UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN’S WRITING

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this Unit, you will be able to:

- understand the different aspects of, and the conflicts within, the concept of feminism over time.
- trace women’s writing throughout history, and across cultural and geographical boundaries.
- get acquainted with the literary figures associated with the struggle for the acknowledgement and acceptance of women’s writing.

Words in **bold** are explained in the Glossary.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Feminist literary criticism, in reading cultural artefacts from a feminist standpoint, has transformed the study of literary texts. When employed in the context of literature, feminist criticism assesses a text by a female or a male author for its literary value as well as for its representation of women characters.

Across the centuries, women have been the subject of innumerable reconfigurations and with every reinscription comes the necessity of rereading. In the space of the text, woman can be both defamed and defended, and it is here that the most persuasive possibilities can be found for imagining the future of the female subject. (Plain & Sellers 2)

Feminist literary criticism helps reassess existing literary **canons** for the patriarchal ideologies, political beliefs and value systems that they perpetuate,
which more often than not, belong to the European, White man. It has simultaneously also influenced the concomitant aspects of publishing and critical reception with particular focus on the analysis of how the literary techniques employed by women writers are different from the prescriptions of the male canon. The blossoming of feminist theory in the past few years has also led to new developments in the field of Women’s Writing.

Activity 1: Rereading of canonical works is also followed by retellings of such texts. Do you think they justify the representation of women characters?

The roots of the earliest feminist discourse have to be traced in the eighteenth century when Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a work she was vilified by many fellow writers for endeavouring. Inspired by the notions of equality and liberty that the French Revolution emblematized, the work was one of the world’s first sustained feminist arguments and challenged many of the conventional notions of femininity of her time. Wollstonecraft’s emphasis on female education—the kind which enforces solid virtues as against artificial graces—made her one of the earliest proponents of gender equality. However, unlike latter-day feminists, she did not seek freedom for women from the domestic sphere. Wollstonecraft’s efforts were paralleled by Margaret Fuller in the US for she too emphasized on the need to educate women. Unlike Wollstonecraft, however, she did not subscribe to the notion of specific gender roles and sought solidarity between African-Americans and women.

Another founding figure of feminism as we know it today is Virginia Woolf whose ideas continue to influence feminist theorists even today. She was an early proponent of the notion of the ‘androgynous’ creative mind (Fuller too had talked about androgyny but her notion of it was rooted in mysticism unlike Woolf’s). The best artists, believed Woolf, were always a blend of masculine and feminine qualities, or ‘man-womanly’, and ‘woman-manly’, as she called it (Woolf 103). She was also the first theorist who argued in favour of a reading practice that was woman-centric—the kind which would allow women to read as women without having to employ patriarchal yardsticks of aesthetics and values.

1.2 THE WAVES OF FEMINISM: AN OVERVIEW

The history of feminism, which usually begins with the writings of Wollstonecraft, followed by Fuller and Woolf, has usually been divided into three waves. The first wave, which lasted from the 1830s to the 1920s, was characterized by the suffragette movement dedicated to achieving equality for women in the West. The women activists of the time also expressed their concern for such issues as property rights and the opposition to chattel marriage. An important strand of first-wave feminism was Evangelical Feminism, which sought to uplift those who were considered morally ‘fallen’. Significant feminist works of literature written during the first-wave included Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and Henrick Ibsen’s *The Doll’s House*, each of which deal with the restrictive and oppressive roles of women in Victorian society. The second wave of feminism roughly began in the year 1963 with the arrival of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. The mantra of this wave was that ‘the personal is the political’, i.e., the issues that women were dealing with on the personal front were actually political and systemic. Authors like Doris
Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble, Angela Carter and Muriel Spark appeared on the literary scene, rendering the private and social lives of women in vivid detail. They depicted liberated women in their works, who could carve their own niche both in their personal and professional lives. Third-wave feminism began in the 1990s and continues to the present times. This wave was rooted in the works of such theorists as Luce Irigaray, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Judith Butler. Largely influenced by a post-structuralist view of both gender and sexuality, third wave feminism also challenges what it perceives as the failures of the previous wave. Gender was no longer a rigid or stable category, but a shifting, contingent, negotiable and fluid entity.

