

Block

2

FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS

Introduction	72
---------------------	-----------

UNIT 1

Women and Life Writing	73
-------------------------------	-----------

UNIT 2

The Changing Contours of Autobiographical Studies	90
--	-----------

UNIT 3

Reading and Writing Biographies	108
--	------------

UNIT 4

Visual Representations	134
-------------------------------	------------

BLOCK 2 FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS

Introduction

You would have already gained an understanding of key concepts, terms and debates relating to life narratives from your reading of the previous block. The second block will focus more closely on feminist interventions in the genre of life writing and will help you understand the role of women in life writing, the influence of feminist theories and debates on this genre as well as life writings through the form of visual representations.

The first Unit on “Women and Life Writing” will introduce you to both theories and practices relevant to the subject in order to critically evaluate the inputs that women have made in this field. It will focus on issues of self, identity and subjectivity and locate these issues within relevant theoretical frameworks. The Unit will also highlight some recurring themes in life narratives by women, such as that of pain and loss. We will also discuss stylistic innovations in form and language reflected in works by women writers in order to gain some insights into the nature of life narratives by women.

Next, in “Changing Contours of Autobiographical Studies”, we return to issues of negotiations between the public and the private to which you have previously been introduced. This Unit examines women’s autobiography and its rift from traditional forms of autobiography. We will see how these new, gendered forms move away from previous restrictions and how they lead to explorations of identity through self-expression.

In the third Unit, “Reading and Writing Biographies”, we will focus specifically on the genre of biography in its relationship to women writers and female characters. Through a close reading and analysis of two specific works from India and France - *Gulab Bai* and *Dora* - we will examine the portrayal of women in life narratives from a socio-cultural perspective. Cixous’ *Dora* will enable us to critically examine Freud’s assumptions about women, since it is based on a previous case history by Freud. Here, we will also investigate issues of hysteria and repression from a gendered perspective.

In the final Unit on “Visual Representations” we move from the domain of literature to visual narratives. This Unit will help you to understand how gender discrimination can be evidenced in visual representations. You have already been introduced to the notion of the gendered ‘gaze’ in a previous course (MWG 003). This Unit will review the notion of the gaze in its links with voyeurism, violence, sexuality and resistance. We will look at the politics of representation through an examination of the documentation of courtesan culture. With the help of examples such as the self-portraits of Frida Kahlo, we will also see how some narratives of visual art resist the impact of an oppressive gaze to transgress its limits.

UNIT 1 WOMEN AND LIFE WRITING

Meenakshi Malhotra

Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Women's Life Writings: Theories and Practices
 - 1.3.1 Religious Autobiographies
 - 1.3.2 Tracing of Lineage through the Mother
 - 1.3.3 Self and Ego Formation: Theoretical Frameworks
 - 1.3.4 Notions of Difference
- 1.4 Women's Life Writings: Themes and Issues
 - 1.4.1 Narratives of Loss and Pain in Women's Life Writing
 - 1.4.2 Women's Writings as Social Documentation
- 1.5 Women's Life Writings: Form and Language
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Unit End Questions
- 1.8 References
- 1.9 Suggested Readings

1.1 INTRODUCTION

By now, you would already have some idea about life writing - its forms and definitions. To further our understanding of women's life writing, let us begin by asking some questions. To what extent are life writings marked by gender? Or, conversely, to what extent are gendered identities evident in life writing? For instance, if we were to read an autobiography without any idea of the gender identity of the writer, would we be able to make out the gender of the writer through a reading of the text? This unit would suggest that texts are always gender-marked, that is, the gender of the writer/subject can be discerned through the writing, in terms of its themes and styles. Moreover, since life writings often dwell on the formative years, we will also look at how life writings demonstrate the construction of gendered subjects and subjectivities. In this unit, we will dwell on these issues by examining women's life writings in the context of related theories and practices, themes and issues, and forms and styles.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Critically evaluate the creative and critical input of women's life writings;
- Examine the impact of such writings on the theory and ideas of autobiography;
- Explore the broad themes and patterns which run through women's life writings;
- Identify how issues of individual and collective identity are articulated in women's life writings; and
- Discuss the role of subjectivity and language in the context of such writings.

1.3 WOMEN'S LIFE WRITINGS: THEORIES AND PRACTICES

In recent years, women's life writings have offered considerable scope to feminist theory and to autobiographical studies. They have reshaped the map of these disciplines. They have also challenged our fundamental assumptions about gender and gendered roles across a cross-section of cultures and societies.

The first point that we must keep in mind while reading women's autobiographies is that there is no universal category of women. So while we keep the category of gender in mind, we have to remember that women are the products of culture and history as much as men are. If being a woman is a primary attribute, so are facts of race, class, caste, community and region. Thus the cultural assumptions underlying the writings of a white middle class woman would be different from those underpinning the writings of working class Jewish women or the life writings of a coloured female slave. Further, as Amartya Sen and others have stressed (Sen, 2006), identity in the modern world is not singular but plural. As a critic notes in a slightly different context:

"We learn that (women) speak in different voices and from multiple historical, cultural, racial, economic and sexual locations. We learn of the shaping power of overlapping allegiances and oppressions which intersect in often conflicting modes" (Carraway, 1999, p. 6, Cited in Arneil). At the same time, critical writings on autobiography and life writing have identified some broad themes and patterns in women's life writings, which will become clearer once we begin to explore the various forms of women's life writing.

The self, in women's life writings, according to many theorists, is not fixed but fluid and flexible (Arneil, 1999). Identities and subjectivities are evolving and in flux and there is rarely a final place of arrival in the autobiographical text. One may argue here that even men's identities are fluid and relational and to label fluidity specifically as a feature of women's life writings is problematic. While identity or subjectivity maybe in flux and constantly evolving, traditional autobiographical theory seems to assume that the model of separateness (where the ego boundaries are clearly defined and where there is a sense of definite individuality and autonomy) constitutes the basis of autobiography. Studies of autobiography in the 1970s demonstrate a definite bias, which seems to accord a higher place to the autobiographies of famous white men. This privileging of one kind of writing over others is also implicit in the definition of autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (Lejeune, 1982, p.193).

All these ideas and definitional propositions are challenged and its boundaries stretched by women's autobiographies. For instance, the testimonies (collective life writing) of women in struggle, oral narratives like that of the Telengana movement and Chicana women's narratives clearly deviate from the characteristics described and in a sense prescribed above.

The theory and practice of womens' autobiographies has forced a shift in the notions of both the individual as well as of autobiographical theory. It is probably not entirely a coincidence that womens' life writings gained importance as subjects of study at roughly the same moment that postmodernism and poststructuralism came to be "hot" topics of debate and discourse. Each influenced the other with the result that the issue of identity now had to be conceptualized differently. Identities had to be rethought differently and the notions of fluidity, multiple identities and contradiction became a part of the vocabulary/lexicon of identity. The first concept comes from French feminists about the nature of the unconscious and how it lies outside the grasp of our unified sense of rational self. As in Lacan's theory of the mirror that you have come across in earlier units (see MWG 001, Block 5, Unit 2.4), identity is never entire or whole, but is always partial and in process. This point would be explained in the following section.

Thus, the notion of 'identity' is increasingly replaced by the term 'subjectivity' which indicates its fluid, flexible and contingent nature and its multiple, plural and constructed basis. The life writings of women amply illustrate the point made by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) that gender is a social construction. Thus, in both life writings and

autobiographical fictions, we see the childhood of the autobiographical subject as crucial and formative. In Virginia Woolf's autobiographical writings like *Reminiscences* (in *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf, 1915-1939*), *A Sketch of the Past* (1939) and *Moments of Being* (1941), we see her sense of loss and deprivation at the loss of the mother. We are also made to see her abuse at the hands of George Duckworth and how that might have contributed to her discomfort with heterosexuality.

Closer to our own context is the narration of their childhood days by many women autobiographers in the late 19th century and early 20th century Bengal and Maharashtra. Common to most of these life writings is a sense of the carefree nature of childhood, unencumbered by the bonds which were to tie women down in their later life. Thus childhood days are valorized and narrated with a nostalgia steeped in a sense of loss. Early marriages and a high rate of mortality lent a special poignancy to this remembered time. In what is the first published full-length autobiography written by a Bengali woman, Rashsundari Debi's *Amar Jiban* (1868, 2nd ed. 1899). Rashsundari relates her heart-wrenching separation from her mother. While childhood is narrated in many life writings by men, they are not marked by this sense of pain or loss as they are in women's life writings. Later, in her book, tied to her in-laws' house and unable to go to her dying mother, Rashsundari writes: "I was like a bird in a cage, an oil-presser's bullock." She bemoans her fate of being born a girl. This motif is present in many of the life writings written by Indian women, who articulate a saga of dispossession. A sense of loss is manifested even in life writings by affluent women, which is evident in the title of Sarala Debi Chowdhurani's autobiography, called *Life's Fallen/Scattered Leaves* (1945).

1.3.1 Religious Autobiographies

Speaking from a historical point of view, the earliest women's autobiographies were religious in nature. Chronologically, perhaps the first life writings were the "therigatha", the songs of the Buddhist nuns of the sixth century B.C. They included a minimal amount of detail by the nuns about their own lives; the narrative focus is rather on how their lives were transformed under the impact of Buddhism. Accounts of transformation are a key feature of many early accounts, both Indian and western. Much of Bhakti poetry written by Mahadeviakka, Mirabai, Muktabai, Janabai and Lal Ded, besides inscribing the devotion of the female devotee, also give details of ordinary lives transformed by devotion to "Chennamallikarjun" (the subject of Mahadevi's devotional verse) or Mira's "Giridhar", which strengthens her in the face of opposition from her in-laws.

In England, the early prose accounts were of Hildegard of Bingen (11th century) Dame Juliana of Norwich and Margery Kempe. All these narratives demonstrate an array of earthly difficulties offset by growing devotion to a personal god. The significant other of these accounts is God or Jesus Christ. Autobiographies and biographies of this kind aspired, in a sense, to the narrative status of hagiographies, which detailed lives of saints and martyrs.

Another feature that is clearly marked in women's autobiographies, is the use of the image or narrative trope of god, in an ambivalent way. In Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), we see that the grandmother's religious faith leads to an acceptance of social injustice, which the young Harriet/Linda is skeptical about. In Rashsundari's *Amar Jiban*, Rashsundari talks about social injustice and personal deprivation, yet in a kind of double-speak says, "Strange are the ways of god" (Debi, 1897). It is interesting to see that the idea of god is deployed here as a narrative shorthand for social custom and to suggest the force of social injunctions and prescriptions, which women internalize and reproduce.

1.3.2 Tracing of Lineage through the Mother

One of the things that you may notice in women's life writings is the close relationship of theory and practice. As we trace the trajectories and study the frequent motifs recurring in women's life writings, we see the emergence of a different kind of genealogy, where we see the recovery of a sense of a lineage through the life, activities and culture of the mother. For example, in African-American feminism, we have Alice Walker's critical-creative account of her literary foremothers called *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1987). Something that is highlighted in *Amar Jiban* is Rashsundari's sense of bewilderment when people refer to her as her father's daughter. As a child who lost her father before she gained consciousness, she thinks of herself as her mother's daughter and is surprised when people refer to her otherwise. In Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave-Girl* (1861), we see that the feeling of family comes to Harriet/Linda through her maternal grandmother. In Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942), Hurston writes of her sense of homelessness and wandering which is related back by her to the death of her mother which, for Hurston, as for Woolf, disrupted the world "which had been built out of her body and her heart" (Hurston 1984, p. 89). Further, Hurston is in a sense given the responsibility of speaking for the silent mother, prefiguring her future role as writer. When she is too ill to speak, she observes that her mother "looked at me, or so I felt, to speak for her. She depended on me for a voice" (Hurston, 1942, Cited in Anderson, 2001, p. 109). The mother's dying scene suggests that she requires the 9-year old Zora to speak up to resist the customs and rituals surrounding death decreed by their community. As

Linda Anderson comments: “Language (here) has a double function, both connecting and separating her from her mother and the community. It is also what puts her into motion as a subject, allowing her to avoid the ‘wordless feeling’ she associates forever after with death” (Anderson, 2001, p. 109).

There is also the instance of Simone de Beauvoir who writes of her mother’s death from cancer in one of her memoirs, *A Very Easy Death* (1966). Writing of her own mother’s death, in contrast, Carolyn Steedman emphasizes it as a working-class life and a working-class death. She writes: “Simone de Beauvoir wrote of her mother’s death (and) said that in spite of the pain it was an easy one: an upper-class death. Outside, for the poor, dying is a different matter” (Steedman, 1986, p. 2). Steedman, subjectivity is always implicated in the social and the specificities of place and politics, thereby reinforcing the point that there is no universal or one standard model of subjectivity.

While we can assume that the significance given to the mother in women’s autobiographies does not come only from a desire to make a feminist statement about female solidarity, the importance given to the mother is theoretically proved by some developments in psychology and psychoanalysis. As you have already learnt in previous courses (MWG 001, Block 5, Unit 2; MWG 004, Block 4, Unit2), many feminists and psychoanalysts have observed a gap or lacuna in Freudian theory, where the female child’s switch of allegiance from the primary object of love and desire (the mother in the case of both sexes) is inadequately theorized. Critics like Bracha Ettiger have critiqued Freud’s idea of penis-envy as too centered on the phallus as a central signifier, and have considered the idea of breast-envy. Feminist psychoanalysis has opened up a space for the theorizing of women’s autobiographies in a more productive way, and help to explain the process of subject-formation.

The figure of the mother is also central in **Object-Relations Psychology** developed by Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1979), where she theorizes about the girl-child’s development. The girl child’s identity, she theorizes, is relational, while the male child’s identity is independent and autonomous. While it is problematic to universalize one model of growth and development which is specific to one culture, the broad pattern is perhaps applicable to the way infants are socialized in patriarchal, capitalist cultures. The mother -often the primary caregiver - also plays a vital role in the pattern of individuation, a process which is considered central to the genre of life writing.

Check Your Progress:

Read any life narrative discussed above. What, according to you, is the role of the mother in this work? Briefly describe it with the help of the theoretical framework provided above.

1.3.3 Self and Ego Formation: Theoretical Frameworks

The family is the primary site of gender formation in the psychoanalytic theory of both Freud and Lacan, whose theories you would have read about in the earlier courses (MWG 001, MWG 004). Notwithstanding the numerous differences in psychoanalytic theory between the views of Freud and Lacan, both propound a common view of psychological development as moving from identification to separation. Let us now review what you have learnt earlier.

