetuated through a dichotomous thought system right from the creation of Eve who is named by Adam. Through the system of classifying and naming, woman’s secondary status has been internalized in her. This is done through the acquisition of language (symbolic order), as postulated by Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst. His theory of the Imaginary and symbolic stages have been appropriated by French feminists Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous, who put forward the theory of feminine writing (*écriture feminine*), drawing from psychoanalysis, deconstruction and post structuralism. In delineating a theory of feminine writing they introduce concepts like the semiotic, intertextuality, jouissance,
womanspeak, other bisexuality etc, that go into the making of ecriture feminine. The main aim of ecriture feminine is to disrupt phallogocentric systems of patriarchy. It questions and challenges the male representation of female/feminine.

Chapter-III is a study of the works of Angela Carter and Arundhati Roy, *The Passion of New Eve* and *The God of Small Things*, respectively. The myth of the double/twin has been applied to these texts in order to show how these women writers have deconstructed/rewritten cultural concepts of masculinity/femininity enabling them to foreground the distinction between biological sex and culturally constructed gender, to raise questions about gender attributes and the marginal position assigned to the female subject in the dominant culture. Through the characters of the double and twins, they seek to blur the dichotomous divide between ‘self’ and ‘other’ ‘mind’ and ‘body’, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, illustrative of the chaotic/prelinguistic state of creation.

Chapter-IV deals with the works of Monique Wittig and Joanna Russ *Les Guerilleres* and *The Female Man* respectively. In appropriating the myth of the Amazon, they rework and reinvent female sexuality and desire through explosive language. These works are exemplary of ecriture feminine, disrupting, disturbing and deranging language that is culturally embedded in patriarchy. Russ and Wittig have advocated plurality, the presence of the female body, in the texts. They refuse to comply with conventional rules of
syntax, punctuation, etc. in their hands, science fiction has become a way of deconstructing gender relationships and sexual roles and of envisaging new possibilities for women. Their texts are full of angry diatribes against patriarchy, which permeate with radical lesbian stance. Theirs is a utopian vision of female creativity in a truly non-oppressive and non-sexist society which is a marked emphasis on the imaginary that is common in utopian writing.

Chapter-V analyses Atwood’s *The Robber Bride* and Fay Weldon’s *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, in the light of the vampire myth which they appropriate in order to deconstruct/reconstruct gender and sexuality. In the process they have subverted the traditional fairy tale view of women being eternally good and virtuous and thereby passive. In experimenting with words/pronouns, they have in the process attempted at gender role-reversal thereby breaking conventional concepts of female/feminine. They have therefore raised questions of subjectivity/sexual identity and desire, blurring differences between the good/bad dichotomy, instead delineating an ‘other’ in ‘self’.

Chapter-VI centers on the use of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in the fictions of Kate Millet and Ursula le Guin (*Sita* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, respectively). In the light of this ancient myth the feminist writers have attempted a revisioning of gender and sexuality. By dealing with lesbian sexuality, Millet adopts a rhetoric grounded in the erotics of the body that also is integrated with the political agenda. When talking about lesbian/bisexual
beings, both Millet and Le Guin speak about the unspeakable, creating new subjects/identities and emphasize on the bond with the mother or the pre-oedipal symbiotic relationship where self/other are one. Le Guin’s play with pronouns in her work is a rethinking of the questions of motherhood/mothering as culture vs. nature thereby upsetting the conventional codes of heterosexual relationships.

Chapter VII, the final chapter, sums up the core idea of the previous chapters. It also discusses the purpose of the select women writers in their endeavor to make/break myth in their texts. They use myth as a technology to uncreate the patriarchal eve. Through the creation of their texts they seek to deconstruct and in turn reconstruct the concept of woman. It shows how these women writers manipulate myth, in that they resemble the romantics like Mary Shelley, challenging and breaking the god centric system. Their writings, illustrative of *écriture feminine*, shatter gender and sexual roles assigned by patriarchy, the ideology of unified self, in turn proposing multiplicity and plurality; thereby, the writers tend to break the binary oppositions of western thought system. Narrative is used as a tool for liberation by these writers who are only representatives of the global concern for gender related issues. In unnaming Eve they return her to the undifferentiated, pre-oedipal, chaotic state, in other words returning her to the womb/mother.
The focus of this dissertation, hence, based on the thematic textual analysis of the select postmodern texts of fiction, is to reveal the potent force that the reworking of myth can be in women’s fiction. Using the parameters of the concept of *Ecriture feminine*, the study shows how these texts are exemplary of volcanic and subversive writings that serve to break up “truth” and also to re-create and reclaim the lost space, in terms of literary and cultural representation.