Various analytical categories such as class, caste, race, ethnicity, were added to the study of feminism. In a paradigmatic shift in feminist criticism, third-wave feminism also responds to the breakdown of the category of ‘women’ by emphasizing on individual narratives of different women rather than the canonical narratives of the middle-class, White women. Authors such as Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson, Joyce Carol Oates, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Zadie Smith became the popular women writers of the third wave. Recent women’s writing has attempted to theorize the act of narration too. Whose voice narrates a story, whose voice is paid attention to, who holds authority over a narrative, who represents himself/herself and who is represented by another person, have all become significant points of entry into works of literature. Likewise, researchers who study feminism have also made sure that one of their major concerns is their own position in relation to the population they are studying.

Many twenty-first century critics, however, have levelled their criticism against the emphasis on individuality by post-feminists stating that if the personal is truly the political, then a focus only on the individual, defeats what is actually a collective program. For these critics, an over-emphasis on difference impedes the development of the feminist movement. In emphasizing difference, feminists also run the risk of focussing on certain differences (such as race, caste) more than others (such as workplace).

Activity 2: ‘Anti-essentialism’ is a major force in driving the different waves of feminism. What are some of the problems concerning women in the current times? Are they different from those faced by women of previous generations?

1.3 WOMEN’S WRITING: TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT

As a social constructionist view of gender began to take shape—the seeds of which were sown in the first wave, and sex and gender were distinguished between, feminists began to look at and identify the psychological, socio-cultural and political implications of gender norms. Gerda Lerner aptly summarizes this when she says: “Women writers, as women, negotiate with divided loyalties and doubled consciousnesses, both within and without a social and cultural agreement” (Duplessis 40). The tendency to look at certain behaviours and actions as being typical to a particular gender resulted in women writers being in a double bind—they were expected to limit their writings to those areas of which they had first-
hand experience (i.e. the domestic sphere) but in a rather clever distortion of reason, when they would stick to conventionally ‘feminine’ topics, they were accused of being self-serving and parochial. As the prolific author Margaret Atwood had said “when a man writes about things like doing the dishes, it’s realism; when a woman does, it’s an unfortunate feminine genetic limitation” (Nischik 176). To their nineteenth-century peers, women writers were women before and writers later. A woman writer had to often resort to using a male nom de plume if they wished to be assessed solely for the uniqueness of their writing and not for writing well only when compared to the women writers of her time. The awareness that their literary brilliance would be neglected, owing to the many stereotypes that are attached to their gender, served as a perpetual source of vexation to women writers.

Women writers had a strong role to play in undoing these implications. In fact, the uptake of women’s writing as a distinctive literary culture, since the last few decades, has been manifold. This trend has given rise to a whole set of literary studies which specifically cater to women’s texts. However, there are certain critics who oppose the employment of the term ‘women’s writing’ stating that it privileges an author’s gender over her literary productions, almost suggesting that the privilege is a compensation for the wrongs they have suffered. Nevertheless, traditionally marginalized by men, women, in their capacity as writers, have challenged not only the conventional structures of power and dominance, but also the notions of what comprises literature. Their employment of unconventional literary modes, narrative techniques, diction and style has led to the creation of the separate genre of ‘women’s writing’ that occupies a unique position when compared to men’s writings. The written word inevitably then, became a means to empower women. One of the most popular themes of women’s writing is its avowal to express and value women’s own views about themselves as well as the world around them. Over the years, women’s writing has bravely progressed towards an exploration of a woman’s identity. In the women writers’ refutation of a masculine literary tradition, they have steadily moved towards a literature that is anchored within the ‘inner space,’ and “a room of one’s own” was a significant symbol of the same.

