CHAPTER II

WESTERN FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM AND
WOMEN WRITING IN INDIA

Clear from the last chapter that whereas in the West, gender dichotomies and the resultant exclusion of women from cultural and political spheres had been closely connected with, and a result of the formation of the middle class through the 18th and 19th centuries, in India due to the colonial experience and the nationalist response to it, the creation of gender dichotomies has been even more complex, involving caste, religion, imperialism, and ethnicity as well.

How this has reflected, both in women's writing and the concerns and creation of a new discipline, 'feminist literary criticism' in the West, is what is elaborated on in this chapter. How a western feminism and its literary criticism would be inadequate due to its class and cultural limitations, to look at women's writing in India is further discussed. Finally, how women writers have reflected and attempted to subvert the gender roles prescribed to them is also dealt with, bringing out clearly, the different and complex situation in which women in India found themselves as a result of the colonial experience. That one cannot therefore universalize "women's nature" or "women's experience", nor use a western feminist literary criticism
to look at women's writing historically in India becomes clear.

As already discussed in the preceding chapter a process of "class differentiation on the basis of (among other things) redefined sexual mores for women, had taken place in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the new bourgeoisie inscribed its identity on the bodies and souls of women and the proper lady was born. A similar process having taken place in India over the 19th century, where the respectability of women from the emerging middle classes was being defined in counter-point to the "crude" and "licentious" behaviour of lower class women with middle-class women being asked to keep away from the wandering women artists, since their performances were bawdy and anti-authoritarian. Besides this marginalization of women artists the contradictory effects of, on the one hand, the promise held out by the social reformers and the rapid spread of women's education and on the other, the redefining of women's roles as middle-class mothers and wives is reflected in women's writing through the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Dorothy Smith points out the similar contradiction faced by the major women novelists of the 19th century, Charlotte Bronte, Georg Eliot and others, who simultaneously experienced the breaking down of barriers between the sexes with the rise of capitalism and women's access to education
on the one hand, and the social and ideological barriers placed on them by their sex on the other, a conflict and struggle which was to continue well into the 20th century, defining and structuring the debate on women's writing and 'feminist' criticism.

Thus, in the West, women writers and theorists, starting with Virginia Woolf in her "A Room of One's Own" have theorised the material and ideological problems women are confronted with in the process of literary production: the inequitous educational system, lack of privacy, burdens of child bearing and rearing, domestic obligations, restrictions of family and social restrictions etc.

Christa Gürtler similarly mentions the sharp conflict experienced by women writers between their life and writing, as a result of the conditions under which women write:

"So Stellt sich für Frauen Leben und Schreiben meist als scharfe Opposition dar. Die Entscheidung für Ehe, Familie und Kinder erweist sich für Frauen nicht besonders förderlich."

Barbara Frischmuth, a writer, observes on this "Doppelbelastung"

Was noch schwieriger ist, die tägliche Verrichtungen eines Hausfrauen - und Mutter
However, the gender roles of wife and mother have not been the rule for women writers, with the renunciation of family and children appearing often to be a prerequisite for the literary activity of women.

Feminist critics have also drawn attention to how these material and ideological factors have restricted women to certain genres: the genre of the novel mostly, from the eighteenth century, since the open form of the novel and the fact that its subjects were found in areas which were close to the sphere of experience of women helped increase the contribution of women to this genre. Since drama demanded a command over techniques and processes, women were restricted to the role of actresses.

Besides the material problems that prevent women from writing, feminist literary criticism in England and America has drawn attention to the internal censure, which according to Mary Eagleton, for example takes the form of anxiety about their chosen role and how they are perceived. Thus, for many women writers it is difficult to overcome awareness of an oppressive male presence constructing their work, with the woman writer constantly at point of tension, aware that her writing both challenges the conventional view of what is appropriate for women and encroaches on what some
see as male preserve. Adrienne Rich reiterates that the very act of writing is seen as expressing conflict between "traditional female function" and "subversive function of the imagination" - Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their book "Madwoman in the Attic," take the argument even further tracing literary history which sees writing as essentially "male," a kind of extension of the male generative act, which confers on the male writer authority, the right to create, control and possess. Thus, for the male critic, the woman writer is compromised, unfeminine and presumptuous. Gilbert and Gubar believe that the woman writer is involved in the complex balancing act between apparent conformity to certain patriarchal literary norms and a trenchant critique of those same standards.

Whereas socialisation poses a problem for women writers in the process of literary production, the various literary institutional processes also function to control the reception of women's literature and so Gisela Brinker Gabler in "Deutsche Dichterinnen": Men decide according to their criteria whether a work would be printed, published or "tradiert".5

Further concerns of Western feminist criticism have been a lack of tradition for women writers and the literary history of women writers. Shulmith Firestone elaborates:

75
Denn eine Frau, die an der (männlichen) Kultur teilhaben will, muß einer Tradition genügen und wird an deren Maßstäben gemessen werden, obwohl sie keinen Anteil an ihrer Errichtung hatte. Und selbverständlich ist innnerhalb dieser Tradition kein Platz für die weibliche Sichtweise, selbst wenn es ihr gelänge zu erkennen, was das ist.6

Virginia Woolf had similarly theorised on the 'Unbrauchbarkeit' of the masculine sentence for the woman writer. Gürtler concludes therefore, that the search for a new feminine language is often alleged by women writers to be an important motive of their writing, with the French theoreticians also starting from the assumption that feminine thought can only be expressed in a new language.

Other feminist scholarship however, has refuted the notion of a female imagination, since it can confirm the belief in a deep, basic and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world. Such essentialist or biologistic beliefs imply that there is something intrinsic in the experience of being female and thus renders gender biological rather than cultural; they tend to privilege gender at the expense of class or race, and they can too easily become ahistorical or apolitical presuming unproblematic unity among women across culture, class and history.7

On the further question of a female aesthetics

76
related to women's writing, various theoreticians have attempted to distinguish it from the male aesthetics, with Christa Wolf, for example amongst others from the German speaking world trying to incorporate her theoretical understanding into the writing process itself, as seen in her "Kassandra Vorrausstzung einer Erzählung".

Traditionally, Barbara Wartmann explains in her "Writing as an Attach against Women", women's life practice has been connected to aesthetics differently.

In the bourgeois connection the role of woman as object of male adoration is closely linked with aesthetics, defined as a beautiful harmonious counter-world to alienated masculine social practices. In this view women and art are alike in having been stylised by men striving for social liberation into harmonious idealized elements of a freer life-context. Woman with her beauty, sensuality and morality in opposition to man's spiritual and physical work, was equated with a metaphysically transfigured nature principle. In this she was 'simultaneously elevated and degraded', placed so high and so low that she could no longer find a place in society's life-context. An ideologically distorted male longing for reconciliation with nature, for a nonalienated existence, is projected onto femaleness. It is
directed towards an object of desire that like nature itself, is not acknowledged to have independent needs. 8

The contradictory factor in the real substance of these male projections remains: by virtue of their exclusion from society's life contexts, women have maintained certain abilities that may actually have left them the less alienated ones; (they have these abilities) because they either could not find, or could find only with difficulty a place in society's life and work. 9

Christa Wolf's conception of women's writing runs along similar lines. To the question "In wieweit gibt es wirklich "weibliches Schreiben?" she says:

"Insoweit Frauen aus historischen und biologischen Gründe eine andere Wirklichkeit erleben als Männer und dies ausdrücken. Insoweit Frauen nicht zu den Herrschenden gehören, jahrhunderte lang zu den Objekten der Objekte (...) insoweit sie aufhören, sich in die herrschenden Wahnsysteme zu integrieren. Insoweit sie schreibend und lesend, auf Autonomie aus sind. 10

Thus, this understanding of women's writing within the female life context, sees it as an attempt at freedom from oppression and as a form of resistance against permanent alienation. Wolf described women's writing in
that sense as the attempt:

"sich in jedem Sinn von unten an sein Material heranzuarbeiten, das, wenn man es durch ein anderes Raster ansähne als bisher, doch noch bisher unerkannte Möglichkeiten offenbaren mag."\(^{11}\)

For Wolf, the exclusion of women and their alienation is characteristic both for patriarchal history as well as male dominated culture and Aesthetics. Interpreting the thinking which is based on object making in the 'Voraussetzungen', starting from Ingeborg Bachmann's poem "Erkär mir Liebe" she sees it as one which can be characterised by the fact that it excludes love and therefore humanity as well.