In Lacanian theory, the child's separation of himself from his mother is followed by the mirror-stage, where the child realizes itself as a separate entity by seeing himself in the mirror. This image is mistakenly understood by the child to be a whole and coherent identity. As the ego develops and the oedipal phase supplants the early self-absorbed and narcissistic sense of self, the child continues the process of self-construction through the

acquisition of symbolic systems like language. For Lacan, the self constructed through language is also false, like the image in the mirror. Nevertheless, the mirror stage is an important stage for understanding autobiography, for on it hinges the sense of 'I'ness, which makes autobiography possible.

According to Nancy Chodorow, the development of the female child follows a different trajectory since the female child experiences love as a triadic relationship and experiences the contrary pulls of father-love as well as intense emotional commitment with the mother. This interferes with the process of ego-formation in girls unlike in the case of the boy child, who experiences love as a dyadic relationship (where the primary love-object is phased out in terms of societal demands), and whose gender is differently constructed.

Theories of ego-formation premised on separation from the (m)other and the drawing of sharp boundaries between the self and the other thus work differently for men and women, in terms of psychological and psychoanalytic understandings. Theoretical frameworks which work with the idea of separation rather than identification privilege certain models of selfhood where individuality and autonomy are central. Women's identity, on the contrary, according to Sheila Rowbotham, is based on a sense of collectivity and community. Therefore, as Susan Friedman emphasizes: "The very sense of identification, interdependence and community that Gusdorf (one of the influential theorists of life writing) dismisses from autobiographical selves are key elements in the development of a woman's identity, according to theorists like Rowbotham and Chodorow" (Friedman, 1989, p. 38)

Further, women may be said to develop a dual consciousness in a dominant culture. One consciousness comes from the force of dominant culture and the force of patriarchal prescription and from the image of women commonly represented in such a culture. The other consciousness comes from that part of women which resists the force of such cultural prescription. In Rowbotham's words: "But always we were split in two, straddling silence.....From this division, our material dislocation, comes the experience of one part of ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity....in order to create an alternative an oppressed group (must overcome) a paralysis of consciousness and ...project its own image into history" (Rowbotham, 1992, p. 29-31).

Although the model of autobiography invoked above seems to be unitary and undifferentiated, it inscribes the 'difference' of women's autobiography quite sharply. Virginia Woolf's autobiographical sketches and writings are a good example of this difference. As she writes in *Moments of Being*, "when we write of a woman, everything is out of place... the accent never falls where it does with a man" (Woolf, 1941, p.2).

Woman's difference, so Woolf suggests, requires a different emphasis: it flies "in the face of conventional modes of representation, producing a multiplicity which cannot be captured within one and the same, the singular 'I' of masculine discourse" (Anderson, 2001, p. 98). The sense of multiple 'I's - or many selves - jostling for space and articulation is evident in many women's life writings. The autobiographer declares her gender identity as only one of the bases of her identity. Class, caste and race identity are also determining factors. In addition, her self- chosen identity in terms of activity/ profession or in terms of sexual orientation all add to a sense of plurality of identities. The life writings of African-American women has focused attention on the centrality of "group identity", "interdependence" and the importance of "voice-enabling traditions" (McKay, in Brodski & Schenk, 1988, p. 179). As the prison-writings of Chicana women in struggle put it - we were mothers and political activists engaged in struggle. There was no way we could chose one identity and reject the other.

Check Your Progress:

- i) *What do you understand by the term "dual consciousness" in the context of women's lives?*

- ii) *Explain this term in reference to any life narrative that you have read.*

1.3.4 Notions of Difference

Women's life writings have to be understood on the basis of two kinds of difference: the difference of gender and the differences between various kinds of life writing by women who differ from each other in terms of race, class, caste, ethnicity etc. Further, it is problematic to codify and fix the patterns evident in women's autobiographies in terms of loss, absence and anonymity without further exploration.

You have previously come across the term sexual difference in some of the earlier units (see MWG 002, Block 1, Unit 2; MWG 004, Block 4, Unit 2). Broadly speaking, the term refers to the differences between the sexes that derive from their different biological sex organs and differs from the term 'gender'; by extension, sexual difference in psychoanalysis and other theories is also shown to have cultural and psychic effects beyond the merely bodily (Wolfreys, 2002, p.76). Additionally, difference should be understood in terms not only of sexual difference. As Linda Anderson and Trev Broughton suggest: "the idea that women's self-constructions might be distinguished on the basis of sexual difference- as the "other" of some universal "man"- may be both "reifying and essentialist" (Broughton & Anderson, 1997, p. 97). Rather than sexual difference what we have to keep in mind is the construction of gender and gender difference in both men's and women's autobiographies. A good example here is provided by reading the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass, a male slave and Harriet Jacobs, writing at about the same time. The differences and similarities that emerge provide us with a glimpse of gender difference.

The other point to be kept in mind at this juncture is that gender is not the sole determinant of identity and gender-based oppression is not the sole oppression. Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith have posited that an exclusive focus on gender oppressions "effectively erases the complex and often contradictory positionings of the subject" (Watson & Smith, 1992, p. xiv). Subjects have also to be seen in terms of their location and position in terms of race, class and in the Indian context, in terms of caste. Thus the African-American woman slave may share some common experiences of exploitation and abuse with the similarly positioned male slave rather than the white woman, an upper caste Indian woman's experience of life is likely to be very different from that of the Dalit woman. Womanhood is thus not the only ground of difference.

You may have come across the notion of 'intersectionality' in earlier units. It is a concept which helps us to keep in mind the multiple -and varying- registers of subject construction. This is a useful concept to keep in mind while studying women's autobiographies since it prevents us from universalizing the subject. Instead it invites us to try and understand the multiple positionings and to grasp the historical location of the subject.

This understanding of the multiple determinants of subjectivity allows us to see the contradictions between various subject-positions. For example, in the classic psychoanalytical explanation of growth, alignment and separation shows the father as an embodiment of and occupying a place of power. The father as a symbol of phallic power shapes the Oedipal and phallic phase of the child's growth. However, in Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape For A Good Woman* (1986), she recounts her working class father's helplessness in the face of authority. She thus questions the equation/identification of masculinity and power.

Check Your Progress:

Briefly explain in your own words the notions of:

a) *"Difference"*

b) *"Intersectionality"*

1.4 WOMEN'S LIFE WRITINGS: THEMES AND ISSUES

While it is problematic to fix and codify women's life writings in terms of loss, absence and anonymity, there is discernible in women's life writing a distinct motif of loss. In psychoanalytic terms, it may be the loss of wholeness that comes with the separation from the mother; however, there is a socio-cultural dimension to it too. Thus, even though we may be conscious of the tendency to essentialize, and fix broad and universal patterns in women's life writings, we may still detect the inscription of a sense of loss and powerlessness in them. To give a few instances, Rashsundari Debi in *Amar Jiban* talks of going without a meal for two days. Coming from an affluent family, she had really no reason to go without food. But such was the force of cultural prescriptions that she had internalized that she could not bring herself to eat at what was deemed an inappropriate time. The decision to deprive oneself presents a kind of paradox in that it shows an agency which is negatively deployed. According to the Marxist critic E.P.Thompson, the decision on the part of even affluent women to deprive themselves demonstrated the thin integration of women into lineages of caste and class. Thus, the recurring images of loss and dispossession are common motifs which keep appearing in women's life writings.

1.4.1 Narratives of Loss and Pain in Women's Life Writing

The sense of loss in Indian women's autobiographies is partly attributable to the alienation from the natal/paternal home and the lack of power experienced by the women in the house of the husband, where her existence and comfort were contingent on the social approval of others, particularly the mother-in-law. Thus, the account of Keshub Chandra Sen's mother talks of how her blood froze when her mother-in-law looked on her in a disapproving way. Even women from renowned families who were in a progressive mode talk of this feeling of loss and disempowerment. Sarala Debi Chaudhurani, Tagore's niece (the daughter of his sister, the novelist Swarnakumari Debi) talks of how her writings and work were lost in Punjab's political conflagration and tumult during the freedom struggle. This is surprising coming from a woman who led an active political life. The life writing of a famous Bengali stage actress, Binodini Dasi or Nati Binodini (as she was referred to) evinces a similar loss- loss of youth, adulation, economic security and respectability. She refers to her life-narrative as a "bedona-gatha" or narrative of pain. Rimli Bhattacharya who has translated and edited her life writings, *Amar Katha* and *Amar Abhinetri Jiban*, originally written around 1910 (1998) discusses her narrative as one of successive betrayals.

The sense of loss also imbues and informs the life writing written and illustrated in a graphic form, of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, where she

shows the erosion of a liberal ethos of Iran before the Islamic clampdown of Ayatollah Khomeini and orthodox and bigoted Islamists. In fact the resurgence of right-wing movements in many societies have been documented in various life writings.

1.4.2 Women's Writings as Social Documentation

The life writings of women can be seen as powerful social and historical documents. They may be said to have archival value as they provide us with micro-histories of the times they were written in. Not only do they provide a world and wealth of detail, they also show us history from below. Accounts which offer the everyday practices of women and minorities have gained a unique validity since they offer us history or her story from a different perspective. Thus, the disciplines of Sociology and History have used the life writings of women across a wide spectrum of spaces, times and classes in order to chart cartographies of struggle and to gain a more complete idea of societies and their histories.

In what way are women's life writings superior to men's life writings and other historical accounts? According to feminist standpoint theorists, narratives that emerge from a historically unprivileged perspective have greater epistemological validity than knowledge that emerges from a privileged position and perspective. Those in a position of privilege are not likely to experience caste, class or gender-based discrimination or oppression as those who have been historically disadvantaged. It is also likely that the writings which emanate from such groups of marginalized and disadvantaged groups will pose the question of identity in a different way. For example, life narratives like Bama's *Karukkai* (1992) and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (1986) think of identity in terms of the community not in an individual or autonomous way. Instead, their subjectivity is produced in terms of their subjection and subjugation. The basis of this identity is collective and social.

Similarly, Gloria Anzaldua's account of Chicana Mestiza experience encapsulated in *Borderlands* (1987) captures her sense of living in the border between USA and Mexico, settled communities and nomads and heteronormativity and homoeroticism.

So we can begin to see how women's autobiographies have radically revised the idea that individuality and autonomy are the foundation of identity. Instead collectivity and community can be postulated as the bases of identity. Indeed the whole idea that individuality is a necessary prerequisite for autobiography can be seen as a ploy, a ruse to prevent the sense of community or solidarity. Similarly, women's autobiographies have also offered a critique of rationality as a ruse of patriarchy. French feminists and feminist psycho-linguists have even critiqued language as patriarchal. Can women

inscribe their subjectivity, we may well ask, within the limits and confines of man-made language?

1.5 WOMEN'S LIFE WRITINGS: FORM AND LANGUAGE

Diaries, letters and memoirs are all informal genres which have been used by women. For instance, Woolf's *Sketch of the Past* (1939) presents an irreverent attitude towards the conventions of autobiography and its hierarchy of genres. Julia Swindells suggests that when ordinary women (as opposed to famous men) started writing in the nineteenth century, they did so in the extant genres that proliferated in print culture. Some of these forms with a high circulation rate were sensational forms like the melodrama or the romances. Thus, we see the use of informal forms and genres by women who were not exposed to the higher forms of literature like the epic. For instances, the narrative of Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) draws on the subgenres of the captivity narrative and the pursuit motif common to the genre of romance. In early 19th century England and late 19th century Bengal, we see the proliferation of conduct books, books which prescribed appropriate codes of womanly behaviour- like *Grihalakshmi* in Bengal (discussed in Walsh, 2004) and Mrs Beaton's *Books of Household Management* in England (1861). Books like these also shaped the narrative trajectories of many life writings which were didactic and trying to instill the values of thrift, hard work and prudence.

Many life writings also display a heightened consciousness and reflexivity about language. These writings make us question our commonly held assumptions about language. One such instance is the idea that language reflects experience. Domna Stanton in *The Female Autograph* (1984) questions the notion of "bios" embedded in autobiography. Why can't autobiography be recast as autograph, or writing a self, independent of the life it describes? Underlying this idea of the autograph is also an emancipatory move on Stanton's part - if women can't always choose their life, they can at least exercise agency in their choice of subject material.

The question of language is central to the concerns of many feminist theorists, including the work of the French theorists like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, as you have seen in previous units (see MWG 004, Block 4, Unit2). If language is centred around the male phallus, to what extent can it express the subjectivity of women who are implicated in this system of patriarchy and of language-use? Can women articulate their self outside of the symbolic order of language? To what extent does the semiotic - Kristeva's evocation of the space before-and outside-the symbolic, offer women a space to express their selfhood and subjectivity? Can we have a language without the structures of grammar and syntax? Or would it degenerate into some sort of psycho-babble?

Many women autobiographers are now turning to innovative modes of self-representation. Thus, there are the self-portraits/paintings of the artist Frida Kahlo, the graphic representations of the Iranian writer Marjane Satrapi in *Persepolis* and *Embroideries* and the narrated lifestories of Baby Haldar's life writings. Questions of form, innovation and authenticity are all raised here. In fact, the question of authenticity is often posed in life writings which were narrated to amanuenses, mostly by slaves, oppressed and disadvantaged groups. Another related issue which then arises is that of oral autobiographies, which has previously been discussed in the unit on 'Theoretical Challenges' as well (Block 1, Unit4).

Yet another question raised under the template of women and language is the story of many women's hard-won access to literacy. However masculinist language forms may be, women like other subjects, have to be able to access a language, whether their master's or their own. To Rashsundari, secretly and furtively learning to write, access to the written word was nothing short of a miracle. Her life writing and that of many similarly-placed Indian women dramatize their desire for and access to the written/printed word, usually achieved with great difficulty in hostile circumstances.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In the sections discussed above, we get some insights into women's life writings. We have seen these life writings in the context of theories and practices. We have also learnt about important themes and tropes, such as that of the mother, of loss and of pain. Women's subjectivities may be differently constructed owing to different cultural constructions of self and ego, and owing to the intersectionality of gender with class, caste and religion. The element of collective representation that we have discussed above also makes women's life narratives significant sources of social documentation. Some of these points will be further enumerated and explained in the subsequent units that you will read. You will also see how theories of life writing have undergone many shifts and changes in recent years with new life writings posing challenges to fixed formulations of autobiography. Thus life-narratives of disabled and transgendered women have effected many paradigm shifts within the field of life writing studies.

1.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you understand by the term intersectionality? Why do you think it is important in the study of gender and life writing? Discuss with the help of examples.
- 2) Why do you think that the mother is central to women's life writing? Discuss in the context of any one life narrative.

- 3) Trace the idea of loss as unique to women's life writing with the use of relevant examples.
- 4) How would you regard the question of women and language in relation to women's life writings?
- 5) How has the notion of individuality been revised and challenged by the notion of the collective as a basis of identity in women's life narratives? Critically analyse.

