

Chapter I

Writing the Gendered Subaltern

The ideological weight of hierarchy and power, the problematic of subtly created spaces of binary oppositions, and the dynamics of superiority and inferiority traverse every realm of human experience and system of possibilities. No space is neutral, no product is apolitical. A sensitive, sensitized, seeking eye can recognize the overt and covert play of power/ politics in the multifaceted methods by which patterns and textures of subalternity and subordination are inscribed and reinscribed in the social and individual psyche. Culture, societal relationships, diverse institutions including family, education and religion, literature, sexuality – all bear the imprint of hegemony and subjugation.

Language is one of the potent tools wielded by the dominant groups in society to create binary opposites. Prioritising one group naturally creates the Other. Pushing certain groups to the margin, to the periphery, away from the vitality and vivacity of the centre necessarily involves the process of cultural Othering. The subaltern is thus created, burdened with the subordinated dimensions always on the right side of the binary oppositions. The subaltern is imbued with the negatives at all levels, be it social, cultural, sexual or personal. The subaltern is the one who is denied an authentic presence. He/ She is the one bereft of voice or dignity: one who is a mere zero, a cipher with no essential meaning or a sense of being. The gravity of the situation is intensified when the

subaltern is a woman. She is even denied a subject position. Being at the precarious juncture, criss-crossed by multiple forces of oppression, she is the one who occupies the lowest position in the social ladder. Her presence is not even authenticated; if at all it is done, it is only to enforce the superiority of the male counterpart. She is the deviant, the deformed, signifying all the lacks, the voids.

The predicament of the female subaltern is the most miserable of all oppressive states. It is a lethal combination for the subaltern to be a woman. Her life, dreams, hopes and the basic right to a dignified survival are thwarted by multiple forces of oppression. She is a victim of racism, classism, and most importantly, of the primarily subjugating ideology of patriarchy. The dream of transcending the threatening powers of oppression rather remains elusive for her. Even more pathetic is the fact that the dominant powers have so naturalized the subjugation of women that she often fails to recognize the pitfall that she is in. She wails in that dungeon forever, often taking it as her ordained destiny to be always the erratic, the aberrant and the abnormal.

Feminist literature has constantly endeavoured to bring to the limelight the common experience of oppression shared by women. It is significantly laden with ideological gravity and with the nuances of politically laden discourses, exemplifying the axiom, "the personal is the political." Feminists down the centuries have dissected and thoroughly verified the category called the feminine. Gender equations become a major area of feminist concern since they regard gender as a cultural construct. Being a woman may be a biological categorization but being feminine is a cultural construct. The category called

the feminine is constructed with reference to the male, the masculine, the norm, the centre: “Just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique is defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine” (Beauvoir,1972:15). Simone de Beauvoir further elaborates the process of cultural Othering:

She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (1972:16)

This process of taking the masculine as the yardstick against which the deviant called feminine is measured and analysed creates a negating effect on feminine identity. She starts denigrating herself. This process is accentuated by the hegemonic pursuits of the different societal institutions.

The ideology of patriarchy tends to reinforce an already entrenched system of exploitation. Gender equations attain threatening dimensions within the framework of patriarchal dominance. Juliet Michell sees patriarchy as a dominant feature with cultural rooting and maintained through the operation of ideology. It is perpetuated through a process by which subjectivity is culturally constructed. Gendered subjectivity can be seen as constituted ideologically, ensuring the continuous reproduction of dominant masculinity and dominated femininity. Patriarchy is not merely an ideology; it is a set of organized power structures with the key positions occupied by man or his supporting mechanism.

Heidi Hartmann defines patriarchy as a

... set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enable them in turn to dominate women ... patriarchy is not simply hierarchical but hierarchy in which particular people fill particular places. (1981:103)

The positions of hierarchy, the authority to dominate and subjugate, is nonetheless enjoyed by man. He creates the norms and those norms perpetuate his superiority.

Though femininity and womanhood are not the same, patriarchy has rendered them identical and women marginalized from the supremacy of phallogocentric order have occupied a position allied to unreason, madness and chaos. Female subjectivity and the internal dynamics of a woman are often created as a result of the negative process of cultural Othering. What women imbibe from the vibes of the society around is these negative images and they attempt to shape themselves to suit the male definitions of ideal womanhood. Indoctrination is a naturalising process that caters patriarchy to the consumption of women and makes them the supporters of an ideology that enslaves them.

Literature is a representation of the pulses and vibrations that circulate within the wide framework of society. It is against this configuration that literature produced should be analysed. The literature produced by male authors, indoctrinated by the ideology of patriarchy, provides a prejudiced, mutilated graph of women. Women are misrepresented either as angels, the true

emblem of purity and innocence, of service and sacrifice or as the evil temptress, the demon ready to tempt and lead man to havoc. Male constructed literary texts stereotype woman either as the paragon of all virtues or the demon of all vices. The realistic portrayal of woman, who stands between these extreme cases, is conspicuous by absence in literature produced by male writers. These stereotypical images are intended as prescriptions for women dictating to them what they should be and what they should not be. The discourse of patriarchy reads women's desire for choices and liberation of women as forms of aberrations.

The process of indoctrination starts right from childhood. There is even now a categorization of toys as boys' toys which include gun, car and so on and girls' toys predominantly represented by dolls of different types and hues. It is still possible to find playthings labelled in much the same way as in the nineteenth century verse, part of a collection for school boys, during their leisure hours at boarding school. Susan Greenhalgh quotes the dialogue in her essay on growing up:

Mamma and Miss Ann

Mamma: Go and buy a Toy, Ann

Ann: I can buy a gun.

Mamma: A gun is not fit for you, Ann.

Ann: Why is a gun not fit for me?

Mamma: A gun is only fit for a boy.

Ann: May I buy a top?

Mamma: No, but you may buy a mop
(qtd in Madoc-Jones,1996:22).

The fact that this dialogue is targeted in the first instance at a boy underlines how vital it is for boys as well as for girls to recognize appropriate conduct since this will ensure that they keep to their own gender roles.

Ideology constitutes the process of being won over to a particular belief system by a variety of means: from family model to nursery rhymes and fairy tales, from advertisements to comic books, from soap operas to films. It is a set of power relations which privileges some people at the expense of others. It is made to seem inevitable and even desirable by the languages or discourses of images, words, gestures, clothing or the values and attitudes expressed in such institutions as the media, the schools and workplaces. Femininity can be regarded as one such very powerful ideology : a code of do's and don'ts often masquerading as free choices. The apparent choices offered are all male constructed and patriarchally conditioned.

Jamaica Kincaid's *Girl* encapsulates from a West Indian perspective the variety of languages and codes of behaviour that construct femininity. The following extract is piece of advice given to a young girl:

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the colour clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothes-line to dry ... you mustn't talk to wharf-rat boy, not even to give directions ... this is how to sew on a button; this is how to

make a buttonhole for the button you have just sewed on, this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming, be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don't squat down to play marbles – you are not a boy, you know ... this is how to make a pepper pot, this is how to make a good medicine for a cold, this is how to make a man love you (1986: 326)

Codes of feminine conduct are overtly or covertly imprinted in the interior landscape of women binding them to gender specific roles. True self-worth as a woman comes to be regarded as possible only through acceptance of a caring, nurturing role.

Biological differences are seen to be irreducible, but the meanings built around that differences are constructed. Radical feminist theory sees that one group, defined by biological sexual difference, is oppressed and violently controlled by the other. The category called women, defined by biological sexual difference, is further disempowered through a socialization process that both creates and reinforces inferior status. Ideology is the principal means by which interests of one group are maintained and guaranteed through the creation and simultaneous subordination of another group. But the disturbing fact is that these sets of commonly held ideas, values and beliefs always serve the interests of the dominant group. The term dominant ideology suggests both the widespread acceptance of one set of ideas, values and beliefs over others

and their relationships to power . Patriarchy as a dominant ideology inscribes inferior status to women and make them signifiers of frailty and dependence.

Helene Cixous focuses attention on the patriarchal value system which, in dealing with sexual difference, validates a hierarchical construction of binary oppositions. The biological opposition of male/female is used to construct a series of negative female values which are then imposed as definitions of the female. Where male is equated with activity and power, female is equated with passivity and powerlessness. For meaning to be acquired by one term , it must destroy the other; as signifying supremacy is attached to the male, the battle is one in which the female must always lose.

The Greeks conceptualized the universe in terms of various binary oppositions. These included limit/infinity, light/darkness, reason/unreason, mind/body, good/evil and masculine/feminine. In this sequence of binaries the second term is subordinated to the first. The terms on the left of the opposition are identified with one another and are positive for Greek thinkers. The terms on the right are also grouped together, and they represent the treacherous negative. The oppositions are hierarchical as the terms are structured dominant/subordinate. The metaphorical structures place women in the realm of all that is negative, evil and dangerous, in need of control. The binary oppositions have been extended to the realms of gender and sexuality to circumscribe female identity and to restrict female sexuality.

Literature, predominantly controlled by masculine canons of aesthetics, projects womanhood as an ideal to be achieved. Those who do not adhere to

the ideal are the deviants, the deformatants and the incarnations of devil himself. She is either a passive muted victim, the epitome of unquestioning obedience or the witch capable of engulfing everything in the fire of her lunacy. The real woman is lost somewhere in the process. Her hopes and wails are silenced forever. She continues to have a veiled existence, the veil signifying a barrier to reality and a metaphor for existence in a twilight zone.