Asthetics, for Wolf, is the expression of another perception of reality. She therefore equates the masculine reality principle with the masculine aesthetic.

Wolf feels aesthetics can be used both "sich die Wirklichkeit, auch die der eigenen Person, vom Leib zu halten (dies die männliche Variante) als auch ihr näher zu kommen und ihr schließlich ausgeliefert zu sein (dies die weibliche Variante).\(^{12}\)

Thus, Wolf sees Bachmann as identifying with the nameless woman in her novel 'Malina' and also identifying with Franza, who "ihre Geschichte einfach nicht in den
Wolf points out that women writers are confronted with this problem of expressing their experience and emotion authentically in the traditional, already existing forms. Since they cannot take up the already existing forms, they have to search for authentic patterns. This, she feels, was the reason that the women writers of the Romantics chose predominantly those genres from the available, which, based on self statement, dialog etc. belong to the most subjective of literary forms: The diary, letter, poem.

Susan Winnet and Bernd Witte distinguish women's writing from that of men along similar lines and in "Ästhetische Innovationen" elaborate on the need of women writers to break from the tradition set by them.

"Die Auffassung vom Dichter als schöpferischem Individuurn, in dem sich exemplarisch Mensch, d.h. bisher vor allem Mannwerdung vollzieht und durch das die Welt ihrer Vergänglichkeit enthoben wird, hat in der bisherigen Literature zu einer Heiligsprechung des Schreibens geführt. Die in ihr geleistete Erinnerungsarbeit wird als der Ort einer wenn auch noch so schwachen messianischen Hoffnung gesehen, Dieser Mythos ist das schlechte Alte, das zu zerstören die Literature der Frauen zur Aufgabe hat. Die
Frauen d.h. vor allem die des Bürgertums, sind in der Neuzeit historiesch viel später in den Schreibprozeß eingetreten als die Männer; von Ausnahmen abgesehen haben sie sich gegen Ende des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts in größeren Zahl schöpferisch mit Literatur zu befassen begonnen. Die Frau als Intellektuelle, so Christa Wolf in Kassandra 'gibt es in nennenswerter Zahl erst sechzig, siebzig Jahren'.

Since the tradition from which the writer had got his self understanding and role-expectation had been so eminently a masculine one, that it could not be rewritten by women writers they could not refer to it and had to invent a new one which is defined negatively at first as destruction of the masculine discourse and therefore as carrying forward of their own interests as women in language. To this belongs what Wolf called the "Zurück - denken - durch - die Mütter", the distraction of the logocentric style, the inclusion of the many languages, even those of the body in the text, maxim of this writing being - to allow the many voices, possibly all "zu Wort kommen zu lassen." And as Christa Wolf suggests in her "Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung," one could say that this aspect of the aesthetic innovation of women's literature lies in the fact that no more stories are narrated, since they are Hero - stories. Witte and Winnett point out that women writers betray the literary tradition in an even more specific sense, "Wenn sie das Schreiben nicht mehr als sakrale Handlung verstehen,
durch die ein Höchster geoffenbact oder der Tod überwunden werdem könnte. According to them, therein lies what is actually new in the texts of the younger writers; that they oppose the mystification of writing. Instead of that, they understand it as a betrayal of life, as madness. And so the writing woman no longer sees herself as prophetess or hero. Rather as child or still more radically as betrayer or as a mad woman. And so "Schreiben wird damit zu einem Weg, auf welchem dem eigenen Tod entgegenzugehen ist, womit es sich aller Macht versagt und sich in innersten der ganz und gar uneigennützigen, der ekstatischen Liebe zuwendet." 

Wartmann too, would like to see women's writing and aesthetics used as a form of subversion attacking the logocentrism of the symbolic order of patriarchy in an effort to shift the basis of the culture, an effort, which would extend beyond the subjective level of writing.

She says

"Women who write demonstrate over and over that the struggle against patriarchal culture must begin with resistance to the foundations of consciousness itself, of language. With their writing they try to recognize, extinguish or transform their consciousness which has taken possession of them through language. The oppression of femaleness is embodied in the normality of usage by the symbolic order
prevailing under the conditions of the censoring and controlling authorities of male power (this is shown by the sexual, political and economic taboos as well as ideological ones that patriarchal society has established for women)."

Thus, for her, the exclusion of femaleness from the bourgeois systems rationality corresponds to its exclusion of subjectivity, pure and simple.

Following Sohn-Rethal's argument, that there is an intimate connection between economy of commodity production and denial of subjective creativity, Wartmann sees the possibility of a consciousness transforming practice lying in transformed usage which would make the unconscious, not yet exhausted open places hidden in the symbolic order, in language visible. 19

She thus defines feminine practice as a third lying outside the two-part logic "true" or "false" which excludes any other possibility of social relevance, as well as the reflection over the process of becoming.

"Das abendländische Denken hat die strukturelle Ausgrenzung des weiblichen aus dem gesellschaftlichen Prozeß mit seinen Postulate der strukturellen Trennung von Geist und Nature, Subjekt und Objekt vorgenommen, Weiblichkeit ist selbst ein ausgeschlossenenes Drittes, das nicht der identitätatsphilosophischen These, daß 'etwas nicht ein und
The relevance of female and aesthetic production lies thus in its capacity to change the social form:

wie die unter patriarchalem Vorzeichen vorgenommene Hierarchisierung von Körper und Geist zurückgenommen werden kann, indem, sie bewußt und zielgerichtet ästhetisch an den Mustern des gesellschaftlichen Daseins arbeitet. So gesehen sind weibliche und äsketische Produktivität als eine Praxisform zu verstehen, die gesellschaftliche form ändert, D.h. einerseits daß sie versucht, gegen die Unterordnung sinn licher Momente des Lebenszusammenhangs: unter der rationalen Geist widerstandsformen zu entwickeln. Zum anderen heißt daß, daß sie den Bereich Kunst/Ästhetik nicht als ein dem "eigentlichen" gesellschaftlichen Lebens -und Arbeitsbereich entgegengestelltes Moment akzeptieren will, sondern versuchen will momente der ästatischen Praxis in den eigenen Lebensprozeß hineinzunehmen.21
Like the French theoretician Julia Kristeva, for Wartmann, "effect" woman which turns out to be forgotten and represeed possibility of a sensually defined practice, serves as the model for a "logical" un concrete form of utopia; a not real but still not impossible dream."

Wartmann further makes a distinction between bourgeois aesthetic theory and women's aesthetic practice.

Bourgeois aesthetic theory 'emphasises' the social task of poetry to connect spirit and sensuality, reason and pleasure, poetry being the place where otherwise divergent elements of physicality and spirituality are brought productively together, Hegel too speaking of "how spirit and sensuality are joined in art and postulating a fusing together of the two elements such that 'sensual' becomes 'spiritualised' via the aesthetic, since spiritual appears within it as sensualised." 

Wartmann points out that when writing, women's aesthetic practice also "attempts to bring this immanent element of sensuality strongly to bear, the very element that is lost from scientific textual practice." However, in the context of women's social reduction to this very sensuality, it would then be primarily an act of constituting and self ascertaining a different sensuality to define aesthetic practice. She sees this "female physicality that attempts to free itself from these male projections and develops its own needs" as irritating the
theoretically defined bourgeois life forms by a practice that does not adapt to male rational demands but draws sensuality into its blue print. Thus, she envisages the discovery of women's physicality as pointing to the realization of a pleasurable 'life-dream' that produces sensuality 'for' itself not 'outside' of itself by killing off its own desires.23

Thus, using marginalisation of this sphere as a form of subversion, and attacking the logicentrism of the symbolic order of patriarchy are seen by her as efforts to shift the basis of the culture, an effort that would extend beyond the subjective level of writing.

Later theory, Foucauldian in understanding, also examines the 'place' (Ort) from which women speak. Thus Sigrid Weigel in her book "Die Stimme der Medusa", rather than attempting to understand the term 'Frauenliteratur' as genre or to define it, laying down various criteria, analyses it as a discursive practice and is concerned with 'how' and 'why' it became a part of the literary and social discourse. Instead of the term 'Frauenliteratur' she posits the term 'Schreibweise' to describe women's writing.

