INTRODUCTION
Gender like any other social category provides guidelines for acceptable female and male schema of behaviour. Gender categories are ideological structures and masculinity and femininity revolve around “hierarchical appraisals of the natural roles of males and females.” (Devor 1992 : 29). Susan Brownmiller in her essay, ‘Femininity’ has described this hierarchy:

The masculine principle is better understood as a driving ethos of superiority designed to inspire straightforward, confident success, while the feminine principle is composed of vulnerability, the need for protection, the formalities of compliance and the avoidance of conflict in short, an appeal of dependence and good will that gives the masculine principle its romantic validity and its admiring applause.

(Brownmiller 1992: 42)

With the revival of feminist politics in North America and Western Europe the validity and permanence of psycho-sexual identity through gendered identity came to be questioned and the sex / gender system was re-visited. Gayle Rubin’s 1975 essay, ‘The Traffic in Women : Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex’ reflects upon the possibility of an inner discord and the arbitrariness inherent in such classificatory logic :

Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else – for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. The idea that men and women are more different from one another that either is from anything else must come from somewhere other than nature ---- far
from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of ‘feminine’ traits; in women, of the local definition of ‘masculine’ traits. The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men and women.

(Glover and Kaplan 2000 : XXIV)

Sex and gender are therefore related not because one is ‘natural’ while the other represents ‘culture’ but because both are cultural categories that refer to codes of perceiving and negotiating with human bodies and our relationship to ourselves and to others.

Judith Butler in her book Gender Trouble (1990) has argued that gender denotes cultural practices which help to construct ‘desiring and desirable subjects’: Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the ‘illusion’ of an abiding gendered self.

(Glover and Kaplan XXVI)

Gender, therefore, is fragile and provisional, an unstable sign and an act of signification. Negotiating with one’s gendered identity is an on-going process and in some measure unfinished and incomplete. There is a constant slipping in and out of one’s gendered identity. The definition of masculinity and femininity has undergone change with changing ideological positions and hence there are
masculinities and femininities. Gender at any given historical time is simultaneously constructed across a range of discourses, and different constructions often contradict each other. There are different theories of gender which give rise to heterogeneous and multiple realities meanings, knowledge and biologies.

Jane Flax in her essay, ‘Post modernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory’ describes:

Gender relations are differentiated and (so far) asymmetric divisions and attributions of human traits and capacities. Through gender relations two types of persons are created: man and woman. Man and woman are posited as exclusionary categories. One can be only one gender, never the other or both. The actual content of being a man or woman and the rigidity of the categories themselves are highly variable across cultures and time. Nevertheless, gender relations so far as we have been able to understand them have been (more or less) relations of domination. That is, gender relations have been (more) defined and (imperfectly) controlled by one of their interrelated aspects – the man.

(Flax 1997 : 175)

‘Gender Relations’ as a category is meant to represent a complex set of social relations, which keep on changing with social variables. Gender as Jane Flax describes in the above mentioned article is both “an analytic category and a social process” (Flax 174) and is relational. Also from the perspective of social relations men and women are both prisoners of gender, although as mentioned earlier gender is constituted coherently across political and cultural intersections. Gender which is
also the cultural interpretation of sex is not confined to this understanding but as Judith Butler in her essay, ‘Subjects of Sex / Gender / Desire describes:

Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive / cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or ‘a natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘prediscursive’, prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts--

(Butler 1997: 280)

Within this discourse the body figures as the instrument or medium on which a set of cultural meanings are inscribed and become markers of gender.

Gendered identities reflect normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience and reflects the regulatory practices that govern “culturally intelligible notions of identity” (Butler 283):

‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the specters of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the ‘expression’ or ‘effect’ of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice.

(Butler 283)
The construction of ‘intelligible gender’ requires the existence of ‘gender identities’ which fail to conform to established gender norms. However the persistence of these gender identities bring out the limitations of the matrix of intelligent gender identities.

As Teresa De Lauretis in her book *Technologies of Gender* (1987) has argued that they are technologies of gender and sexuality, producing and reproducing constructions and fictions with the potential power of truth-effects of representation. The multiplicity of discourses can also provide space for creation of new gender identities in the context of queer politics.

Adult masculinity, a precarious complex construction is made up of masculine and feminine currents as has been demonstrated by Freudian psychoanalysis. Masculinity was never pure and layers of emotions representing feminine and masculine co-existed and contradicted each other. Carl Jung distinguished between the self constructed in transactions with the social environment which he called the ‘persona’, and the self formed in the unconscious out of repressed elements which he called the ‘anima’. Jung focused not on repression of either ‘persona’ or ‘anima’ but striking a balance between a masculine persona and a feminine anima. Alfred Adler argued that children of both the sexes develop a sense of femininity as the weaker side of their personality and the feminine side is devalued in culture. In normal development the adult personality is formed out of compromise and under tension between the masculine and the feminine selves. But if there is weakness, there will be anxiety which will emphasize the masculine side of things. This ‘masculine protest’ was considered by Adler to be active in both normal as well as neurotic mental life. Masculine protest
meant “over-compensation in the direction of aggression and restless striving for triumphs” (Connell 1995 : 16). The masculine protest was a feature of women’s psychology as well as men’s, but over-determined by women’s social subordination.

The Frankfurt School’s psychological work reflected in Fromm’s The Fear of Freedom (1942) and The Authoritarian Personality (1950) catalogued the conditions which produce different masculinities:

The ‘authoritarian’ type was a masculinity particularly involved in the maintenance of patriarchy: marked by hatred for homosexuals and contempt for women, as well as a more general conformity to authority from above, and aggression towards the less powerful. These traits were traced back to rigid parenting, dominance of the family by the father, sexual repression and conservative morality. The ‘democratic’ characters was less clearly drawn, but included marked by more tolerance and was linked to more relaxed and affectionate family relationships.