Knowingly or unknowingly women themselves sometimes take an active part in circumscribing the realms of female experiences and aid in the perpetuation of patriarchy. This extends from simple socialization processes where the codes and rules of dignified feminine behaviour are taught to the girls to the blind adherence to the preservation of customs and rituals which inhibit women's self realization. This is what happens when a subaltern woman raises her voice to vent out age- old anger and humiliation. This is what happens when a sex worker dares to speak out the essence of her experience. Women themselves sometimes come forward to extinguish such embers of resistance. They extend the codes of patriarchal ideology by denying voice and respect to the subaltern women.

Women as agents of patriarchal ideology is exemplified by Alice Walker and Prabitha Palmar. They confront the issue of respect for cultural tradition which is often made in defense of customs like circumcision

and foot binding which obstruct effective self - realization. By taking an active part in these brutal practices they perpetuate the patriarchal impulses:

Women literally abolish themselves as women and take on a male persona in order to participate in the ritual ... deeply rooted patriarchy perpetuates the violence by turning women into heroes for withstanding the terrible pain of mutilation. The complexity of this web of denial and distancing demonstrates women's ability to embody, embrace and reinforce patriarchal power. (1993: 179)

The feminine cultural traditions like these, though controlled and celebrated by women, are usually a manifestation of patriarchal power literally inscribing itself on female bodies. It brings about an inner colonization which can be challenged and overcome only by mental decolonization, a process requiring the rejection or remaking of cultural symbols, values and practices which maintain the status quo.

Articulating the specificity of her experience in itself becomes problematic for a woman. She is often ordained to be mute, silent and obedient. Many women writers have illustrated the power of authority silencing the female self in their novels. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983) begins with the words of a father who has raped his daughter and taken away the babies that resulted: "You better not never tell nobody but God" (3). Celie's story starts from the point where her very subjectivity is thwarted: "I ~~am~~, I have been a good girl" (3). She doesn't even have the subject position of I **am**. She is rather

a non-entity, an invisibility. The whole novel is an attempt to regain this sense of “I am,” strong and bold, loud and clear. Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* subtitled *Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1977) also starts with an order not to tell: “You must not tell anyone,” my mother said, “what I am about to tell you” (1977:3). Kingston relates the debilitating effects that patriarchal ideology has on the self of a young girl growing up amidst a community which treats growing geese better than growing a girl child:

... And it was important that I do something big and fine, or else my parents would sell me when we made our way back to China. In China there were solutions for what to do with little girls who ate up food and threw tantrums. When one of my parents or the emigrant villagers said, ‘Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds,’ I would thrash on the floor and scream so hard that I couldn’t talk. I couldn’t stop.

‘What’s the matter with her?’

‘I don’t know. Bad, I guess. You know how girls are. There’s no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls’

... Stop that crying! My mother would yell. I’m going to hit you if you don’t stop. Bad girl!’ Stop! ... I’m not a bad girl, I would scream. I’m not a bad girl!. I might as well have said, I’m not a girl!’ (1977: 46)

The ideology at work is so strong that even being born as a girl itself is equivalent to grave misfortune. The power to define a self initially requires respect for the self.

The ideal of womanhood to be sought and achieved is constantly presented by the media. The teenage magazines and women's magazine in general are places where women are given conflicting messages about who they are and what sort of behaviour is expected of them. These texts address women as particular kind of readers, give them a specific social role and position them in a specific relationship with the world as is represented by the texts. These representations are ideologically institutionalised and provided with structures analogous to power relation. They may be called male-cultural or phallogentric discourses. These discourses set up the tension between the reality of what women are and the ideal of what women are told they ought to be.

All media discourses – including literature and advertisements- work to construct social positions for women as viewers , listeners and readers. Media discourses set up social positions for women that are based on stereotypical images of who they are and what they do. Media play an important part in constructing and reproducing these positions. Many representations of women in media discourse are asymmetrical: there is an imbalance between the way men are represented and the way women are represented. Women are frequently represented in the media texts as either fragmented or incomplete in some way. Women are faced with broken images, physical images of body as parts to be worked on . The kind of discourses addressed to women often impart ideal images of what women should look like,

and then demand women to shape up to that ideal. This remaking does not stop at the physical aspects of being a woman, with the “right” shape or “right” size, but solicits a restructuring of personality and femininity. Women’s movements have encountered various types of resistance. These issues include sex role stereotyping, women’s self-image and public image, the social role of womanhood, sexual revolution and the politics of phallogentric language.

Women have been textually constructed according to socially and politically determined norms. Female identity is seen to be malleable. While men are being, women are continually becoming. The various institutions in society make sure that women fit in the framework of gender roles. Women are continually engaged in the process of becoming something or someone else, in order to suit the prevailing notions of what the “real” woman should be like. The media is the space where these notions find free expressions.

Each and every role that a woman plays in the endless drama of her life is under constant surveillance of patriarchal society. Being a daughter, sister, mother, writer or a career woman entails with it certain pre-conceived notions of right and wrong, do’s and don’ts that cannot be questioned or challenged. Marriage and motherhood are two major institutions which chain the true realization of womanhood. Engels says that marriage is “founded on open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife” (Engels,1942: 65). Marriage is characterized by a double standard that requires sexual fidelity from the woman, but not from the man. Marriage is often romanticized to conceal woman’s anxiety and apprehension. The hope of a romantic encounter obscures the realities for woman. Her need for a life space is exploited by man.

Kate Millett observes that marriage is “a means of emotional manipulation” of the woman by the man(1970:37). Romantic love often sweetens the patriarchal ideology served in small doses. Millett romances a form of oppressive ideology by which men continue to subordinate woman (1970: 35). Marriage and family are institutionalized forms of oppression. But man creates a world of fantasy around them.

Motherhood is considered the ultimate culmination of a woman’s existence. The “good” mother is endlessly patient, forgiving, and nurturing and most important of all, unflinching in her love. Just as the ideology of femininity is disseminated at all levels of society, this fantasy of the ideal mother is fuelled through sources as diverse as campaigns, paintings, literature, information booklets, television, film and so on. Feminists see the treacherous working of patriarchal ideology in the rigid conceptual framework of motherhood: “Mothering has become entwined with social, psychological and ideological issues. It has been transformed from simple procreation and basic caring to profession, obsession, perversion, phenomenon and paradox” (Reynolds, 1996: 41). The figure of the mother is simultaneously a reality, an archetype and a historical construct. In a patriarchal society man controls not only the system of production but also the system of reproduction. A mystique is created around the maternal function of woman. A woman lives through her body. She regards child bearing, as Betty Friedan observes, “the pinnacle of human achievement” (1963:126). This is the result of socialization and the impact of maternal mystique. This “glorification of female sexual function” is a patriarchal strategy (Friedan, 1963:126). It is one of the

ways by which female subordination can be ensured and the phallogentric domination of society can be maintained.

Within the context of patriarchal ideology women's sexuality becomes a problematic construction. Stereotypical presentation of sexuality involves the notion of male sex drive as "natural" whereas women's sexuality is seen as passive, modest, non-existent and shameful. "Sexuality is a product of the social forces of culture and history"(Mauthner,1996: 136). Foucault challenges traditional descriptions of the history of sexuality in terms of repression and prohibition and offers a way of thinking about sexuality in terms of mechanisms of power. According to Foucault, "sexuality must not be seen as a drive but as an especially dense transfer point of relations of power" (1981: 103). The links between power and sexuality have been traced by feminist critics: "Sexual desires are not biological essences but are constructed in historical discourses. Power and knowledge come together in sexuality" (Ramazanoglu, 1989: 156). Sexuality is historically and culturally constructed and heterosexual relations can be defined in terms of power relations of dominance and subordination.

Sexual behaviour is shaped by and shapes the wider social and political context. Sexuality is a product of the times and other factors - political, economic, historical, geographical and cultural. Sexuality acts as a system of control. Women's sexuality is perceived as passive; its role is to service men's sexual needs. According to Catherine MacKinnon, "sexuality is the locus of male power" (qtd in Madoc- Jones,1996: 144). Some feminists see sexuality as a form of supremacy of power which men have over women and which is

institutionalized by heterosexuality. Some see men's sexual violence as a form of punishment, a way of disciplining women who transgress the gendered power relations of patriarchy. The institution of heterosexuality as compulsory makes it oppressive and a means of control. Heterosexuality is seen as the norm and this relegates all other forms of sexuality to the margins as deviant and abnormal. Judith Butler finds "masculine domination and compulsory heterosexuality as restrictive frames" and she thinks that these frames must be disrupted by the "performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations" (1990: 180). Compulsory heterosexuality as a norm has evolved out of the male fear of the Other. The classic concept of androgyny, the fantasy of a bisexual total being, is designed to allay this fear.