1.8 REFERENCES

- Anderson, L. (2001). *Autobiography: The New Critical Idiom series*. London: Routledge.
- Anzaldua, Gloria (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. US: Aunt Lute Books.
- Arneil, Barbara (1999). *Politics and Feminism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bama (1992). *Karukku*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Benstock, S. (1988). *The Private Self : Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. London : Routledge.
- Broughton, Trev & Linda Anderson (1997). *Women's Lives/Women's Times :New Essays in Auto/Biography*. Albany : State University of New York Press.
- Chodorow (1978). *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley : University of California Press.
- Dasi, B (1910). *Amar Katha o Amar Abhinetri Jiban. My Story and My Life as an Actress*. (Trans. & Ed.) Rimli Bhattacharya (1998). New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred Knopf and Co, 1953.
- De Beauvoir, Simone (1966). *A Very Easy Death*. London : Penguin.
- Debi, Rashsundari (1868). *Amar Jiban. Words to Win, The Making of Amar Jiban: Autobiography of a Nineteenth Century Woman*. (Trans & Ed.) Tanika Sarkar (1999). New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Friedman, Susan (1989). *The Private Self: Theory and Practice Of Women's Autobiographies*. (Ed.) Shari Benstock. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Jacob, Harriet (1861). *Incidents In the Life of A Slave Girl*. New York: Norton and Co.
- Kamble, Baby (1986). *The Prisons We Broke*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Karlekar, Malavika (1992). *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*. Delhi: OUP.

Lejeune, Philippe (1982). *On Autobiography*. (Ed.) Paul John Eakin. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marcus, L. (1994). *Auto/biographical Discourses*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

McKay in Brodzki, Bella & Celeste Schenk (1988). (Eds.) *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiographies* Ithaca: Cornell.

Rowbotham, Sheila (1992). *Women in Movement : Feminism and Social Action*. New York and London: Routledge.

Sen, Amartya (2006). *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. London: Allen Lane. USA: Norton and Co.

Stanton, Domna (1984). (Ed.) *The Female Autograph*. New York: The New York Literary Forum.

Steedman, C. (1986). *Landscape for a Good Woman*. London: Virago.

Swindells, J. (1985). *Victorian Writing and Working Women*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tharu, S & Lalita. (1991). *Women Writing in India; 600 BC to the Present* 2 vols. Delhi: OUP.

Walker, A. (1984). *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*. London: The Women's Press.

Walsh, Judith (2004). *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women learned When Men Gave Them Advice*. London: Roman and Littlefield.

Watson & Smith (1992). *De-Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiographies*. Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press.

Wolfreys, Julian et al (2002). *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Woolf, Virginia (1979). *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. (Ed.) Anne Oliver Bell, 5 vols. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Anderson, L. (2001). *Autobiography: The New Critical Idiom*. London: Routledge.

Marcus, L. (1994). *Auto/biographical Discourses*. Manchester: Manchester Univ Press.

Tharu & Lalita (1991). *Women Writing In India: 600 BC to the Present Vol. 2*. Delhi: OUP.

UNIT 2 THE CHANGING CONTOURS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

Nzanmongi Patton

Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Shifting Contours
 - 2.3.1 New Boundaries or No Boundaries?
 - 2.3.2 Self and Form
 - 2.3.3 Across Margins
 - 2.3.4 The Autobiographer's 'Intention'
- 2.4 Relocating Nations Amidst Conflicts
- 2.5 Performance and Retelling in *Song Sung True*
- 2.6 Memory, Silence and Resilience in *Woman Warrior*
- 2.7 Sexual Politics
- 2.8 Narration and Re-Creation
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Unit End Questions
- 2.11 References
- 2.12 Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Some stories are told and some never but it is an undeniable fact that every person is a story in her/himself, maybe not complete and ever changing, but certainly a story lived. Autobiography is what we have as the written form of the story. It always makes an effort at staying true to a story, individual or collective. Autobiography can be about your entire life, a certain time of your life or some events that are special. It involves the making of a certain history. Often an autobiography is assumed to be the story of a single person but it is never so because a story can never be told in isolation, it is always involved with other stories and other people. This is particularly so for women, the contours of whose subjectivity is shaped by the dominant assumptions of a largely patriarchal culture.

Questions of subjectivity are not confined to women's work, and neither are they new. If we look at the autobiographies of the early ages, Renaissance and then 18th century, we see the human being emerging from the medieval social order to being an autonomous creature. Such concepts of the individual figured prominently in the autobiographies of the Italian Renaissance men;

Michel De Montaigne's *Essais*, 1580, represents the instance of the individual as a whole. This was once considered the only accepted argument of autobiography but with the changing balance of public versus private, the definition has evolved. Autobiography has come to a juncture where it is no more seen as just 'personal experience' but rather "an articulation based on the determinate memory and recall of experience via the lens of traumatically constrained ideology" (Anderson, 2001, pg. iii). This directly challenges the notion of history and subjectivity as stable elements in the story of one's life. It is the process which articulates the determined subject so as to actively produce a new positive identity thus de-stabilizing the idea of a stable identity. It also becomes a process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation.

However, this dialectical attitude towards the understanding of the social world always requires the consideration of two things - subjectivity and objectivity - at the same time. Autobiography has often been seen as objective because the eyewitness may be the most suspect interpreter of events. But it has also been taken as subjective because it relies too much on the constraints of the real to be taken as an art. Thus, autobiography falls out of both history and fiction if considered in isolation from each other. In our discussion in the subsequent sections of this Unit, we will examine some of these issues in the context of gender and the changing contours of autobiographical studies.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine autobiography and its new forms;
- Discuss how these forms have moved away from restrictions of boundary and genre;
- Appreciate the new expanse of autobiographical studies;
- Identify the thin line of demarcation between autobiography and history;
- Discuss how changes in genre have accommodated the voices of women and underprivileged groups; and
- Describe the political implications of the uses of autobiography.

2.3 SHIFTING COUNTOURS

"The mark of autobiography indicates a disruption in genre; an eruption or interruption of self representations in genres in which it has not been previously legitimated".

(Gilmore, 1994, p.7).

The convention of autobiography traces a transition from “form into life” for the one who ascribes and it offers a shift from “life to form” for the novice writer. Language is very important in the weaving of a narrative of life. Thus, the medium of autobiography many a time stops at language. Autobiography is not only a tale of a certain life but it allows a stage for experimenting and acting as well. Autobiography therefore imposes the canvas of life and art too. It encompasses a range of ideas from Selfhood to Authorship, to Representation to Presentation, to Fact versus Fiction dichotomy, towards history of a society to a single history. It is indeed a slippery terrain and thus there is a need to discipline it within some boundaries. This is where the genre plays an important role in creating a form or mould.

2.3.1 New Boundaries or No Boundaries?

We see the manifestation of the changing contours of autobiographical writings in changing forms - from confession, then to letters, to diaries and journals, to memoirs and travelogues, and now in the 21st century to graphic autobiographies and internet blogs, autobiography has had a really long and transforming journey. It has adopted new forms and shapes increasingly written by actors from varied social worlds, bringing new inflections and modulations, as we will see in the subsequent sections.

Some examples of the changing actors of autobiographical writings are provided by artists like Malika Pukhraj who composed a long piece - her autobiography - when she was in her 80s. *Song Sung True* was written in fluent Urdu, with a smattering of Punjabi, Dogri, English and even French words. Pukhraj's memoirs are of a remarkable life. Born in Jammu and Kashmir's Hamirpur Sidhdhar village, at the age of nine, she became the star singer and dancer at the court of the Maharaja of Jammu. Her mother took Pukhraj to Jammu, determined to educate her in all the arts and skills the world had to offer. Ali Baksh, father of Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, a doyen of Sindhi khayal (a classical style of singing), gave Pukhraj musical training for two meals a day. He inevitably was the one who encouraged and inspired Pukhraj to sing true all her life: “Listen child, no matter what you sing, even if it is a *jugni*, sing in tune, for only then will it reach the heart. You can stretch a tuneless phrase till the earth shatters, but that will not matter a jot to the ears” (Pukhraj, 2003, p.36). Subsequently in Delhi, Pukhraj learned singing and dance from Mamman Khan, who had taught many from royal families. During those days, “...dances were not vulgar. People appreciated a dancer who looked as if he or she were walking on water” (Kidwai, 2003, p. 40). She began to sing *thumris*, complete with gestures and facial expressions. Her popularity grew and Pukhraj was invited to perform at court in Jammu. She gave her first performance, a *thumri*, then a *ghazal* and a *pahari* which was the start to a romantic relationship

with Maharaja Hari Singh. He indulged her, showering her with jewellery and clothes. She enthralled audiences and performed at festivities and celebrations such as Basant, Holi and Dussehra.

Her autobiography reveals not just her story but also offers a commentary on the political and communal discord in Jammu around that time: “There was no peace in the kingdom as in earlier times... There were times when I wanted to laugh. I had nothing to do with politics and with the Hindu-Muslim riots. Nor did I understand any of these things. Yet, the Hindus had become my enemies. Leave alone those living outside the kingdom, even those living in the kingdom had started to believe stories of my wanting to kill the Maharaja” (Pukhraj, 2003, p. 215).

In terms of autobiographical forms, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* represents an important break from past trends of autobiographies; her complex, multi-layered and quasi-fictional narrative flies in the face of traditional autobiographies, which tend to follow a linear-chronological pattern and maintain a stable narrator—an “I”—throughout. Kingston, a Chinese-American writer, writes a memoir which is a blending of voices and styles, often contradictory, using many of the techniques of postmodernism: ambiguity, incoherence, pluralism, and irony.

These texts are more often than not, an alternative space of social, political and cultural commentary which is stifled in non-democratic worlds. Marjane Satrapi, an Iranian-born French writer, in her graphic autobiography *Persepolis* struggles with the conflicting idealism of her parent’s political persuasion in contrast with the reality of their middle class life. Very early in life, the author discovers the realities of class divisions from reading the work of a famous Kurdish author. She then sees the reality of hierarchy and class divide when her maid, Mehri, is not allowed to be with a boy she is in love with because of class differences. Marjane feels great disharmony in her own life because of these disparities. It is as if the nation undergoing a revolution because of these class conflicts is paralleled in her identity which is also rebelling and undergoing a revolution: “The reason for my shame and for the Revolution is the same: the difference between social classes”(Satrapi, 2004, p.33).

Persepolis is Marjane Satrapi’s memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. Her story focuses on multiple themes that include civil strife, war as witnessed from a child’s eyes, and various class hierarchies and distinctions that formed the reality of Iran at that time. She recounts the political situation of Iran in the year of 1979. Being the intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran’s last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely

entwined with the history of her country. Her story is more than just a mere re-telling of experiences surrounding her life but a social commentary on the unrest that lie embedded in every citizen. Through the medium of a black and white comic form, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. Her work clearly shows that women have suffered more at the hands of the revolution; the space chosen by men to exercise their 'superiority': "They insulted me. They said that women like me should be pushed up against a wall and fucked. And then thrown in the garbage....And that if I didn't want that to happen, I should wear the veil..." (Satrapi, 2004, p. 7).

This event happens to Marjane's mother when she is assaulted by a group of men angry with her for not wearing the dress code imposed on Islamic women. Marjane sees this as a kind of misogyny and a way of depriving women of their individuality and their identities. It enforces the gender divide further and feeds the notion of women as subservient and 'needing protection' of men. In the eyes of these fundamentalist men, women who do not voluntarily deprive themselves of their humanity must be dehumanized. This leads to the threats and the violence that Marjane Satrapi's mother experiences. Satrapi's recollection of her life in Iran shows us that war is a most horrible and abhorred phenomenon that destroys lives, homes and countries, but it cannot ever destroy humanity. They may be listening to the latest punk music or challenging the government, but that flicker of life and an indomitable spirit is always there in Satrapi and in the people that she talks about.

These autobiographies also suggest the need for a separate space for women to write and express themselves. They are seen re-creating a space for something new to emerge, opening up a space for difference within discourse; rooms of an uncharted unconscious. Autobiography has become a popular vehicle for giving a voice to the experiences and discrepancies suffered by the marginal: "Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness- women, black people, working class people- have more than begun to insert themselves into a culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a "personal voice, which speaks beyond itself" (Swindells, 1995, p. 7). Women have entered the uncharted territories of men and contested authority while carving their niches within the established even as they establish new boundaries.

2.3.2 Self and Form

Self

The story of the self and the skepticism towards the self, both engage with self-introspection thereby pointing towards autobiography as a critical perspective too. The idea of the 'self' as fixed and singular has been broken down. The concept of multiple, changing selves has opened a new epoch of thought. Also, the idea of 'objectivity' in presenting one's life or in reading those of others has been exposed as epistemologically problematic. As you will read in other units, autobiography has been at the centre of controversy, centering on French theories of psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and feminism. There have been many questions on the self evident nature of the subject and the knowledge. Post-structuralisms posits language and discourse as both preceding and exceeding the subject, deposing the author from her or his own central place as the source of meaning, and thus undermining the unified subject of autobiography.

Form

Form has changed as well. No more does autobiography follow the linear trajectory of chronology and time; rather, it re-configures its own selectiveness of memory and choice. For example we have autobiography of the 'moment' in a new kind of autobiography, that of the internet, with twitter, facebook and orkut documenting these fragments of autobiographies. Even the idea of the 'real' self and the 'virtual' self converges and diverges at any impromptu time and whim. The lived experience is becoming provisional. Quoting Sherry Turkle, writer and psychoanalyst in *Virtuality and its Discontents*, "... the 'lived' and the 'virtual' equally mirror the problematic of authenticity... we stand on the boundary of the real and the virtual, a moment of passage when new cultural symbols and meanings can emerge" (Turkle, 1996, p. 53).

2.3.3 Across Margins

Virginia Woolf wrote extensively on the problems faced in writing about lives, especially the problem of writing women's lives. She questioned, from a feminist perspective, the accepted notions of the subject and prefigured and influenced present day debates about writing and sexual differences. Woolf has carried out many experiments with the problem of how to allow the mother's presence into a writing which has traditionally not permitted her a place. Further, in her writing, the Self as a fixed, stable subject was deconstructed:

"There looms ahead of me the shadow of some kind of form which a diary might attain to. I might in the course of time learn what it is that one might make of this loose, drifting material of life; finding another use for it than

the use I put it to, so much more consciously and scrupulously, in fiction. What sort of diary should I like mine to be? Something loose-knit and yet not slovenly, so elastic that it will embrace anything, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind” (Woolf, 1979, p. 266).

By imagining her diary as a boundless space, she creates for herself a subject which goes beyond the form of the traditional. She opens up a new space for discourse, and explores new frontiers of representing subjectivity which would relate to the possibility to the thinking femininity which also challenged the presumed and socially given self.