(Connell 18)

Construction of masculinity is not monolithic and is not merely a personal identity but extended in the realm of social relation governed by class and race and hence there is diversity in masculinities. Masculinities are constructed on “relations among alliance, dominance and subordination.” (Connell 37). Since knowledge of masculinity arises within the project of knowing gender relations which are not fixed, a positivist science of masculinity is not possible. Knowledge of masculinity has developed in several contexts, two such contexts are the Gay Liberation and Women’s Liberation. Gay men mobilizing for gay rights and safe cultural spaces
coined the term ‘homophobia’ to describe their rejection and abuse by heterosexual men. The Gay Liberation has provided insight about the “pervasiveness of homophobia and how closely it is connected with dominant forms of masculinity” (Connell 40):

Homophobia is not just an attitude. Straight men’s hostility to gay men involves real social practice, ranging from job discrimination through media vilification to imprisonment and some times murder – the spectrum of what Gay Liberation called ‘oppression’. The point of these practices is not just to abuse individuals. It is also to draw social boundaries, defining ‘real’ masculinity by its distance from the rejected ----In homophobic ideology the boundary between straight and gay is blurred with the boundary between masculine and feminine, gay men being imagined as feminized and lesbians as masculinized women---Gay men’s collective knowledge, thus includes gender ambiguity, tension between bodies and identities and contradictions in and around masculinity.

(Connell 40-41)

Feminist movement, which shared the concept of ‘oppression’ with Civil Rights Movement moved from understanding patriarchy as a structure, to liberation of female bodies by questioning sexual politics to theorizing masculinity and femininity in terms of Lacanian theory where the ‘Law of the father’ constitutes culture and possibility of a position. Here masculinity is not an empirical concept (as in classical psychoanalysis) but is a position as mentioned earlier in terms of symbolic and social relations. Oedipal repression creates the symbolic order, which is associated with the masculine order of things, whereas the imaginary order
represents the feminine maternal and the phallus then represents a political position and is to be clearly distinguished from any empirical penis.

Gender structures are not necessarily biologically governed and masculinity is always liable to internal contradiction and historical disruption. The concept of multiple masculinities brings in the play of a relational approach among hegemony, sub-ordination, complicity and marginalization. The concept of ‘hegemony’ derived from Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of class relations refers to the pre-dominance of one group / ideology over other ideas / groups in social life at a given historical juncture. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women”. (Connell 77) However the hegemony of a group may be challenged to be replaced by another type of hegemony. Hegemony relates to the subordination of a group over another group. In the context of this study, which is contemporary North American Society, there is the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men. Not all men rigorously practice the hegemonic masculinity and majority of men gain from patriarchal hegemony on account of patriarchy dividend. Since a large number of men benefit from sexual politics of hegemonic patriarchy without having to embody hegemonic masculinity, the need arises to theorize this specific situation. This can be done by recognizing another relationship among groups of men, the relationship of complicity with the hegemonic project. Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the
frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense. (Connell 79)

Masculinities as an institution brings into play structures of class and race and also subordinated masculinities. Marginalized masculinity refers to the “relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups” (Connell 81) and also between subordinated masculinities as mentioned earlier. The terms ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘marginalized masculinities’ are not fixed positions but refers to configurations that generated in a particular situation. The gradual shift in cultural presuppositions about masculinity is irreversible and has resulted in varieties of historical consciousness about masculinity and has opened up the possibility of transforming gender and ushering in new social arrangements.

Femininity while defined biologically, psychologically and socially is also used a promiscuous qualifier to describe almost anything; from cars, home furnishings, colours, lifestyle to men. And in the similar vein, while femininity is always associated with femaleness, it has been a common strategy to ascribe feminine traits to supposedly inferior ethnic groups. Femininity has been defined in opposition to masculinity and is associated with passiveness. In the twenty-first century femininity emerges as a contradictory constellation of meaning that “can refer at once to normative flawed and even ‘perverse’ categories of the human”. (Glover and Kaplan 4) And therefore, “there are many femininities – sexual, transgressive, threatening inferior, weak and dependent and all of them are interconnected.” (Glover and Kaplan 4). Modern femininity is a mix of objection and euphoria and moves out of the binary structure of passive and active nature /
culture, reason / emotion, head / heart which were dominant in the previous centuries. Feminist historian and theorist Joan Scott has argued that ‘paradox’ is the term which describes modern femininity where the tension between opposed psychic states mentioned earlier results in productivity and also where contradiction results in creativity.

The construction of femininity in Rousseau’s *Emile* is located within his political philosophy where he is concerned with promoting a certain kind of social organization that is strong and long-lived and as equitable for men as possible. In this task, Rousseau has to resolve the tension between reason and passion, culture and nature. Rousseau resolves this tension by sexual division of human nature, whereby women should be educated to fulfill her domestic role of child birth and child rearing, since women are naturally associated with these activities. Men on the other hand are associated with the public sphere and therefore Emile is familiar with the arts and sciences, with government the laws and public affairs in general. Sophy’s education on the other hand is designed to help her execute her role in the private domestic sphere whereby the “potentially socially disruptive elements engendered by her education will be privatized and hence converted into qualities that actually support the society.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) presents a counterattack to the influence of Emile. Wollstonecraft does not challenge the split between the public and private spheres and she recommends that both spheres be managed according to the principle of reason. It is through education that girls and women that Wollstonecraft feel will help women to be rid of their trivial and irrational nature. To hinder women from this education is to
prevent their advancement and hence social injustice. Her faith in the capacity of the environment to encourage or dwarf the development of reason stems largely from her utilization of Locke’s associational and environmental psychology. Wollstonecraft’s acceptance of the natural foundation for the sexual division of labour, her acceptance of Cartesian dualism, that human beings are separable into a sex-neutral mind and a sexed body, acceptance of a neutral and a priori subjectivity, her recommendations for extending Rousseau’s educative programme for boys to include girls is itself unworkable. Emotion is a key element in every definition of femininity and there is a perceived difference between women’s and men’s feeling. The construction of femininity is paradoxical since politicized ‘feminine subjects’ like Mary Wollstonecraft and radical novelist Mary Hays conceived themselves in terms of discourses about sexual division of labour and reject these divisions. The impact of market in terms of the rise of bourgeois culture resulted in a new, reformed and liberated femininity, which had “simultaneously to accept the terms of the market – including the volatile feelings that were its psychological drives – and abjure them. Women from this period onwards, seeking more rights and more freedom, had little choice but to move within the emotional and libidinal economics of market societies, which demanded self-realization and the up-front desires that went with it” (Glover and Kaplan 16) The Chartist Movement in 1840s for political rights with the abolition of slavery in Britain was followed by a decade which showed a steady decline in humanitarian sympathy, and femininity is no longer confined to bourgeoisie construction only and the period is marked by anxiety about ‘women’s aggressiveness’ and the stage is set for a wide spectrum of possible femininities in terms of class and race:
In the 1840s as in the 1790s the political aims of women for more cultural power and for economic and social parity in the public sphere, as well as their other aspirations and wishes – for passion, marriage and motherhood – draw on an affective vocabulary in which the desiring languages of the market and those of the gendered self are hard to disentangle.