One effect of being defined by sexuality within a patriarchal social and symbolic order is that women develop a relationship to their own bodies which is self-objectifying. The understanding that women's bodies are the objects of male gaze makes women develop a self-consciousness about how they look before others. According to Foucault, discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, docile bodies. Women's bodies are subjected in the sense that they are dominated, made to conform to particular institutional regimes; and practised in the sense that they are made productive and useful. This is achieved not by physical coercion but by a form of surveillance – panopticism – which encourages one to watch oneself because we imagine ourselves observed by others (Foucault, 1979: 138) . The awareness of pervasive male gaze makes

women fashion their bodies as sexually desired by men. In this context, Sandra Bartky states :

In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other. (1988: 72)

Male gaze is an alternative form of panoptic surveillance that compels women to overemphasize their bodies and physical appearance. A practiced and subjected body is one on which an inferior status has been inscribed. This inferior status makes the female body an object of male sexual fantasy.

Woman's body language speaks expressively, though silently, of her subordinate status in a hierarchy of gender. Self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy. It is also the reflection in woman's consciousness of the fact that she is under surveillance in ways that he is not, that whatever else she may become, she is importantly a body designed to please or excite. There has been induced in many women, in Foucault's words, "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1979: 201). Objectifying her body creates an alienating effect in the woman's psyche. She feels alienated from her body, alienated from her very being.

For many radical and lesbian feminists, patterns of dominance and subordination are not to be played with or celebrated. They are rather the

evidence of the ways in which women's sexuality has been shaped by patriarchal society and culture. Adrienne Rich speaks about how compulsory heterosexuality, by making it the norm, the normal, is imposed on everyone. The critique of heterosexuality raises the possibility of lesbianism as a positive choice. For some, it is simply a personal choice, but for others, like Monique Wittig and Sheila Jeffreys, lesbianism is a political choice. Monique Wittig observes: "For a lesbian, being a lesbian goes further than the refusal of the role 'woman'. It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of man"(Jackson,1993: 23). Heterosexuality is a destiny, but not a choice. Lesbianism offers an alternative and counter hegemonic form of sexuality. It is a form of political choice as feminism is sexual politics.

It is this ideologically laden scenario that the feminist writers seek to unveil and explore. The task of the feminist writer is to uncover the forces of oppression that circumscribe the life and possibilities of a woman. Women have been victims of an interior kind of colonization. Having denied the resources of language, they have been led into silence or euphemism or even circumlocution. The feminist writer's attempt is to define and retrieve new horizons of dignified and fruitful existence to women. Her attempt is to thwart the powerful play of gender equations that always relegates women to the margin, to the vacuum.

The word feminist is formed with the French word *femme* meaning woman. A feminist is a person who fights for women. Feminism is basically concerned with the liberation of women in all realms of society including literature. It is the belief in social, political and economic equality of the sexes,

and a movement organized around the belief that gender should not be the pre-determinant factor shaping a person's social identity or socio-political and economic rights.

The resurgence of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was based on the shared recognition that women were oppressed, and that there is a need to develop a theory and politics that would further the process of women's liberation from male oppression. Some feminists drew their inspiration from Marxism and saw class, that is economic exploitation of the have not's as the basis for women's oppression. The Marxist feminists or the Socialist feminists sought either to incorporate feminism into a Marxist critique, or to extend Marxism to encompass the politics of women's liberation. The radical feminists, however, perceived the analysis of patriarchal ideology as a system of male dominance requiring theoretical priority.

Psychoanalytic feminism unravels the silent ways in which patriarchy controls the structured female psyche. Patriarchy is seen as operating very subtly in the psychology of women moulding them to the passive, diffident feminine. In this context, Juliet Mitchell points out:

Under patriarchal order women are oppressed in their very psychologies of femininity, once this order is retained only in a highly contradictory manner this oppression manifests itself. Women have to organize as a group to effect a change in the basic ideology of human society. (Jackson,1993: 11)

Juliet Mitchell advocates a specific struggle against patriarchy- a cultural revolution is seen as the requisite. Women should decolonize their minds and subsequently decolonize their bodies to rediscover autonomous female identity and unrestricted female sexuality.

Postmodern feminism involves a rejection of any grand narrative which purports to identify the basis of women's subordination. Postmodernists prefer the term gender relations to women's subordination. The concept of women's subordination implies fixed objective state whereas gender relations is suggestive of greater fluidity. Postmodernist thought does not see gender as a

. . .stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow. Gender is rather an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted as an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The gendered reality is created through sustained social performances. (Butler,1990:140-5)

Feminists do not perceive gender identity as rigid and stable, unchanging and unperturbed, but they see it as a fluid space constantly under construction and reconstruction.

In the 1980s the poststructuralist feminists entered debates within psychology on the nature of the process underlying the production of gendered subjectivity. Within the Freudian theory, femininity develops through an awareness of the lack when girls compare themselves physically with little boys. This produces in the female the desire to be male and this desire, associated with "penis envy" is linked to typical female characteristics of weak

superego, passivity and masochism. Women's fascination for action oriented life called "masculinity complex" is an indirect attempt to make good this lack. Beauvoir condemns penis envy as an anomaly which fails to distinguish emotion from sexuality (1972: 304-307). The girl develops a negative attitude towards women, and the ties of affection with the mother as the object of desire are loosened. At the same time, for the boy child the recognition of the lack in the female becomes, in association with his own libidinal development, a fear of also losing his "phallus," which Freud called "castration complex." Freud is found both attractive to and loathed by many feminists. His writing takes masculinity/femininity as biological constructs and inevitable, a point which has antagonized many feminists. But, at the same time, it offers a social explanation for male derogation of females in terms of anxiety around castration. On meticulous analysis Freudian psychology is seen founded on the inequality of sexes.

The ideologically conditioned cultural parameters value the activities of men and degrade women, and literature both shapes and responds to this culture. It perpetuates patriarchal ideals through representations of women which omit reference to the reality of female experience. It is this politically laden scenario that feminist writers and critics seek to unveil. They try to bring forth the powers of oppression which work cunningly and viciously. The struggle to achieve self-definition, and to break free from the predominantly male power to view ideal womanhood is one which is explored in depth by many feminists. By articulating, women operate a form of resistance to the oppression of patriarchal logic.

Patriarchy has denied women any subjectivity other than being subservient to male notions of femininity. Chris Weedon postulates subjectivity as viewed earlier and its new post-structuralist feminist connotations:

Subjectivity is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world. Humanist discourses presuppose an essence at the heart of an individual which is unique, fixed, coherent and which makes her what she is Against this irreducible humanist essence of subjectivity, post-structuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in the process, constantly being constructed in discourse each time we think or speak. (1987: 32-33)

The attempt to emancipate women's subjectivity from within the four walls of patriarchal definition and giving it a fluid quality is a step towards envisioning women's liberation. Sue Lees sees women's subjectivity today as moving towards more possibilities and challenges:

For many years girls were brought up to develop 'only' a woman/female identity directed to the reproductive function and caring for a husband, with a subjectivity that was constructed as muted or suppressed ... Today such a clear delineation has gone and what comprises womanhood is misty, confused and contradiction. (1993: 263)

There are both challenges and possibilities in the dissolution of the sharp contours of what it is to be a woman, in becoming hard to pin down rather than being pinned down to one's sex. It is this challenge that the feminist writers take up, it is these possibilities that they seek to explore. Himani Bannerji, for instance, voices horror and resentment at the monolithic construction of womanhood in her poem "Wife":

This is a fearful construction

I cry I pray

For an earthquake

To splinter this rock

This granite monolith

A mere form

Built by the male hands

Of history. (1990: 19)

Forced identities must be destroyed before the female self comes into being. There should be a radical dissent against the cultural symbols, the consequent poeticisation of reality, and all fabrications of truth, which falsify realities.

Mary Eagleton speaks about the five-fold function of an ideal feminist work. First, literature serves as a medium of honest self expression for many women. It is a platform to express the true self. Second, a feminist text which is allied to feminine experiences, is an attempt to attain cultural androgyny.

Third, it provides positive role models which question the traditional stereotypical notions of feminine labour and capability. Women engaged in traditionally unconventional roles inspire a sense of confidence and independence. Fourth, a feminist text also instills a sense of sisterhood, of oneness, of similarity of experience and existence. It provides a new sense of community based on female-female relationship. Lastly, a feminist text helps in consciousness-raising by sensitising women to issues of gender relations and equity (Eagleton,1986: 169-74). Any literary text that serves some or all of these functions can be feminist.

The oppressive nature of sexual politics as inscribed in the literature by male authors is exemplified by many feminist writers. Kate Millett took an extensive interest in this and analysed the play of deeply rooted misogyny in the literature of 1830 – 1930. Kate Millett finds distinctive male chauvinistic ethos in Freud’s concept of how femininity is constructed. She points out that to acknowledge what Freud says is to acknowledge that “to be born female is to be born castrated” (1970:180). She finds it unfortunate that Freud did not deem himself so objective as to acknowledge that:

A woman is born female in a masculine-dominated culture which is bent upon extending its values even to anatomy and is therefore capable of investing biological phenomenon with symbolic force. (1970: 180)

Confronted with so much concrete evidence of the male’s superior status, sensing on all sides the depreciation in which women are held, girls envy not

the penis, but only what the penis gives one social pretensions to (1970: 187). She means that, the superiority men enjoy is the result of the social/ cultural condition created through a phallogocentric perspective.