Women’s autobiographies are episodes of the self where a single chapter could stand alone as a story. Very often they follow a theme of quest for identity commonly involving a journey, literally or figuratively. Theirs is usually a discovery of the self even if it means painful self confrontation, rather than the introspection of one that is already formed. The recovery and revival of interest in the lost lives of women has brought women’s literature from the margins to the fore.

2.3.4 The Autobiographer’s ‘Intention’

The role of an author has been the subject of raging debates in the twentieth century. These debates question the condition laid down by traditional theorists who feel that “there must be an identity between the author, the narrator and the protagonist” (Lejeune, 1982, p. 193). This identity connect is a problem because it cannot be established as a matter of intention on the part of the author. Laura Marcus, a recent autobiographer and theorist notes that the concept of ‘intention’ is a huge problematic. Intentionality points towards the belief that the author is behind the text, controlling its meaning; the author becomes the guarantor of the ‘intentional’ meaning or the truth of the text and reading a text therefore leads back to the author as its origin. This notion has been questioned by recent theories of deconstruction and poststructuralism. Critics have also stated that an autobiography can be understood as real if the space the author occupies in relation to their lives can be reconstructed by the reader. Autobiographies and their validation is still another issue. The genre of autobiography like many others has been riddled and bound with gender. Do we believe in all subjects? Does sincerity in narration already imply a masculine subject as Nancy Miller suggests? Are women lesser believed on account of who they are? Autobiography has been seen as promoting the view of the subject as universal; it has underpinned also the centrality of masculine modes of subjectivity. What is this about autobiography celebrating the extraordinary lives of ‘great men’? Not anymore. “Autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it” (Lang, 1982).

Check Your Progress:

- i) *What do we mean by 'self' and 'form' in the context of autobiography?*

- ii) *Do you think these notions are influenced by the gender of the writer? How?*

- iii) *According to you, how has modern technology influenced the construction of 'autobiography'?*

2.4 RE-LOCATING NATIONS AMIDST CONFLICTS

“Deep down in the layers of my mind, was the first impact of a religion against which I had risen as a child, when I had seen that glass tumbler touched by someone with a different faith became impure”.

(Pritam, 1998, p. 150)

Surfacing out of these narratives, we see how nations are being inscribed through the countless conflicts caused by ethnicity and religious beliefs. Nations and their growing up in the middle of ideological and physical clashes carry the narrative to its new destinations.

Segregation, stigma, and scarring were a part of the plot. Individuality, especially for women became a taboo. As observed by Tharu and Lalitha, “society attacks anyone who dares to say its coins counterfeit, but when it is a woman who says this, society begins to foam at the mouth. It puts aside all its theories and arguments and picks up the weapon of filth to fling at her” (Tharu & Lalitha, 1993, p.160). Women had no freedom in choosing lovers or partners by their own choice. Examples of this can be found in works by Ismat Chughtai and Amrita Pritam: “But it’s objectionable for girls to draw lovers to themselves,” said the witness. “Why?” “Because... because it’s objectionable for good girls to do so” (Chughtai, 1999, p. 34). “Neither Grandmother nor I knew then that the man I was to fall in love with would be of the same faith as the branded utensils were meant for” (Pritam, 1998, p. 5).

Many of these narratives also emphasize the power of education to free people from the superstition of religion and the subjection of political dictators.

Recurrent themes in many nineteenth-century women’s memoirs are the woman’s joy in the love and support of a progressive husband and her education and the new possibilities that opened out to her. But even in relatively conventional accounts we come across passages that give us a glimpse of many-faceted struggles involved: the pain of being constantly watched and corrected; the feeling that they were not good enough; the exhausting demands of the new housework; the uncertainty and anxiety involved in raising children in the new mode, outside the reassuring circle of the traditional family; the longing for the support of a world they had lost, and so on. (Tharu & Lalita, 1993, p. 160).

Throughout *Persepolis*, Marjane’s parents put an emphasis on her education. “I think that the reason we were so rebellious was that our generation had known secular schools” (Satrapi, 2004, p. 98). Marjane sees the root of her rebellious nature as being rooted in the education that she had received before the regime took over. Marjane’s Uncle Anoosh claims that the Iranian people allowed the Islamic regime to come to power because they were uneducated and illiterate and needed a strong symbolism in order to bring order to the country. Through education and an acknowledgement of its empowering role, Marjane observes that the courage of her family to reject the strictures of the regime and to rebel against its brutality comes from that empowerment.

2.5 PERFORMANCE AND RETELLING IN *SONG SUNG TRUE*

When an autobiographer narrates about her/himself, we can view this as a performance in action. Every act reminisced, every word that is remembered and put on paper is a segment of life re-performed by the writer for his audience - we the readers. Story telling is an art perfected over years of practice. In the peace-annihilated atmosphere of Jammu post India-Pakistan Partition in 1947, leaving the Maharaja, Pukhraj and her family had to relocate to Lahore. Moving away to Lahore meant leaving his employment, more importantly his unfinished romance between them. *Song Sung True* tells us about Pukhraj's condition when she sang her last song in his court: "with emotions that I was unaware were within me.... I wept within my heart and my singing sounded like the wail of a *been* (musical instrument). His Highness left the moment I stopped singing and I did not even get the chance to wish him a final farewell" (Pukhraj, 2003, p. 129).

Pukhraj invited the audience to witness the show of her life and her musical performances through her re-telling. Amidst the disgruntledness and complaints of the men who came to watch her sing, she introduces us to the 'she' who had her own set of strict principles - she would not sing after 11 at night, nor would she sing where alcohol was being imbibed. Some retorted they had come to hear her sing, not to pray at a mosque! At musical gatherings, singers were typically at the mercy of their hosts for the whole night. But Pukhraj maintained her dignity and her boundaries. Pukhraj's fame as a singer grew day by day. She loved singing the thumri '*Sab din howat nahin samaan*' - all days are not the same. It depicts the impermanence of life and the changing human fortunes - different seasons, the birth of a child, youth, decadent old age, poverty and death. Never short of admirers, including several who fell in love with her, Pukhraj grew fond of Syed Shabbir Hussain Shah, a Government Officer, who courted her loyally for years on end. Going against the wishes of her family, she married him and had six children. For the first time in a very long life, Pukhraj would feel free- free to laugh and enjoy herself. Away from imposing restrictions and responsibilities, she had nothing to fear. She was the mistress of her own self and she allows us into that new world through her work.

Activity:

Read Mallika's Pukhraj's work and describe the relation between performance and autobiography in your own words.

2.6 MEMORY, SILENCE & RESILIENCE IN WOMAN WARRIOR

What sets apart Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography from the rest is in the fact that it is also a memoir. The line between memoir and autobiography is a thin one, especially in this modern literary era, when writers are constantly blurring the boundaries between genres to create a new, exciting one. Memoir is more about how it made you feel, and maybe also about, how it makes you feel now. Autobiography, on the other hand, is essentially a truthful biography written by the main character, or at least drafted with a collaborative writer. While memoir concerns itself with an emotional truth, autobiography details physical facts as its foundation. Gore Vidal, a

memoirist himself in his own memoir *Palimpsest* (1996), gave a definition of the two genres, stating, “a memoir is how one remembers one’s own life, while an autobiography is history, requiring research, dates, facts double-checked”.

Maxine Hong Kingston’s autobiography *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1975) explores the many forms of adversity that women face. Kingston uses women’s stories to explore her own cultural history. As a first-generation Chinese American, she struggles to reconcile her Chinese cultural heritage with her emerging sense of herself as an American, in an attempt to find her identity while reclaiming her past. Kingston’s struggle in “No-Name Woman” and in the memoir as a whole is to write about the unspoken: her unnamed dead aunt, “You must not tell anyone,” my mother said, “what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born” (Kingston, 1989, p.1). Then also Kingston assumes voices for vocalizing the atrocities in her mother’s Chinese village, and another aunt, Moon Orchid, who is unable to adapt to life in America. Kingston’s struggle is also about finding her own voice, as both a Chinese-American and a woman, doubly after she has been silenced all her life. Writing a memoir therefore becomes a rebellion of sorts, from the first sentence—she is in fact revealing her life to *everyone*. In writing her memoir, Kingston displays a willingness to break the silence and asserts power over those who have held her back.

Kingston’s work offers a glimpse into the realities of life for many Chinese emigrants to America and their children. As early as the 1840s, Chinese immigrants had been arriving in moving to America in search of better lives, driven from their home country by widespread poverty and attracted by possibilities in the new American West ventured out for their big American Dream. However, like many other ethnic groups entering America at the time, the immigrants faced social, economic, and legal discrimination that limited their rights and opportunities, keeping most of them living together in pockets of Chinese communities such as the area in Stockton where Kingston grew up. Women such as Brave Orchid, who had once been a doctor in her own country, were forced to toil in sweatshops or become laundry workers—some of the few jobs available to Chinese-Americans well into the twentieth century. Kingston’s memoir is important, especially because it counters the stereotypes created by the masses. Her narrative is important in understanding the role of women in traditional Chinese society. Ultimately, because of the postmodern, or consciously fragmented, nature of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston’s highly personal autobiography is very western and individualistic in character. Her autobiography is very subjective and she is presenting only *her* version of events, not a version officially sanctioned or approved by the entire Chinese-American community. *The Woman Warrior* can

be considered a postmodern autobiography because of its self-awareness and interrogation of presenting only one interpretation of truth, as you would have learnt from your reading of MWG 007. For example, at the beginning of the memoir's last chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," Kingston confesses that her version of events is often her own interpretation of what she hears from someone else and not what she has experienced firsthand. There is truth in it but of a subjective kind. She suggests a parallel between herself and the legendary Chinese "knot-makers" who "tied string into buttons and frogs, and rope into bell pulls. There was one knot so complicated that it blinded the knot-maker. Finally an emperor outlawed this cruel knot, and the nobles could not order it anymore. If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker" (Kingston, 1989, p. 189-190). She mirrors this in her life's story which she sees like a knot so complicated that it can never be untied and laid out in a straight line.

Whereas other autobiographers tend to present their life stories as factual, Kingston undermines her own authority as narrator. Kingston betrays her own subjectivity, by declaring at the beginning of the next chapter that she did not personally witness the events in "At the Western Palace". Like every other literary genre, autobiography is as much imagined and fictional as it is factual. Kingston's memoir, so intensively aware of itself and its limitations, is filled with a subjectivity that is the hallmark of a postmodernist text.

Activity:

*Read **Woman Warrior** by Maxine Hong Kingston. Describe the struggle of the writer in your own words.*

2.7 SEXUAL POLITICS

From your reading of previous courses, you may be already aware that Kate Millet's book, *Sexual Politics*, published in 1970, talks about how thoroughly culture and society are dominated by men. Similarly, in this section, let us look at how women and their bodies are subjected to the tyranny and dictates of the male. Woman's body has been used as a tragic site for men to draw restrictions and create margins. A woman is not born but made, made from the constant losses she bears through living in the worlds she must inhabit. Ismat Chughtai's fiction is the fiction of the repeated traumatic kind, and in the ways in which she reiterates loss, her work participates in the kinds of questions raised by Sigmund Freud. What Chughtai's work makes clear is that she had to tease out a relationship to representation, so as to portray women dressed in *Kagzi Hain Pairahan* or *Lihaaf* who stand before us as claimants carrying their complaints, their charges on their bodies.

Like many other women writers, Chughtai too, had to return to the spaces and conditions associated with the domestic, where women were identified through and understood themselves through their lives as wives and mothers. These kinds of identifications produced gendered figures who were domesticated into wifedom and motherhood. In order to undo these kinds of identifications, writers like Chughtai had to reconfigure the sites of their domestication. Ismat Chughtai's dexterity with sensuousness and with temporality are qualities that characterize films and the best kind of biographical prose. These qualities trigger the illusion of a body.

(Patel, 2001, p. 355)

Issues of the body and desire, sexual purity, are confronted. Women have been seen as the tempter and the bait; the pristine wife and the amorous mistress; the untouchable and the touched:

The Warsis were usually well educated with BA and MA degrees, and were litterateurs or poets. Bedam Warsi, many of whose ghazals were sung by Akhtari Bai, was one of them. For those who just wanted to attach themselves to the order, the message was simple 'Love others for it is in love that God is to be found.' But to become a part of the order was far more difficult and there were many stages through which seekers had to pass. In the first stage, they were ordered to love small children, then little girls and after that, young unmarried girls. Then came the turn of married women. The rules were that the seekers had to look at them from afar, love them unquestionably and never touch them. Anyone who passed through those challenging phases with his purity intact could become a faqir. (Pukhraj, *Song Sung True*, 2003, pp.56-59)

Sexuality and its domain are described and negotiated. Many women writers use this illusion whereby they conjure and bring a body into being, complete with all its features present at the moment, almost as though the body were standing right in front of a reader. Bodies are given shape in the present tense.

When Ismat Chughtai composes, she produces bodies through the sometimes subtle, sometimes brutal sense of the sensual:

“The world around me seemed like a delusion. The apparently shy and respectable girls in these families allowed themselves to be grabbed, hugged and kissed in bathrooms and in dark corners by young men who were related to their families. Such girls were considered modest. Which boy would have taken interest in a plain Jane like me? I had studied so much that when there was a debate I would beat to a pulp all the young men who were scared of the sight of books. They considered themselves superior to women merely because they were men!” (Chughtai, 1999, p. 34)

Often perceived as a feminist writer, Chughtai explored female sexuality while also exploring other dimensions of social and existential reality. A double moral standard towards sexes is nothing new. In the patriarchal set up of our society, it is more difficult for a woman to write an autobiography because she is surrounded by social and cultural restraints at all times.

2.8 NARRATION AND RE-CREATION

The forgotten lives or the lives of the obscure- the one who are always shut within the four corners of the house covered by the thick veil of the curtains, these are lives of women whom the dictionary left out in its explanation of ‘great men’. They were there but un-noticed and undiscovered. It is not an alternative claim for ‘greatness’ but Woolf used this obscurity to interrogate the very terms in which the biographical subject is thought, challenging notions of the ‘exceptional’ or ‘unique’ as self evidently connoting value and questioning whether progress and achievement provided the only way of structuring historical understanding. It is not possible to separate lives from books and vice versa. What is assumed ‘true’ or ‘history’, is an ideological, socio-cultural construct. It is also fiction. Woolf, through her use of the ‘Stream of Consciousness’ technique in her novels and the emphasis on the ‘inner life’, brought back to the notice of readers that women feel and narrate too and ‘that’ is also her story which makes an autobiography. The story of the woman is a “story of becoming, of yearning and potential” (Anderson, 2001, p. 97). It is a story of a story hidden in the pages of history.

