1.1 MISTAKEN IDENTITIES 'SEX' AND 'GENDER'

It is extremely essential to know the difference between sex and gender before we begin our discussion. Every society has a sex-gender system. Going by the simplest of all definitions, sex is a biological term and gender is more of a socio-cultural expression.

The words male and female are used to define an individual's biology, or in other words, sex. Whereas words such as feminine and masculine explain gender, which describes a set of qualities that are defined - or socially constructed - in a particular society or culture.

Sex refers to the biological aspects of a person like the hormonal, anatomical, chromosomal and psychological structure. It is 'ascribed' status in that a person is assigned to one sex or the other at birth. Gender refers to psychological, social, and cultural components. Unlike sex, it is an 'achieved' status. People learn what behaviors and attitudes they should have according to their label - male or female. Further, when a male is acting in culturally condoned gender-appropriate ways, he is viewed as masculine, and when a female is acting in gender-appropriate ways she is seen as feminine.

One's biological sex, can be totally independent of one's gender identity. Gender identity "I am a boy" or "I am a girl" is one of our most basic self-definitions. We are born with a sex that remains unchanged throughout our lives; but we know about gender as part of learning to live in a family and society. And, was part of how we see ourselves.
From cradle to grave they are a part of society. They interact through different associations and institutions, which mould their personalities. Admittedly role of the sexes and all the sex related functions are greatly influenced by cultural factors. Biology makes human beings male and female; culture makes them men and women. They do and feel according to the requirements of society.., men and women are socially differentiated, and each sex, as a sex, is forced to conform to the role assigned to it. (Das: 57)

Reverberates Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir: 295). Sex categorization within the cultural context - everyone is or should be either male or female is determined at birth. Anatomical differences are the basis upon which a child is placed into a sex category. Gender identity what it means to be male or female in terms of appropriate role performances, personality structures, attitudes, and behaviors - is not determined at birth.

Showalter endorses Chodorow's theory in her Feminist Criticism in Wilderness. (1981) Nancy Chodorow in her The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (1978), revises the traditional psychoanalytic concept of differentiation, the process of which the child comes to perceive the self as separate and to develop ego and body boundaries. According to Chodorow:

Since, differentiation takes place in relation to the mother (the primary caretaker), attitudes toward the mother "emerge in the earliest differentiation of the self"; "The mother, who is a woman becomes and remains for children of both genders the other or object." (Showalter, 1981: 196)
Over the years a lot of People have put in efforts in explaining the difference between the sex and gender in order to portray the position of women in the society. This process however, starts when a child’s socialization begins with the mother. Chowdorow adds:

The process of differentiation is not the same for boys and girls. A boy must learn his gender identity negatively as being not-female, and this difference requires continual reinforcement. In contrast, a girl's core gender identity is positive and built upon sameness, continuity and identification with the mother. (Showalter, 1981: 196).

Families are the primary sources of gender inequality. It is within families that children become boys and girls. Parents treat female and male babies differently. One of the chief reasons for this diverse treatment is that mothers and fathers are themselves different. As the family is important in producing gender, defending the family as a sex/gender system is a significant way of contesting feminism.

Before the seventeenth century, sex or the body was the epiphenomenon and gender was real; sex was a sociological and not an ontological category. For two thousand years, female and male bodies were not conceptualized in terms of difference. Medical texts described female and male bodies as fundamentally the same, with one difference: Women's genitals were inside their bodies and men's were outside. Sex is in equality and inequality is sex The gender differences from which women suffer are imposed by force. Hence, the idea of gender difference as a set of bipolar distinctions helps to sustain the reality of male dominance.

Biological explanations of female-male differences were being actually put forth somewhat earlier in the century. But the need for gender
as an analytic tool was especially highlighted with the retrenchment of post-war culture. Later on, many feminists and other writers took up and used the distinction between sex and gender as a useful tool in both epidemiology of women's positions and its epistemology: both causes and ways of knowing. This is how we all came to understand that everything is a matter of gender.

1.2 HISTORY OF WOMEN IS HISTORY OF GENDER

Instead of explaining the inequality between men and women, gender gives sexual overtones to it. Gender is a linguistic marker for women. This indicates that what has happened to women is bound to be reflected in what has happened to gender. It is believed that women signify feminism at one level or the other.