Millett discerns three distinct responses to what she calls sexual revolution. The most optimistic of these is the recognition of the need for social and cultural reform. The second emanates from a sentimental paradigm of the good and virtuous woman whose elevated status rests on her function as moral exemplum in the roles of wife and mother. In the third, the unconscious masculine fear of unbridled female sexuality leads to the projection of woman as demon - sensual, intemperate and powerful to subvert and corrupt patriarchal culture.

The theories of feminism, be it Marxist, social, radical, psychoanalytical or poststructuralist, position women as a generalized category with similarity of experience and ethos. This generalization of women as a stable collectivity is challenged by many black women authors. They find feminism as practised in the present, an extension of the view points of the white heterosexual middle class women. The issues projected are also that affect the life of the white woman which necessarily are exempted from many of the oppressive forces that define a black woman's life. The black feminist Hazel Carby exemplifies this point:

When white feminists emphasise patriarchy alone, we want to redefine the term and make it a more complex concept. Racism

ensures that black men do not have the same relations to patriarchal/ capitalist hierarchies as white men. (1996: 62)

Carby further stresses the need for both feminist theory and practice to recognize the fact that white women stand in power relation as oppressors of black women. Black women generally occupy an overlapping space of oppression constituted by racism, sexism and classism.

The way the gender of black women is constructed differs from constructions of white femininity because it is also subject to racism. Sojourner Truth pictures the ways in which ‘womanhood’ was denied the black woman:

That man over there says women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches Nobody ever helps me into carriages, and lifted over ditches or mud-puddles! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried with my mother's grief, none heard me! And ain't I a woman?(Lowenberg,1978:235)

The theory of feminism as such fails to encompass into its fold the life dimensions of those women whose life is traversed by other forces of oppression, be it racist or cultural. The experience of women differs from race

to race, culture to culture. Feminism needs to address the issues of women specific to their situation. Universalisms have proved to be cunningly veiled surrogates for the hegemonies of patriarchy, colonialism.

Hazel Carby very powerfully articulates her antagonism in being complacently grafted into the universal womanhood:

Black women do not want to be grafted into 'feminism' in a tokenistic manner as colourful diversions to 'real' problems. Feminism has to be transformed if it is to address us. Neither do we wish our words to be misused in generalities as if what each one of us utters represents the total experience of all black women ...

... of white feminists we must ask, what exactly do you mean when you say 'WE'??(1996:84)

The ethos represented by the black woman can be to an extent adopted to the situation of those women who occupy the margins of society in terms of race, culture and social positioning like the tribals and the prostitutes. There is no one all encompassing theory that could represent them adequately. They surpass general theorizing and theorizing them is equivalent to negating the specificity of their existence.

Women of different class, race, national, marital status or sexual orientation groups are subjected to different degrees of patriarchal power. Women may themselves exercise class, race or national power, or even patriarchal power over men lower in patriarchal hierarchy than their own male

kin. Other systems of relationships constitutive of gender division also exist. If each of these systems is taken as a circle, then the gender division is the zone illuminated by the projection of these circles on one another.

Denise Riley in “*Am I That Name?*”: *Feminism and the Category of Women in History* explicates the impossibility of generalizing:

‘Women’ is a very volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned, so that the apparent continuity of the subject of ‘women’ isn’t to be relied on, ‘women’ is both synchronically and diachronically erratic as a collectivity, while for the individual, ‘being a woman’ is also inconstant, and can’t provide an ontological foundation. (1988: 126)

There can be major differences in the social circumstances of different groups of women and their interests and problems may often be even contradictory.

Many women writers from Virginia Woolf to Anita Brookner attempt to break down traditional structures and dislocate narrative strategies in order to re-examine subject identity and to demonstrate the complexity of female experience. The problem of the female subject – fragmented, dislocated, frequently absent- is a significant concern of feminist writers. The recognition of the alien nature of the dominant discourse is in itself an act of resistance and it provides a platform to address the essential definition of female subjectivity and associated power hegemony. These women writers exploit a rhetoric of uncertainty about themselves and about the role of women, and record feelings, not accomplishments. Many women writers present characters who go through

a potentially challenging pilgrimage of self discovery and finally manage to define a new space and voice of their own.

Women as writers face multifaceted challenges in their attempt to model an act of utterance and experience. The model of literary history that is available is essentially male-centred and women are but aliens to this. Being caught in a world structured by male-centred concepts, it is challenging for women to have a way of knowing or representing themselves. Subjectivity, historically constructed and expressed through the phenomenological equation of Self/Other, necessarily rests masculine “selfhood” on feminine “otherness.” The Self and the Other make a pair in which the Other is subordinated. Man is identified as the Self and woman as the Other; the Self treats the Other as supplement. Thus womanhood is negatively constructed in patriarchy. The subject centre of dominant discourses in terms of power, agency and autonomy has been a universal subject which has established its identity through the invisible marginalization or exclusion of femininity.

Lacan, like Freud, locates masculinity and femininity in the castration complex, but for Lacan this is a consequence of the child entering the world of reality through the acquisition of language and the rules of the symbolic. Entry into the symbolic world produces both prohibition and recognition of the loss associated with prohibition. The signifier of this state is the phallus; the Oedipus and the castration complexes involve a recognition of the impossibility of fulfilling the desire. As language is organized around the phallus, the norm being male and the female being signified or defined by “lack of maleness” the subject is split by language and sexuality.

Lacan moves away from the idea of the problematic but socially assured process of exchange, that is, women as subjects to the construction of women as a category within language. Femininity is produced outside the symbolic system. Since language is phallogentric and patriarchal, there is no place within its discourses for the feminine. The “feminine” thus becomes that which cannot be expressed. It exists outside the realm of symbolic signification, constituted through male gaze. It is endowed with the mysteriousness of one whose objective status is seen as absolute and definitive. It is this absolute corpus that the woman writer has to challenge and represent. Representing the subaltern woman becomes especially problematic. If the regimes of representation are based on patriarchy, then women are positioned as objects and men as subjects. Class and race also come to play in the case of a subaltern woman thus making her true representation almost an impossibility. Her experiences are conditioned by an interlocking system of race, class and gender.

The reduction of women to the stereotypical angel or monster by the male literary culture excludes whatever sense of self the female writer may have as a definition of her gender. The female writer experiences an overwhelming presence of loneliness and seclusion. Her first attempt is to satisfy the need to contradict and isolate herself from the patriarchal authority of her art. She has to find an independent model for herself as woman and as writer to legitimize her autonomous rebellious existence. The woman writer is thus literally writing a “blank page,” helping to create both her subjective self and a new tradition. She has to evolve a new aesthetic and a new ethic firmly

based on the equality of sexes and the perception of woman as an autonomous human being capable of versatile activities.

Literary history, like language, is male-centred, and women writers are conspicuous by absence in literary history. It is a saga of relationships between the literary father and the literary son, as Dryden or Swift made it to be. To the important question of where a woman writer fits in to the overwhelmingly and essentially male literary history, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar answer in the negative: “We find that we have to answer that a woman writer does not ‘fit in.’ At first glance, indeed, she seems to be anomalous, indefinable, alienated, a freakish outsider” (1979:48). A woman writer has to confront precursors who are almost exclusively male and so different from her. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar speak about the pressure that a woman writer experiences in her attempt to carve a sense of self in a male centred literary sphere:

Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority, they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of her self – that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity. (1979:48)

The Bloomian “anxiety of influence” that a male author experiences during the process of artistic creation becomes the “anxiety of authorship,” as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar term it, in the case of a woman writer.

She is engulfed by a “radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become the precursor the act of writing will isolate or destroy her” (1979:49). Apprehension of authorship and doubts of reception torment a woman writer in the early phase of her career.

The male centred theory of art, the paternity theory, considers artistic creation as synonymous with biological creation. The male author is conceptualized as the father, an aesthetic patriarch, and his phallic pen interacts with the outside world, which is essentially feminine in character and soul, and produces the literary text. Literary history is thus predominantly dominated by the father figure and woman does not have any place in this domain. The representation of women in literature is also ordained by this sense of superiority which relegates women to the margins. The attempt of the woman writer is to retrieve a platform for herself and her community by giving a truthful representation of female experience. It is often easier for a woman writer to follow the patriarchal model and reinforce her own positions of inferiority. Lying can sometimes provide coordinates of power to a woman writer. It takes a lot of courage and confidence to rebel against false representations and attempt to portray the poignancy and potentiality of the true experience of a woman. In this regard, Adrienne Rich suggests:

Our future as women depends on our making known our versions of reality, so that the false power gained through lying can be replaced by truth to experience. Only through repudiating the

imposition of the subject definitions which encourage them to police their own oppression can women gain full control of their lives. (1979: 36)

In siding with androcentric aesthetics, women collude with those definitions, isolate themselves from one another and facilitate the manipulations which continue to confine women. So women writers can find a literary space through a gynocentric aesthetics and consolidate women's collectivity and collective identity.

As the power rests with men, the literary canon is institutionalized and only a few women writers find place in the canon. Elaine Showalter, in her *A Literature of Their Own*, charts the development of women's fiction from the early adoption of masculine models and structures, through the subversive strategies of the concealed writer in late nineteenth century, to the openly developed considerations of a female consciousness in the twentieth century. She affirms the urgency of the need to revisit and redefine female self-awareness, to reclaim those works excluded from the literary canon, and to re-establish historical links, so that the tradition of female authorship can be validated, and in its affirmation, offer security to both reader and writer.