(Glover and Kaplan 21).

From the 1880’s till the early twenties, writers and social thinkers fashioned a new liberated femininity – a vanguard identity dubbed as the ‘new woman’ who demanded parity with men in every sphere. The war proved to be a catalyst for women’s emancipation and other social hierarchies and femininity shifted its construction and resulted in ‘imagined femininity’, since the “femininity, that early twentieth century feminists were determined to uproot and replace was more than a century old and harder to supplant than has been supposed”. (Glover and Kaplan 27).

‘Paradox’ as mentioned earlier describes the “lopsided relationship between female subjectivity and the universal concept of the human” (Glover and Kaplan 8). Denise Riley has suggested that we should think of femininity only as one aspect of female subjectivity and not as whole, both at the collective and at the individual level. This in turn brings the instability of gender identities:

Can anyone fully inhabit a gender without a degree of horror? How could someone ‘Be a woman’ through and through, make a final home in that classification without suffering claustrophobia? To lead a life soaked in the
passionate consciousness of one’s gender at every single moment, to will to be a sex with a vengeance - these are impossibilities, and far from the aims of feminism.

(Denise Riley cited in Glover and Kaplan 9)

Psychoanalysis has been one of the important sites of gender formation and has brought the recognition that gendered identities fail and point to the contradictory nature of gender identities Joan Riviere in her fascinating essay, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’ (1929) highlighted the performative status of femininity with reference to groups of professional women who were emerging during this period, who were executing their feminine roles as mother, wife and disinterested mother-substitutes among a wide circle of relatives and friends and simultaneously they were successful in executing their professional roles. In her case study which involved a woman of this kind, she suffered from anxiety after every successful performance. While unraveling similar cases of cross-gender performance, Dilsey argued that “femininity – womanliness is itself a ‘masquerade’, and one, that many woman adopt as a defense against anxiety produced by masculine identification” (Glover and Kaplan 45).

Cross-gendered performance, where a ‘woman’ becomes more like a man’, psychologically and socially in narratives, especially in feminist science fictions, which are located in the brave new world where the privileges and priorities of gender inequality have disappeared only intensifies the puzzle about nature of femininity. An incomplete or simulated masculinity has often been preferred to the “impossible feminine” (Glover and Kaplan 48). This turn towards masculinity as a
refuge from an undervalued femininity, referred to as ‘femininity’s disappearing act’ at one level may seem natural but at another level raises doubt about the construction of female subjectivity. This construction of virtual masculinity with feminine and feminist space has been present in feminist treatise like Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where femininity has been a negative site and femininity often referred to as “decline from the human ideal” (Glover and Kaplan 49) and ‘imagined masculinity was the remedy’:

Early feminists, launching their critique both at the everyday andocentrism of bourgeois society and at the theorized misogyny of progressive social philosophers such as Rousseau, shared an uncomfortable common ground with their opponents in their dislike of actual existing femininity. But while Rousseau believed that the feminine was innate, and recommended restraint as the only cure for its inevitable excesses, Wollstonecraft argued that it was cultural, and therefore open to reform. Rejecting biological determinism, and its accompanying fatalism about the future of sexual difference, she believed that woman could and should transform their ‘degraded’ consciousness through exercising their latent rationality or ‘understanding’. It “should be the first object of laudable ambition to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex”, wrote Wollstonecraft, but her ‘human being’ is remarkably close to eighteen-century ideal of masculinity. It sometimes seems that the scenario of women’s slow but steady emergence from their subaltern status rests not only on the assumption that women are made not born, but on a model of
re-gendered humanity that owes more to imagined masculinity than to any other.

(Glover and Kaplan 49).

The various discourses about gender have been influenced by feminist theories, which have influenced by Enlightenment models of reason, justice and subjectivity. Feminist discourses have exposed the contradictions of Enlightenment thought in terms of the public/private split which has consigned women to the ‘private’ realm of feelings, domesticity, the body, in order to define the public realm as the realm of Reason and as masculine. The construction of gender as fixed category has also been challenged by post modern’s challenge to grand narratives’ and being replaced by meta narratives and has legitimatized heterogeneity and plurality. One such category which was re-constituted was the construction of ‘homosexuality’ which is no longer viewed as a sickness or pathology but is viewed as “a congenital anomaly” (Foucault 1978 : 101). Queer movement is another site which challenged existing gender boundaries and reflects Judith Butler’s celebrated phrase gender as trouble ‘Queer’ represents the desire which is incalculable, inconvenient and unbounded. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s definition captures this: Queer can refer to:

the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonance, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.

(Glover and Kaplan 106)
The phrase “queer” becomes the signifier of an attitude and a refusal to accept conventional sexual and gendered categories and go beyond the regular limits of ‘heteronormativity’. Queer movement produces what Sandra Gilbert describes as an attempt to escape from the ‘disorder’ and ‘disease’ of gender and bring out the inconstancy of gendered identities. Queer movement provide a critique of heteropatriarchal structures like state and family which create the category ‘woman’ and its influence:

The heterosexual gender system with all its manifold ramifications of marriage, motherhood, the family, unequal pay, violence against women, was the political regime within which women were kept down. Heterosexuality was endorsed by patriarchal religions, all patriarchal religions ---- We cannot escape these patterns. Many homosexual couples, lesbian, gay and trans gendered, reproduce similar heterosexual structures in their relationships and in their lives.