1.3.1 Women’s Writing: Locating the Genre

If we examine the major writers of nineteenth century England, we see that a host of women writers like Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Kate Chopin, Elizabeth Gaskell, Emily Brontë and Maria Edgeworth, among others have written works which were groundbreaking for the age in which they were written. These works, for the past few decades, are being looked at as presaging the issues and themes of latter-day feminist enquiry. Even more revolutionary were the works of the American novelists of about the same time such as Louisa May Allcot, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Rebecca Harding Davis and Winifred Holtby. In their seminal study on nineteenth century women novelists, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state that the major thematic concern of the nineteenth century was “the woman’s quest for self-definition” (76).

At the turn of the twentieth century, women writers who wrote novels and prose pieces adopted new literary approaches and experimented with narrative techniques and styles. Disjointed, non-linear narratives marked by analepsis
and prolepsis, explicitly addressed those issues which were earlier swept under the carpet such as women’s sexual desires, sexual violence, same-sex desire and the woman’s psychology. Writers began to explore how unfulfilling the traditional roles of a daughter, wife and mother can be and how romantic engagements and marriage cannot be a woman’s only dream. According to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, modern women writers have been “especially interested in the woman alone. The lovers and husbands of their heroines clearly play a secondary role, not in the trivialized mode of narcissistic fantasies or underdeveloped characters (to the contrary, these men are finely delineated) but as particular figures among many in the difficult lives of struggling women” (272). Women poets of the time, like their prosodic counterparts, also embraced a new literary mode, charging their works with unique stylistic and structural characteristics, using the poem’s physical structure as a means to challenge the traditional literary forms. Poets like Carol Rumens and Anna Wickham in England and Marianne Moore and Hilda Doolittle in America have posed a veritable challenge to mainstream literary traditions. Even so, they were treading on thin ice here because while writing in as distinct a manner as they could, they also had to carefully avoid being ‘personal’ rather than universal because they had to rely on mainstream literary circles for getting published and being held in esteem. However, as the times progressed, women writers, who were financially independent, started their own printing presses, journals and magazines.

The twentieth century also witnessed a massive output of African-American literature. African-American writers’ texts were characterized by different issues than those of the White writers of the period. Authors like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and Zora Neale Hurston produced works that focussed on issues of racial injustice, rigid standards of beauty, desire, motherhood, interpersonal relationships, misogyny, gender roles, violence, incest, community and society and God. These stalwarts of Black women’s writing inspired a whole generation of young novelists such as Toni Cade Bambara and Gloria Naylor. Black Feminism insisted on the need to include the analytical category of race in feminist arguments. Thinkers like Patricia Hill Collins, Hortense Spillers and Hazel Carby were the pioneers of Black feminist thought. Postcolonial feminism, which emerged soon after, went a step forward and extended the concerns of Black feminists to the issues faced by the Chicano and Asian American women as well as the women of other cultures and nations.

Activity 3: Women writers in the nineteenth century often resorted to using pseudonyms or anonymity to avoid the label of a “woman writer” and to have a wider readership. Do you think the emergence of Women’s Writing as a distinct genre hinders its reception in the zone of ‘mainstream’ literature and renders women’s writings as belonging to the ‘other’?

1.3.2 Perspectives in Feminist Thought

Since the 1970s and 1980s there has been seen a surge of critical works that analyze women’s writings in terms of the growing body of feminist thought. French feminism, in particular, which evolved during the 1970s, with the works of Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, has extensively explored female subjectivity. Drawing upon psychoanalysis, Cixous challenged the tendency towards ‘phallogocentrism’ in literature and instead suggested how...
the only way forward was to overthrow the hierarchies of language prevalent in an androcentric society. She conceptualized men women as A and B, or as independent entities, rather than as A and A–. Women, would no longer be the ‘other’ of men. Kristeva, likewise, suggested that since women could not become an active part of the ‘symbolic order’, their writings expressed themselves in the form of poetic language which she referred to as ‘genotexts’ (McCance 148), for they evade the norms of language. The realization that language is an instrument of oppression in the hands of patriarchy was one of the major developments in feminist thought in the 1980s.