Creating a history of women's literature, providing a space for female sensibility in literature, is an attempt to subvert patriarchal dominance. History is essentially "his" story. She, the woman does not find a valid place in this cult. Women's literature, predominantly unconventional and subversive, proposes to create an alternative history. She envisions a metamorphosis of

“his” story to “her” story. Women’s status in history is rather ironic; Virginia Woolf voices the paradoxical positioning of women in history:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover. She is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of anybody whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell, and was the property of her husband. (1963:45-46)

Women writers tend to reassert their true subjectivity and reaffirm their rightful place by subverting and challenging patriarchal dominance.

A woman writer is in a way a survivor. She fights not against her male counter part’s reading of the world, but her battle is essentially against his reading of her. Before finding an authentic sense of being a woman writer she must first find an all encompassing definition of her self. She must redefine her terms of socialization. The essential struggle negotiating the psyche of the woman writer is between the pangs of artistic creation and the compulsion to adhere to ideal womanhood. This struggle, however, adds poignancy and a rare depth to the creative outputs of the female writer. Her revisionary struggle, therefore, becomes a struggle for what Adrienne Rich has called “Revision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an

old text from a new critical direction ... an act of survival” (1975:90).

Tillie Olsen also equates the act of women writing to the act of survival:

We must not speak of women writers in our century without speaking also of the invisible, the as-innately-capable, the born to the wrong circumstances – diminished, excluded, foundered, silenced. We who write are survivors, ‘*only’s*’.
One-out-of-twelve .(1980:39)

It is survivors who ignite a new torch of existence and dignified selfhood to women at large.

The question of language is central to feminist concerns. Virginia Woolf suggests that the use of language is gendered so that when a woman turns to novel writing she finds that there is no common sentence ready for her use. The female writer is seen as suffering the handicap of having to use a medium which is essentially a male instrument fashioned for male purposes. The women writers who have to confront with a lack of positive role models to rely on, are forced to succumb to patriarchal notions of literary greatness or mould powerful and innovative strategies and narrative structures capable of capturing the inner nuances of women’s experiences. Deborah Pope also points out that the woman writer is, “plagued by the problems of language and style, questions of power and survival, and the task of contact with her self” (1984: 2-3).

Language is essentially phallic and the women writers find it an inadequate medium to communicate the interiority of their self with its specific rhythms and tones. Expressing their deepest emotions and thoughts in a

phallogocentric language becomes akin to once again submitting meekly to patriarchal equations of dominance and subordination. This essentially demands the creation of a woman-centred language capable of relating the truth of a woman's existence.

Phallogocentrism is a patriarchal model which generates meaning by placing terms like nature and culture in opposition within the binary system. Language is essentially phallogocentric. Helene Cixous denounces the equation of femininity with passivity and death and calls for a recognition of the relationship between the female body and feminine writing, or in a term that she coins, *écriture féminine*. This kind of writing is liberated through *jouissance*, which responds to and emanates from the forceful creativity of women's sexual drives. The female unconscious is, she argues, shaped by the body, and must acknowledge the power of physical creativity:

Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. . . To write. An act which will not only realize the decensored relation of a woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to native strength; it will give back her goods, her pleasure, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal.(1981:250)

Women's perception of her own self is to a large extent defined by her own concepts of gender, sexuality and body. The language in which she represents herself should also bear that stamp of the self, with related co-ordinates of

sexuality and the body. It is her psychosexual specificity that empowers women to overthrow masculine ideologies and to create new female discourses.

Women's writing is regarded as an aestheticized female body. Scheherazade's art of storytelling is a surrogate female body that saves her and her community from male atrocity. Cixous makes an attempt to connect women's diffuse sexuality to women's language:

Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours. ... She lets the other language speak – the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death ... her language does not contain, it carries, it does not hold back, it makes possible. (1981:259)

Écriture féminine is by its very nature transgressive, rule-transcending, intoxicated .

Cixous continues:

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility which will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed and coded ... it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric, male dominated system, it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of by subjects who are breakers of automatism, by peripheral figures no authority can ever subjugate. (1981:254)

Language, in order to do justice to the complexity of female experience, should transcend the rigidly laid down rules and must be so flexible as to imbibe the fluidity of female selfhood.

A typical feminine writing which contradicts itself with the phallogocentrism of male dominated language is postulated by other feminists too. Julia Kristeva uses the terms symbolic and the semiotic to designate two different aspects of language. The symbolic aspect is associated with authority, order, fathers, repression and control, the semiotic aspect of discourse is characterized not by logic and order, but by displacement, slippage and condensation. The semiotic is the physical basis of language, its sounds, tones, and rhythms originating in the body. As a physical basis it is logically and chronologically prior to the sign. Without it no symbol or language or culture is possible. For these feminist writers, writing the self is synonymous with writing the body. They presuppose a language beyond the grasp of limiting rules and regulations. The immediacy with which the body, the id, *jouissance* are supposedly experienced promises a clarity of perception and vitality that can bring down mountains of phallogocentric delusion. The female body is seen as a direct source of female writing thereby making way for a powerful alternative discourse: to write from the body is to re-create the world.

Women's writing tends to equate sexuality with textuality. The concept of one's gender and sexuality, one's self and its nuances, play a major part in fashioning the textual aspects of a woman's text. The political conviction of a writer can be located precisely in her textual practice (Moi, 1985: 6). Ideology becomes a very powerful undercurrent in feminist writing designing its content

as well as form. The narrative strategies and literary structures are so appropriated to be vehicles of the politically laden thoughts and experiences that the text wishes to convey. The search for identity and the urgent need to define her 'self' with all its diversities and dynamics become a core drive of women's writing. Literature is taken as the medium through which to carve a social and cultural self- understanding. The social and cultural function of literature gives power to the endeavour of feminist writers to emancipate women from the holds of patriarchy and an oppressive culture.

Feelings, impulses, wishes and fantasies form the dynamic contents of the inner world which occupy the deepest recesses of one's psyche. A woman writer trying to articulate the deepest and finest traces of her experience shares a similar female sensibility and need with other women. There is a sort of bond, a continuum of female likeness, a shared parallel of the need to define one's identity that unites women writers. The conviction that women's life is at the same time different and alike, divided and integrated, dissimilar and similar unites the styles and interests of women's literature. Women's writing is often autobiographical and it operates through an exploration of the themes of authorship, authenticity and identity.

Language is seen as the loci of power which produces and sustains specific forms of subjectivity. The question of language and its political implications has taxed the intellectual scenario of feminist writers and philosophers alike. Feminists do not consider language a side issue or luxury but an essential part of the struggle for liberation. Deborah Cameron sees "Language as a weapon used by the powerful to oppress and silence the

subordinates” (1992:1). From ancient Greece to Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four*, speech and writing have been credited with a malign power to regulate human social relations in ways users are not aware of and to disguise important truths in a cloud of misleading rhetoric.

The gender in language becomes especially conspicuous in the representation of women or in the images of women. Language is a medium of representation and the sexism of many conventional usages have been challenged by feminists. Usages need of reform, if they are blatantly offensive or androcentric, implying that the norm of humanity is male. Reform includes avoiding offensive expression or recasting androcentric ones so that they become neutral. Thus “mankind” is reformed to “humanity.”

Language is often abused by the powerful to conceal or distort the truth or reality. If one is exposed repeatedly to stereotypes and distortions, one will start believing them and take them for granted. Language is the medium through which we interpret our external world. Reality is expressed through language. This necessarily entails another powerful concept. If reality is interpreted through language it also follows that language plays an important role in creating our reality, or at least our sense of what reality is. It is here the politics of language attains dangerous proportions. Language can create our world for us, it can impose on us our worldview, it can manipulate our concepts of self and identity. This is threatening for women in general and women writers in specific, for reality is always an androcentric concept. The reality of woman is as interpreted by man, the norm. Language, being a weapon in the patriarchal hands, can inscribe positions of inferiority on womanhood.

Any attempt to represent the deepest responses of the women's psyche also becomes problematic, for the vehicle to express one's inner core with all its complications and complexities is essentially phallic.

The need to communicate, the urgency to make contact, is a constant theme of feminist writing. Silence is a symbol of oppression, while liberation is speaking out, venting out. The process of consciousness raising is essentially a linguistic practice in which women talk to one another about their experiences. This process helps them to discover common threads of experience and common textures of oppression. Language has a therapeutic value providing chances of reconstruction. But whether the phallic language can shoulder such a dream and responsibility is the essential question.

Women struggling to reinterpret the world find that language does not in itself guarantee communication, and that words are often inadequate. Deborah Cameron cites the example of a woman responding to the sexism in language :

Sometimes when I am talking to people I really feel at loss for words. I have this idea in my head and a feeling I want to express and I just can't get it out. I have felt like this for many years and I have never been able to understand why . A vast number of the words I use all the time to describe my experience are not really describing them at all. (1992:8)

Women sometimes feel alienated from language. A woman trying to communicate in a gendered language feels that her words are not her own, but they are co-opted or taken away and turned against her.