(Duncker 1999 : 54)

Heterosexuality and the gender system is based on the interest of a single gendered class and does not allow for any dissent and hence within this paradigm. Queer movement challenged, the “prison of gender”.(Duncker 56) and ‘woman’ as a sign became a floating signifier. As Patricia Duncker in her essay, ‘Jurassic Feminism Meets Queer Politics’ describes:

we are making our own meanings. All you had to be was a woman in the process of becoming ‘woman’ was no longer a fixed point of closure, but a dynamic process. (Duncker 56-7)
Queer movement has also been described as “post feminist generation” (Duncker 57) where feminism has “atrophied into boring politically correct rules” (Duncker 57). Queer movement points to post gendered world, where there is a multiplicity of genders:

Queer theory has put Lesbian and Gay studies on the academic map, invaded cultural politics, advertising, television and cinema and given homosexuals of both sexes a new visibility, and with its suggestive politics of cross dressing, theoretical and literal, queers of every gender have provoked new debates about essentialism and the gender system, which is all to the good.

(Duncker 60).

Feminist politics has been located within the self-reflexive mode and hence there has been a questioning of its own legitimating procedures. Feminist theory has developed a self-conscious awareness of its own hermeneutic perspective based on the recognition of a central contradiction in feminist epistemology. The contradiction is that women seek recognition of a gendered identity, which has been constructed in terms of very same ideological formations which feminism seeks to challenge and dismantle. Julia Kristeva in her essay ‘Women’s Time’ (1981) elaborating on the agenda of libertarian movements such as feminism to create democratic institutions, she points to the influence of “sociosymbolic contract”:

Then there are the more radical feminist currents which, refusing homologation to any role of identification with existing power not matter what the power may be, make of the second sex a counter society. A “female society”, is then constituted as a sort of alter ego of the official
society, in which all real or fantasized possibilities for jouissance take refuge. Against the sociosymbolic contract, both sacrificial and frustrating, this counter society is imagined as harmonious, without prohibitions, free and fulfilling. As with any society, the counter society is based on the expulsion of an excluded element, a scapegoat charged with the evil of which the community duly constituted can then purge itself, a purge which will finally exonerate that community of any future criticism. Modern protest movements have often reiterated this logic, locating the guilty one – in order to fend off criticism – in the foreign, in capital alone, in the other religion, in the other sex. Does not feminism become a kind of inverted sexism when this logic is followed to its conclusion.

(Kriesteva 1997: 870)

Kriesteva’s critique of essentialism based on the notion of fixed ideological anchorage in the construction of the category ‘woman’ reveals tension between deconstruction of the category and social constructivist theories which claims a fixed identity and feminist theories becomes site where the instability is reflected. Jane Flax in her essay, ‘Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory’ argues:

A fundamental goal of feminist theory is [and ought to be] to analyze gender relations: how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them. The study of gender relations includes but is not limited to what are often considered the distinctively feminist issues: the situation of women and the analysis of male domination. Feminist theory includes an (at least implicit) prescriptive
element as well. By studying gender we hope to gain a critical distance on existing gender arrangements. This critical distance can help clear a space in which re-evaluating and altering our existing gender arrangements may become more possible.

(Flax 1997: 173)

Femininity is a set of cultural norms, ‘female’ represents biologism, while feminism is a political position. If feminists try to create another set of ‘feminine’ virtues to counter the patriarchal construction of femininity, they would become part of metaphysical binary opposition which Helena Cixous criticizes. Feminist are therefore in a kind of double impasse, since they have to deconstruct their basic assumptions about the opposition between male power and female submission. Toril Moi her essay, ‘Feminist, female, Feminine’ has pointed out that Julia Kristeva’s position of defining ‘femininity’ as a position radically deconstructs the binary opposition:

If femininity then can be said to have a definition at all in Kristevan terms, it is simply as ‘that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order. This relational ‘definition’ is as shifting as the various forms of patriarchy itself, and allows her to argue that men can also be constructed as marginal to the symbolic order, as her analysis of male avant-grade artists ---- have shown.

(Moi 1997: 248)

Kristeva’s definition of femininity as marginality “allows us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of positionality rather than of essences”.(Moi
This concept of femininity implies that at any given time men or women can occupy this position.

The metaphysical nature of gender identities, where by woman is associated with lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos has been deconstructed. The construction of subjectivity, where by human subjects become subjects after they enter the Symbolic order of culture via the Oedipus complex by moving out of the Imaginary order, and the Imaginary order as Lacan has defined in his essay, “The insistence of the letter in the unconscious’ is the unconscious, which is the discourse of the other (Lacan 1988 : 102) will be critiqued. Luce Irigaray in her essay, ‘The Other: Woman’ will try to re-define the construction of woman as other, within the economy of a single subject:

But many women and men for that matter, still do not believe that woman can be anything other than the complement to man, his inverse, his scraps, his need, his other. Which means that she cannot be truly other. The other that she is remains trapped in the economy or the horizon of a single subject.

(Irigaray 1997:311)

Irigaray will try to re-define the female generic:

As our tradition dictates, man originates from God and woman from man. As long as the female, generic – woman – is not determined as such, this will be true. Women will remain men’s or Man’s creatures. With respect to themselves, and among themselves, they were unable to create, create (for) themselves, especially an ideal, for want of an identity and of mediations. They will be able to criticize their condition, complain, reject themselves or one another, but not
establish a new era of History or of culture ----- Women’s liberation, and indeed the liberation of humanity, depends upon the definition of a female generic, that is, a definition of what woman is, not just this or that woman. For women to get away from a model of hierarchical submission to male identity we need to define the female gender, the generic identity of women. To be able to attain this generic identity, we need to attribute value to the pronouns he and she and to their plural forms as an expression of gender and we need to accord positive value to the pronoun she as that which designates the female gender.