Speaking of the voice of the Medusa, or the language of women as an almost impossible constellation she says:

Sie wiederholt sich in den Schriften und in der
Sprache von Frauen. Wenn diese versuchen das, was aus den herrschenden Redeweisen und Überlieferungen ausgeschlossen ist, zu beschreiben, dann müssen sie den Ort, von dem aus gesprochen wird, einnehmen und dort sind sie immer schon die Beschriebenen.

Thus the voice of the Meduas or rather the language of women is "nichts einfach Gegebenes oder zu konstruierendes sondern eine Bewegung, der ein ständiger Perspektiwechsel einhergeht."24

The relationship between women, femaleness and language she points out is a complex and conflicting one, with the dialectic of this relationship reappearing again and again as motif in the representation of the recent literature by women.

Characterising the Ort from which women write and speak, in social terminology, she says:

In dem Frauen teilhaben teilnehmen an der herrschenden Sprache sich ihren Zugang zu zeithlichen Bühne erobern sind sie, an der bestehenden Ordnung beteiligt. Sie benutzen dann eine Sprache, Normen und Werte von denen sie zylglich als das andere Geschlecht ausgeschlossen sind. Als ausgegrenzt oder obwesend zu sein, das macht den spezifischen Ort von Frauen in unserer
Kultur aus. Autorinnen haben zahlreiche Scheibweisen entwickelt um diesen doppelten Ort innerhalb und außerhalb des symbolischen zum Ausdruck zu bringen: J. B. doppelte und vielfach verdoppelte Perspektiven, die Anwendung bestehender Genremuster und ihre gleichzeitige Zerstörung Bescheibungen von innen und außen zugleich.

Weigel is not concerned with defining women's literature as genre or as phenomenon, or in establishing its essence. She points out, that as soon as writing by women is discussed one starts to question what is special about women's literature or what is different about this literature which she argues makes it equally controlling normative, as well as 'festschreibend' and 'ausgrenzend' in its relationship to the literary phenomenon, to which it relates. Instead, she examines the historical conditions of the genesis of the term 'women's literature', i.e. she views women's literature as discursive practice, since the introduction of this term in the mid - seventies marks a break in the existing literary practice as well as having wide - reaching consequences for the literary praxis of women and the reading of their texts.

She, therefore does not want to give a criteria catalog for female literary production, but a historical description of
1) the situation from which, 'women's literature' emerged as lack and as programme, and

2) the literature of women in the course of this situation and since the introduction of 'women's literature', wherein she does not see the present literature by women as a unity or continuous development but rather as a series of discontinuous practices, which overlap and sometimes touch upon, which however also ignore or exclude other developments of the literary discourse. 27

According to Weigel it is less the contents as the "Art und Weise wie Haushofer, Bachmann und Zürn (women writers of the 70s) beispielweise mit dem weiblichen verfahren", which lead to the fact that their literature remained without any connection to the developing women's movement in the same years.

She sees the concept of 'Frauenliteratur' in the German context as arising out of the 'Ungleichzeitigkeit' between the "bedentungskonstitutierende Differenz zwischen der Schreibweise dem literarischen Subjekt Entwurf und den Bezügen zum symbolishchen und Imaginären in this literature on the one hand and the mechanisms of the feminist discourse on the other. For these writers then, this situation meant an isolation difficult to imagine which was responsible to a large extent for their individually differing biographical failure. 28
Weigel points out that the reception of these texts was obstructed not only through the prejudice of the mostly masculine literary critics but also through the discourse of the women's movement. Instead of criticising the Patriarchat, these women writers deal with the 'place' (Ort) of the female in the symbolic and in the Imaginary and describe the destructive structure of the masculine order as they are inscribed on the body, in the thoughts and into the dreams of women. Especially the fact that the woman does not figure as the theme, marks the basic difference with the emancipation discourse - Weigel quotes Bachmann's answer in a 1971 interview as exemplary.29 Thus, she sees certain similarities on analysing the contents and reception of Bachmann's "Malina" and "Fall Franza", Unica Zürns text "Dunkler Frühling" Caroline Muhr's "Depressionen. Tagebuch einer Krankheit", Marlen Haushofer's "Die Wand" and "Die Mansard":

Alle diese Texte handeln nicht von Aufbrüchen sie zeichnen keine Geschichte die sich als Emanzipationsentwicklung lesen ließe und sie entwerfen nicht das Bild eines autonomem weiblichen Subjekts. In Gegenteil: Sie handeln vielmehr von Schädigungen, Krankungen und Verunsicherungen ihrer Figuren oder Erzählerinnen. Es sind Texte, die nicht dem Erzählmodus realistischer Beschreibungs - literatur folgen,
In Haushofer's novel "Die Wand" for e.g. the first person narrator finds herself as the only survivor behind a wall which separates her from the outer, which no longer has human life. Her attempt to organise a new life with some animals implies a 'Rückblick' to the woman which she once was and the erasing off of her earlier female identity, in that she builds a new relationship with herself and with nature. A Leitmotif of her reflections represents the discrepancy between female experience and the order and rationality of the male dominated existence.

Weigal sees the outline of the novel as provoking a questioning of the total symbolic order, as the place, (Ort) which can also be considered to be the Obverse (Kehrseite) of culture from which, as developed later by Wolf, women write.31

Weigel points out that the image of the wall is used in other texts by women as well. For example in Bachmann's "Malina", Doris Lessing's "Memoiren einer Überlebenden" and Jutta Heinrich's "Das Geschlecht der Gedanken".
All these texts, she points out were received with ignorance, rejection, lack of understanding or with discriminating judgments, in which they were characterised as female neurotic. She elaborates:

Für die rationalitätskritischen und psychoanalytischen Aspekte dieser Texte gab es im deutschsprachigen Raum (noch) keinen diskursiven Zusammenhang. Sie konzentrieren sich auf die Thematisierung der psychischen Verstrickungen von Frauen in den Konzepten und Mythen von 'Weiblichkeit und weiblicher Sexualität, in dem sie eine Durchquerung der darin eingeschriebenen Träume, Sehnsüchte, Schädigungen und Kränkungen beschreiben.32

Whereas Weigel's concern is the place (Ort) from which women writers write, Barbara Becker - Cantarino represents another important strand of feminist literary criticism in the German speaking countries, which pleads for a theory and methodology of literary criticism which takes the social history of women and literature into account rather than a literary history of women writers.

For Becker - Cantarino, too, it is the dilemma of the women writers of the Seventies and their concern with the question of language and femaleness, as well as their search for their own language which affords the starting
point of there her concern. She quotes Christa Reinig's observation that: "Literatur ist ein hartes Männersgeschäft von dreitausend Jahren her: Das muß jede Autorin erfahren wenn sie das Wort 'Ich' gebraucht". Reinig's novel 'Entmannung' thus represents the attempt to consciously free itself from the overwhelming three thousand year old male tradition, through the 'entmannen' of the figure Dr. Kyra and creates the prerequisites for the female 'I' to be able to articulate itself. Becker-Cantarino reiterates that this search for their own language which is blocked out by the dominant (male) tradition has been understood by all women writers of the new literature of women. She draws attention to the history of this 'Unmündigkeit' vis-a-vis the established literature - its genres, aesthetic demands, its images, wherein women who wrote were devalued with names such as 'Dilettantin' from Goethe, "Schriftstellernde Dame" by Schiller, Goethe's 'Männin oder Amazone', or 'Celebritäten, deren Lorbeeren im Schatten der Schürze gewachsen sind', from Prutz, 1862. She sees this conflict between the established literature; which is characterised by the dominant masculine norms and the female "I" without tradition as being a conflict which is also an existential one between man as subject and the woman as Other, the Second Sex (Simone de Beauvoir) a conflict she feels which has been articulated only recently by women themselves and which has hardly been perceived by literary history. She points out that though there have been a lot of literary
histories which mention individual women compensatorily, they are still limited to their gender roles: Gottschedin, for e.g. as help mate of her husband, Sophie La Roche as friend or former finance of Wieland etc. Even the few "Neuwertungen" or "Vorarbeiten," on women before 1800, which appeared in the first two decades of this century are not or are hardly taken into account: for example - Ludwig Geiger's: "Therese Huber" (1901) or Christine Touaillon's: "Der deutsche Frauenroman des 18. Jahrhunderts" (1919), Adan Blanch Roe's. "Anna Owena Hoyers, A poetess of the seventeenth century" (1915), Edith Krull's "Wirken der Frau in frühen deutschen Zeitschriftenwesen" (1939), the new material in these studies was hardly considered, nor notice taken of them.

