INTRODUCTION

With the realisation in the 1960s that gender relations have more to do with Social customs rather than with natural and biological differences, the politics of gender entered a new phase in the late 1960s, leading in the 1970s to the questioning of cultural history and finally a more integrated approach to the domain of cultural history through a feminist historiography - such a historiography starts necessarily with the assumption that all aspects of reality are gendered, with gender difference simultaneously structuring and being structured by other social relations.

Such a reading of history, which seeks to understand the construction of gender differences, must necessarily concern itself with various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics, literature etc., and finally also the questioning of the histories and assumptions of these disciplines.

Thus, literature for example can no longer be isolated from the culture of which it forms a part so that the need to understand writing as a cultural rather than an individual phenomenon needs to be stressed, since the social context of literature is more than an explanatory 'background', and literature itself is historical.

The attempt to answer various questions: how a
writer or a text represents women, what it says about gender relations, how it defines sexual difference must therefore be understood both in a historical context and in inter-relation to the economic and social structures that govern the social formation of which they are a part. Clearly, defining gender has been integral to the formation of classes and dominant ideologies, the description and management of gender and female sexuality having been involved in the maintenance and re-production of social inequality\(^1\) as well. Feminist cultural history has thus emphasized especially "the ways in which social convention has tended to operate on behalf of the dominant group, and norms of femininity have worked in the interest of men"\(^2\).

Both in the West and in India, gender relations can be seen to have been historically formed into gender dichotomies. In 18th century Europe it was the rise of capitalism, the creation of the middle-class and the separation in the spheres of the household and work place which led to the deepening of the sexual division of labour and a corresponding cultural and ideological creation of gender divisions through education, religion, the philosophers and conduct books for example.

In India the colonial experience and the nationalist response to it rendered the women's question a far more complex one, with the orientalists and later the Indian reformers playing a vital role in creating a new
identity for women in the late 19th century. Here factors of caste and religion also determined the shaping of this new role for women, since a selective appropriation of Hinduism was involved. Most feminist cultural historians point out the fact of how the creation of these gender dichotomies and the shaping of this new identity has determined women's roles and subjectivity well into the 20th century.

With the further development of capitalism in Europe, resulting in technological and scientific advancement, contradictions between ideological constructs and the actual situation of women has been seen to increase, so that middle-class women after world war II had increasingly begun to question gender roles and patriarchal norms, evident for example in the appearance of books like Kate Millet's, "Sexual Politics" and "Patriarchal Attitudes" by Eva Figes in the seventies. These books looked at literary texts and women writers as integral to culture, rather than isolated from it.

By the Eighties, however, language itself had also been questioned with Dale Spender's "Man made Language" for example pointing out that language does not merely name male superiority, it produces it, with the binary oppositions of male and female terms privileging one pole over the other. 3.

In the Seventies and Eighties, feminist literary criticism developed and was institutionalized in the West as
a discipline with amongst others the appearance of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's book "The Madwoman in the Attic", which theorises women's resistance to social and literary constraints in terms of women's anxiety about patriarchal influence. The concerns of this discipline have centered around issues of "loss" and therefore, "recovery" of women's writing, the idea of "release" or "escape" and those of female experience and female nature.

Feminist cultural historians in India have however taken issue with these concepts of Western feminist theory since they tend to "falsely encompass the world", besides remaining restricted to the fundamental antagonism of only a patriarchal hegemony without taking other hegemonies of class, caste or race into consideration.

Whereas in the West feminist theory and criticism has had a rather long history, in India we see cultural historians attempting to understand historical processes which have reconstituted patriarchy, in India, thus rethinking historiography as a whole rather than "a mere tokenist inclusion of women or the numerical or qualitative evaluation of these participation in this or that movement. In this sense Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid's Recasting Women. Essays in colonial History" has been of tremendous importance to feminists in India. Similarly, there have been sporadic articles and books on, for example, feminist literary criticism of women's writing, Susie Tharu...
and K Lalita's book, "Women writing in India. 600 B.C. to the present," is almost the first comprehensive theoretical and textual representation of a historical conceptualisation of gender relations and women's writing in India.