(Irigaray 312-313)

The French feminist school of thought represented by Helena Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva will challenge gender construction not in terms of understanding ‘women’ as real biological entities, who at this point in history are united in terms of shared experience but as Alice Jardine has pointed out as a ‘writing-effect’:

When the French talk of l’écriture feminine, they do not mean the tradition of women’s writing that Woolf and Showalter have laboured to uncover, but a certain mode of writing which unsettles fixed meanings. On the other hand, when Anglo Americans use the term ‘feminine’ they are usually referring to that cultural stereotype which patriarchy tells us is the appropriate, even ‘natural’ form of behaviour for women. Though both gynesis and gynocriticism would agree that the master narratives are bankrupt, gynesis does not want to substitute
mistress narratives. Therefore gynesis gives no special emphasis to female authors and characters: most of the examples of ‘feminine writing’ it considers are by men. It is not necessarily preoccupied with women’s groups, on the contrary, Jardine stresses, the location that concerns gynesis is a space, an absence. In gynesis belief in the individual as a fully conscious, rational, secure identity gives way to a ‘subject’ which is unstable and constantly reformed. Kristeva uses the phrase ‘subject in process’ to convey how ‘our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trail, over-rules.

(Eagleton 1991 : 10-11)

Hence Cixous in her essay, ‘Sorties’ describes the political economy of masculine and feminine which governs the solidarity of logocentrism and phallocentrism:

The political economy of the masculine and the feminine is organized by different requirements and constraints, which, when socialized and metaphorized, produce signs, relationships of power, relationships of production and of reproduction, an entire immense system of cultural inscription readable as masculine or feminine.

(Cixous 1988 : 289)

French feminist tries to understand phallocentrism as a discursive practice where the two sexes have been subsumed into a singular ‘universal’ model which is the masculine. By trying to understand what E.A. Grosz in her essay, ‘The in (ter) vention of feminist knowledge’ has described as “masculinity of knowledges”,

22
feminist can deconstruct phallocentric paradigms of Truth, Reason, Logic, Meaning and Being and thus claim space for women:

An open avowal of the masculinity of knowledges is necessary for feminists to clear a space within the ‘universal’ and to reclaim women’s places in it. Ironically, phallocentrism is a disavowal or denial of the specificities of the male sex, the male body or masculine subjectivity rather than, as is commonly assumed, the imposition of clearly masculine value onto women. In attributing a masculine status to knowledges which present themselves as universal, objective, truthful and neutral, as free of all sexual determination, feminists may for the first time be able to claim a space within theory for women as women.

E.A. Grosz has described phallocentrism as abstract, universal and general representation of masculine attributes so that women’s concrete specificity for an autonomous definition is nor realized. It is thus difficult to locate as compared to patriarchal or sexist viewpoints since it is the “theoretical bedrock of shared assumptions that is so pervasive, that it is no longer recognized” (Grosz 94).

The French feminists believed that western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women’s experience and her body. Therefore their assertion of feminine to challenge western culture which is fundamentally phallogocentric:

I am the unified, self-controlled center of the universe’, man (white, European and ruling class) has claimed. ‘The rest of world, which I define
as the other, has meaning only in relation to me, as man/ father, possessor of the phallus.

(Shoshanna Felman as quoted in Jones 1985 : 87).

Ecriture feminine is a position, where resistance to phallogocentric concepts takes place in the form of jouissance that is “in the direct re-experience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality, repressed but not obliterated by the Law of the father”. (Jones 87)

Julia Kriesteva finds jouissance, which results in constructing texts against the rules and regularities of conventional language which results in semiotic liberation. Kriesteva has defined semiotic discourse as “an incestuous challenge to the symbolic order, asserting as it does the writer’s return to the pleasures of his preverbal identification with his mother and his refusal to identify with his father and the logic of paternal discourse”, (Jones 88) Kriesteva find liberatory potentials in the marginalized position of women, who on account of their position will not produce a “fixed, authority-claiming subject / speaker or language”. (Jones 88) ‘Women’ to Kriesteva represents not “so much a sex as an attitude, any resistance to conventional culture and language; men too, have access to the jouissance that opposes phallogocentrism”, (Jones 88):

A feminist practice can only be ---- at odds with what, already exists so that we may say ‘that’s not it’ and ‘that’s still not it’. By ‘woman’ I mean that which cannot be represented, what is not said, what remains above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies. There are certain ‘men’ who are familiar with the phenomenon.

(Julia Kriesteva as quoted in Jones 88)
Luce Irigaray on the contrary offers the viewpoint that women are different from men and because they have been caught in a world structured by man-centred concepts and have no way of knowing or representing themselves. Hence she offers female self-consciousness as the starting point through women’s bodies and women’s sexual pleasure because they have been misrepresented in male discourse. Irigaray argues further that female sexuality explains women’s problematic relationship to masculine logic and language:

Contradictory words seem a little crazy to the logic of reason, and inaudible for him who listens with readymade grids, a code prepared in advance. In her statements at least when she dares to speak out—woman retouches herself constantly.

(Irigaray quoted in Jones 89)

According to Irigaray it is not only women’s discovery of their autoeroticism which will enable them to transform the existing order but also analyses the various system that oppress them.

Helena Cixous is convinced that the “psychosexual specificities” (Jones 89) of women will empower women to overthrow masculinist viewpoint and far as possible woman’s libidinal economy is not identifiable. In her essay, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, which is the manifesto for l’écriture feminine—which is a separate writing / language metaphorically based on women’s physical experience of sexuality:

The new history is coming it’s not a dream, though it does extend beyond men’s imagination and for good reason. It’s going to deprive them of their conceptual orthopedics, beginning with the destruction of their enticement

25
machine. It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded - which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system, it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico – theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.

(Cixous 1997 : 353)

Writing in the feminine is therefore a position and a feminine text is more than subversive. “It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there’s no other way”.(Cixous 357)

As a methodology for interrogation of gender construction, this school of thought is more concerned with the gender of the text, than with the gender of the author. This methodology will also deconstruct the masculine construction of ‘Man of Reason’ and debunk the search for a unitary truth as a masculine effort. Ecriture feminine will develop an alternative to andocentric narratives and therefore the French feminists have been important in formulating the post modern feminist position.