Instead, she writes despite publications in the seventies on social histories of German literature, male critics hardly touch upon the topic 'Women and Literature' or they offer vague and false conceptualisations:

"In der deutschen Literatur setzt die geistige Emanzipation der Frau mit der Romantik ein. An den Frauen der Schlegel Brüder beginnt sich diese literarische Selbstbesinnung in musterverhafterweise abzuzeichnen ......" She sees the detailed "Frauenliteratur Geschichte Schreibende Frauen von Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart" (1985) however as presenting a new concept.34

For Becker-Cantarino the problematic as has been

94
articulated by Christa Reining, is one which is also the central dilemma of science, the social sciences as well as the Humanities: "Die Menschheit .... das sind die Väter und Söhne Nichts weiter." Thus she reiterates that the myth of the male as the culture creating sex, as the measure of all things exists still, even though it is strongly debated, a myth which she argues has had a long tradition. Tracing the roots and history of it to the 18th century when for the first time literature by women was published on a wide scale she shows how the reinforcement of this myth took place by falling back on an unfailing tradition: the story of creation. Becker Cantarino quotes how this appeared in the women magazine "Magazin für Frauenzimmer", in 1777-78 in Halle as an article "Über die Entstehung des schönen Geschlechts, den Charakter and die Unentbehrlichkeit desselben."

"Einsam und tiefsinng ging der erste Mensch durch die erstgeschafftenen Fluren und Wälder der geselligen Schöpfung, staunte über die großen Wanderwerke .... Aber verlassen sah er sich selbst .... Gleich einem Engel nahte sich zu ihm die Gestalt, die er so lange vermißt hatte, sie schlang sich um seinen Hals und schmiegte sich an seine Hüfte .... Ihr Wille war der seinige, und die ganze Schöpfung war Harmonie .... Willig gab er ihrer ausschweifenden Lüsterheit nach und beide fanden ihr Verderben. So entstand Vergnügen und Schmerz durch die
einschmeichelnden Reize dieser unwiderstehlichen Göttin, und so entstand durch ihre schönen Nachfolgerinnen auf dem großen Schauspiel der Welt, der sonderbare Kontrast von Glück und Unglück, von Himmel und Hölle. Jener große Tag, von der festlichste Tag in der ganze Schöpfung, an welchem die ersten Augen einen andern begegneten, gründete das Reich und die Herrschaft der schönen Geschlechts..... Männer stehen am Ruder des Staates, besorgen Ämter und Gewerbe und stehen als Hausväter an der Spitze ihrer Familien, gleich als wenn sie allein alles regierten und jeder wird von seiner zweiten Hälfte modifiziert und alles bekommt hiernach seine Wendung .... Doch nur den männlichen Charakter biegsamer zu machen, gab die Natur dem Manne das Weib, nicht aber, ihn einzuschmelzen. Dies zu verhüten, gab sie ihm größere Stärke der Vernunft ..... Sanftmut, Bescheidenheit, Reinlichkeit sind die vornehmensten Tugenden des schönen Geschlechts, weil sich mit diesen die Keuschheit von selbst verbindet, die sie liebenswürdig macht. 35

This modernised version of the story of creation, she points out has all the cliches of the difference in existence of the man and the woman: The man is the the ruder of the state, looks after offices and business, as 'Hausvater' he stands at the head of the family, has the greater strength of Reason, has been seduced by the woman, with the woman as the second rated half. Thus, a strict sexual division with firmly laid down gender characteristics and an androcentric world view in which the man understands
himself as centre of the world and conceives of ite thus, is reflected in the enlightened version of the story of creation.

She reiterates that myths are tenacious, especially in literary histories, so that the neglect of literature by women and its exclusion from the official literary science in theory and research has had wide ranging consequences. Many texts by women to not exist any more or are no longer traceable. The majority of the women writers are known only by name, their texts almost unknown or they have been judged or condemned by a pre-existing image, especially that of a learned or writing woman, with the literary cannon and literary history being established and theorised by men alone, according to their interests. As a consequence, she concludes, the subject 'Woman and Literature' has been widely neglected and repressed and secondly even when handled, has been represented in a distorted way from a purely male perspective and 'Erkenntnisinteresse'.

Becker - Cantarino analyses Hans Mayer's work "Außenseiter" as the first attempt to emerge out of this perspective which suppresses all else, in order to consider marginal figures or Outsiders. Though "Außenseiter" is not feminist literary criticism it is one which emerges from the premise in the 70s of the failed bourgeois Englishement as seen in the literature of the 18th century according to
which three groups of outsiders were excluded from the attempt to concretise politically and through the law, the highly charged emotions of Fraternity: Women, Jews and Homosexuals. To these three groups she writes Mayer dedicates his work, which is concentrated on literary types who he sees as reflecting the historical reality. Thus, Mayer is especially interested in the minorities in women, represented by the two Old Testament figures Judith and Dalila.

She takes issue with his work on the grounds that firstly, it reduces women uncritically and in a biased manner to the two myths of Judith and Dalila. Thus Mayer himself remains caught in the reductive male literary tradition, which he himself recognizes as being reductive, and which can and will only understand women as myths or stereotypes.

Secondly, Mayer goes in the same breath from the fictional existence of the figures to the socio-historical reality or to an ideological interpretation. So women's images and women's lives are simply lined up associatively together instead of being analysed and related to each other. Becker - Cantarínó comments that women appear as vague but somehow monstrous Outsiders, as "Ausgeburt (en) eihen männlichen Kastrationsangst." Thus, she concludes, women still remain as a collection of superfluous marginal comments to his own, that is to the male structured literary project.
To Mayer's handling of the Outsider, Becker - Cantarino counterposes feminist literary history which deals with the question of Outsider much more self critically and concerns itself with the inner perspective of the other. Thus Renate Möhrmann's work "Die andere Frau Emanzipations ansätze deutscher Schriftstellerinnen im Vorfeld der Achtundvierziger Revolution" (Stuttgart, 1977) for example throws light on the lack of history of women critically, Möhrmann herself having included the Otherness of the historical and literary situation of women writers in her work.

Besides Möhrmann's work Silvia Bovenschen's "Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit. Exemplacische Untersuchungen zu Kulturegeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentations formen des Weiblichen" (1979) offers a critical view of the mutually restrictive role of women's images in literature and women writers of the 18th century. as the central theme of her work. Bovenschen deals critically with how femaleness is filled up with differing interpretative patterns and how in the 18th century the type of the 'gelehrten Frau' gives way to that of the 'sentimentalen Frau'.

Bovenschen sees the representation of the female mainly manifested in two ways: firstly in the Reduction theories and secondly the Complementary theories (of Male cultural historians). In the Reduction theories, the female is limited to certain demarcating themes and areas (women
topics and the women's question for e.g.) and in the Complementary theories the female is understood as compensatory to the male, (here gender specific characteristics are attributed to the female, which are based on a religious, moral or aesthetically established gender ontology).

Bovenschen sees incorporated in both these representation forms (the reductive and the compensatory) "das gleichbleibende Bedürfnis der Männer, dem weiblichen (die eigenen) Sehnsüchte und Bedrohungen einzuschreiben und gleichzeitig die realen Frauen in ihren halbkolonialen Status (Bloch) zu belassen."