Language has been credited by many feminists as possessing a power which allows it to control social relations in ways we are not privy to, disguising patriarchal ideologies in misleading rhetoric. Dale Spender in her work *Man Made Language* meditated at length on how unlike the declarative and assertive manner of men’s writing, women’s writing was almost always deferential and apologetic in its tone. Since then, language has been credited by many feminists as possessing a power which allows it to control social relations in ways we are not privy to. Spender goes on to also highlight how the connotations of masculine forms of words tend to be more positive when compared with their feminine counterparts and she states the example of the master-mistress word pair to emphasize the same. (Kate McKluskie 51)

With language inevitably skewed in the favour of men, the obvious task before women writers was to develop a language that was “their own”. Writers of the last three decades of the twentieth century like Jeanette Winterson, Angela Carter, Fay Weldon and Kathy Acker, among others, reflect what Helene Cixous described as the “écriture feminine” in *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Their writings reflect a female consciousness which bring into being styles, themes, diction and tropes intrinsically distinct from male writers. Use of mystic language, puns, word play, and even visual alterations such as hyphens and parentheses became common. Their characters were more fluid and difficult to categorize. Jeanette Winterson, for example, created characters marked by a certain gender fluidity; Angela Carter tried to subvert patriarchy through the use of magical realism and through showing absent father figures and focussing on mother-daughter relationships. In fact, the emphasis on gender fluidity in the works of these writers and critics set the stage for the gender-queer theories of the twenty-first century.

Activity 4: Can you think of some other ways of using language, employed by women writers, to portray the oppression and trauma of women characters?

Another seminal work of the 1970s was *A Literature of Their Own* by Elaine Showalter. Showalter effectively divided the literary culture of the feminist movement into three phases, that is, the feminine, the feminist, and the female apart from charting the repetitive issues, tropes, symbols and style in women’s writing. She also coined the term ‘gynocriticism’ to underline the employment of a feminist framework for the analysis of women’s writing. Certain other works like Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* have influenced literature written by women across the world. The task of feminist literary criticism is then to call
into question the legitimacy of masculine literary aesthetics and values that have been assimilated by both male and female writers. In the words of Annette Kolodny’s, it pays “attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed (or encoded) within our literary inheritance: the consequences of that encoding for women— as characters, as readers, and as writers” (Cho 19) Most feminists would agree with the fact that literature serves as an important instrument for the perpetuation of unequal power relations in a society. By popularizing and reinforcing stereotypical portraits of women which usually fall into two categories—that of the angelic mother and the predatory seductress—literary texts naturalize these roles making them acceptable and worthy for girls who are exposed to such texts.

Activity 5: Can you trace some examples of the portrayal of the power of women and the mechanisms for ‘controlling’ them?

Some of the most incisive criticism of feminists has been directed at the way the female body is perceived, specifically at the notions of what an ideal ‘feminine’ body should look like, what are fitting feminine behaviours which the body must be trained to practice and also at her reproductive biology. In fact, it is the repeated performance of certain roles prescribed by a culture-specific script that makes a body gendered—an idea explored at length by Judith Butler. Consequently, a lot of research has been done by feminist thinkers in the field of the ‘ethics of embodiment’. Failure to embody a certain gender, class, race or other social constructs is thus seen in most cases as a transgression which ultimately leads to them being marked for oppression and/or ostracism. One such philosopher, Gail Weiss points to specific feminist philosophers, critical race scholars, and disability theorists who … illustrate, and ultimately combat, the insidious ways in which sexism, racism, and “compulsory able-bodiedness” (McRuer 2006), impoverish the lived experience of both oppressors and the oppressed, largely by predetermining the meaning of their bodily interactions in accordance with institutionalized cultural expectations and norms. (77)