Feminist theorists enter into postmodernist discourses by deconstructing notions of “reason, knowledge, or the self and to reveal the effects of the gender arrangements that lay beneath their ‘neutral’ and universalizing facades”. (Flax 1997: 173) Postmodern feminists have problematized gender relations and gender can no longer be considered as simple natural facts, rather it refers to the position
one occupies in an ideological grid. This in turn has resulted in understanding the relations of domination in gender relations, whereby the women is the other, while men are universal. As Elizabeth Wright in her essay, ‘Thoroughly Post Modern Feminist Criticism” has pointed to the emergence of new frame work, whereby the diversity and contradiction between various positions and also within a particular position and this points to the contradictions within feminism.

The subject positions are always coalitional positions, where the subject position is always being re-formed along various axes like gender, race, age and psyche, with some factor is reinforced at some point and also the factors are at times in conflict with each other. Kathy E Ferguson in the book The Man Question: Vision of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory (1993) has coined the term ‘mobile’ subjects, who:

...trouble fixed boundaries, antagonize true believers, create new possibilities for themselves --- they are ambiguous, messy and multiple, unstable but persevering. They are ironic, attentive to the manyness of things --- They are politically difficult in their refusal to stick consistently to one stable identity claim.

(Lloyd 2005 : 16)

A given subject position is always in a flux, transgressing various established paradigms of nature and culture and represents a complex intersection of various discourses and represents a “potential for endless possible (per) mutation” (Lloyd 16). Subject position represented through identity are political effects and are generated within the field of power. Post modernism has had an impact on gender construction / positions in terms of concentrating on the instability of all subject
positions and provides a “critique of consolidated identity” (Lloyd 21). One’s subject position is therefore deferred and post modernism does so by treating gender identities as normative and hence prone to dissonance and uncertainty and hence undermines logocentric discourse. Teresa de Lauretis’s understanding of gender moves beyond the limit of sexual difference and proposes the theory of technologies of gender mentioned earlier to produce multiple gender through what she terms as “variable configurations of sexual discursive positional ties. (Lloyd 24) This postmodern approach reflects the various contradiction in a particular position and the manner in which subjectivity is inscribed within the “movement in and out of ideology, that crossing back and forth of the boundaries – and of the limits – of sexual differences (s)” (Lloyd 24).

Race will confront the monolithic construction of masculinity and femininity and the note of difference brings in fragmentation of identities. In the process, issues of agency and structures appear more complex with factors like racism and exclusion accompanied by growing material inequalities. Race will challenge the notion of white, middle-class man as the dominant notion of masculinity, while the other group is so taken for granted that it is almost rendered invisible. Race confronts gender construction through legacies and practices of colonialism and results in the context of indigenous peoples challenging both the “gendered and the racialized assumptions of the conqueror’s world view”. (Bhavnani and Coulson 2003 : 73)

The idea of woman as an ahistorical, unlocated, undifferentiated category was re-visited and ‘different’ women raised their voices and they insisted on the particularity of their experiences and transformed the category ‘woman’ into
something more complex and diverse. The inclusion of race results in the creation of new categories, that will be inclusive and pluralist rather than being exclusive and masculine in nature. Inclusion of race also implies understanding the material base of construction of gender and patriarchy and deconstruct the notion of tragic essentialism. Inclusion reading gender as the site of multiple oppression and reflects upon the cultural production of gender.

Gayatri Spivak’s observation that “it is at these borders of discourse metaphor and example seem arbitrarily chosen that ideology breaks through” quoted in (McDowell 1997 : 237). The interface between gender and race in terms of theory has resulted in creation of notes of a counter history and has challenged the role of institutions in creating epistemologies:

A counter history, a more urgent history, would bring theory and practice into a productive tension that would force a re-evaluation of each side. But that history could not be written without considering the determining, influences of institutional life out of which all critical utterances emerge.

(McDowell 241)

In terms of literacy production this brings into play what Abdul Jan Mohamed has described as “Manichean Aesthetics”:

Even though an African may adopt the formal characteristics of English fiction, his rendition of colonial experience will vary drastically from that of a European, not only because of the actual differences in experience, but also because of his antagonistic attitude toward colonialist literature.

(Jan Mohamed quoted in Godard 1990:198)
Babara Godard in her essay, ‘The Political of Representation’ has pointed out that in the context of Native Writing in Canadian literature, native writers have interrogated boundaries, challenged the hierarchy of prevailing discourses and created the in-between sites for movement and change. The creation of ‘in-between sites’ result in heterogeneity and hybridization resulting in dialogic discourses within the body of Native writing:

It establishes a theory of a transformative practice grounded in critique and resistance. For the focus of the dialogic is on change, on bodies and social formation as sites of instability and displacement. In these terms, the project of Native writers is not merely inscribed within the dominant discourse as opposition, but is a destabilizing movement in the field of power relationships.

(Godard 198)

These “new objects of knowledge” (Godard 199) require “new discursive practices” (Godard 199) to analyze them. The discourse of gender located in the larger context of resistance literature results in the ‘coloring’, to borrow Deborah E. Mcdowell’s term of gender theories. Elizabeth Spelman’s observation is useful here:

It is not white middle class women who are different from other women but all other women who are different from them.

(Quoted in Mcdowell 237)

As Toril Moi has observed that the “influence of gender is not be found at the level of theory, but at the level of politics (Moi quoted in Mcdowell)”. Gender and race
intersect to provide a powerful critique of the construct of ‘True Woman hood’ and the authorizing knowledges.

The research will analyse gender as a category in selected Canadian literary texts employing feminist literary theories. It is in the wake of feminist criticism that gender has become recognized as a “crucial determinant in the production, circulation, and consumption of literary discourse”. (Ruthven 1984 : 9) The introduction of gender in literary studies marks a “new phase in feminist criticism, an investigation of the ways that all reading and writing, by men as well as by women, is marked by gender. Talking about gender, moreover, is a constant reminder of the other categories of difference, such as race and class, that structure our lives and texts, just as theorizing gender emphasizes the parallel between feminist criticism and other forms of minority discourse” (Showalter 1989 : 3). Interrogation of gender is decoding the ways in which gender ideology is inscribed in various cultural practices and that gender ideology is a dialogue between masculinity and femininity. Gender has always been a significant term in feminist criticism, however men’s writing is also gendered, rather than being patriarchal or sexist.