The history of gender is actually like the history of women. 'Gender' is simply another word for 'women'. Academic feminists gained respectability by naming what they do as 'about gender' rather than as about women. This means that gender leads more directly to women than to men.

(Das: 57)

Feminists believe that men and women are not taken as equal in any culture of the world. There are some roles which we link to women are performed by men in some other societies. At present, in almost all countries of the world, more importance is attached to the work done by men; women's work is under weighed. Take the example of Mead's Tachambuli culture in New Guniea. There the women are dominant, impersonal and managing and men are emotionally dependent. However, that such matriarchy can only be seen in a handful of cultures is a different matter.
1.3 FIGHT OVER FUNDAMENTALS: IS ANATOMY THE ULTIMATE DESTINY

Normally in every culture and society, a boy is told right from his childhood, that he is different and superior to the half of the lot – women. This wrong perception has given birth to what is known as patriarchy. As Ruthven explains: “a system, which enables men to dominate women in all social relations.” (Ruthven:1)

It’s the patriarchy that has tagged women as inferior to men for biological reasons. Biology is destiny and women are destined to be weaker than men. Essentialists like Freud and Lacan have strengthened the aforementioned view. According to them, anatomy is destiny. Patriarchs worldwide immediately toed to this line as the view endorsed by Freud and Lacan equipped them with the required authority to empower women.

Freud distills specific inferences for women from his psychoanalytic thesis. For women ‘biology’ becomes ‘destiny’ and ‘anatomy’ her ‘fate’ Bodily features, menstruation, conception, childbirth, menopause are all reflected in personality of women. The feeling that she does not have penis shapes her psychology very profoundly. The feeling of deficiency is not fully compensated by having a male body. The remnants of inferiority complex give rise to masochism and passivity which are considered as natural traits of women's personality. As the female variety of oedipal complex in not fully settled, .she has ill developed super ego. She does not have adequate sense of justice; envy is her nature; her social interest is not wide and abiding and her capacity to sublimate is weak. Thus Freud asserts that woman's subordinate position is inherent in her biology and anatomy.

Freud believed that biological make up determined one's role in society, that anatomy is destiny. His interpretation meant that any
organized attempt by women to attain equality was simply further evidence of their effort to overcome penis envy. Mead's argument against Freud is based on her understanding of non-European cultures, to primitive and modern. What Freud ignored, said Mead, was that "the social definition of male and female roles throughout prehistory and history have reflected practical conditions" (Cassidy: 94). The necessity for women to breast feed and carry infants and for men to spend virtually all their time providing for their families accounted for the traditional division of responsibility, not penis envy.

Moreover, said Mead, Freud failed to grasp that boys and girls in other cultures, such as those Mead had studied in Oceania (and which formed the basis for her argument in Male and Female (1955) could see anatomy is destiny in a different way. In open societies such as these, said Mead, the evidence of sexual difference is apparent to children of both sexes from an early age. Boys see girls menstruate, develop breasts, carry children; boys understand their inability to bear children, and put their emphasis on achievement. If Freud could postulate penis envy, said Mead, there is ample evidence from other cultures to indicate womb envy among males. Thus, "there is no more reason for a girl to envy a boy than for a boy envy a girl, for the contrasting and differentiated functions of each are fully apparent to children of each sex" (Cassidy: 94).

Das in her The Feminine Gender writes:

Many suggested alternative approaches. Karen Horney, who founded the American institute of Psychoanalysis, offers a different psychosexual development for woman. She believes that there is over emphasis on ‘Penis envy’. On the contrary men use to envy reproductive motherhood woman enjoys a kind of superiority over men. Men try to over compensate their deficiency by being more creative and assertive. (Das: 30)
Just as a poor white consoles himself that he is not a ‘dirty’ nigger, a mediocre male consoles himself that he is superior to any female – at least physically stronger than a woman if not in any other sense. Patriarchy imposes certain social standards of femininity on all biological women in order to make us believe that the chosen standards for femininity are natural. A woman who refuses to conform can be labeled both unfeminine and unnatural.