1.4 WOMEN’S WRITING: THE INDIAN CONTEXT

With cultural norms becoming an important concern within feminist enquiry, the need for feminist and cultural theories, that could cater to the needs of specific groups of women (intersectional feminism) such as Blacks, Indians, lower-class women etc., was deeply felt. To steer clear of essentialism, and of the oversimplification of the experiences of women, became the major focus. The influence of Western feminist philosophy has been unmissable in the way Indian feminism has taken shape but the critical theories of the first-world countries are absolutely divorced from the circumstances of women who are operating at the grassroots. The whole idea behind ‘feminism without borders’ is to widen the scope of feminism and to not privilege feminist theories about and by White, middle class women. It thus emphasizes on the need to maintain cultural-specificity when talking about women’s experiences.

To state an example, in nineteenth century Britain and America, the problems addressed by feminists included the right to vote, to be free from wearing corsets, to be allowed to hold meaningful occupations outside of the home etc. At about
the same time in India, feminism encompassed such causes as the abolition of the practice of sati, child marriage, female infanticide, restrictions on female education, inheritance laws, etc. Even then, the reformatory efforts were largely limited to upper class, and mostly Brahminical women. It was only later that issues like women’s health, domestic abuse, wage legislation, the rights of the tribal and the Dalit women were acknowledged. Such wide-spread disparity in the issues being addressed speaks volumes about the need for culture-specific feminism and women’s writing. Hence, the syllabus of this paper has been designed in a manner that takes into account the various perspectives of women’s writing to highlight the richness and diversity of women’s voices across temporal and spatial boundaries. It brings together a spectrum of texts by and about women.

The world of literature in the Indian subcontinent was for long marked by an overpowering presence of male writers with women appearing on the scene late, and garnering popularity and critical acclaim even later. When observed under a feminist stance, the trope of having a voice and being listened to generally serves as a symbol of agency, a trait which has originally been understood as a masculine attribute. Most contemporary Indian women writers have emphasized on the woman as an individual in her own stead, attempting to give their women characters the freedom of self-definition, or in some cases, self-redefinition.

In the latter half of the twentieth century writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Githa Hariharan, among others, became popular for exploring middle class women’s quest for fulfilment. But there were authors like Ismat Chughtai, Amrita Pritam, Krishna Sobti, Gaura Pant, Rashid Jahan who had dealt with women’s issues with unconventionality and rigour in pre-Independent India as well. The Bhakti tradition has also been an inalienable strand of India’s religious and literary tapestry and the writings of women Bhakti poets like Akka Mahadevi, Andal, Jana Bai, Mira Bai, Lal Ded, and Bahina Bai can be seen as the earliest manifestations of autonomy and liberty in the face of the arbitrary and unbridled religious authority of the high-caste Brahmin male.

Active resistance, as opposed to passively accepting oppression, has become one of the major hallmarks of modern Indian women’s writing. They have reiterated through their works the importance of bringing ‘women’ into the category of ‘human’. Authors like Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy have managed to bridge the gap between activism and the academy and have employed their works of fiction to voice their concerns about marginalized communities such as women, Dalits, transgenders, tribals and have also levelled their strident criticism against bureaucrats, policy makers, police officers and upper caste men.

Modern-day critic-writers like Nivedita Menon and Namita Gokhale have dealt with other issues such as the threat that caste politics pose to women empowerment, sexual harassment in the workplace, politicization within households, intersectionality and queer identities. Activist-writers like Laxmi Narayan Tripathi (the first transgender to represent his/her community at the United Nations Organization) and Aka Revathi (the first transgender person to write an autobiography) have also contributed to the amelioration of the circumstances and status of gender-queer persons in India. However, queer theory emerged in the West in the 1990s and most of what is identified as queer theory
in India today is an interpretation of the views of Western theorists rather than it being a culture-specific framework.