Feminist literary theories as a research methodology is to deconstruct androcentric structures prevailing in the text and hence reading of the texts works under, what Judith Fetterley had described as the “Resisting Reader”: 

Their goal is to disrupt the process of emasculation by exposing it to consciousness, by disclosing the androcentricity of what has customarily passed for the universal”.

(Schweickart 1989 : 27)
There is also understanding the power of ‘false consciousness’ into which both women and men have been socialized and this in turn brings out the force of literature and the complexity of literary influence. Feminist literary theories along with reader response theory is preoccupied with two closely related questions:

i) Does the text manipulate the reader, or does the reader manipulate the text to produce the meaning that suits her own interests? and (ii) What is “in” the text? How can we distinguish what it supplies from what the reader supplies?”

(Schweickart 32).

Both the questions refer to the subject-object relation that is established between the reader and the text in the process of reading A feminist reading elaborates the reading process in which the gender inscribed in the text is as important as the gender of the reader.

Interrogation of gender implies interrogating the deep symbiotic relationship between the androcentric canon and androcentric modes of reading. Annette Kolodny in her essay, ‘Dancing through the Minefield: Some observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of Feminist Literary Criticism’ as analyzed the situation:

In so far as we are taught to read, what we engage are not texts but paradigms --- In so far as literature is itself a social institution, so, too, reading is a highly socialized – or learned – activity ---- We read well, and with pleasure, what we already know how to read, and what we know how to read is to a large extent dependent on what we have already read (works from which we have developed our expectation and learned our
interpretive strategies). What we then choose to read --- and, by
extension, teach and thereby ‘canonize’ – usually follows upon our
previous reading.

(Kolodny 1997: 179).

Interrogating androcentric interpretive strategies involves the application of
post structuralist feminist approach, where “the feminine” as a category within
culture is investigated as mentioned earlier in the analysis of ‘l’écriture feminine’.
Judith Fetterley in her essay, ‘On the politics of literature’ has described all
literature as political and has a “palpable design upon us” (John Keats quoted in
Fetterley 1997: 564), where one vision is allowed to prevail over other meanings:

When only one reality is encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted and
when the limited vision endlessly insists on its comprehensiveness, then
we have the conditions necessary for that confusion of consciousness in
which impalpability flourishes.

(Fetterley 564)

Interrogation of gender which is also to interrogate the universality of
literature, which masculine in nature and the female experience is often rendered
invisible. The politics of literature is also related to power and to be excluded from
literary representation in terms of gender, race, class results in powerlessness.
Therefore, investing the text as a gendered text implies reading the text in terms of
politics of representation and interrogating the male system of values. Such
questioning results in the creation of a new consciousness and provide conditions
for change:
To expose and question that complex of ideas and mythologies about women and men which exist in our society and are confirmed in our literature is to make the system of power embodied in the literature open not only to discussion but even to change.

(Fetterley 569)

Reading of gender along with other socio-cultural factors results in multiple readings with no particular point-of-view being privileged and points to the impossibility of a fixed valid reading. This mode of reading is concerned not exclusively with the ideologies of gender but seeks to explore the intersection of gender with other cultural practices and the complex ways in which ideas and material conditions intersect. Feminist literary criticism results in a reading of gender which is dialectical in nature and as Julia Lesage describes, this dialectics “explain process and change” (Lessage quoted in Newton and Rosenfelt 1985 : xxii) and points to the contradictions and determinations within the text. This methodology results in a reading which is not static and linear and reads literature as a site where ideology is produced and negotiated with and in turn the contradictions of ideology are made visible.

The tendency towards essentialism with regard to male domination is challenged and polarized view of history and society as male and female, masculine and feminine is re-visited. Gender relations are not constructed in terms of a simple and unified patriarchy; where women are universally powerless and universally good. Rather an interrogation of gender employing feminist literary criticism as methodology helps us to understand the manner in which “women at different moments in history have been both oppressed and oppressive, submissive and
subversive, victim and agent, allies and enemies both of men and one another”. (Newton and Rosenfelt xxix) Such an analysis results in the understanding of the “power of ideas, language and literature; their importance as a focus of ideological struggle”(Newton and Rosenfelt xxix-xxx) and this reading will embrace contradictions rather than providing simple answers. This approach which aims at dismantling androcentric assumptions studies the construction of gender as a “trans-disciplinary venture”. (Ruthven 1984:75)

The first chapter titled Shifting Terrains : Genders in As for Me and My House will investigate the construction of gendered identity in a canonical text located within the realistic mode, which adheres to fixed subject positions. The unity of a gendered identity is what the diary moves toward. The analysis will try to read the ruptures in the construction of masculinity and femininity. An interrogation of gender construction provides clue to the larger ideological possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configuration, which the chapter will try to read. In the process the chapter has tried to bring out the boundaries / limits of a discursively gendered experience, the limits of which are set by prevailing hegemonic cultural practices. The entrapment of both the protagonist located within the realist mode of production brings out the production of ‘intelligent genders’ to borrow Judith Butler’s term. The text as a labyrinth will also be interrogated in the chapter. The entries at times are dominated by masculine mode of linearity, logic and progression and simultaneously there is the feminine side, which is governed by intuitions. The chapter will interrogate the ambiguity present throughout the novel.
The second chapter titled Unstable Sign: Transgressions in *Albertine in Five Times* will interrogate the feminine sign in varied manifestations as reflected in the character of Albertine. The transgression emerges at the hidden unconscious level of the sub-text represented in the text in the will to “look for a third choice” and this in turn will contradict the avowed intention of the main text. This female voice in the chapter will interrogate and foreshadow the deconstruction of the woman as object, who supports the masculine order. Albertine at 30 and 40 will deviate from the prescribed course and will become symptomatic of the impasse in patriarchal order. They will articulate the search for a conscious political protagonist to interrogate existing ideological grids. Albertine at 50 will try to escape from the burden of femininity and motherhood but there will be swift retribution. Albertine at 60 will initiate the process of closure and Albertine at 70 will present patriarchal femininity. The chapter will try to interrogate the ambiguity surrounding the feminine sign. The reading of the chapter is not to seek an archetypal feminist position, rather to interrogate the in-between spaces offered by the female position where existing gender grids will be interrogated.