As opposed to this, feminist literary criticism in Germany in the last few years, Becker-Cantarino comments, has concerned itself with images, ascriptions and projections. It has produced critical analyses on literary images of women, to approach women and femaleness, to trace the sketches of female heroes and female writing or to discover the aesthetic function of the feminine for e.g. "Schlegel's Lucinde." It is thus not just concerned with an ideological critique or reductions, distortions and misogynous representations of women in the texts (of mostly male writers), which was also an important aspect, she feels but only as an exit point which has led to new critical reading and understanding of texts of the literary cannon as well as of other lesser known texts of women.
Coming to recent feminist literary theory, Becker - Cantarino explains that it is the question of femaleness and writing which has of late been focused on: the (often uncritical and superficial) imitation but also the well thought out reception and critical discussion through Post structuralism, with the French feminists, especially Irigary, Cixous and Kristeva which has also begun in Germany. She points out that the essays on feminist literary criticism and the literary cannon, cultural history of women, the ways of writing of women and feminist theory in the volume, 'The New Feminist Criticism'. impressively cover the different positions and processes of the feminist literary criticism, which orients itself on the one hand on texts by women, on the (social) historical place of women, on the historical and philosophical category of gender and on the other, attempt to go over the 'place' (Ort) of the 'Weiblichen' and constitution of femaleness (Weiblichkeit) beyond Positivism, beyond positivistic statements in the literary, philosophical and psychoanalytical discourse to new writings in its own discourses.

She raises the question of how this literary criticism would deal with the texts and written evidence of (and over) women from historical periods which lie hundreds of years back since they are chronologically very far from the material on which the methodical and theoretical positions of literary criticism have been based and one has
to deal with totally different sorts of texts. She feels the distortions which could result from an ahistorical and anachronistic analysis cannot be denied. Even more questionable here is the discourse which professes to belong beyond Positivism and positivistic statements. Her conclusion therefore is that feminist literary criticism given its new way of seeing and analysing must concern itself with the question and search for women and their historical 'place' (and not with the rewriting of femaleness in another language). She reiterates that securing the signs and the reading of these signs is necessary in order to change the facelessness and lack of history of women in (German) and lack of history of women in literature in the presence of women.37

If the recent dominant strand of Western feminist literary criticism in general and that in Germany in particular as pointed out by Becker - Cantarino has increasingly become concerned with femaleness and writing and an approach based on Poststructuralism and the French theoreticians Irigary Cixous and Kristeva, Susie Tharu and K Lalita in India would like to approach the question of women's writing differently by questioning the development of feminist literary criticism as a discipline and how its four major concerns namely: the idea of 'loss' and 'recovery', the notion of 'release' or 'escape' the concept of 'experience' and therefore of 'female nature' itself, are inadequate for the study or reading of women's literature in
India. In the process they take issue with Western feminism itself and its limitations, both of restricting itself to just gender antagonisms as well as with respect to other societies and social formations, where the question of gender has been interconnected with those of caste, class, religion, colonialism and imperialism, as already discussed in the first chapter.

They point out that feminist criticism has not merely developed a methodology to study a phenomenon that actually exists: women’s writing, it has actually shaped a new discipline and in the process created as the object of its study a new field: women’s writing. They reiterate that by studying what women have written in the past as women’s writing, by charting it as an area of study and sculpting it into a tradition, women take on a significance that is a contemporary invention. Thus, "gynocritics" as a discipline, developed in the late seventies by the American feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter, "has designated its archives, forged its tools, asserted its authority and made its political alignments".

Tharu and Lalita by their critique of the major assumptions and conceptualisations of such a discipline and its understanding of women’s real experiences and of female nature itself, point out its inadequacies for the study of women’s writing in India, despite the fact that its self-proclaimed international scope, "the increasing self
consciousness among Western liberals about classes, the wild celebration of pluralism that Post modernism decries and the growing multinationalist scope of industry and commerce may have opened up a space for other cultures". 40

Making a critique of the concept of 'loss' and 'exclusion' for example on the grounds that they help contemporary criticism set up the present as norm to measure the past besides universalizing Western feminism's concerns to encompass the world, they would also like to question the role of the (male) library institutions to which they are supposed to be lost, a role which involves "providing Post Enlightenment Western Society in general and the nation in particular with its ethical capital".

Thus, they contend that the feminist act of 'recovery' even as it establishes historical legitimacy for women's writing "would consolidate the hold of a (liberal) humanism and with it the political imperative that under wrote the setting up of literary studies as a major agent of that ideology".

Similarly, they demonstrate how the question of 'release' by "asserting the presence of a repressed female creativity struggling for a release, the reach of Gilbret and Gubar's present day feminist consciousness" as elaborated in their "The Madwoman in the Attic", is extended "to a point where it is naturalized and enshrined as female
nature itself, with release being from 'male houses' and 'male texts' as well as a middle class women's place'. Further, "The Madwoman in the Attic", regards the European middle class women's place as an adequate metaphor for all women/s worlds, with gender subordination defining the entire scope of the woman writer's world, in which as Gilbert and Gubar image it "there appears to be only the fundamental antagonism repeatedly played out in its primal tune: that of a monolithic, unchanging patriarchy, which would seem to have no connections with other hegemonies, say, of class, or race and an equally fixed and resilient female self".41

On the concept of 'experience' too, Tharu and Lalita question the assumption underlying popular reading and literary criticism: that literary texts express the authors experience and by revealing the truth about his or her world provide the reader with access to the universal dimension of human nature. So, by counterposing women's writing which is read by feminist critics as a transparent expression of women's authentic experience to the stereotypes of mainstream literature or 'male literature', expressive realism as theory gets reaffirmed. They point out that though experience did have a critical function especially in the course of consciousness raising, this was lost when it was conflated with the empiricist idea that experience was the source of true knowledge. Tharu and Lalita conclude that it was this conflation and the
consequent valorization of female nature which helped change the women's movement from a politically powerful one into a dominant bourgeois humanist scheme of things. Thus, what were increasingly referred to in universalist and naturalistic terms as women's experiences were endorsed by feminists. Thus, a female tradition was invented, which has to be recovered, with liberal feminists speaking of an essential difference between male and female. Their significations were then set up as a kind of 'covert norm' with some sort of female essence struggling in the work on the woman writer to express itself.

Tharu and Lalita are critical of western feminist criticism's understanding of 'reality' or women's real experiences or 'a real' or authentic female voice in a woman writers work, since it is opposed to or contrasted with 'unreal' or 'unlike' portrayals of women in the work of most male writers 'real' therefore being the truth as it emerges once prejudices and a false consciousness are thrown off. The roots of such an understanding lying in the fact, as already discussed in the first chapter, that the "major contradictions middle-class feminists in the West experienced in the initial stages of the movement were those between the promises of freedom and equality that liberalism held out to them and the social and psychic determinations that limited women's access to these rights." 42

Thus they conclude that though the women's
movement in the West could develop a theoretical and political critique of Patriarchy, the solutions posed by the dominant strand only dealt with the "contradictions principally as women from such social formations experienced them. Other contradictions rooted in Patriarchy as it was historically constituted by class, by colonialism or by caste which shape oppressions of working class women for example in India and determine their selfhood or subjectivity were not taken into consideration besides excluding other histories of power, which influenced gender subordination with the result that the changing reciprocal relationships that determine women's worlds and female subjectivities are not exposed nor is the complicity of white women or middle class women in the structures of domination scrutinised.43

Thus, the many conflicts women faced in their every day lives found expression in a 'fictional' world or a 'real' world, in which an adequate resolution to problems was achieved as middle class women exposed the material and ideological processes that had excluded them from full citizenship in their society and developed strategies to ensure their inclusion: In the process, oppression of class, of imperialism, of race, which for many women, white middle class as well compound and reciprocally constitute those of patriarchy, were glossed over in a narrative logic that focused its attention exclusively on what it defined as
women's concerns. Such narratives then, reiterate Tharu and Lalita by assuming that both author and reader as 'woman' belonged to a social configuration taken as norm, helped in producing and consolidating such a norm. They therefore rightly conclude that "though feminism drew attention in spectacular ways to the subtle strategies of power written into the shaping and differentiation of the feminine in the everyday practices of the family, of education, of the work place, of the law, and of medicine and psychology, by projecting the results of this constructive move as 'true' or 'natural' as essentially female it projects not only present day middle class subjectivities as normatively female but also the problem as they construed it, as the limits of feminism, and their present day concerns as the great female themes." Tharu's and Lalita's premises are borne out when one looks at the social history of women writers and their writing in Germany from the 18th century onwards, where the major problem remains that of gender roles, as opposed to women's writing in India in the same period which was complicated by issues of colonialism, nationalism, caste, class and religion.

As already discussed in the first chapter, towards the end of the 18th century, gender roles had been strictly laid out as 'außen' for the man and 'innen' for the woman, through literary stilisation amongst other ideological constructs in Germany. Becker - Cantarino traces out the
social history of women’s writing in the ‘Neuzeit’ showing how women coped with, as well as questioned these gender roles in the course of their writing.