In their book, Tharu and Lalita argue that though Western feminists of the liberal mainstream questioned the ideological processes that endorsed their subordination as women, other "narrative fragments" have not been questioned as vigorously as the social construction of middle-class feminity has been, thus underwriting the politics of class, race or imperialism. The problem with such a feminist approach is clearly that, by projecting the results of such a critique as "true" or "natural", as essentially female, present day middle-class subjectivities are projected as normatively female, besides establishing the limits or parameters of feminism and present day concerns as the only relevant female themes.

Other contradictions, those which result from patriarchy as historically constituted by class, by colonialism or by caste which have been responsible for the oppression of working class women in India for example are in no way taken into consideration.

Thus, whereas the voluminous feminist literary criticism which had attempted in the Seventies to read the

5
later prose of an author like Ingeborg Bachmann in Europe from a feminist point of view remains limited to a critique of patriarchy, gender roles, women’s writing as envisaged by the French theoreticians Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigary and to a pointing out of the gender-bias in the male reception, feminist criticism has also used Lacanian and Derridian deconstruction and Poststructuralism as methodology to attempt another reading of both "Malina" a novel belonging to the Ways of Dying"cycle and the two narratives "Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha" and" Undine geht".

That such a "reading" and feminist theoretical understanding would be inadequate to look at issues of gender oppression and the representations of women and, sexual difference in Amrita Pritam’s poems and prose is amply clear since the sexuality and subjectivity of the women protagonists of her novels and short stories is so evidently interlinked with factors of religion, caste and class, this subjectivity having been created historically in the process of the colonial experience and the nationalist response to it.

Divided into four chapters and a conclusion, the first chapter of this thesis starts with a discussion of the concepts "sex" and "gender" and the distinction between them. How gender relations have historically been formed into gender dichotomies in capitalist social formations in general and in German speaking Europe in particular through
the 18th and 19th centuries in particular, a process which has been related to the emergence of the middle-class is further discussed. A feminist historiography dealing with gender relations and the creation of gender dichotomies in India, however, draws attention to the fact that it was a process which had been far more complex due to the historical experience of colonialism and factors of caste, class, religion and ethnicity.

The second chapter elaborates upon how this process has been reflected in women's writing, as well as its literary criticism would not be adequate because of its cultural and class limitations to look at writing by women in India is further discussed. Finally, how women writers have represented and attempted to subvert gender roles prescribed to them is also dealt with, showing clearly the different and complex situation in which women in India found themselves as a result of the colonial experience. Therefore universalize "women's nature" and women's experience and use the paradigms of Western feminist literary criticism to look at writing by women in India would be incorrect.

The third chapter then, makes an appraisal of Ingeborg Bachmann, a woman writer from the German - speaking world with whom both male and feminist critics have extensively concerned themselves. The chapter discusses
both the conflict between the role of a woman writer and the
traditional gender role of wife and mother in her own life and the representation of gender
dichotomies in her later literary projects culminating in
the novel "Malina".

The chapter also discusses how the feminist literary
criticism of Bachmann's work has mostly drawn attention to
the gender specific nature of the male reception, besides
concerning itself with issues of women, femaleness and
language, women's writing in its difference with that of
men, as well as a critique of patriarchy and how Bachmann
attempts to subvert traditional female roles. The novel
"Malina" of the "Ways of Dying" cycle and the two
narratives "Ein Schritt nach Gemorrha" and "Undine geht" are
analysed as reflecting Bachmann's gender ideology.

The fourth chapter deals with how for a woman
writer in the Punjab for example, both reception of her
works and representation of gender relations is much more
complex, since factors of colonialism, caste, class and
religion play important role in her consciousness as well as
that of her protagonists.