Women writers resurrect and recreate themselves through their narration. They are endeavouring towards a self that has been bruised and exploited by the male-centered society, and by writing they are looking for purging and a certain healing. They are re-christening themselves with an identity fresh out of the confinements of social barriers. As Easterine Kire would say in her note on Barcelona Dreamtime (2007), “In finding freedom to tell their stories, I believe there will be some healing”.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

We have looked at autobiographies and their various new faces. Autobiography has transcended all outlines given to it and has now widened its initial territory. Where we once had access to written autobiographies only in book form, now we have autobiographies in comic strip convention, computer graphics, self- portraits and painting, internet fragmental autobiographies and the list keeps expanding. This Unit has provided you a glimpse of the concepts and the range of crucial questions surrounding the domain of autobiographies - Identity, Representation, Language and Writing. As contemporary readers, what is it that we have assimilated of this entire genre, and we use the word ‘genre’ deliberately only as a means of getting some order in place. Moreover, our discussion has also enabled us to see a new trajectory of autobiographers as ‘Historians of the Self.’ We have learnt that just as fiction has always been a part of the self, autobiography is no exception to this observation. Drawing upon the notion of the changing self and the changing contours of autobiography, we have seen how autobiography can help us come to a deeper understanding of unfixed selves.

2.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the new forms of autobiographies? Briefly describe these.
- 2) What are the ways in which the idea of the Self has changed in post modernist discourses of the Self in autobiographies? Explain in your own words.
- 3) What kind of role does fiction and performance play in an autobiography, which is essentially a writing of the Self? Discuss.
- 4) What are the points of intersection in all the autobiographies written by women? Discuss with the help of examples.
- 5) Do you think that an autobiography can prove cathartic to the autobiographer? Justify your answer with the help of specific examples.

2.11 REFERENCES

- Anderson, Linda (2001). *Autobiography*. New York, Routledge.
- Bruner, Jeremy (1991). Self and World Making. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. 25(1), 67-78. JSTOR. 09/08/2012 from <<http://www.jstor.org/>>.
- Chughtai Ismat (1999). *Lihaaf (The Quilt)*. (Trans.) M. Asaduddin. Manushi. Vol 110. pp.26-40. 10/10/12 from <http://www.freespeech.org/manushi/110/ismat.html>.
- Cosslett, Tess, Celia Lury, & Penny Summerfield (2000). *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*. London: Routledge.
- Eakin, Paul John (1985). *Fictions in Autobiography*. New Jersey: Princeton Press.
- Eakin, Paul John (2005). *Living Autobiographically*. Biographical Research Center. 28(1), Projectmuse. 12/04/2008 from <<http://www.projectmuse.com>>.
- Gilmore, Leigh, Kathleen M. Ashley, & Gerald Peters (1994). *Autobiography & Postmodernism*. Amherst: University Of Massachussetts Press.
- Hassan, Ihab (1988). *Quest for the subject: The Self in Literature*. Contemporary Literature, 29(3), Contemporary Literature and Contemporary Theory. pp 420-437. JSTOR. 09/08/2012 from <<http://www.jstor.org/>>.
- Jolly, Margaretta (2001). *Encyclopaedia of Self Writing*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong (1989). *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Kire, Easterine (2007). *Writing in Danger*, Barcelona Dreamtime. Catalan PEN's conference.
- Lang, Candace (1982). *Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism*. Diacritics, 12, pp 2-16.
- Lejeune, Philippe (1982). *The Autobiographical Contract*, in Tzevetan Todorov (Ed), French Literary Theory Today Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Millett, Kate (1970). *Sexual Politics*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Marcus, Laura (1994). *Auto/biographical Discourses*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Nora, Pierre (1989). *Between History and Memory: Les Lieux De Memoire*. Representations. 26: pp 7-24. JSTOR. 12/03/2008 from <<http://www.jstor.org/>>.

Patel, Geeta (2001). An Uncivil Woman: Ismat Chughtai. *Annual of Urdu Studies*. Vol.16, pp 345-355, Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin: Madison Press.

Peel, Ellen. (1989), *The Self is Always an Other; Going a Long Way Home to Autobiography*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 35(1), pp.1-16. JSTOR. 10/10/2011 from <<http://www.jstor.org/>>.

Pritam, Amrita. (1998). *Rasidi Ticket*. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books.

Pritam, Amrita (1998). *Rasidi Ticket (The Revenue Stamp)*. (Trans.). Krishna Gorowara, Delhi: Vikash.

Pukhraj, Malika (2003). *Song Song True*. (Trans.) Salim Kidwai. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Satrapi, Marjane (2004). *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Swindells, Julia (1995). *The Uses of Autobiography*. UK: Taylor & Francis.

Tharu Susan & K. Lalita (1993). *Women Writing in India*, Vol. I. New York: The Feminist Press

Turkle, Sherry (1996). *Virtuality and its Discontents*. The American Prospect. Winter 1996. Pp50-57 retrieved on February 02, 2014 from <http://web.mit.edu/sturkle/www/pdfsforstwebpage/ST_Virtuality%20and%20its%20discontents.pdf/>

Woolf, Virginia (1979). *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. (Ed). Anne Oliver Bell, 5 Vols, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

2.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

Harter, Susan (1999). *Construction of the Self: A Developmental Perspective*. New York: Guilford Press.

Kingston, Maxine Hong (1989). *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Olney, James (1972). *Metaphors of the Self; The Meaning of Autobiography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Smith, Sidonie & Julia Watson (1998). *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

UNIT 3 READING AND WRITING BIOGRAPHIES

Usha Bande

Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives
- 3.3 *Gulab Bai: The Queen of Nautanki Theatre*
 - 3.3.1 *Gulab Bai* as Biography
 - 3.3.2 Nautanki: History of Folk Art
 - 3.3.3 Gulab Bai: Life and Achievements
 - 3.3.4 Gulab Bai and the Social Canvas
 - 3.3.5 Portrayal of Women in Gulab Bai's Biography
 - 3.3.6 Bedia Clan: The Socio-Cultural-Historical Realities
- 3.4 *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*
 - 3.4.1 Freud, Hysteria & Dora
 - 3.4.2 *Dora* as Psycho Biography
 - 3.4.3 Background to Freud's *Case History of Dora*
 - 3.4.4 Analysis of Dora's First Dream
 - 3.4.5 Analysis of Dora's Second Dream
 - 3.4.6 Feminist Perspectives on Freud's *Dora*
- 3.5 *Portrait of Dora* by Hélène Cixous
 - 3.5.1 Introduction to the Author and the Play
 - 3.5.2 Cixous' Reading of *Dora*
 - 3.5.3 *Portrait of Dora* as a Feminist Text
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Unit End Questions
- 3.8 Glossary
- 3.9 References
- 3.10 Suggested Readings

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit seeks to study the application of feminist theory to selected biographies. In Block 1, Unit 1, we defined biography as “life”; we also took into consideration the fact that as no life is lived in a vacuum, similarly no biography, or for that matter autobiography can be written without reference to the socio-cultural or historical realities. The subject has lived a life in his/her society, interacted with people and garnered experiences. These experiences go into writing biography or autobiography. In the case of biography, the writer re-creates the world of the subject with the help of diaries, archives, recordings, interviews and travel to the site of the subject's

residence, as Deepti Priya Mehrotra did in the case of Gulab Bai. In the present Unit we are analyzing *Gulab Bai: The Queen of Nautanki Theatre*, Freud's *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* and Hélène Cixous' *Portrait of Dora*. Our aim is to induct you into giving a feminist reading to the texts.

Now, what do we mean by 'feminist reading'? Does it mean reading as a woman or does it mean reading a text by or about a woman?

Actually, neither!

A feminist reading means interpreting the text to see how it represents women, what it says about gender relations in a particular culture/society, how it defines sexual difference. As feminist readers we examine given texts in order to understand the place of women in the culture and to comprehend what it means to be a woman or a man in that society. This paves the way to reaffirm or challenge the existing socio-cultural norms.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss *Gulab Bai*, *Dora* and *Portrait of Dora* in the context of the genre of biography;
- Establish the three texts within specific contexts: socio-cultural (*Gulab Bai*); psychoanalytical (Freud's *Dora*); and feminist (*Portrait of Dora*);
- Examine the characteristics and roles of the protagonists/subjects in each text; and
- Analyze the impact of patriarchy on various characters in these texts.

3.3 GULAB BAI: THE QUEEN OF NAUTANKI THEATRE

You have by now gained familiarity with the nature of life writings in general, and their various forms such as autobiography and biography. Let us begin by examining one such work, *Gulab Bai: The Queen of Nautanki Theatre* in the context of what insights it may offer us about women's lives and patriarchy.

3.3.1 About the Book as a Biography

Gulab Bai: The Queen of Nautanki Theatre written by Deepti Priya Mehrotra is the biography of the legendary Gulab Bai, a Nautanki performer who gave dignity to this folk art form. It is not only the life story of an icon but also a tribute to her talents, her struggles and dedication.

In researching the life story of Gulab Bai, the author enters a self-conscious phase of feminist reading by isolating the persona from the culture of which she (Gulab Bai) was a part and then placing her beside mainstream culture to reconstruct the times she lived in. Mehrotra offers a critique of sexual power relations within the range of Nautanki culture; she depicts the reality of the cultural contexts - both Bedia and mainstream; interprets the Bedia social milieu in which women were free and yet bound within the specific norms, elevated as artists to be trivialized as women. In that, the author relives history and as Cathrine Belsey and Jane Moore opine in their "introduction" to *The Feminist Reader* (1997), "History has always been important to feminism, because it is history which provides us with evidence that things have changed" (Belsey & Moore, 1997, p. 2).

This well-researched biography presents the life of Gulab Bai along with the history of Nautanki theatre with the help of documents, oral narratives, interviews, and visits to her village. In the process it brings out the entire socio-historical and cultural ethos and economic and political conditions prevalent in the region. The book covers the period from 1920 to 1996 from Gulab Bai's life. Thereafter, it comments on the fate of Nautanki theatre up to 2006, when the book was published. Gulab rose from her humble background to reach national fame. She is credited with taking the Nautanki art form to uncharted heights. She used her acting and singing talents to help her family, train the young Nautanki artists and start her own Nautanki company. Her life is one of success, struggles, and poverty amid plenty.

The biography presents an all-inclusive picture of the personal and professional life of Gulab Bai exploring the shift between the public and the private. "Gulab sought refuge in art - she entered a form hitherto proscribed to women, thus expanding the spaces women could move into. Yet even as public spaces expand, women seem to be increasingly subjected to male gaze" (Mehrotra, 2006, p. 14). The identities she lived were varying and the persona she inhabited was complex. Along with the changing socio-cultural mores of pre-independence society through post-independence and after, the author presents a convincing picture of Gulab Bai, the woman, ever asserting her freedom and yet trapped in attachments and betrayals; and also Gulab Bai, the artist, ever energetic yet caught within the tensions of creativity and professional challenges.

3.3.2 Nautanki: History of the Folk Art Form

Nautanki is one of the popular forms of folk theatre of North India. Its history goes back to several hundred years. Its origin lies in folk performances like Bhagat, Raasleela, Khayal and such other dance dramas. Till the early 20th century Nautanki was performed by male artists. The performances would start late in the night and lasted till early morning hours. The pleasure of Nautanki lies in its vigorous dances, sonorous music and witty

dialogues with double meanings or licentious remarks which generated laughter. Earlier, women were not allowed to enter this male precinct, neither as performers nor as audiences; however, in the 1930s and 1940s women entered as dancers and singers in this exclusively male domain and took it to pinnacles of glory. Their entry added more vigour and flavour to the dramas and dances. Gulab Bai, for example, joined Tirmohan Lal's troupe in 1931. Her performances as the leading lady in the plays, and the thumris and dadras she sang became the rage of the times. Nautanki received recognition after the independence when the government instituted awards and gave impetus to folk art forms. Early Bombay cinema borrowed stories from the Nautanki theatre - mythologicals like *Raja Harishchandra*, romances like *Laila-Majnu* and *Shiri Farhad*; historicals like *Amar Singh Rathore*. During the freedom struggle Nautanki became a powerful medium to rouse sentiments against the British.

3.3.3 Gulab Bai: Life and Achievements

Early Life

Gulab Bai was born in 1920 in Balpurva village in Uttar Pradesh to Lal Bahadur from the Bedia clan and Jehangira from the Kurmi clan. Bedia is a nomadic clan which, along with Nats and Kalbelias, is good at performing rope tricks, street dances and pole vaults. Gulabiya's birth was celebrated as goddess Lakshmi's entry into their home. This was because the elders looked at girls as being auspicious, but rather due to purely mercenary considerations: girls have great earning potential. The social psyche of these poverty stricken people was not necessarily free of patriarchal control. It was at best ambiguous - girls were free to earn but the men exercised control over them – their earnings, their sexual alliances, their potential performances. This was true of Gulab's life -she earned in plenty yet lived in penury.

Gulab's father doted on her and took care to train her since early childhood. Gulab's family was poor. The only earning member of the large family was Chandrabhaga, Gulab's cousin. As soon as little Gulabiya was eight she tagged along Chandrabhaga to dance and sing in the village streets and in melas to earn some pittance. By the time Gulab was about ten years of age, the responsibility of earning fell on her as Chandrabhaga had left Balpurva to live with her patron.

The life of these nomads revolved round the village fairs, deities and fakirs. Once at Madar Shah's fair, Gulab saw a Nautanki performance of *Raja Harishchandra* and was strongly attracted to this art form. But at that time women did not perform at Nautankis and the proposition of joining the troupe did not seem very feasible.

Gulab's father, however, was enthusiastic to induct his talented daughter into Nautanki. By the 1930s women in Bengal and Bombay were coming out to join the cinema and theatre companies. Lal Bahadur contacted Tirmohan Lal, the proprietor of the Nautanki Company and somehow managed to place Gulab to sing Dadra and thumaris between the scenes. Gulab got an excellent opportunity to show her talent. Soon she was given the roles of Ranis - Rani Taramati in *Raja Harishchandra*, Haadi Rani in *Amar Singh Rathore*, Shehzadi in *Shehzadi Nautanki*, Laila in *Laila Majnu* and Farida in *Bahadur Ladki*. With her grace, beauty, and acting talent, Gulab became the prime crowd-puller and the mainstay of Tirmohan Lal's company.

Love-Life

Gulab matured into a beautiful woman by the time she was twenty and craved for a male partner. But in the social system of the Bediyas, the male members such as fathers, brothers and uncles, usually discouraged girls to marry because it meant an end to family income. Fortunately, Chander Seth, a perfume manufacturer from Kannauj took a fancy to her, agreed to help the family financially and married her. Chander Seth was already married but social norms did not prevent a man from taking another wife. Thus, with social sanction, Gulab became his second wife. Chander Seth kept her in luxury. She stopped performing at Nautankis and led the luxurious life of a rich man's wife. She bore him a son named Suresh Chander. However, Chander Seth's interest in Gulab Bai wore off after a while. He started neglecting her. Gulab was too astute not to understand his excuses for long absences and also too fiery to tolerate his infidelities. Pained and saddened, she broke off the relationship and returned to Nautanki.