On the other hand, feminists argue that a woman is a female to the extent that she feels herself as such. Though body is one of the essential elements in her situation in the world, it is not enough to define her as a woman:

1.4 'FEMININITY', THE PATRIARCHAL IDEA OF 'WOMANHOOD'

Julia Kristeva defines femininity as that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order. Patriarchy has developed a whole series of feminine characteristics such as sweetness, modesty, humility, subservience etc. Femininity is always defined as irrationality, darkness, negativity and so on. That is:

Day/night,
Sun/moon,
Activity/passivity

As Simone de Beauvoir puts it in her Second Sex:

The fact is that woman has always been man's dependent if not his slave. The two sexes have never shared the world in equality. (de Beauvoir: 20)
The ideology of Christianity is doubly restricting for women. According to the Bible, Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and while he was asleep, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. God did not take Eve from the head of Adam because he did not want her to rule over Adam. He also did not take out Eve from the feet of Adam, because he did not want her to be Adam's slave. Eve was made out of the rib of Adam because he wanted that men should always remember women and keep protecting beside her. Woman is considered to be a 'help-mate' of man in Christianity... self sacrificing character of woman is depicted as a perfect woman; while self assertion in a woman is regarded as sinful. On the whole the Christian attitude towards sex and women is negative. According to the Bible the worth of a woman is only three-fifth that of a man.

However, feminists disagree to it and argue that Adam was only a rough draft that God succeed in producing the human being in perfection when He created Eve.

More space is given to the rich, the titled, the famous and the powerful than to those who lack those attributes. This principle of the higher the status, the greater the space, when applied to males and females, suggests that even in the non-conscious of interpersonal distance, females have lower status than males.

Man can think of himself independently but a woman cannot think of her existence without a man. They live dispersed among the males attached through residence, housework, economic condition and social standing to certain men - fathers or husbands.

Women are mostly defined in terms of their relationships with men; men are defined in terms of their relationship to the world at large. Good examples in our language usage are the words master and mistress. Originally these words had the same meaning - the power held by a
person over servants. But with the demise of the feudal system these words acquired different meanings. While the masculine variant metaphorically refers to power over something, the feminine variant metaphorically (although probably not in actuality) refers to power over a man sexually. Men are defined in terms of their power in the occupational world; women in terms of their sexual power over men.

1.5 MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY, THE SOCIAL TAGS

When people are labeled, they are treated in accordance with that label. Consequently, they learn to see themselves and act in ways compatible with the labels. Men and women come to see themselves as others see them. If one cannot perform the expected gender-role behaviors, one feels demasculanized or defeminized. This leads us to a very important insight: Gender behaviour is both prescribed and chosen on the one hand, appropriate behaviour is socially shared and transmitted through the culture: People learn what is appropriate for their gender. But on the other hand, they are constantly (whether through habit or will) choosing to present themselves as masculine or feminine persons. Therefore, persons have the option to accept or reject cultural definitions of appropriate gender behavior, and consequently the ability to change either themselves or the culture.

Shaping of anything begins from a very nascent stage. Things are no different in case of imparting knowledge regarding manners and etiquette. Boys and girls are shaped in such a way that they become men and women. And parents or family play a very important role in this endeavor. Children learn what they are taught.

The adult roles of men and women are differently presented in the picture books. Adults delineate a picture of sex, which teaches the children what they might expect for themselves when they grow up and hence helps inculcate aspirations, goals and self-images. Interestingly,
the image of the adult women in the picture books is stereotyped and limited. She is passive and dependent, performing activities of service to men and children in the home. If she is not a wife and mother, she is an imaginary creature such as a fairy godmother. Not one woman in all the books surveyed held a job or had a profession. Motherhood is presented as a full-time, life-long job. The adult male in these books, on the other hand, displays a wide range of roles: kings, monks, fighters, policemen, preachers, judges, storytellers, storekeepers etc. Fathers never help share in cooking, cleaning, shopping or baby-sitting. They read newspapers and are waited on by their wives. The prescription is clear. Girls can expect to grow up and become wives and mothers. And boys can grow up to do whatever they choose.

1.6 POLITICS OF GENDER IN LITERATURE

Gender and literature are very closely related to each other in the sense that neither can be conceived apart from society and culture. Sex is the creation of God and sexual differences are essential for procreation, but gender is not God's creation. It is the creation of patriarchy and serves the male flair for domination. A patriarchal social setup firmly asserts men's superiority over women and is based not on mutuality but on oppression. Although women have played a vital role in the creation of society and have been active agents, the actors in history, yet the patriarchal thought has always tried to relegate them to margins, 'to obscure their history.' Gerda Lerner has observed, "women had no history - so they were told and so they believed. And because they had no history, they had no future alternatives" (Kaur: XI).