The 18th century she points out saw a further sentimentalisation and idealisation of the woman as ‘unmündig’ hard working but happy, since economically secure, one who could be dedicated to ‘Kirche’, ’Kindern und Küche’ and who herself wanted this idealisation, suppressing the emancipatory process which had started in the 16th and 17th centuries with the search for their own beliefs and which had progressed in the 18th century with reading and a spiritual education. Thus Becker - Cantarino reiterates that the ‘tüchtige’ und ‘züchtige’ woman was propogated as ‘Wunschbild’ of a small elite group at the beginning of the 18th century, when the social and economic changes as well as the claims of the women of the well to do Bourgeoisie to ‘Mündigkeit’ appeared to threaten the patriarchal family and the man.

So women who did write could do so only after fulfilling their function of ‘dienen’ and Gebären (Zuarbeit für den Mann und unterordnung unter dem Mann) (the biological task of reproduction and the social one of socialization).

In Anna Louise Karsch’s writing for example, a simple writer of the people, the effect involved in
fulfilling her role as woman appears through despite the fact that she "beschönhigt, verniedlicht, verkleinert" the daily ugly chores, Ihre Arbeit steht ganz in Dienste der Familie, der Kinder des Mannes.

Others, Anna Ovena Hoyers for example, could follow up her religious and literary interests only as a widow.

Or Gotschedin, who remained the geistige Zuarbeiterin for the literary programmes of her husband who prescribed all her activity from copying to translating, from writing of dramas to essays. Only in her letters was she allowed to decide for herself. Sophie La Roche too, progressed from the 'Bücherhilfe' of her father to 'Anregerin' der gräflichen Gesprächsrunde (her husband chose books and passages which Sophie memorised and brought over as discussion) material, without however, taking part in the discussion or as secretary for the foreign correspondence of her husband. Only when her children had almost grown up and there was a break in the career of her husband did she start with other literary work.

Becker - Cantarino thus observes that it appears as though it was especially those women who were fartherst from (the exclusively female) experience of reproduction who began to articulate in the early 'Neuzeit'. There was however no linear progressive development, but individual sporadic departures and out breaks. Katharin Zell amongst
others, as a childless widow and as religious co-fighter with the reformer and priest, Mathias Zell could fight for the new belief through her literary and practical activity, as also Caritas Pirckheimer, Anna Maria von Schuman, Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg etc.

And with the Prayer book that Moscherosch gave the virgins of the 17th century, together with the spindel the book, the intellectual world and word culture which so far had been almost exclusively a male world slowly came within reach and helped bring about slow changes in the structure of patriarchal society.46

Becker - Cantarino points out that even though the exclusion of women from the important educational institutions like the Academies, Latin schools and Universities principally remained (admission for women was not even discussible) with the access to reading and writing, the possibility of self education, in the family with mostly male relations or alone at least became a reality, this reading - learning - thinking process resulting in deliberations about their own lives for more and more women of the Bourgeoisie. The ability to express for themselves, Becker-Cantarino says, led to the beginnings of a female tradition. The despairing religious songs of Elisabeth of Braun Schweig-Lüneburg and the satorical verses of Anna Ovena Hoyers did not resemble the dominant literary tradition but made the expression of their own desire possible.
For the women of the Aristocracy, it was the comparatively luxurious life, the free time as well as possibilities of participating in the festivities of the country life, Becker - Cantarino argues, that allowed them a small free space for musical literary activity for the singing of Sophie Elisabeth or Kattarina Regina von Greiffenberg, for example.

The literary programme of the Enlightenment had however also started to turn to women, who had begun to influence it, though at first only indirectly as readers, to whose world and taste it was often directed.

Marianne Christiane von Ziegler, Hedwig Zäunermann or the Karschin however grappled consciously with the relationship to the male gender and deliberated over the role of women which had been prescribed to them. It was Sophie La Roche who first outlined a (reconciliatory) female Utopie, "wenn sie ein papiernes Mädchen" mit ihrer Romanheldin erziehen wollte, so ist das ein Angebot an die Leserinnen konkrete Anweisungen folgen, 3 B. in 'Panona für Teutschlands Töchter."47

The end of the 18th century however, and the beginning of the 19th saw many women of the Romantics publishing their novels: Dorothea Veit (1763-1839) published her novel "Florentin" in 1801. Karoline Michaelis (1763-1809), August Wilhelm Schlegel's wife, Manfred
Jurgensen, points out, was the spiritual centre of the Jenaer Romantics circle, other women too succeeding either through their own literary activity or through the social importance of their literary Salon in winning an influence over the cultural life.

Frevert however points out the contradictions in the lives and biographies of these middle class women who resisted the new norms regulating relations between the sexes and the new notions of male and female behaviour like Sophie La Roche for example, though one of the first to publish her literary writing, still saw themselves firstly as wives and mothers, their aim in life being personal happiness rather than disregarding social conventions.

Thus, Caroline Michaelis too, despite her own unconventional life: widowed after four years of marriage, was taken prisoner and rejected by society because of her republican views, inspired Friedrich Schlegel, married August Wilhelm Schlegel, divorcing him later to marry Schelling, twelve years younger, Michaelis, Frevert writes upheld the principles of female duty and utterly condemned those who violated them.

Similarly Dorothea Mendelssohn, who after 26 years of marriage left her husband, got divorced and lived with Friedrich Schlegel unmarried for several years did not in any way attempt to question bourgeois conventions, Schlegel being for her the master whom she idolised, the relationship
involving both self sacrifice and accomodation of him and his needs. Agreeing with the supremacy of man in marriage, she wrote: "women can be made unhappy by the unreasonable rule of men but without this rule they are without exception lost for ever."^49

Benedicine Naubert wrote romantic family novels, which achieved relatively large editions, Karoline von Güderrode as well as Sophie Mereau, and Luise Hensel are known for their lyrical talents, Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859) also grapples with social questions. Amongst later poets is Annette von Droste - Hülshoff (1797-1848).

A progressive treatment of marriage problems appears in the foreground of the works of Ida Hahn-Hahn (1805-1880) and Fanny Lewalds (1811-1889) with the prose of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830-1911) posing an unusual amount of social criticism.

Towards the end of the 19th century, Jurgensen points out, the women's question had however been concretised and stepped into the foreground as a social problem with writers like Clara Viebig (1860-1952) discussing concretely the problems of women's profession, its socio-political consequences and the changes in gender specific roles. Amongst others, Gabriele Reuter (1859-1941) and Helen Böhlau (1859-1940), Reuter's novel "Aus guter Familie (1859) Böhlau's narrative works "Der Rangierbahnhof"
(1896) and "Das Halbtier" (1899) are examples of a Naturalism which turns against not only the predominance of the man, but against the whole bourgeois capitalist system with Bertha von Suthener's novel "Die Waffen neider" being a specifically female confession, for which she received the Nobel (Peace) Prize in 1905.

Though women participated with increasing self awareness in the cultural, political and social life of the Whilhelmian period "literature geschicrtuch läßt sich uon einer gesellschaftspolitischen Eigenständigkeit weiblicher Autoren (noch) nicht sprechen" Jurgensen writes.

After 1945, however, due to the major economic, social, cultural and political changes, already discussed, an increasing number of women writers are to be found in German literature.

Jurgensen comments that with a further questioning of gender roles and cultural stereotypes through consciousness raising in the 60s and 70s together with other processes, a great many women experienced a changed self understanding, such changes then finding reflection in literature, at first as new representations of women by the male writer, and then increasingly as literary self creation by women writers, Bachmann, for example exemplifying the literarisation of the new role for women.50

In India the question of women's writing became a
far more complex one, since caste and religion together with class have played major roles in determining the lives of women and in shaping patriarchal understanding with the body and soul of women becoming the site of struggle for cultural hegemony in the colonial period, a struggle which also involved the selective appropriation of the past.