Gulab was heart-broken and lonely till Raja Master, a co-actor, came in her life. They had two children Asha and Rajendra. Unfortunately, Raja's early death left her shattered but the pain gave a deeper resonance to her dadras and thumaris. In 1950 she opened the Great Gulab Theatre Company. Slowly, she gave the roles of heroines to her younger sisters and later to her daughter Asha and she busied herself in training young talents. The Company became famous and a leader among all competitors. After a while Gulab came in contact with Balbir Singh, the owner of a touring cinema company. He hailed from the Punjab but visited her often. A daughter, Madhu, was born to them. Balbir wanted to educate his daughter but he fell on bad days, cheated Gulab, siphoned off all her savings and left her penniless, never to return. Madhu's dream of becoming a doctor was shattered; she could not even get married because her mother could not give her dowry. Madhu and Asha both landed on the stage to carry on their mother's legacy.

Gulab Bai won many honours and awards including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1985, Padmashree in 1990 and Yash Bharati Award in 1995. She became a legend, a cultural icon and symbol of Nautanki. Retired from the stage, she worked for the betterment of the Nautanki artists and tried to institute other welfare measures for her co-actors. Her songs were recorded by the HMV recording company, she was extensively interviewed and a couple of biopics were made on her. Many of the movies of Bombay cinema drew stories from her plays and *Teesri Kasam* which bears remarkable resemblance to her life was made in 1966. Gulab Bai died on July 13, 1996.

3.3.4 Gulab Bai and the Social Canvas

Biography presents, along with the subject's life-story, the record of the social, economic, historical and cultural exigencies of the time. Gulab's biography works on three levels:

- Gulab's life as a Nautanki actor;
- The history of Nautanki; and
- The socio-cultural-political setting.

For the feminist reader, Gulab Bai's biography offers rich feminist overtones. These unfold slowly as the author reconstructs the life story of the legendary Gulabiya, popularly known as Gulab Bai. The relationship between biography and feminism is a complex one but in this biography, Deepti Priya Mehrotra successfully shows the male-dominated social set-up and Gulab's life within its precincts.

Gulab's biography covers the time span from 1920 (Gulab's birth) to 1996 (her death) but it also focuses on the current state of Nautanki and the condition of the Nautanki artists. In the early decades of the 20th century Nautanki was an all-male genre. But after the 1930s, women started entering the profession as dancers and singers and the Nautanki Companies became women dominated. Despite that, women had to be content with the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of men, as was the case with Gulab Bai, her sisters and later her daughters. Mehrotra feels that along with Bedia cultural norms these women also had to submit to the mainstream masculine supremacy.

3.3.5 Portrayal of Women in Gulab Bai's Biography

Within the limits of the biography of a woman and legend, Deepti Priya Mehrotra reconstructs the silenced history of women in the patriarchal society. The picture she presents is three-dimensional and outlines the situation of:

- The dalit Bedia clan and the colonization of women within its system;
- Male lust for the female body amongst both rich and poor Nautanki audiences; and
- Higher class/ caste women who despite their 'respectable' status were subjected to male whims and fancies.

The condition of Nautanki women was marginalized. The Bedia women were the main earners in their families and hence parents took special care to guard them from falling into permanent relationships. Often, these women led a lonely and insecure life. They lived in relationships but since these were not legally/socially sanctioned men walked in and out of their lives when they chose. Often the children became the mothers' responsibility. The birth of the girl child was, however, celebrated as the bread winner of the family. Gulab supported her family all through her life. The male members were free to lead an idle existence or indulge in criminal offenses like thefts. However, this was not an isolated case. All Bedia men looked to the female members as their mainstay.

On the obverse side, the biography directs attention to the condition of mainstream women from upper castes/classes that was no better, thus testifying against the injustice of the system. These 'respectable' family women led restricted lives; education was unheard of for girls, and often they had to silently bear their husband's waywardness. Men were free to keep the Nautanki girls as mistresses; some married them and spent on them lavishly neglecting their wedded wives and children. Chander Seth betrayed his wife to marry Gulab and later betrayed Gulab for another woman. Men had society's full sanction to behave as they would. The Nautanki women were not free in the real sense of the word despite their unfettered life; in that, the social sanction for them was limited too. They were kept in virtual purdah and were discouraged from amorous alliances.

Gulab Bai's biography exposes the national and cultural discrimination against women of the disadvantaged class. Their double colonization is apparent all through the book. The spaces they have for themselves do not constitute a linear narrative; they are punctuated with the cultural dominance of the mainstream. But at the same time we can note women's bonding in the Bedia clan. Their buoyancy of spirit emanates from a sense of community in shared work, shared pain and suffering. Gulab Bai was the mainstay – both financially and emotionally – for her sisters, cousins, their children and also for her daughters.

3.3.6 Bedia Clan: The Socio-Cultural-Historical Realities

The Bedias, along with Nats and Kalbeliyas were originally from Rajasthan. The Bedias claim that they were soldiers in the army of Maharana Pratap.

After the Rana's defeat at Akbar's hands, instead of surrendering to the victor, they chose to roam about in the jungles and with time strayed into Bundelkhand and Avadh. The Bedias were good street dancers and singers. They, therefore, went into the village entertainment professions and enthralled the village folks.

Bedia men were fighters and women were entertainers. The men usually rebelled against authority and indulged in unlawful activities. In 1871, the British government enlisted these communities as "criminal tribes and castes" and their activities came in for close scrutiny. Consequently, the men hid in the jungles or concealed their identities. In their absence their women became the central bread earners and men lived on the periphery of domestic economy.

These facts can be substantiated from the lived realities of Gulab's life. Gulab not only looked after her children and sisters (four of them) but had to dole out large sums for her father and five brothers who lived off her. The male members lived in luxury - drinking, smoking and doing nothing while the women slogged - their mother Jehangira toiled at home and the daughters struggled in their profession.

Though Bedia women were not encouraged to marry, there were no taboos regarding relationships with men. If at all they married, it was ensured that the man marrying a Bedia woman would compensate the family adequately. Chander Seth married Gulab but he substantially supported the entire family. Gulab had a relationship with Raja and later with Balbir Singh who did not resent her monetary help to her sisters and others. She bore them children but they were not legitimate. Often these men were not serious in maintaining life-long bonds, they cheated or betrayed their women and left them high and dry - Chander Seth was not faithful to Gulab while Balbir Singh cheated her of all her money and left her a pauper. The emotional life of Nautanki women was generally empty and they suffered from loneliness, insecurity and want. Their daughters had no choice but to enter the mother's profession willy-nilly. Gulab's daughters Asha and Madhu could never fulfill their dreams of a settled life.

Traditionally, women's biographies presented a stereotypical picture of women performing allotted roles within the andocentric culture. The society being patriarchal, the male view of women prevailed. Since biography is the story of a person from birth to death, the subject of the biography (that is, the woman whose life was written about) was fitted within a frame and even women biography writers portrayed an "image" rather than the real being.

But, the emergence of feminist biography changed the graph. Now, when we talk of a woman's biography, we mean woman in the biography as well as a woman author's perspective on this biography. In the case of Gulab

Bai's biography under study, we get the advantage of knowing her more than just as a mother, daughter, mistress; we see her as a professional artist placed within the society that is constantly present in the narrative. Deepthi Mehrotra's perspective enables us to make sense of the double view she presents: the particular life, i.e. of Gulab Bai and of the lives of women in general.

The book seeks to explore the relationship between biography and the many new developments evident in feminist history. Gulab Bai's story is no longer the story of a heroic woman on the way to women's emancipation but the story of the travails of a woman who challenged the illusion of objectivity

Check Your Progress:

i) Fill in the blanks:

- a) The film is based loosely on the life of Gulab Bai.*
- b) Gulab Bai belonged to caste.*
- c) The three men in Gulab Bai's life were,, and*
- d) Gulab Bai acted as Rani Taramati in the play, and as..... in Amar Singh Rathore.*
- e) The name of Gulab Bai's Nautanki Company was*

ii) Why was the birth of a girl celebrated in the Bedia community?

iii) a) What were the primary relationships in Gulab Bai's life?

- b) Why do you think that none of them lasted?*

iv) How and why was she introduced into the tradition of Nautanki?

3.4 DORA: AN ANALYSIS OF A CASE OF HYSTERIA

You have already been introduced to the work of the well known Viennese psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in previous units (for instance, see MWG 001, Block 5, Unit 2). Amongst his many other famous works, Freud contributed a case history entitled *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1963), based on his clinical experiences of treating a young girl suffering from hysterical symptoms. The work has garnered much interest and criticism from feminist scholars. Since it falls under the rubric of life writing, let us look at it in the context of the larger rubric of this course - gender and life narratives. In order to do so, it is important to begin with an understanding of Freud's own perspectives on hysteria in its relationship to women.

3.4.1 Freud, Hysteria and Dora

Freud, who wrote most of his works at the turn of the 19th century, became very interested in Jean Martin Charcot's work on hysteria (which he translated). Subsequently, he collaborated with Josef Breuer to publish his now famous *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-95). Freud developed an advanced theory on hysteria and its links with the unconscious, reading hysterical symptoms as expressions of repressed desires, and thus as ways of decoding the unconscious. As many of his patients suffering from hysteria were women, Freud grew increasingly interested in the gendered nature of hysteria, and began to study closely the presentation of hysterical symptoms in women.

So what exactly do we mean by hysteria? Hysteria is a disease commonly known as conversion disorder which afflicts women. The word "hysteria" is derived from the Greek word "Hysteron," meaning the "womb" or "uterus." Greek physician Hippocrates believed that the psychological symptoms of hysteria were associated with woman's womb. But 20th century research found that hysteria afflicts both men and women. In hysteria psychological conflict is converted into bodily problems. Thus, it has both psychological and physical symptoms. Briefly, psychological problems can be categorized as amnesia, anxiety, depression and trauma. Physical symptoms are: paralysis, nervous tics, loss of speech, sleep-walking, appendicitis, hallucinations and convulsions.

In October 1900, an eighteen year old girl, named Ida Bauer, was brought by her father to Freud for treatment of hysterical symptoms. Freud later published the case history under the title *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1963), changing Ida's name to 'Dora' in order to maintain confidentiality and to protect the identity of the family. Even her parents are never addressed by their family name and their neighbor is called Herr K. and his wife Frau K.

This is one of Freud's most famous works and has been praised for the scientific strength of Freud's research methodology of analysis and diagnosis. During this case Freud discovered the theory of "transference" which we will look at later. The book has been divided in three parts. In Part I, Freud gives his prefatory remarks about the case and its sensitivity, analyses two dreams of Dora and gives the clinical picture of her problem. In Part II and III he focuses on the history of hysteria with general remarks about the disorder.

Dora suffered from several psychological problems which Freud related to the traumatic experiences of her sexual life. Freud discovered after a few sittings that her problem started after her encounter with Mr K whose amorous advances aroused her sexually. Dora repulsed him but developed trauma and stress due to fears. These repressed sexual urges caused physical and psychological disorders. As Dora's case suggests, Freud's approach was to reach the unconscious through his typical treatment of talking. This allowed both the doctor and the patient to identify the subconscious problem, face it and solve it. But Dora discontinued the treatment abruptly after eleven weeks and Freud was unable to bring the case to a fruitful conclusion.

In the subsequent sections, we will look more closely at Freud's methodology, and the role played by dreams, associated day-time events and physical symptoms in his analysis of Dora's case.

3.4.2 *Dora as Psycho-Biography*

First of all let us understand what psycho-biography is. It is the study of the psychological biography of some historically known person and its aim is to understand the actions and motives with the help of psychological theory. Sigmund Freud's analysis of Leonardo da Vinci is generally considered as the first modern psycho-biography. Psycho-biography uses some typical methodology to interpret the person's mental markers like their dreams to understand the pattern of behavior. But, it may also be kept in mind that psycho-biography is not biography though it uses biographical data. In biography, the aim is to tell the story of a life as comprehensively as possible. Biographers do not do psychology; they want to set down the record of the life. Biographies are chiefly descriptive; psycho-biographies are explanatory and interpretative. Biography's aim is to see the "what" of the life? Psycho-biography is the search for "why"? Freud's book comes under the category of psycho-biography in a limited sense because though it relates the psychological leanings of Dora, it does not interpret her full life. We know limited aspects of her personality - her childhood, Oedipus complex and her sexual urges. Before we examine closely Freud's interpretations of Dora's case history, let us familiarize ourselves with the background to the book.

3.4.3 Background to Freud's *Case History of Dora*

Freud's book opens with his "prefatory remarks" about the doctor-patient ethics and the exigency of keeping the patient's secrets. He admits that his problem was whether to publish the findings or not because on the one hand divulging the secret of a patient would be tantamount to breach of faith; on the other hand, a psychoanalyst must enlighten the others in the field of research. The issue was particularly tricky because Dora's case was of psycho-sexual nature. It was culturally improper for him to talk to an eighteen year old girl about intimate sexual urges but since sex played an important part in her case, he had no choice but to discuss it with Dora.

In the second section entitled "The Clinical Picture," Freud emphasizes the importance of dreams. Earlier in his book *Studies in Hysteria*, published in 1895, he had made the point that in order to understand the role played by sex in hysteria, it was necessary to demystify dreams. Usually, we have some desires that we leave unexpressed because they are forbidden. They are shameful and hence improper. But these repressed desires remain hidden in the consciousness and surface in dreams, thus indirectly expressing the innermost thoughts and urges. Knowing these dreams and the situations behind them enables a psychoanalyst to understand the mental process of hysteria.

Dora's father brought her to Freud for treatment as she was suffering from neurotic attacks. Freud employed his understanding of the Oedipus complex in his analysis of Dora's psychosexual development and hysterical symptoms. (We have already read about Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex in MWG 001, Block 5, Unit 2. It would be useful for you to re-visit this unit for a better understanding of these ideas.)

The case in brief was thus: Dora was very attached to her father. When she was eight, her father took seriously ill and her mother nurtured him to health. Consequently, the two patched up their differences and came closer. Thereupon, Dora became hostile to her mother. At the age of fourteen, Dora suspected that her father had an affair with Mrs. K, their young neighbor, and he was offering her to Mr. K as a substitute. Mr. K was a romantic type of a young man. His advances and acts angered her and she was beset with fear. Dora developed psychological symptoms of neurosis and physical problems like appendicitis, loss of voice and hallucinations. The real-life problems manifested themselves in her recurring dreams. Freud analyzed her dreams and came to the conclusion that her hysterical symptoms were the product of her repressed longings. He speculated that Dora perhaps liked K's advances because she was young and sexually excited by his touch, but that she repressed her desires.