Literature, they say, holds a mirror up to the society. It not only reflects social reality but also shapes the complex ways in which men and women organize themselves, their interpersonal relationships and their perception of the sociocultural reality. The attitude of the male author towards men and women as reflected from his works and the attitudes of
the characters, male and female to one another highlight the gender relationships as well as the author's attitude towards these relationships.

No wonder, literature offers the best possibility of exposing the politics of gender. A crucial question that demands our attention is: How has woman been portrayed in literature?

1.7 DEPICTION OF VICTORIAN WOMEN IN LITERATURE

Given that literature reflects the socio cultural reality, the depiction of women in literature has been in accordance with the social status enjoyed by women. But the status of women has not been the same at all times and in all societies. Therefore, it is difficult to make generalized statements that would be universally valid. Yet, on the whole, women all over the world have always enjoyed secondary status vis-à-vis men. As Iqbal Kaur in her Gender and Literature puts it:

The images of women in literature have been of the slaves who could be easily sold or bought by men who were their masters. It was not inconvenient for Hardy, for example, to show Henchard selling his wife and daughter at a country fair and that to for an insignificant price.

(Kaur: XII)

However, according to her, the descriptions like this did not shock the Victorian readers as most of them, being male, shared with the author the patriarchal notion of male monopoly over women. Some critics believe that what wisdom can there be in menses? What source of knowledge in the milk-filled breast? What food for abstraction in the daily routine of feeding and cleaning?
One discovers that men relegated women from the realm of literature. Over the years men dominated the field of literature. Argues Kaur,

In fact, it was difficult for men to read literary works, which portrayed women as self-actualizing beings who rejected the 'Angel in the House' image and refused to be female stereotypes. They enjoyed reading about women who existed as nonentities. (Kaur:XII)

Arguably, one finds Kaur’s argument on the lines of Virginia Woolf. In her A Room of One's Own, Woolf believed that in order to become a writer, women had to kill the 'Angel of the House' - a women who would willingly be submissive to male dominance. Even after having taken to writing, 'she' was not allowed to pen anything about her physical desires as well as anything that was considered to be 'anti-men'.

Therefore, literature offered pleasures to the readers – particularly male readers – by depicting women as passive, docile, dependent, helpless victims at the mercy of men. The inner experiences of women were rendered invisible because they were considered to be trivial, insignificant and not worth considering. The roles of women were confined to their womanhood. Hence, literature failed to reflect the experiences of the muted female half of the society.

1.8 WOMANHOOD, THE ONLY VOCATION

Showalter in A Literature of Their Own clearly states:

Victorian women were not accustomed to choose a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself

(Showalter, 1987: 21)
The chief occupations or 'vocations' that were open to the eighteenth century women were teaching music, teaching alphabet to small children, reading to old ladies and making artificial flowers. Women in the aforesaid era were expected to play either a wife or a daughter or a mother.

What does Nature
ask of women?
Give to him that needeth.
Employ the hour that passeth.
Be resolute in submission.
Love thy husband.
Bear Children.

(Jacobus: 171)

Creative, writing was almost a taboo to a woman who wanted to be considered 'a perfect woman', because for a woman to write meant insubordination which was intolerable to the male dominated society. In fact, for a woman to indulge in creative writing was considered a kind of abnormality, a subversive function of imagination, a neurotic act. A woman who wanted to write was designated as 'deviant'.

Women's writing was treated as trivial, sentimental and sensational and was not taken seriously. The reader's prejudice against the women writers affected their responses to the literary works produced by women. Thus, the Victorian society's concept of femininity had its strong impact on literature. (Kaur: XVI)

Woolf envisages the story of Judith Shakespeare, an imaginary woman bestowed upon with as much poetic genius as her brother, William Shakespeare. She builds up the story of Judith's poetic career ultimately succumbing to kismet as much formidable as the
splendor of her brother's success. Judith becomes an epitome of any century woman, who possessed exceptional poetic genius.

The fact that many women authors used pseudonyms would testify the claim. With a view to hiding their identity, in most of the cases the pseudonyms too, were borrowed from men, as is evident in the case of George Eliot, Acton Bell and Curer Bell. Also, the lack of confidence was reflected in their writing, as recognition was hard to come by.

Why are the women marginalized, why are they treated as mere objects. When a male writer pens something he doesn't mention his sex whereas a woman writer does. If a woman wants to define herself, she must first of all say that she is a woman; on this truth must be based all further discussion. Man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man.