The feminist view of language has something in common with feminist view of sexuality. It is a powerful resource that the oppressor has appropriated, giving back only the shadow which women need to function in a patriarchal society. It is crucial in any struggle for women's emancipation to reclaim language for women. Truth is rather relative to power. Claims to truth depend crucially on the authority of those who make the claim. Authority is sanctioned through language and if a woman cannot express herself in a language conducive to her truth and authority, the reality she tries to express becomes mediated. All assertions of neutrality are in essence illusory, for, language is not politically neutral. The reality created through language is a language-specific reality and is always mediated.

The postmodern societies are characterized by the incessant production of messages, images and signs. Understanding society entails learning how to read its cultural codes, its languages. The meaning of gender is constructed and reconstructed in the codes of the society. The codes function like language, its dissemination will lead to the comprehension of power play within society. The naming, the labeling, the assignment of meaning has been done invariably from the male point of view. Language may "speak" men and women, or the masculine and feminine subjects differently. One crucial aspect of a person's gender is its relation to language. For feminists like Dale Spender, there is no

reality outside its linguistic representation. The language one uses affects what one perceives as real. Language constructs our reality.

Saussure found language as connected to socio-psychological questions. He framed the branch called semiology to study the symbolic systems such as spoken or written languages, sign languages, codes and so on. Signs separate reality from its representation. Both elements of the sign, the signifier and the signified are arbitrarily connected. The patterns of language relations have been applied to other sign systems too. Claude Levi-Strauss studied systems of kinship as if it were a system of language. Roland Barthes studied the language of fashion. They called the systems “forms of metalanguage.” Lacan maintains that the unconscious is structured like a language, a system of signs. The very fact that the relationship between the signifier and the signified in a language system is arbitrary provides scope for the inversion of gender equations.

Language is a tool of acculturation. It is language that turns a child, a mass of instinctual drives spreading out in all directions, into a member of the culture. The role of language in acculturation is important for feminists as gender and sexuality are taken as cultural constructs. Language can provide insight into the nature and acquisition of femininity and positions of subalternity. Feminist approaches are centrally concerned with the relation of women to the sign-systems of patriarchal culture, including its language. Language is treated primarily as a mediator of social relations, an expression of social identity, a repository of cultural values and a medium of art and ritual.

Language is a key to the understanding of culture and its multifaceted dimensions.

Linguistic sexism refers to a wide range of verbal practices. It includes not only how women are labeled and referred to but also how language strategies in mixed sex interaction serve to silence or depreciate women. Language not only reflects but also perpetuates and contributes to gender inequality. Women as subordinated group in a patriarchal society are kept in that deprived position, since language and its meanings are invented by men. Women are oppressed through sexist labeling, including the asymmetry of oppositions like “bachelor – spinster,” “master – mistress” and so on. Usage of generic pronouns like “he” and “man,” which supposedly incorporates female, renders women invisible, and therefore powerless. Women are made a muted group. He/Man makes the man come to the centre while females become the blurred and indecipherable background. Such generic usages make women outsiders, not just metaphorically.

A woman growing up using and listening to language which has been developed in a patriarchal context will imbibe an androcentric worldview which invariably casts her as the aberrant, the insignificant. Dale Spender argues that “males- who have created the world, invented the categories, constructed sexism and its justification and developed a language trap which is in their interest” (2003:147). Women are both trapped by and excluded from a language that is man-made. Women writers also face the same problem for she is forced to express through a language the critique of the ideology functioning in the same language. As Deborah Pope points out, “women are often forced to

express their personal truths in an alien language” (1984:7). This tension informs the writing of women writers. They try to reach a compromise between the literariness of the text and the ideology the text tries to postulate. This also constitutes one kind of mediation linguistic representation makes out of reality.

There are explicit or implicit relation between language and power, linguistic variation and social disadvantage. Women and men relate differently to language. Femininity places the subject in a position marginal to it. The project of the feminist linguists today is a quest for a female centred language. In this context, Deborah Cameron points out:

One is positive: The quest for an authentic female language, whether this is taken to reflect some deep seated cognitive difference, or the existence in many societies of a distinct female subculture. The other is more negative: to identify the sexual power dynamic in language use, the conventions and behaviours through which speech reflects and perpetuates gender inequality. (1992:37)

Feminist linguists seek to analyse language as is used today to bring forth the lacks and voids it represents for femininity.

Femininity is stereotypically represented in male-centred language. Stereotypes however false, tend to persist for as long as the social differences and inequalities they reinforce exist in society. As long as women are subordinate to men, their language will continue to be stereotyped, indicating natural subservience, unintelligence and immaturity. This in turn creates a sense

of diffidence and isolation in the mind of the woman writer. Her very existence and her experiences are characterized by a sense of isolation. Her attempt to represent them in a language that inferiorises her only aggravates the sense of segregation.

The style of a woman's speech has been studied by many feminists. Robin Lakoff in her *Language and Woman's Place* distinguishes woman's speech from neutral language. There are two styles of speech: neutral language and woman's language. The latter is characterized by a lack of forcefulness. Women use more tag questions (approval seeking constructions such as 'that'll be all right, won't it?', more uncertain rising intonations, more intensifiers (so, really, very) and more qualifiers (not exactly, a bit), more exaggerated politeness and less offensive expletives than men. According to Lakoff, "It [women's language] submerges a woman's personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly, on the one hand and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it" (1975:14).

Women's speech is a subservient way of talking in which everything is hedged about and nothing is asserted outright. Lakoff further explains that "the use of hedges arise out of a fear of seeming too masculine by being assertive and saying things directly (1975:51). However the categorization of women's language with the neutral language immediately makes it seem the deviant, the deformant. The communicative experience of white middle class males is prototypical whereas the experience of women, other ethnic groups and classes are treated as deviations.

Women's use of tags and epistemic modal forms is seen as reflecting the diffidence that women have. But Jennifer Coates gives it a positive ring making them symbolize women's cooperative character. She explains:

Epistemic modal forms are used to respect the face needs of all participants, to negotiate sensitive topics, and to encourage the participation of others; the chief effect of using epistemic modal forms is that the speaker does not take a hard line. Where a group rather than an individual overview is the aim of discussions, then linguistic forms which mitigate the force of individual contributions are a valuable resource. (1989:119)

The specific characteristics of women's speech is an extension of their desire to express solidarity and interpersonal sensitivity. They demonstrate interactional co-operativity. Women's speech, Coates concludes, is, in effect, women's strength. Her observation resonates with Foucault's arguments on the relation between knowledge (language) and power; they are analogues which can be expressed in identically structured paradigms.

It is men who have created the world which women inhabit, and if women want to make their own world, it is necessary that they understand some of the ways in which such creation is accomplished. This means the task of exploring the relation between language and reality. Once categories are made within language, the world is viewed according to those categories. Such categories are so naturalized and simplified that they are taken

to be the reality. Reality is after all a chain of categories and those categories are not natural but manmade. It is men who categorise reality and women are expected to follow these categories for representation.

Writers, irrespective of gender, uses the same male centred language for creative or critical discourses. Female writers' choice of the phallogocentric language finds a parallel in the colonial situation wherein the colonized uses the language of the colonisers. Women writer's choice of the androcentric language is detrimental to the construction of female identity. One of the latent objectives of the male-centred language is to perpetuate the subordination of women. The language is so structured and organized to meet this end. So this language is not only inadequate but even fatal to represent female identity. Dale Spender posits the mechanism in which language inscribes the status of inadequacy to women:

Given that language is such an influential force in shaping our world, it is obvious that those who have the power to make the symbols and their meanings are in a privileged and highly advantageous position. They have, at least, the potential to order the world to suit their own ends, the potential to construct a language, a reality, a body of knowledge in which they are the central figures, the potential to legitimate their own primacy and to create a system of beliefs which is beyond challenge. The group which has the power to ordain the structure of language, thought and reality has the potential to create a world in which they are the central figures, while those who are not of their group are peripheral and therefore may be exploited (2003:147).

In the patriarchal order, this potential is realized by the males. They, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought and reality. In this space, women have no role, they are in the periphery, in the margins. What the dominant group has taken for granted can be problematic for the muted group and this in turn keeps them muted.

There is a constant and damaging misrepresentation of the world by the sexist language. In that language women are portrayed as the second sex, neither seen nor heard. They are eternal sex objects and personifications of evil. Language is a species of thought control. Reality is mediated by human perceptual process. Radical feminists view language not as a convenient classification system helping to make sense of the world, but as a straitjacket, something that forces women's experience into categories that do not fit. Woman and her experiences become aliens to phallogentric language. Language is androcentric, it does not merely filter reality but distorts it.

One's subjectivity, identity and sexuality, according to Lacan, are constructed by language. As all the practices that make up a social totality take place in language, language is considered the space where the social individual is constructed. The term "subject" which designates that social individual is a pun. As well as being the "subject" of her own perceptions, the social individual is a "subject" in the other sense, subject to the authority of someone or something. That something is the symbolic order of language. Everyone is subject to the laws of language. Acknowledging it and positioning oneself in it to suit the cultural dimensions make one normal, or else one becomes the deviant, erratic and psychotic. Since women lack the phallus, the cultural

signifier of masculinity, they are positioned differently in relation to the symbolic order that the phallus dominates. Women are marginal to it. This positioning outside the symbolic order makes women, the Other, a cultural outcast, a linguistic alien.