However, during repeated sittings, Dora expressed her denial of ever being in love with Mr. K. In the face of Freud's insistence to the contrary, she abruptly decided to stop the treatment. This was her revenge on Freud for his assessment of her feelings and motivation. According to Freud, Dora's behaviour during analysis could be explained on the basis of the theory of "transference". He opined that Dora projected her emotions for K onto Freud, then as an act of vengeance she discontinued the treatment. According to Freud, her revenge on Freud was actually a 'transference' of her vengeance towards K.

3.4.4 Analysis of Dora's First Dream

Dreams: Freud believed that dream interpretation was crucial to understanding hysteria. According to Freud, most dreams are wish-fulfillment: "I argued in my book that every dream is a wish which is represented as fulfilled, that the representation acts as a disguise if the wish is a repressed one" (Freud, 1963, p. 85). Freud's analysis of two dreams told to him by Dora form a crucial part of the case history since it reveals both Dora's repressed desires and fears, as well as Freud's 'reading' of these emotions based on his theoretical understanding. To get a better idea of the content of the two dreams, let us look at each one individually. We will begin with Dora's first dream, as narrated to Freud and re-told in his case history.

The First Dream

In the first dream, Dora's family house is on fire. Her father wakes her up in an attempt to get out of the house; however, Dora's mother wants to look for her jewelry-case before they leave the house. Her father and mother have an argument over it. Let us take a look at the narration of the dream as reported by Dora to Freud, and recorded by him in the book:

Box No. 3.1

"A house was on fire. My father was standing beside my bed and woke me up. I dressed myself quickly. Mother wanted to stop and save her jewel-case; but Father said: 'I refuse to let myself and my two children be burnt for the sake of your jewel-case.' We hurried downstairs, and as soon as I was outside I woke up." (Freud, 1963, p. 81)

This dream is related by Freud to two day-time events which may have triggered the dream:

- Real life situation i): Dora's mother had earlier locked the dining room which was linked to her son's (Dora's brother's) room. Her father had expressed concern that in case of an emergency, the son would not be able to come out. He had also expressed fear of the house catching fire.
- Real life situation ii): Dora was napping in her room when K had slyly entered the room and stood near her bed which she had resented.

Freud's interpretation: Freud interprets the jewel case as a symbol of Dora's urge for sex. The jewel case was a present from Mr. K. and Dora wishes to return the favour by having a sexual encounter with Mr. K. In this section Freud gives the readers a look at the psychological process called "transference." Let us take a look at Freud's interpretation of various aspects of this dream, through a dialogue that he has with Dora, and which he reports in the case history:

"Perhaps you do not know that 'jewel-case' ['Schmuck-kastchen'] is a favourite expression for the same thing that you alluded to not long ago by means of the reticule you were wearing - for the female genitals, I mean."

"I knew you would say that."

"That is to say, you knew that it was so. - The meaning of the dream is now becoming even clearer. You said to yourself: 'This man is persecuting me; he wants to force his way into my room. My "jewel-case" is in danger, and if anything happens it will be Father's fault.' For that reason in the dream you chose a situation which expresses the opposite - a danger from which your father is saving you. In this part of the dream everything is turned into its opposite; you will soon discover why. As you say, the mystery turns upon your mother. You ask how she comes into the dream? She is, as you know, your former rival in your father's affections.

...

Then it means that you were ready to give your father what your mother withheld from him; and the thing in question was connected with jewleery. Now bring your mind back to the jewel-case which Herr K. gave you. You have there the starting -point for a parallel line of thoughts, in which Herr K. is to be put in the place of your father just as he was in the matter of standing beside your bed. He gave you a jewel-case so you are to give him your jewel-case. ... So you are ready to give Herr K. what his wife withholds from him. ... The dream confirms once more what I had already told you before you dreamed it - that you are summoning up your old love for your father in order to protect yourself against your love for Herr K. But what do all these efforts show? Not only that you are afraid of Herr K., but that you are still more afraid of yourself, and of the temptation you feel to yield to him. In short, these efforts prove once more how deeply you loved him."

Naturally Dora would not follow me in this part of the interpretation.
(Freud, 1963, p. 87-88)

As we can see from the above, Freud interprets Dora's resistance to the sexual advances made by Herr K. as a repression of her sexual desires -

both for her father, and by transference, for Herr K. Despite Dora's repeated denials of Freud's insistence on this line of thinking, he remains firm in his belief that Dora desires the men whom she claims to resist.

Based on his theory of 'transference' Freud further extends this interpretation to include himself in the ambit of males desired by Dora: "Taking into consideration, finally, the indications which seemed to point to there having been a transference on to me - since I am a smoker too - I came to the conclusion that the idea had probably occurred to her one day during a sitting that she would like to have a kiss from me" (Freud, 1963, p. 92). Thus, according to him, Dora has transferred her desires from her father onto to Herr K. and then onto Freud himself. Feminist critics of Freud have interrogated such a male-centered reading of Dora's case history, as we will see in the subsequent section. Before we get to that, let us look at the second dream and Freud's de-coding of this dream

3.4.5 Analysis of Dora's Second Dream

In the dream Dora is in a strange town. She gets the news that her father is dead. She has to catch the train to go home but she is unable to reach the station. As she is walking and enquiring, everybody tells her that the station is at a distance of just five minutes' walk but she cannot reach it. Finally, on reaching home Dora is told that her mother has already left for the cemetery. Here is the content of the dream that Dora narrates to Freud:

Box No. 3.2

The Second Dream

"I was walking about in a town which I did not know. I saw streets and squares which were strange to me. Then I came into a house where I lived, went to my room, and found a letter from Mother lying there. She wrote saying that as I had left home without my parents' knowledge she had not wished to write to me to say that Father was ill. 'Now he is dead, and if you like, you can come.' I then went to the station ('Bahnhof') and asked about a hundred times: 'Where is the station?' I always got the answer: 'Five minutes.' I then saw a thick wood before me which I went into, and there I asked a man whom I met. He said to me: 'Two and a half hours more.' He offered to accompany me. But I refused and went alone. I saw the station in front of me and could not reach it. At the same time I had the usual feeling of anxiety that one has in dreams when one cannot move forward. Then I was at home. I must have been travelling in the meantime, but I know nothing about that. I walked into the porter's lodge, and inquired for our flat. The maidservant opened the door to me and replied that Mother and the others were already at the cemetery ['Friedhof']."

(Freud, 1963, p. 114)

This dream, like the previous one, is linked by Freud to real life situations experienced by Dora which may have led her to have this dream:

- Real life situation i): Dora had seen the photograph of some town in an album presented to her by a young engineer who was planning to court her which is reflected in her dream.
- Real life situation ii): she had written a letter to her parents that she was leaving home. This she had done to scare her father so that he would end his relations with Mrs. K. Mrs. K had also written her a letter inviting her to visit the Lake.

Freud's interpretation: According to Freud, this dream, a fantasy of running away from home, is Dora's revenge against her father and Mrs. K. Freud also connects the letter to the one Dora received from Mrs. K. inviting her to the lake. He explains these links with the help of the theory of displacement:

"The *wood* in the dream had been just like the wood by the shore of the lake, the wood in which the scene she had just described once more had taken place. But she had seen precisely the same thick wood the day before, in a picture at the Secessionist exhibition. In the background of the picture there were *nymphs*.

...

But now, with the addition of "nymphs" visible in the background of a "thick wood," no further doubts could be entertained. Here was a symbolic geography of sex! ... If this interpretation were correct, therefore, there lay concealed behind the first situation in the dream a phantasy of defloration, the phantasy of a man seeking to force an entrance into the female genitals."

(Freud, 1963, p. 119-120)

As is evident from the above interpretations, Freud links aspects of Dora's dreams to repressed sexual desires on her part, focusing especially on desires for the male father-figures who play important roles in her life. Feminist critics of Freudian psychoanalysis have pointed to several problems in such an interpretation. In the next section, let us turn to feminist perspectives on the case history of Dora.

3.4.6 Feminist Perspectives on Freud's *Dora*

Dora is the psycho-biography of a girl of eighteen. We learn about her life through the analysis of her psychological problems. Freud received both praise and criticism for this work. He was praised because he achieved a breakthrough in psychoanalytic theories and gave a new interpretation to

dreams and the issues of “transference” and “displacement”. He was criticized because he traced all psychological problems to sexual urges.

Freud’s “phallocentrism” is obvious in his interpretation of Dora’s dreams. Phallocentrism typically offers a male view of women’s sexuality and deprives the female of any positive sense of her own sexual organ. She sees herself as a castrated male and consequently as inferior to men. Freud avers that a female child develops the idea of female inferiority early in life. With maturity, she may accept her inferiority but if she fails to mature adequately, she pursues the masculine aims. According to Freud’s theory and his interpretation of Dora’s dreams we are led to believe that Dora is suffering from the Oedipus complex: she has sexual urges towards her father; she hates her mother and also Mrs.K because both are contenders for her father’s love. At the same time, she wants a sexual encounter with Mr. K.

Freud’s analysis of Dora’s case has drawn a lot of feminist criticism on the following grounds:

- Freud’s method of analysis is coercive. The doctor is a male who asserts his own power over the patient - the female, thus privileging the masculine over the feminine;
- Freud agreed to treat Dora on her father’s insistence because of which his analysis is biased;
- Freud’s assessment of Dora’s case is sexist. Freud rejects the possibility of active female sexuality. From the beginning, Freud does not consider Dora capable of turning down Mr. K since he is convinced that she harbours an unconscious desire for him;
- Hysteria may be a reaction against an oppressive male-dominated society. Several feminist scholars see hysteria as a passive form of resistance to social expectations which women may find it impossible to fulfill.

Feminist scholars like Hélène Cixous, Catherine Clément, Toril Moi and Sharon Willis offer some important critical commentary on Freud’s approach, and *In Dora’s Case* (1990), and anthology edited by Charles Bernheimer & Claire Kahane will also provide you with many interesting feminist perspectives for further reading (see list of references at the end of the unit).

3.5 PORTRAIT OF DORA BY HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

In the previous section, we obtained an understanding of Freud’s work as well as feminist perspectives of this work. As mentioned earlier, Freud’s case history has drawn a lot of critical attention from feminist scholars. In

this section, we will look at a fictional work by one such French writer, Hélène Cixous, who has attempted to fill in the gaps of Freud's 'reading' of Dora's life story by creating a play within which both Freud and Dora are principal characters, along with other members of Dora's family mentioned in Freud's recording of her history. In 're-writing' the story of Dora from a woman's perspective, Cixous calls our attention to Freud's biased interpretations of Dora's psychological problems.

3.5.1 Introduction to the Author and the Play

About Hélène Cixous

Hélène Cixous, pronounced as Elaine Siksu, is a French feminist author, playwright, theorist who is best known for her work on 'feminine writing' ("*écriture féminine*") and 'writing the body' ("*écrire le corps*") to which you have previously been introduced in previous units (see especially MWG 004, Block 4, Unit 2). She has written extensively on femininity in its relation to women and creative writing, and has interpreted literary texts from a feminist angle. She was particularly critical of Freud's analysis of gender roles and sexual identity and his theory of the Oedipus complex. Her famous essay, "The Laugh of Medusa," published in 1975, is an important feminist text. Besides this, she is the author of many works of fiction, drama and literary theory and criticism. In 1976, she published the play *Portrait of Dora* which we are going to study in this unit since it relates directly to the case history of Dora discussed in the previous section. Cixous' play offers a critical perspective on Freud's analysis of Dora's case, and is presented in the form of creative writing. The genre of the play allows her to create a fictitious account of Dora's story, as she imagines it. The form of the play also enables her to construct imaginary dialogues between Dora, Freud and other important characters in Dora's life so that we are able to look at Dora's story from angles which were blocked out in Freud's book. She has taken a feminist view and does not agree with Freud's analysis of Dora's dreams. Cixous's work shows us how Freud's understanding is limited by his patriarchal views on female sexuality and encourages us to think about the exploration of this issue from Dora's perspective.

About the Play

Portrait of Dora, written by Hélène Cixous in French, is based on Freud's book which we have studied. The play was translated into English by Anita Barrows (1977) and directed by Simone Benmussa. The play has five characters as in the original account of Freud. These are: Freud, Dora, Mr.K, Mrs. K. and Mr. B (Dora's father). The play is staged with a combination of "dream work" and "stage work". Taking the place of the traditional 'chorus' of classical drama, the "Voice of the play" performs an important

role in joining the two strands and allowing the spectators a peep into the psyche of the main character, Dora. The stage is the visual center or meeting place of the desires that are unattainable. Since in Freud's *Dora*, the past and the present inter-mingle at the level of memory and desires, symbols have been used to present the incidents economically on the stage.

The play starts with brief patches of conversation between Dora and Freud. Dora dares Freud (the analyst) to kiss her and she threatens that she would slap him. Cixous plays with the idea of transference introduced by Freud, showing how Dora may be transferring her desire and anger towards Mr. K on to Freud. This catches the interest of the audience/reader immediately. Mr. B (her father) intervenes and states that Mr. K only feels paternal affection for Dora. "Dora is still a child and Mr. K. treats her like a child" (Cixous, 1979, p. 30). Dora affirms that she never loved Mr. K. The conversation can be surmised to mean that Freud wanted to prove that Dora is suffering from repressed desires related to the Oedipus complex; she does not want her father to have affair with Mrs. K and in order to resist her father she is using displacement. Thus, Cixous wishes to expose Freud's phallogocentric biases. She shows that his case study is full of contradictions and gaps. In this play she creates an alternative version of events documented by Freud by reconstructing the story from Dora's angle and showing the oppression of women in Austrian society in the early twentieth century.

3.5.2 Cixous' Reading of *Dora*

Cixous makes Dora an empowered figure and re-imagines her as a woman who has the guts to transgress social norms. Dora rejects the limitations imposed on her by the patriarchal society. She asserts her sexuality, denaturalizes cultural and aesthetic assumptions about sexuality, desires sex with Mr. K and she transfers her desire to Freud, her analyst. In addition, Cixous' Dora experiences same-sex desire for Mrs. K, an aspect completely ignored by Freud due to his focus on the men in Dora's life. In Cixous's account, Dora's hysteria is not due to her Oedipus complex but due to her homosexual urges for Mrs.K. Freud's overlooking of this important repressed aspect of Dora's sexuality is thus revealed as a patriarchal blindspot in the 're-visioning' enacted in Cixous' play. In the excerpt taken from Cixous' play below, we notice that when Dora talks about her attraction for Mrs. K, Freud immediately changes the object of her affection from female to male, in keeping with his phallogocentric focus:

Dora: I owe her everything. I cherished her.

Freud: How could you be attracted by this man when your cherished friend spoke so ill of him?