Feminism in India has come a long way with the setting up of centres of research devoted specially to women, women’s organizations, NGOs fighting domestic violence and child abuse, and the pioneering of women’s journals such as *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* and *ANTYAJAA*. Critics and scholars like Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Susie Tharu, Kumkum Sangari, K. Lalita, Nira Yuval-Davis and Chandra Mohanty have published politically informed and nuanced works of feminist enquiry rooted in the Indian context. Nonetheless, many critics are of the opinion that feminism in India still has a long way to go especially with respect to the intertwined areas of criticism and interpretation.

In India, the idea of the nation and the home surfaces time and again when examining issues related to gender. Critics like Partha Chatterjee and Sudipta Kaviraj have emphasized on how the “inside” was marked as the domain of women—they were responsible for maintaining the home’s purity and sanctity. The “outside”, on the other hand, was the man’s domain and a part of their task was to shield the “inside” from the corrupting influences of the “outside”, especially during the colonial regime. Likewise, the practice of looking at the nation as being synonymous with a mother figure has been a source of debate among feminist critics. Many of them have argued that it allows the man to control the woman and the country under the guise of shielding her/it from harm.

Further, even if the nation state promises certain rights to women, these rights are in conflict with the personal laws of their community and the latter often take precedence over the former. Gayatri Spivak used the term “asceticism” (Rassendren 22) in elucidating the manner in which the men of the house tried to exert as much control within the house by regulating female desire. This ascetic self-control was supposed to perpetuate a certain ideal of womanhood embodied by such mythical figures as Sita and Savitri. Nira Yuval-Davis has also suggested that “women are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the community’s identity and honour, both personally and collectively” (45). Consequently any moral lapse on their part is treated more harshly. This centrality of the family and the community gives rise to an important challenge to Indian feminism—autonomy and liberty for women in India needs to be established in a manner that does not alienate them from their family, community and culture. Modern feminists have also tried to engage with issues related to sex work. While many consider it as an extension of patriarchy’s crimes against women and their tendency to relegate women to the status of a mere object, others have suggested that sex work should not be treated differently than any other profession and should be seen as what it is — work. Interestingly, since these women never make it to mainstream feminism, gender violence against these women is often overlooked.

**Activity 6:** The collectivistic community standards in India present layers of restrictions to women writers for a true expression of their reality. Discuss.

### 1.5 LET US SUM UP

- Women’s writing across the world and in India has, since the beginning, also seen the trend of autobiographical and semi-autobiographical
By examining women as recipients of literary texts, we can analyze how they employ these texts to challenge the narratives imposed on them by the society. Feminist theories, therefore, concern themselves with not only women as writers or producers of texts but also as readers and consumers. Like their Western counterpart, autobiographical writings by women in India have been endowed with increasing critical and scholarly attention.

Feminism in today’s times is a sprawling, manifold academic and political concept. It insists on being change-oriented rather than being simply a theoretical framework devoid of practical applications. Feminists argue against the creation of a distinct academic field and instead insist on integration with other fields of knowledge. To ensure this, the inclusion of feminist values in the field of research is seen as an important manoeuvre.

The ultimate aim is to create the space and opportunity to unravel the pervasive inequality present in the society, and suggest ways of dealing with the same. Most critical works have, therefore, tried to engage with ‘materiality’ of texts, that is, with the works’ non-fictional aspects or the works’ grounding in reality.

Latter-day materialists have actually suggested that materiality brings to the fore ‘things that matter’. Over the years, feminism has moved from its limited scope to encompass a more critical understanding of women’s experience.

Not only are there different types of feminisms (Liberal, Marxist, Social, Ecological, Cyber etc.) but the very meaning of the term ‘feminism’ is open to debate and negotiation. From Simone de Beauvoir’s celebrated epithet “one is not born, but becomes, a woman”, to notions of gender performativity, to the acknowledgement given to subversive and ‘queer’ gender identities, feminism and gender studies have definitely come a long way and have always been in a state of flux.