The third chapter titled Inscribing the other: The Feminine in *Beautiful Losers, Field Notes* and *Running in the Family* will interrogate the construction of gender in post modern texts. The ‘feminine’ or the ‘writing of difference’ associated with French feminism provides a critique of phallocentrism in discourse located with the symbolic order. As Teresa De Lauretis describes the political possibilities offered by this position:

Not in femininity as a privileged nearness to nature, the body, or the unconscious, an essence which inheres in women but to which the relations of
the subject in social reality can be rearticulated from the historical experience of woman.

(de Lauretis quoted in Smart 1991 : 89)

Running in the Family is a meta fiction where the reader is made aware of the process of creating order through myth and history. ‘Feminine’ has been inscribed in the text in terms of the new archeology, which is not a grand one but a fragmentary one and marked by a distrust for grand narrative. The novel at one level is informed by the phallocentric desire of the narrator to inscribe himself in the symbolic order and is reflected in his desire to re-construct his father and simultaneously the search for a new history is in terms of multiple stories and multiple voices translated in the novel as ‘Father Tongue’ and ‘Aunts’. Each story is also the site of construction of masculinity and femininity which the chapter will interrogate. The text is not only recounting the history of the Ondaatjes but also that of Ceylon. While trying to reconstruct the history of Ceylon, the gaze is that of a male colonizer and Ceylon becomes the other. Reading the construction of gender is analyzing varied masculinities each reproducing its own Otherness. Cohen’s Beautiful Losers according to Linda Hutcheon heralded the beginning of the Canadian post modern, with the readers participating in the construction of the fictive worlds which remain incomplete. The ‘feminine’ has inscribed in the desire to escape the tyranny of meaning. The novel has no beginning, middle and end. The search for universal signifier will be defeated via construction of history of Catherine Tekakwitha in a linear fashion. An alternative mode which will challenge the metaphysics of presence is sought and in the novel through the act of re-defining the history of the saint, both the male subject and history have been simultaneously
de-centered. The chapter will interrogate the novel as inscribing the ‘feminine’ in terms of reading multiple voices present in the novel. The novel has many truths and does not try to privilege one truth over another and thereby provide a critique of masculine definition of rationality. The novel embodies features of ‘feminine’ writing since it does not rush into a single unified meaning.

Robert Kroetsch’s The Ledger and Seed Catalogue will be interrogated as gendered texts by reading the ruptures in the text manifested in the decentred approach. This approach results in disrupting the masculine construction of history as monumental and monolithic and history becomes fragmented. The chapter will explore the tension between story and anti-story, which will imply revisiting the “monologic, functional, referential unity of historical account” (Jones 1993: 61). The poems will be investigated as archeological sites where ‘writings’ emerge and in the process the text will be freed from binary oppositions and the poems are sites of heterogeneous meanings, which defy a unified vision.

The fourth chapter titled Abstract Masculinity in Edward and Patricia brings out the construction of gender in the interface between patriarchy and capitalism. The chapter has tried to analyze the construction of masculinity and femininity in this auto-referential text corresponding to the rationale of market driven society. The ideology of abstract masculinity is related to the ideology of a market driven economy, which is based on the binary opposition between public and private space, with femininity constructed as excluded from the ideals of reason. The other aspect which the chapter will interrogates is the fetishization of the female body which results in objectification converging with the repudiation of femininity. Women too participate and seek their identities in the social structures which are
located within the paradigm of abstract masculinity. The protagonists as they conspire with each other and negotiate with the ideological structures reflect the ensnarement and tyranny of prevailing ideology.

The fifth chapter titled Gender and Resistance in The Rez’s Sisters seeks to interrogate the construction of gender in the text which brings out the violent juxtaposition of the cultural values of the Native and Non-Native Canadians. The text which is symptomatic of Resistance literature defies stereotypical portrayal of native women and deconstructs the binary opposition of colonizer / colonized. The chapter will interrogate gender construction in terms of female agency and female subjectivity and their relationship to colonialism in Canada. There is no fixed, monolithic subject position offered by the text, rather there are different positions of the resisting subject. At one level the sisters point to the impact of the white capitalist culture and therefore the need for change. However the desire to visit the Biggest Bingo in the World brings out the complexity of their situation. The Bingo represents decay and defeat but is also seen as strategy for survival for all the Rez sisters. The text emerges as a site of struggle, where the Native women is not merely an empty sign possessing all that, which the white woman lacks. By participating in the Bingo the sisters will try to re-write their subject positions and there is displacement of dominant structures of power.

The sixth chapter titled Imagining the Other: Kerrisdale Elegies will explore the construction of the woman as the muted other. Bowering’s Kerrisdale Elegies is a collection of poems divided into ten sections. The sections map the spiritual poverty of the poet trapped in labyrinth of intellectual obfuscation and incomplete
personal relations represented in the poem through the image of ‘eerie tautology’ coupled with the ‘anxiety of influence’. The poems bring out the poet’s literary Oedipal struggle along with the fear of the woman whose ‘dark embrace’ he wishes to escape. The construction of women represents the semiotic, the carnivalesque, and the disruptive representing what Juliet Mitchell describes in her essay, ‘femininity, narrative and psychoanalysis’ as “an organization of polyvalence and polyphony”. (Mitchell 1988: 428) The text embodies both the masculine and the feminine voices and the tension between the two has been reflected in the text, since the feminine threatens to disrupt the symbolic order which the elegy strives for. Writing in the feminine as reflected in the poetry allies itself with formalist and post modern revisiting of form and literary conventions, as well as questioning of Western master narratives based on notions of universality and objectivity. However the elegies does not include a challenge to masculine order and inscribe the female. The chapter will explore the ambivalence in the poem resulting from the masculine subject who is under threat and simultaneously attracted to the feminine.

The concluding chapter will be a comparative study of different gender constructions in canonical texts and examining texts as gendered texts. Analysis of gender with reference to larger social and ideological structures results in readings which provide an alternative to institutional reading which promotes unified reading over heterogeneous reading. Interrogation of gender politics involves interrogation of androcentric modes of production. In the final analysis, the research seeks to offer an alternative mode of reading and understanding of texts.