1.9 WOOLF'S PRINCIPLES

At the end of all the hardships, women were not allowed to try their hands at 'serious forms of literature' and were relegated to writing 'non-serious' stuff. The literary forms like epic or poetic drama had become a prerogative of male writers on account of their tendency to require greater amount of concentration and labor than normal. Woolf believed that the novel alone was young enough to be soft in the hands of a woman writer.

In her A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf clearly expounds the inevitability of four prerequisites. According to her, if women are to make a move towards autonomy, to producing literature of considerable value. The pivotal principles are:

- Having a room of one's own
- Having one's own income.
- Killing the angel of the house
- Telling the truth about one's own experiences as a body
Woolf argues that given a room of her own and five hundred a year, a woman can definitely become a poet in another hundred years time. Woolf asserts:

A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write a fiction: and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved. (Woolf, 1954: 6)

According to her, material circumstances only add to the prevailing obstacles for a poet, especially when she is a woman. The lack of a room of one's own aggravates prodigiously the amount of difficulties in the case of a woman. Woolf writes:

If a woman wrote she would have to write in the common sitting room. And as Miss Nightingale was so vehemently to complain, 'women never have an half hour ... that they call their own' - she was always interrupted. (Woolf, 1954: 64)

Reading a frequent employment of the image of 'a room' Showalter in A Literature Of Their Own comments:

A room of one's own with its intent insistence on artistic autonomy and its implied disengagement from social and sexual involvement was a favorite image. (Showalter, 1987: 34)

### 1.10 Difference in Literature Produced by Men and Women

Histories of English literature will regularly lead, one to the conclusion that poetry is men's work; when women are involved in
literature, it is far more likely to be as writers of novels. Does this mean that it is characteristic of male writer to be able to use language in a dense and highly formed way, whereas it is characteristic of the female writer to use more loosely formed language?

Showalter in her introduction of *A Literature of Their Own*, wrote;

In the *The Subjection of Women* (1869), John Stuart Mill wrote: If women lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings, they would have had a literature of their own. (Showalter, 1987: 3)

Showalter argued that women have always lived in a different world from that of men and have always had a literature of their own.

Showalter believed that woman’s ability as a writer cannot be judged by applying male critical theory to their work because male critical theory is a concept of creativity, literary history or literary interpretation based entirely on male experience and put forward as universal. Offering solution to the problem, Showalter coined the term Gynocritique. The programme of Gynocritique is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature to develop new models based on the study of female experiences rather than to adopt male models and their theories. Gynocritics believe that women's writing differs to that of men due to four major reasons: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural.

As Showalter puts it:

Linguistic and textual theories of women's writings ask whether men and women use language differently, whether sex differences in language can be theorized in terms of biology, socialization
or culture; Whether women can create new languages of their own, and whether speaking, reading and writing are all gender marked. (Showalter, 1981: 190)

Interestingly, Luce Irigary interprets the nuances of language in women writing in terms of the physical organs.

The labia, those two lips which embrace each other continuously, and which ensures that every woman is 'in touch with herself, by herself and in herself' In somatic terms, the definition of feminine sexuality, therefore is, 'that sex which is not one': the labia make it 'always twofold at least' and therefore "Plural as well'. The consequence of this (in Caroline Burke's summary) is that women's language will be plural, autoerotic, defused and indefinable within the familiar rules of (masculine) logic. (Ruthven: 100)

Along with the language, the subject also is indicative of their psyche. It is surprising how many spinster writers there have been: Jane Austen, Charlotte Mew, Steve Smith. Anne Stevenson, in Writing as a Woman, says:

These women may have -suffered, but they suffered as women who attempted neither to fight male domination nor compromise themselves to suit it. There was a narrow independence, even a selfish one, but it was real. It was bought at the price of what use to be called 'womanliness' - Sex, marriage, children and the socially acceptable position of wife. (Stevenson: 163)
Whatever women writers achieved, they did at the cost of their personal lives. And this is one of the reasons why we have fewer women writers. The subjects around which their writing revolves, too, were depression, humiliation, suffering and to a certain extent, self-hatred.

1.11 HISTORICAL PHASES OF WOMEN'S WRITINGS

Showalter observed that the literary tradition of women's writing has evolved through three historical phases. In looking at literary subcultures such as slacks, Jewish, Canadian, Anglo Indian or even American, we can see that they all go through three major phases. First there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing models of the dominant tradition, and internationalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self-discovery a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages Feminine, Feminist and Female.