Over the last few years, a growing body of work has explored the concept of ‘doing gender’, that is, exploring how one’s gender is enacted in social situations and interactions. Theorists today have also started analyzing how body movements and gestures have also come to be recognized in terms of an abiding gendered self. Suggestions have also been made with regard to looking at feminism not as a movement about women but about how performativity discourses prevalent in a society produce the categories of man/woman and masculine/feminine.

The largely heteronormative codes that have been followed for long preclude the possibility of reflecting on the experiences of certain
Individuals (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, pansexuals, asexuals etc.) In the past few years, feminists have engaged with LGBTQ+ identities in their works and have examined the part that literature can play in understanding how diverse sexual relationships play out.

- Modern protagonists at once belong everywhere and nowhere. A perpetual jostling for turf is evident in most works. In disproving the myth of the heteronormative society, they bring to light a whole gamut of diverse sexual manifestations.

- Gender, therefore, still remains a topic of much contention and debate. Apart from the concerns of LGBTQ+ identities, feminists have also tried to incorporate other oppositional movements in their fight for gender equality, thereby widening their outreach. They have linked feminist movements to anti-racist, anti-casteist, anti-castist, environmentalist, and other movements.

- Thus, feminism has come to subsume many areas of knowledge and experience. In the words of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The cogency of female literary culture as a whole lies in the multiplicity of its voices and its insistence upon the collective foundation of individual consciousness” (270)

### 1.6 AIDS TO ACTIVITIES

**Activity 1** : For example, such retellings of mythological characters as *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood and *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* by Pratibha Ray

**Activity 2** : The emergence and relevance of the fourth wave of feminism in the era of internet and technology for addressing problems such as body-shaming, rape-threats, and sexual harassment, among others

**Activity 3** : The problem of stereotypes and generalizations with regard to women writers, their writing styles, etc.

**Activity 4** : For instance, fragmented narration and the use of silence in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* to represent racial injustice and gendered oppression

**Activity 5** : Witch-hunts/trials, hysteria, madness, turning/ pitting women against women, etc.

**Activity 6** : Indian women writers through a history of restrictions and oppression: family-honour, rules and norms of the social space/ public domain, threats and trolling in cyberspace

### 1.7 GLOSSARY

- **Analepsis** - a literary device, where a past event is narrated at a chronologically later point of time.
Non Fictional Prose

- **Androgynous** - having both masculine and feminine qualities
- **Canons** - Literary works considered to be the most important, influential and of the highest merit.
- **Chattel Marriage** - A form of marriage where the wife becomes a possession of her husband, devoid of all her rights and property which too then belong to the husband.
- **Embodiment** - concrete representation of an abstract idea; here, according to the normative and socially constructed ideas of categories like gender and race.
- **Gender** - Social manifestation of sex as a social and cultural identity.
- **Heteronormative** - the concept of the gender binary and heterosexual relationships as the only normal.
- **Phallogocentrism** - A term used in Critical Theory to refer to the privileging of the masculine in understanding meaning.
- **Prolepsis** - a literary device, where a future event is narrated to have occurred already before its turn.
- **Sex** - usually assigned at birth, based on the biological and anatomical characteristics of a person.
- **Suffragette Movement** - 19th and early 20th century movement demanding women’s right to vote in elections in the West.

1.8 UNIT-END QUESTIONS

1. Examine the categorization of Women’s Writing as a distinct literary area. How is it approached in two ways: as a space for encouraging writing, representation, and criticism by women; and, as a means of rendering them the ‘other’, outside the zone of ‘mainstream’ literature?

2. What has the public response to Women’s Writing been like: from ignorance and ostracization to trolling?

3. How do you see the rise of the new ‘New Woman’?

4. Comment on the role of Women’s Writing in representing the Nation.

1.9 REFERENCES & SUGGESTED READINGS


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