In his *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure rejects the notion that language simply gives form to pre-existing ideas:

Psychologically, our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs, we would be unable to make a consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language. (1960:112)

Language is what gives meaning and the meaning is located not in the thoughts of the enunciator, but in the system of signs itself. If this is true, it becomes especially problematic for a woman writer to express her hitherto thwarted identity and distinct emotions in language. It is doubtful whether the system of signs arbitrarily created in a patriarchal society provide room for the sighs and sobs of the dispossessed.

There is a rhetoric of silencing, alienation and appropriation that pervades the writings of women. The inauthenticity of the language that the woman writer tries to express herself in may undermine her capacity to transform the world she lives in. This is because unauthentic language lacks

the defamiliarising capacity required for this transformation. Mary Daly expresses this dilemma in powerful words:

The fact is that the female saying 'I' is alien at every moment to her own speaking and writing. She is broken by the fact that she must enter this language in order to speak or write. As the 'I' is broken, so also is the Inner Eye, the capacity for integrity of knowing/sensing. In this way the Inner Voice of the Self's integrity is silenced: the external voice babbles in alien and alienating tongues. (1978:1)

Language is an important source of women's alienation. It accentuates the inauthenticity and isolation that women experiences in patriarchy.

Sex differences are often taken for granted, naturalized. Language influences our perceptions and recirculates sexist prejudice in a subtle and perhaps unconscious form. The tendency is to treat women as "the sex," the ones who are different. There is always an inclination to look for natural difference and ignore cultural difference. They reinforce each other, causing men to be studied and women to be stereotyped. Gender linked difference can be attributed to the general operation of gender roles. But gender roles are not something stable and absolute. It is created by a complex system involving many socio-cultural factors. Cultural, racial and ideological coordinates must be taken into consideration before making generalizations about women's language.

The subordinate groups find themselves muted in their attempt to articulate their reality. They have no voice, language or history of their own.

They have to borrow the discourses of the dominant groups to express themselves. In this context, Shirley Ardener explains:

There are dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structures within it. In any situation, only the dominant mode of the relevant group will be 'heard' or 'listened to'. The muted group in any context, if they wish to communicate, must express themselves in terms of this mode, rather than in ones which they might otherwise have generated independently.(1978:20)

The muted groups have to perform a kind of translation ; their reality differs from the dominant one, but cannot be expressed in its terms.

The dominant model may impede the free expression of alternative models of the world which the subordinate groups may possess. A tribal woman trying to communicate her specific community ethos confront this problem. Her reality cannot be sincerely expressed in the alien tongue. The reality of a subaltern woman fails to get a proper footage in a language which has no resources to identify the silences of her self. The subdominant groups are forced either to keep silent or to structure their reality in terms of the model of the dominant group. Women, especially the subaltern women, have a different reality and they are forced to encode them in terms of men's reality, the reality of mainstream men. This results in a kind of muting.

The muted group speaks, but the actual communication is lost. The shadows and the silences fail to make their presence felt. The muted structures fail to be realized in the language of the dominant groups. This is because paradigmatic elements and associative relation are more important in texts and cultures of subordinate groups.

It often becomes expedient for women or the muted groups to respect the preferences of the dominant group. Women without the ability to symbolize their experience in the male centred language, either internalize male versions of reality and present them in the acceptable mode or embrace silence. Unless women's views are presented in a form acceptable to men, they will not be given a proper hearing. In an endeavour to attain proper hearing, women express their experiences in male centred modes. In this process, the fidelity of the experiences is diluted and their essence and spirit will be lost.

Women can move towards autonomy and self determination only when she is capable of transcending the barriers created by "man made language" and encode her self and identity authentically. Spender exhorts women to seize the language and start encoding their own meanings. The power of language and discourse is the ability to make one's own version of reality look natural and consensual. Women writers need to acquire this ability which is part of their textual politics. The politics of a writer can be precisely located not only in the choice of content but also the narrative strategy.

There are always many versions of reality. The "man made language" universalizes man's experiences and presents man's reality as the universal

reality. It is through the endless writing of the universal story of “Man” that women have been consistently excluded and misrepresented. It is precisely this that the women writers seek to subvert. A woman complacently presenting “the reality” does not authentically communicate the specificity of women’s reality. Truth, subjectivity and reality are very relative terms and they vary from person to person, culture to culture, race to race and so on. The act of repeating this oppressive error of speaking for women in general, generalizing and universalizing their experience, is synonymous with casting innumerable women into “Others” and marginalizing them as men have marginalized all women. Women writers or feminists who make this move either ignore other women’s realities or assimilate them to some version of their own. This is a kind of linguistic/cultural imperialism. This process universalizes the experience and levels the cultural differences that define the cultural identity. It is an oblique attempt to erase cultural identities of subordinate groups, both ethnic and sexual.

This kind of generalization is politically important when one strives to represent the subaltern woman. The magnitudes and dimensions of her reality are so different from the mainstream that homogenizing or universalizing it is equivalent to erasing the very existence of the subaltern woman and damning her to subjugation forever. That is why Gayatri Chakravathy Spivak so poignantly asks “Can the Subaltern Speak?” The patriarchal ideology and the manmade discourse offer her a subject position that is not true to her essence and experiences. She is rather a muted category and she is given a subject position that functions with a borrowed voice; offering an unauthentic voice

which is synonymous with perpetuating the equations of superiority/ inferiority in indirect ways.

Subaltern is originally a sixteenth century military term meaning junior rank. It comes from the Latin *sub*, meaning below and *alternus* which means alternate. The idea of the subaltern came into Cultural Studies through the work of Gramsci who spoke of the subaltern classes as unorganized popular masses. The term has gained currency principally through the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" This has a greater association with postcolonial theory through a collective of Indian writers headed by Ranajit Guha.

In the 1970s, the term began to be used as a reference to colonized people in the South Asian subcontinent. It provides a new perspective on the history of a colonized place from the perspective of the colonized rather than from the perspective of the hegemonic power. Marxist historians have already begun to view colonial history from the perspective of the proletariat, but this is unsatisfying as it is still a Eurocentric way of viewing the globe. "Subaltern Studies" began in the early 1980s as an "intervention in South Asian historiography." While it began as a model for the Subcontinent, it quickly developed into a "vigorous postcolonial critique." Some thinkers use it in a general sense to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes—a person

rendered without agency by his or her social status. Others, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, use it in a more specific sense. She argues that *subaltern* is not:

just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie....In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference (de Kock,1992: 31)

The term subaltern commonly refers to persons who are socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure.

Homi K. Bhabha, a key thinker within postcolonial thought, emphasizes the importance of social power relations in his working definition of subaltern groups as oppressed, minority groups whose presence is crucial to the self-definition of the majority group: subaltern social groups are also in a position to subvert the authority of those who have hegemonic power (Beverly,1999: 12). They belong to a subculture that exercises subversive resistance to the hegemony of the dominant power structures.

Subaltern studies is about power, who has it and who does not, who is gaining it and who is losing it. Power is related to representation: which representations have cognitive authority or can secure hegemony, which do not have authority or are not hegemonic. John Beverly points out that the dialectics

of representing the subaltern is an important concern in any attempt of the mainstream elite to give voice to the subaltern:

What subaltern studies can or should represent is not so much the subaltern as a concrete social-historical subject but rather the difficulty of representing the subaltern as such in our disciplinary discourse and practice within the academy. The question of what subaltern is itself is not separate from that discourse and practice. Spivak is trying to tell us that, almost by definition, the subaltern is subaltern in part because it cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge and theory. It cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively produces subalternity, it produces subalternity in the act of representing it. How can one claim to represent the subaltern from the standpoint of academic knowledge, then, when that knowledge is itself involved in the 'othering' of the subaltern? (1999:12)

This position seriously questions the sincerity and authenticity of any attempt to homogenize and represent the subaltern. Questions of power and ideology enter the scenario with new connotations.

Spivak's work revolves round the questions of whether the experience of oppression confers special jurisdiction over the right to speak about oppression and whether a representation of this is ever possible in a discourse in which the subaltern groups are already spoken for. Her work questions the

credibility of the subaltern woman as subject already represented as mute or ignored, her speech is by definition, non-speech. Speech in this conception is not so much about the abilities to articulate as the reception they are afforded.

Subalternity refers to the composite culture and resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy. Part of the overall project, according to Spivak is to disclose whiteness as a culturally constructed ethnic identity that is constructed in contra-distinction to subaltern minorities who have been subjugated or silenced. The privileged position of the centre in relation to the subaltern groups has been naturalized to the point of invisibility. The position of centrality is made possible by the denial of the voices of the Others. The position of woman becomes problematic even within the subaltern group as hers is a specific experience, sonorous of oppressions of multiple hues. She occupies the lowest rung in the social/cultural ladder. Hers is a marginal existence without any significant and dignified stance to it.

Spivak and bell hooks question the academic engagement with the Other. They argue that in order to truly engage with the subaltern the academics need to decentre themselves as the experts. Traditionally, the academic wants to know about the subalterns' experiences, but not their own explanations of those experiences. hooks argues that according to the received view in Western knowledge a true explanation can only come from the expertise of the academic. This means that the subordinated subject, gives up their knowledge for the use of the Western academic (1990:241). Theorising the subalterns is a disservice as it dilutes the political content of their oppressive experiences.