Tharu and Lalita point out that already in the pre-colonial period and its literature powerful representations of the past had begun to be built, which later shaped the debate on women (their status in India society, their role in the family and in the nation, their education, their freedom, their sexuality) and consequently the debate over women's subjecthood and women's writing in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Since it was important for the Orientalists both Indologists and the Utilitarians "to come to terms with the Orient" that is based on the Orient's special place in Western experience as its cultural Contestant or Other, Indologists, William Jones, Max Muller and Clarissa Bader developed and furthered the thesis of a common Indo European heritage based on the similarities between Sanskrit, the language associated with the Aryans and the classical European languages, thus setting up a distinction between the languages derived from the Aryan and the Non-aryan, i.e. the Dravidian or Semitic languages, so that the India of the Rig Veda became the lost heritage of India.
Bader further argued that Western women had much to learn from ancient Aryan civilisations in which "women were characterised by spiritual and ascetic tenderness, complete abnegation of self interest and unlimited devotion to the family." The contemporary degradation of Indian women, according to her was due to loss of Vedic beliefs and practices and the growth of sensous Vaishnava cults.51

As already discussed, other purposes were also served by this process of translating Vedic patriarchies into contemporary Western ones, such as "the reaffirmation of Western patriarchy's own identity, besides gaining authority by setting itself off against Oriental Patriarch." Representation of various themes also helped to contain the past: "the many histories and many practices of a changing heterogeneous society were contained in a narrative that obscured or subordinated other narratives and other schemes of which there was no dearth" besides being able to extend their aspirations by producing Vedic India.

Tharu and Lalita argue that this reading of Indian history which "regarded the three thousand years that followed the Vedic Golden Age as a continuous process of degeneration" helped ignore the medieval Bhakti movements for example which have a big collection of women's compositions since it was the Aryan man who was set up as the centre piece of Indian civilization, "the Aryan woman, perfect adjunct to the Aryan man", so that all discussions
of women’s writing became "centred on the two hymns of 'Rig Veda' attributed to Ghosa and on the verses that might have been composed by eight other female seers, these being "held up as evidence that women were educated and regarded as capable of highest spiritual and literary achievements."53

In actuality, Tharu and Lalita argue much of women’s writing from the pre-colonial period is either from pre-Aryan or non-Aryan sources, Tamil Sangam poetry of 1st to 3rd century A.D. for example emerging from pre-Aryan agricultural societies and both Buddhist and Bhakti poetry coming from movements that opposed caste discriminations and ritualized Hinduism, dominated by the Brahmin priest, with later secular literature also emerging due to the patronage of Mughal courts. They also draw attention to the fact that in nearly every region women’s songs are also song mainly to celebrate the cycles of the agricultural year and have their sources in local Non-Aryan cultures.

Thus, there were a great many women Bhakti poets Akkamahadevi, Sule Sankavya, Janabai, Rami, Gangasti, Ratanbai, Mirabai, Molla, Bahinabai and Taugonda Venkamamba for example, starting with the Tamil poet Karraikal Ammaiyyar in the 8th century, the bhakti movement spreading later in the 15th and 16th centuries to Rajasthan, Gujarat, Kashmir, Punjab and the Bengal and Assam.

Tharu and Lalita also draw attention to the fact
that since these movements represented a people's revolts against caste domination, these women did not have to seek the institutionalised spaces religion provided to express themselves, and women's poetry moved from the court and temple to open spaces of field, work place and common woman's hearth. And by composing in the regional languages with familiar contexts, imagery and symbolism they broke the literary and religious hold of Sanskrit. Their poetry also reflected their rebellion against the family and household structures, Lal Ded’s songs for example describing "her mother in law's taunts and numbing trivality of domestic chores", "Bahinabai and Mirabai's chaffing at married life" etc.54

Despite the large amount of women's writing from these movements it would be erroneous, Tharu and Lalita warn, to assume that they had radically questioned patriarchal control. In the later phases "associated with Tulsidas and Nanak in the North", both the number of women and the depth of their rejection of patriarchy had been reduced even further as compared to the earlier phase with the movements themselves being "pushed into cults structured along Vedic gods" and losing their critical edge even in the South by the early 17th century.55

In the era of Muslim rule, Tharu and Lalita argue, Gul Badan Begum's history of her brother Humayun's reign as well as the life and work of Zebunissa show that women of
Mughal royal families were educated, knew Persian, could read religious texts and were well versed in the arts.

Others too, Mahlaqa Bai from Hyderabad for example, a much sought after composer and singer as well as patron of arts; Muddupalani who belonged to the Thanjavur Court (1739-63) and wrote "Radhika Santwanam", besides the powerful Maratha queens Tarabai (1676-1767) and Ahalyabai Holkar (1735-1795) and the compositions of tawarifs in this period prove the falsity of the claim of the Western Orientalist Scholarship and the Nationalists in the 19th century that the Muslim era was one of decadence, despotic rule and one of the most oppressive periods in the history of India.56

With the British presence however, establishing itself from the middle of the 17th century onwards, "both agricultural self-sufficiency and what by many accounts was a growing industrial economy was broken down" affecting peasants, textile workers and weavers severely with the women as the "most marginal" being "worst-hit".

Not only was there sale of girls by distressed families to pay taxes as already discussed but in more fundamental ways their traditional role in the economy, in the processing of grain as part of artisan production and the service sector, Nirmala Banerjee shows, "slowly became redundant, while their gains in the modern sector remained negligible". With the old urban Aristocracy also losing
power "as the flourishing textile cities of Dacca, Murshidabad, Surat and Madurai declined in importance", "a whole community of women court artistes, poets, singers, musicians and dancers were displaced", besides being marginalised in their role as "genetic bankers of traditional agriculture", with the shift from growing food to cultivating cash crops resulting in the agricultural knowledge preserved and practised by women dying out from disuse besides the knowledge in areas such as medicine, forest conservation song and story telling. 57

By the beginning of the 19th century, however it was issues of the social reform movement: sati, widowhood and child marriage which were centralised and "fiercely debated", throughout the 19th century since "a traditional religious and hierarchical society was to be transformed and set on the road to modernity, secularism and progress", with women being both focus and principal beneficiaries of these changes.

To this end, earlier efforts centred around abolition of sati and plight of widows, whereas by the 1860s, it was women's education which had become a major issue. 58 Clearly, as already stated, these were problems that affected only a small proportion of upper caste women, the debate for example over women's education in Punjab in the Arya Samaj centring around the question of education of women from the upper strata.
Tharu and Lalita argue that the more radical and subversive women's literature of the time addressed the hidden agendas, the strategic intentions and the interests underlying the issues of the reform movement sati, widowhood or child marriage, which involved "massive ideological reconstructions of patriarchy and gender that underwrote the consolidation of imperial power, these reconstructions often taking place at the interface of patriarchy with class and caste".

They point out how writings by middle class and upper caste women show the change in their lives as imperial rule established itself. Faced with the new demands of their husbands and fathers, who had new hopes for them, they also had new aspirations themselves.

Thus, they reiterates that though issues associated with the reform movement can be clearly seen in their writings, as well as questions raised by an emerging nationalism, they also reveal the "drame of the many and often conflicting ideological transformations that were taking place" in those times displaying the "complex dimensions in which women's subjectivity was being sculpted and the way particular women negotiated redeployed or subverted these blue prints".59

As already mentioned, the reparticularizations of gender in relation to class took place in the colonial
period by the deligitimazation and marginalization of women artists like the Vaishnava poets and singers. Sumanta Banerjee demonstrates how in Bengal the social reform movement deliberately made attempts to break the intercourse between women of all classes to create the respectable middle class housewife.

He points out how within the Vaishnava movements religious norms had allowed widows, married and single women freedom of movements, access to all levels of society and a certain liberty in their relations with men their compositions being realistic, tough, sensous, bawdy, using the familiar domestic terms or forms of address associated with women's dialects. "The purity and domestic virtues of the 'bhadramahila' had to be defined by setting it up as 'antithesis' of the 'unbridled movement', and 'licentiousness' of the Vaishnava poets, a process which led to not only women artists facing penury and being forced into prostitution but the shaping of the new respectable upper caste woman, the elaboration and hence containment of her sexuality".60

The reformulation of the law too played a major role in creating a private world for women. Whereas the new law provided rights to the new Indian subject to transform Indian society by creating a modern or personal possessive individualism, private law was based on principles sharply opposed to those that determined the public sphere, with
public law designed to encourage and safeguard the freedom of the individual and personal law intended to limit the extent of this freedom by prescribing the social and ethical obligations to which the individual was traditionally subject.