One of the ways, in which most dictionaries still define woman is being a sweetheart and paramour or mistress. In order to free themselves of such labels, women during the first phase of imitation, tried to be like men and chose to adopt the male style: Hence, the exaggerated importance given to the neutrality of great art. While stepping out of one role, they adopted another - and none of the two gave them an identity.

The rise of feminism saw women becoming aware of the fact that their inferiority is not predestined in heaven, that gender is neither natural nor immutable because it is the creation of patriarchy. It is a construct, which can be deconstructed. The realization of self-worth amongst women and awakening in them led to a social revolution. Women were no longer prepared to accept the definitions given to them by men - the definitions which suffered from the male bias to women. They sought new
definitions and hence tried to redefine themselves according to how they viewed themselves.

During the second phase of protest, female authors experienced an 'anti-patriarchal rage, which is reflected in their writings. The themes, subjects, characters and situations created by female authors out of this rage are bound to be different from those by male writers in a patriarchal society. It can be seen in Markandaya’s Caroline - a possible consequence of this anti-patriarchal rage. In Possession it is a woman's world in which the male is manipulated, purchased, commanded, exploited and taken around like a pet. Caroline is a model of anti-patriarchal stance and her traits are associated with male members in patriarchal cultural construct. She has none of the traits conforming to predefined patterns of femininity, such as, sweetness, modesty, subservience, humility.

During the third phase the focus changed from man-bashing to self-discovery. However, many argued that women have not learned to see themselves earlier, because the mirrors they look into do not reflect them. They reflected the male idea of a woman - whether married or single. Things have changed for the better in recent times, as women have consciously started exploring their emotional responses and their creative recesses for shaping their identities.

1.12 WOMEN AS READERS/WRITERS

According to Showalter, there are two distinct modes of feminist criticism. The first mode is ideological': It is concerned with woman as a reader, and it offers feminist readings of texts which consider the image and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism and woman as sign in semiotic system. This is not all feminist reading can do: It can also be a liberating intellectual act.
Feminist reading or the feminist critique, is in essence a mode of interpretation, one of many which any complex text will accommodate and permit. (Showalter, 1981: 182)

Jonathan Culler draws attention by asking "if the meaning of the work is the experience of a reader, what difference does it make if the reader is a woman?" (Kaur:47). Elaine Showalter stresses the importance of feminist reading as methods of articulating the feminist experience. Patricia P Schweickart in her essay 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading' points out that both reading and writing are correlated processes and feminist criticism should address itself to the questions:

What does it mean for a woman to read without condemning herself to the position of the Other?
What does it mean for a woman, reading as a woman, to read literature written by a woman as a woman? (Kaur: 47)

There are several inbuilt assumptions in these questions: All texts are not feminist texts even when written by women for, many women do not write as women. There is also the assumption that there are several ways of reading a text, and one of them is gender based. Men may read differently from women, selecting for attention different things. It may be possible, for both men and women, to learn each other's way of reading by learning to transcend mental barriers and prejudices.

Feminist criticism is a method of projecting the reading awareness related to women's perception, and has in Elaine Showalter's opinion graduated from feminist critique to gynocritique. Thus there are several ways of reading and writing, a text and at times the multiplicity of the written text maybe incorporated in the act of writing.

The second mode of feminist criticism engendered by this process is the study of women as writers and its subjects are the history, style, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics
of female creativity, the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition

Virginia Woolf aptly remarks that though a woman's writing is always feminine - it cannot help being feminine and at its best it is the most feminine - the only difficulty lies in defining what mean by feminine. However, Helene Cixous on the other hand argues that it is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing for this practice will never be theorized, enclosed or encoded. However, according to her this doesn't mean that such a practice does not exist at all. It is difficult to divide styles of writing into watertight compartments. For instance, some critics believes that there are no such literary qualities which are present in all works by women and absent from all works by men. According to them it would be impossible to reduce the diversity of styles in books written by men to a monolithic masculine style capable of being contrasted with some equally monolithic feminine style which in turn would represent the full range of styles in books written by women. In short, arguably, there is no technique, form, or approach used exclusively by women.

Drawing upon Coleridge's concept of androgyny Woolf articulates her own views on creative production:

It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. (Woolf, 1954:99)