A subaltern account of experience is a construct of oppression and the subaltern need to articulate is an art of necessity: an art essential for the survival of the individual as well as the community. The academic theorizing is a kind of “subaltern on the shelf.”

Edward Said's work on Orientalism is related to the idea of the subaltern in that it explains the way in which Orientalism produced the foundation and the justification for the domination of the Other through colonialism. Europeans, Said argues, created an imagined geography of the Orient before the European exploration through predefined images of savage and monstrous places that lay outside of the known world. The imagined geography eventually consolidated the physical geography. During initial exploration of the Orient these mythologies were reinforced as travellers brought back reports of monsters and strange lands. The idea of difference and strangeness of the Orient continued to be perpetuated through media and discourse creating an "us" and "them" binary through which Europeans defined themselves by defining the differences of the Orient. This laid the foundation for colonialism by presenting the Orient as primitive and irrational and therefore in need of help to become modern in the European sense. The discourse of Orientalism is Eurocentric and does not seek to include the voices of the Orientals themselves: “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony” (1985:5-6).

Stuart Hall points out the power of discourse to create and reinforce Western dominance. The colonialist discourses describe how Europe represents

differences between itself and Others using European cultural categories, languages and ideas, and performs cultural Othering. The knowledge produced by a discourse gets put into practice and then becomes reality. By producing a discourse of difference Europe was able to maintain its dominance over “the Other” thereby creating a subaltern by excluding the Other from the production of the discourse. The scenario is the same when the subaltern, particularly the subaltern woman is being represented in mainstream discourse by elite community. It only furthers and reinforces her subalternity. Adopting mainstream discourses to subaltern female experiences only leads to further marginalisation of the subalterns both as individuals and as a community.

Theories of representation are implicitly theories of the relationship between self and world, and the discourses, texts or objects through which this is constituted. One of the contributions of gender analysis has been to point out the many-layered nature of these constructions, which are often marked by silencing, exclusion or symbolic violence. Edwin Ardener’s concept of “muted groups,” captures the fact that women’s particular experience is not always expressed or expressible in terms of dominant public models, either internal to a society or that the observer may create. Thus, representations are never innocent, or readable simply at face value, but always in danger of being marked by a double distortion.

The answer to the quintessential question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is essentially in the negative, according to Spivak. She concludes that the subaltern can never speak. This is especially true in the case of subaltern

woman for her life and psyche are stigmatized by an assortment of domineering forces. Her predicament is unique and is hard to find an apt representation. Forces of classism, racism and sexism act together to rob her of her very essence and value. There are no subject positions in English or Indian discourses that would allow the subaltern to know or speak herself/himself. This is doubly so in the case of the subaltern women in the colonial contexts who have neither the conceptual language to speak nor the ear of the colonial or indigenous man to listen. Spivak, in "Can the subaltern speak?," states that "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (1988: 287). Spivak continues:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world woman" caught between tradition and modernization. (1988: 306)

It is not that the subaltern woman cannot literally communicate, but there are no subject positions within the discourse of colonialism and patriarchy that would allow them to articulate themselves as persons and they are thus condemned to silence.

The significance of different subject positions and cultural locations in the production of representations of gender is an important issue in any attempt to represent the subaltern. Spivak at once encourages and criticizes the efforts

of the subaltern studies group, a project led by Ranajit Guha to locate and re-establish a “voice” or collective locus of agency in postcolonial India. Although Spivak acknowledges the “epistemic violence” done on Indian subalterns, she suggests that any attempt from the outside to ameliorate their condition by granting them collective speech invariably will encounter some problems: a logocentric assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people, and a dependence on western intellectuals to “speak for” the subaltern condition rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. As Spivak argues, by speaking out and reclaiming a collective cultural identity, subalterns will in fact re-inscribe their subordinate position in society. The academic assumption of subaltern collectivity becomes akin to an ethnocentric extension of Western logos that does not account for the heterogeneity of the colonized body politic.

The subaltern presents itself to academic knowledge as something like Jacques Lacan’s category of the Real: that which resists symbolization, a gap-in-knowledge that subverts or defeats the presumption to “know” it. The term designates a subordinated particularity. Spivak reminds that representation is not only a matter of “speaking about” but also of “speaking for” Representation is concerned with the politics of hegemony, which includes the politics of language as well.

The term authenticity itself becomes suspect to the feminist agenda, because it impales women within the archetypal and mythical frameworks of

thought, engineered to serve dominant power ideologies buttressing the elite. Authenticity makes cultural constructs stable. In this context, Rai explains:

Authenticity assumes fixed, essential and unitary constructs of cultures, identities and groupings. 'Authentic voices' are perceived as their true representatives ... Authenticity can become a political and economic resource in specific ethnic projects, but can also give to what Kubena Mercer has called 'the burden of representation' and Amrita Chachhi has called 'forced identities.' (Rai,2008: 167)

Authenticity makes cultural constructs monolithic; it is likely to level the differences among women that postmodernism emphasises. The subjectivity of the doubly commodified Third World woman challenges the continuous process of elimination of women's "difference."

Spivak observes that the subaltern is denied access to both mimetic and political forms of representation. In her famous essay, Spivak questions the notion of the colonial (and Western) "subject." She argues that European intellectuals have assumed that they know the "Other" and can place it in the context of the narrative of the oppressed: "Intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's Other" (1988:272). In fact, through this act of epistemic knowing/violence, the essentialization of the Other is always the reinforcement of the menace of empire. As Spivak warns: "There is no more dangerous pastime than transposing proper names into common nouns, translating, and using them as sociological evidence" (1988:306).

Culture has a structure akin to power or knowledge which can be abused as tools of hegemonic oppression.

Given these limits of discourse, Spivak is always aware that "theory" may have limited value to the subaltern. Though Spivak wants to make, for example, "feminism" more theoretical, she recognizes that the subaltern "cannot be served by the call for more theory in Anglo-American society" (1988:295). Theory, though powerful, cannot act as an elixir to the issues of the subaltern.. Spivak asserts that all claims to subjectivity, even "postmodern" subjectivity, are at their foundation a form of neocolonialism. Spivak further posits that subaltern cannot be heard, because he/she cannot be heard through the epistemic violence wrought at the origin. The "native informant" is simultaneously created and destroyed in the subaltern discourse.

The platform to articulate, the authority to represent and the power to voice are denied to the subaltern women. This is especially so in the case of those subaltern women who occupy positions of extreme marginality in the orb of subalternity itself. This group includes the tribal women and the prostitutes, who are stigmatized and subjugated on a variety of counts even by women themselves. They are treated as outcastes, the agents of pollution, representatives of demoniac, destructive forces even within the circle of subaltern women. It is deemed an impossibility for them to speak and try to create a space for themselves. Still, there can be found such voices from the margin, emerging boldly, thwarting all the oppressive shackles, with the primary goal of mere articulation of their life and reality.

Sheer articulation itself is a brave and courageous step for them, for voicing itself is an act of rebellion. C.K Janu and Nalini Jameela are two such specific, isolated voices affirming a bold presence, establishing a strong aura of cultural resistance and rebellion in the ideologically dominated kingdom of patriarchy.

Any form of homogenization is a political attempt. This is what happens in any attempt to represent the subaltern, especially the subaltern woman. The specificity of her problems and yearnings are inaccessible to the mainstream male authority. So any such representation of her becomes a misrepresentation. Such an attempt would only aid in perpetuating the subordination of the subaltern woman. Such representations of insurgent narratives of subaltern women, done through the eye of the mainstream society implicitly cements the ideological text written by patriarchy and imperialism. The circumscribing nature of such discourses excludes the self-conscious voice of the subaltern Other. According to Spivak, “there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak” (1988: 307). Her authority as the articulating subject is often thwarted by mainstream intrusion. The voice of the sexed subject- that of the self-conscious female subject- is lost and successfully written over at the very origin of institutional textuality. The resultant tragedy is that she cannot speak as she is, articulating the labyrinths of her mind, the interiors of her self and identity.

The so called representation of the subaltern is based on the ability of the subaltern to speak as a coherent, homogeneous whole. Oppressed groups, while descriptively alike, do not by definition necessarily align their interests and desires behind a programme of political representation.

The attempt to homogenize and represent the subaltern woman is an act of ensuring the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow. Such an attempt to represent the subaltern is to rely on a hegemonic, specific conception of reality that may not contain the voice of the subaltern at all. The gendered subaltern herself is not present in the dominant discourse, screened through the filters of mainstream consciousness except as a shadow, a lurking invisibility. The attempt of the gendered subaltern to represent herself is thwarted by mediating influences. C.K Janu's autobiography *Mother Forest* as told to Bhaskaran and translated into English by Ravi Shanker and Nalini Jameela's autobiography *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, though in essence are specimens of cultural resistance, invariably come under the circumscribing coordinates of patriarchy, appropriations of translation, politics of language and imperialist discourse. Their authenticity and validity come under suspicion, making one wonder if the quintessence of their very struggle and resistance, life and reality are not mutilated in the attempt to theorise them.