More importantly, Tharu and Lalita comment, this formulation of a standardized rigid 'Brahmanical' version of Hindu law took place through the discovery of existing customary and religious norms, so that women's individuality, their citizenship, their freedom were defined and contained in the domain of the personal not only by the law, but also in the agitated debates on other issues that accompanied the setting up of the law.

Thus, texts of this period reflect the complex and problematic connections between the "personal domain, newly constituted in exclusively religious terms", and "caste tradition, Victorian norms of feminine propriety and imperialist ambitions" as can be seen in various autobiographies in Bengali, Marathi and other languages in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries.61

What is reflected in the autobiographies of women like Pandita Ramabai and Lakshmibai Tilak, are thus the politically significant struggle of women caught between the bold public gestures of the Westernized men they were married to, the public promises of freedom held out to them.
and personal lives that were bound again into private spheres.

There are also the life stories of actresses Binodini Dasi and Hamsa Wadkar which reflect their struggles for a living and survival in the male worlds of theatre and cinema, where they were even denied the progress and freedom offered to middle class women. In Maharashtra, there were women like Muktatai, a student of Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule's school, who struggled against caste oppressions as well, rejecting the tendency to go back to the Vedas for answers to all contemporary problems. Tarabai Shinde on the other hand was critical of the westernized men and their aping of the rulers.

Struggles took place on other fronts too. Rassundari Devi, struggled for example to read and write in a village after her children had grown, subverting in the process the reform movement's educational project into a totally different personal one, her desire for literacy being quite different from that postulated by the new individualism. Her need to read, being neither for domesticity nor motherhood, nor for any of the other aims of female education but more a powerful sense of self worth that drives her, as well as the need to extend the spiritual dimensions of her life.

Rokeya Hossain's 'Sultana's Dream' Tharu and Lalita comment is similarly subversive in its questioning of
women's education, the tasks of education being for the rebuilding of the entire world, for which women need the knowledge of modern science and a training in the fearless use of reason. 62

Tharu and Lalita point out other complexities involved for the women of the 19th century. Thus, it was not enough for the woman in the 19th century to be an efficient homemaker and supportive companion. She also had to be one with whom the hero could fall in love, the making of such a woman becoming a major project of the 19th century novelists, with women's writing however once again opposing such projects. Swarnakumari Devi's "Khake" for example subverts the question of finding a fit domestic companion for the new man by turning it into the story of a woman's search for a social mate and Mokshodayani Mukhopadyyaya's poem "Bengali Babu", and Tarabai Shinde's "Stri Purush Tulana", documenting the ways women turned the censure directed against them onto the men, Rokeya Hossain's "Sultana's Dream", described the invention of the 'murdana' and inversion of the 'zenana'. 63

With more and more women learning to read and write they themselves carried on the debates on the issues of the social reform movement by editing and publishing in various journals between 1880 and 1920, though women's issues are supposed to have disappeared form the agenda of public debate int he last decades of the 19th century such
women including Sughra Humayun Mirza, Tallapragada Vishwasundaramma, Nazar Sajjad Hyder, Shymala Devi, Homvati Devi, Sarawati Bai Rajwad and Lalithambika Antharjanam. Analysing the effects of the nationalist struggle on women and their writing in the 20th century, Tharu and Lalita argue that the beginning of the 20th century saw major transformations in cultural practises, because of the Swadeshi movement and its emphasis on 'atmashakti', which had an important impact on women’s writing too, "with its assertion of self help and constructive village work but also the building of character and the reassertion of national dignity, honour and confidence".

Since the Swadeshi movement demanded, Tharu and Lalita point out, supreme sacrifice by the nation, from women more than men, a powerful new female figure could be seen in various texts of the period, one who was both patient and long suffering in accordance with the Victorian ideals of domestic virtue as well as "self confident and autonomous, conscious of her power and of the strength she could find in tradition: a gentle but stern custodian of the nations’s moral life - a figure that dominated the literary imagination for several decades to come".

Thus, Nirupama Devi, herself a widow following percriptions laid down for a Hindu widow’s life, wrote very popular novels whose "heroines were traditional and yet resolute and strong". Others too Mahadevi Verma, Subhadra
Kumari Chauhan etc. create such characters in the first few decades of the 20th century.  

Elaborating on the difference between the normative literature commonly associated with the 19th century social reform movement which dealt with limited set of characters: child widows, victims of sati, wives in purdah etc., and the women's literature of the late 19th century to the early decades of the 20th century, they reiterate that it had totally broken "out of these programmatic moulds and was narrated from new points of view", - "with a many faceted and often contradictory phenomenon emerging not easily held down in a single formulation or an inert sense of period, the spread of women's education and the new self confidence inspired by the new nationalist mood being the reasons behind it". Kashibai Kanitkar's novel "Palkicha Gonda", which is about a state ruled by a wise educated woman, where women are a vital part of the village community, reflects this in ample measure. 

Marathi women writers Indira Sahasrabuddhe, Geeta Sane and Vibhavari Shirurkar however dealt more directly with the contradictions in the promises of freedom and equality held out by the liberal reformers, Indira Sahasrabuddhe's novel "Balutai Bada Ghe", an autobiographical work, tells of how the protagonist's aspirations are crushed by her progressive father, just as
she is deserted by her progressive lover.

Vibhavari Shirurkar raises questions of women's marriage and sexuality outside it, bringing a new image of the single independent working woman into Marathi fiction. 66

Towards the 30s and 40s however, under Gandhi’s leadership though women from all strata and in large numbers participated in the Freedom struggle, Gandian ideology also restricted the scope of their political involvement and growth, with a new ideal taking over in which "women were seen as the ones whose strength lay in their weakness".

Novelists Saratchandra and even Tagore reinforced this ideal by ridiculing educated, westernised women who sought roles outside their homes, especially in politics.

Women's writing in the 20s to the 40s however, Tharu and Lalita reiterate tends to support Partha Chatterjee's argument, as already discussed, of nationalist ideology being formed on a division between material and spiritual life, the home and the world, with the outer associated with male domains allowed to change whereas sanctity of inner was to be preserved by women. The most important task for writers like Nirupama Devi, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Mahadevi Verma, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Dhirubhen Patel, Balamani Amma etc. being the creation of this new resilient self. Whereas earlier writing had
concentrated on the landed aristocracy or the intelligensia in big cities or some times the peasantry, stories by these writers, Tharu and Lalita comment are set in small towns and were about middle class lives. In comparison to earlier works of Tarabai Shinde, Bandaru Achamamba, and Rokeya Hossain, "they appear conservative and restrained confined to spaces that have always been sanctioned to women".

What they do reflect Tharu and Lalita conclude, are "women's unmistakable and moving struggles for dignity and parenthood outside the double edged promises of the Enlightenment and the social reform movement". 67

Clearly, the concerns of a Western feminist literacy criticism in general and of those in the German speaking world in particular differ greatly from the concerns of a theory of women's writing in India as mostly drawn out by the two women literary theoreticians, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita in their comprehensive book "Women writing in India". Thus, whereas westerns feminist literary criticism has mostly concerned itself with aspects of material and ideological reasons for the exclusion of women from literary activity, reasons for biased male criticism of women's writing, the problems involved in women writer's search for language in the 20th century; (and how they have articulated this) as also with Postructuralism and deconstruction in its analysis of feminist literary activity as lying outside of, and subverting the symbolic order, a
theory based on the understanding of Western culture and society being divided into male and female nature and culture. etc., a theory of women's writing in India must on the other hand necessarily take note of the various complexities of caste, religion, colonialism and the nationalist response to it, rather than just gender antagonisms, when it deals with women writers in India through the 19th and 20th centuries.

The following two chapters are an attempt to exemplify this distinction through the two writers: Ingeborg Bachmann (1922-1973) in Austria and Amrita Pritam (1919) in Punjab, by looking into various aspects: of their own lives within the female gender roles; the reception of their work especially the difference between the gender specific criticism of male critics and the feminist criticism; and finally the representation of their gender ideology in their works and theoretical writing with a more detailed analysis of two stories and a novel each; that is Bachmann's "Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha" and "Undine geht" and the novel "Malina" of the "Ways of Dying" cycle and Pritam's "Andhere Ka Kamandal" and "Ganje Ki Kali" as also the novel "Pinjar".