Dora: (*standing beside MRS. K.*) She is an intelligent woman, superior to the men around her. A woman of exquisite beauty. How white your back is! And your skin! Oh, God, I love you! (*A whisper, and the very faint sound of a kiss*) May I? And here, too, just above...

You can't imagine how much I love you. If I were a man, I'd marry you, I'd take you away and marry you, and I'd know how to make you happy.

(Cixous, 1979, p. 42)

Towards the end of Cixous' *Portrait of Dora*, Dora's decision to quit psychoanalytical therapy under Freud reveal an independence and awareness on Dora's part which Freud was unwilling to recognize. Freud's blindness to other possible ways of looking at Dora's hysteria forces Cixous' Dora to ask "Who betrays whom in this story?" (Cixous, 1979, p. 53). Dora's decisiveness in the face of Freud's insistence on reading her problems only from his own perspective, and her denial of Freud's desires present an alternative way of understanding what Dora may have been experiencing. Let us look at a part of the dialogue from the play where Dora declares to Freud her decision to leave stop the treatment. Here, instead of Dora appearing as the victim, the reader is able to perceive Freud's own vulnerabilities and repressed desires for Dora. Cixous, in this manner, manages to invert Freud's transference theory to reveal that he is as much affected by unrecognized desires as Dora was. Freud's failure to recognize these aspects about himself, and his insistence on imposing only certain interpretations onto Dora, result in an 'inconclusive' case history - Dora's story is one that Freud, despite all his knowledge, is unable to bring to a successful resolution. Finally, as Cixous shows, it is up to Dora to take her life into her own hands, reject Freud's understanding of her story, and try to carve out an alternative one for herself. Her final "No" to Freud brings a satisfactory feminist closure to the play, allowing the reader, along with Dora, to reject the phallogentric and patriarchal expectations and interpretations imposed upon women by men:

Dora: Do you know, Doctor, that this is my last time here?

Freud: You're informing me.

Dora: Yes, I told myself I would try to be patient, but I don't want to wait much longer for the "cure".

...

Freud: You never gave me the chance to finish expressing myself. That's what you got out of your tendency to hurt yourself. I've never seen such violence.

Dora: Today is my last time here.

Freud: (doesn't hide his panic) you are avenging me the way you would have liked to avenge Mr. K. And you are abandoning me the way he abandoned you.

Dora: You don't understand anything. That won't stop you from existing! Here's my revenge: I'll go "alone," I'll cure "myself". And I've made up my mind to leave on a date I've set myself. The first of January 1900.

Freud: Listen. Your decision... We had decided....

Dora: No.

(Cixous, 1979, p. 64-65)

The Role of Memory

Cixous challenges Freud's theory that memory resides in the individual unconscious in the form of repressed memory traces. For Dora, her body is the privileged site of memory. This memory is brought to the surface during the psychological process of "talking cure" when the patient talks of his/her past problems. Cixous draws our attention to what is left unsaid. As we have studied in the previous section, loss of voice is one of the symptoms of hysteria. Throughout the play Dora maintains silence at crucial moments. According to Cixous, Dora's silences are informative. Dora's refusal to speak can be read as her resistance to conform to the symbolic form of language. Cixous uses stills and film projection to replace verbal communication. Through this alternative means of expression, Cixous gives her memories visual form through her dreams and memories.

The Role of the Body

The play emphasizes Dora's subjectivity through the body to show the libidinal impulses of the female body. This conforms to her theory of *écriture féminine*, or "writing the body" which is a metaphor for the creation of feminist literary texts; it is the central medium of repressed and silenced memories. In the scenes on the stage, Dora's body is active and not a hysterical body lying on the couch. The scene between Dora and Freud is the central point of the play and is presented by the representation of memories, dreams and fantasies. Dora's body is not only a biological entity but also a social construct. Cixous' Dora is a subversive figure because she resists and subverts the patriarchal order. Dora is also a social figure trapped in the traumatized body. However, problems arise when Dora's body becomes the site of internal desires.

3.5.3 *Portrait of Dora* as a Feminist Text

A feminist text states the author's views about women in society, their relation to the patriarchal power structure and the oppression of women. A feminist text is generally written from a feminist perspective, and it points out deficiencies in society regarding gender inequalities. In the biographies we have read, the main character personifies the social struggle against male domination.

- *Portrait of Dora* is a feminist text re-telling the story of Dora from Dora's perspective. It highlights Dora's resistance to male-centric thinking;
- Cixous makes it clear that Dora's hysteria can be attributed to her sexual abuse by Mr. K, her father's affair with Mrs K and Freud's perpetuation of a damaging situation. Her hysteria is portrayed as the result of social, cultural and historical factors. Freud, Mr. K and Mrs K are the representatives of a patriarchal social system;
- Freud's treatment of Dora shows his phallogocentric approach to the female psyche;
- Dora's abandonment of the treatment is indicative of her independent gesture. Her dismissal of Freud is a silent protest and a sign of female empowerment. Dora is an example of feminine revolt;
- Hélène Cixous has carefully crafted her sentences, metaphors and the dream scenes, the importance of body and voice to instill the picture of male oppression;
- *Portrait of Dora* is a feminist text, because it challenges old ideas about hysteria. Dora expresses her personal choice to stop the analysis abruptly and thus takes revenge on Freud.
- The text exposes the social conventions that dub woman's sexual urges as sickly, aberrant or abnormal.
- Dora's case cannot be understood in its complexity through the lens of the Oedipus complex. She has homosexual urges which do not fit into this frame and which need to be examined from an alternative perspective not allowed by Freud's reading.
- The play promotes Cixous' call for change through creative writing and the force of a feminine imaginary.

Counter-View

Some feminists feel that such interpretations celebrating hysteria as woman's empowerment and resistance may end up ignoring the real suffering of the victim. Ironically, such readings may result in replicating Freud's own blindness towards the social and historical factors that contribute to the hysteric's pain and suffering.

Check Your Progress:

- a) *The full title of Freud's book on Dora is*
- b) *Dora was a case of*
- c) *According to Freud, Dora suffered from complex.*
- d) *Dora's real name was*
- e) *Portrait of Dora is written by in the language.*
It has been translated by into English..
- f) *Memory andplay important roles in Portrait of Dora.*

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied three biographies from three different angles.

Gulab Bai's biography reconstructs the life of a Nautanki dancer with the help of letters, archives, interviews and video and audio tapes. In the course, the author presents important evidence on Nutanki folk art form, historical background of the Bedia clan and the socio-cultural history of the period in which Gulab Bai lived and performed. Her biography becomes an important socio-cultural document as also a feminist text. Here, the female body is the site of male gaze and pleasure. But these were the accepted facts. Gulab Bai, her sisters and other Nautanki artists knew well that they could not counter them. As Deepti Priya Mehrotra writes, "The very presence of a woman on stage stimulated male fantasy. ...Male gaze easily classified such a woman as 'available'" (Mehrotra, 2006, p. 121).

Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria by Sigmund Freud is set in Vienna of late 19th and early 20th century. Freud analyzed Dora whose real name was Ida Bauer. In the course of analysis Freud discovered Dora's childhood, her sexual urges as an adolescent girl and what he perceived to be hysterical symptoms caused by the repressed desires of an unresolved Oedipus complex. This book can be studied as psycho-biography. Here, the female body becomes the site of male oppression and female anger.

Portrait of Dora by Hélène Cixous is a play modeled on Freud's case history of Dora. With the help of dream scenes, screen memory and stage voice Cixous captures Dora's complex and contradictory feelings and desires whose repression gives way to hysteria. This is a feminist biography in which the playwright shows Dora's problem from the perspective of a woman. It downplays the role of the Oedipus complex and focuses on Dora's freedom of choice, her trauma and homosexual urges towards Mrs K. Cixous indicts Freud for his masculine bias and inability to understand female sexuality.

Here, the body is represented as an alternative medium through which to portray memory and to resist male oppression.

3.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Comment on the position of Bedia women as reflected in *Gulab Bai: The Queen of Nautanki Theatre*.
- 2) Discuss Dora's relations with (a) her father, (b) her mother (c) Mr K (d) Mrs K as represented in Freud's *Dora*.
- 3) a) Discuss Dora's first dream and Freud's interpretation (about 100 words).
b) Critically analyse Freud's interpretation from a feminist perspective.
- 4) a) Comment on *Portrait of Dora* as a feminist text.
b) What is the role played by memory in *Portrait of Dora*?
- 5) Discuss the representation of the female body in the three texts you have read from a feminist perspective.
- 6) Write short notes on the following:
a) Nautanki Folk theatre b. Hysteria c. Displacement d. *Écriture feminine*.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Écriture féminine : This term was made popular by Hélène Cixous, the French feminist. Écriture in French means "writing". Thus, it means a specific form of feminine writing that is said to emerge from the libidinal impulses of the female body. This theory is best articulated in Cixous' 1976 article "The Laugh of the Medusa". Here Cixous proposes a utopian feminist vision, that writing emerging from the female body can subvert patriarchal language.

Displacement : literally means "shift". It is an unconscious defence mechanism in which the mind redirects the anger or dangerous thoughts from one object or person to another. Displacement operates in the mind unconsciously and involves emotions, ideas or wishes being transferred from original object to a substitute. By doing so, the victim relieves his/her anxiety. Freud refers it to sexual urges.

- Hysteria** : It is a psychological disorder in which a person undergoes emotional conflict. This conflict converts into bodily disturbance like hallucinations, nervousness, paralysis and loss of voice. Earlier, it was thought that hysteria affected only women but now psychologists have diagnosed men also with hysteria.
- Nautanki** : A traditional folk art form popular in North India. The stories were earlier based on village heroes or heroines but later historical and mythological themes and romances were included in it.
- Transference** : The psychological process in which the patient projects his/her emotions towards the psychoanalyst.
- Writing the body** : is a metaphor for the creation of feminist literary texts. It also serves as an apt description of a feminist theatrical practice that gives ascendancy to female desire, sexuality and subjectivity through the body of the female performer.

3.9 REFERENCES

- Belsey, C. & Jane M. (1977). (Eds). *The Feminist Reader*, 2nd ed. Houndsmill: Macmillan Press.
- Bernheimer, C. & Claire K. (1990). (Eds). *In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cixous, H. (1979). *Portrait of Dora*. Trans. by Anita Barrows. London: John Calder.
- Freud, S. (1963). *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. New York: Collier Books.
- Mehrotra, Deepti P. (2006). *Gulab Bai: The Queen of Nautanki Theatre*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Moi, T. (1981). Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's 'Dora'. *Feminist Review*, No. 9, pp 60-74, .Retrieved from 29 April 2008. JSTOR. www.jstor.org.
- Willis, S. (1985). *Portrait de Dora: The Seen and the Un-Scene*. *Theater Journal*, 37(3), 287-301, 29 April 2008. JSTOR.

3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Cixous, H. (1999). *The Laugh of the Medusa*. In Marilyn Pearsall (Eds.), *Women and Values: Reading in Recent Feminist Philosophy*. Ed. by Belmont CA: Wadworth.

Gupta, C. (2001). *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community - Women, Muslims, and Hindu Public in Colonial India*. Delhi: Permanent Black.

Hansen, K. (1993). *Grounds for Play - The Nautanki Theatre of North India*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications.

Showalter, E. (1981). Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness, *Critical Inquiry*, 8(2), 179-205.



UNIT 4 VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS

Devaleena Das

Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Politics of Representation
- 4.4 Gendered Representations in Film
 - 4.4.1 Feminist Film Theory
 - 4.4.2 Documentary Representations of Courtesan Culture
 - 4.4.3 Resistance and Transgression in Indian Cinema
 - 4.4.4 Representations of Same Sex Desire Limitation and Restriction
- 4.5 Painting and Feminist Art Criticism
 - 4.5.1 Frida Kahlo: A Brief Biography
 - 4.5.2 The Evolution of the Self in Frida Kahlo's Self-Portraits
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Unit End Questions
- 4.8 References
- 4.9 Suggested Readings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination has always eroded society based as it is on an unequal power relation. In previous units, you have already come across representation of women's life narratives in relation to self-portraiture, biography, autobiography and sexual politics. In the last unit of this block we will focus on visual forms of women's life narratives, ranging from painting and cinematography to theatre and television. We will also examine some of the problems and predicaments that arise in this context.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe how gender discrimination impacts the 'gaze' in visual representation, especially cinema;
- Discuss the voyeuristic cinematic gaze in the context of courtesan culture;
- Examine violence and sexuality in erotica from a feminist perspective;
- Explain the relationship between violence, space and 'placeness'; and
- Discuss Frida Kahlo's self-portraits in the context of visual life-narratives.

4.3 POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

The term ‘representation’ is complex and embodies several layers of meanings. You have already come across this term in MWG 003, Block 2, Unit 2, where we have already defined the term. Here, let us begin by reviewing what we mean by representation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides eight different meanings and the most common definition is that representation is “an image, likeness, or reproduction in some manner of a thing”. Therefore, representation is the reflection of the real and it attempts to ‘capture’ or ‘stand for’ the original. One of the crucial questions that arise with the act of representation is the authenticity of the original. Among the earliest Greek philosophers, Plato has already problematized the word ‘representation’ - for him literature or art is twice removed from reality and creates a world of illusion merely feeding our passion. However, Aristotle, in his theory of mimesis, has explained how the act of representation is a natural instinct in human beings and it is integral to art and culture.

In contemporary times, scholars have attempted to define representation in various ways. Stuart Hall in his *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), has proclaimed that politics goes hand in hand with representation and new meanings are produced through it. The act of representation cannot be free from the ideological influences of the person or the authority that is representing it. This influence can be conscious or unconscious but representation is always determined by power dynamics. This implies that more than ‘re-presentation’ it aims at exercising power by obliging the audience to see what the representer wants to show. This is what Kate Millet describes in her *Sexual Politics* as “power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of people is controlled by another” (Millet, 2000, p. 23). Let us take an example to understand this concept. In the novel *Foe* by J.M Coetzee, we come across a female character called Susan Barton who suffers from a lack of control of narrative about her cast away life which she wants to capture in the form of a story. When she hires an elusive author called Mr. Foe to ‘represent’ her story, she finds the truth being manipulated and violated by the author: “When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body...Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth” (Coetzee, 1987, p. 115).

This violation and imposition in the process of representation is the most crucial area of ambiguity. This charge of distortion becomes critical when representation is not being carried out in the first person. In our society,

patriarchy, taking for granted its authority to represent, has enjoyed the power of representation. As Karl Marx's famous dictum in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* suggests: "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (Marx, 2009, p. 126). The shift from narration to visual representation inevitably reveals many issues that are easily communicable to a greater mass. At the same time, the omnipresence of feminine image in relation to the politics of representation also raises interrogations regarding social conformity and individuality. To what extent are individuality and individual desires of women given space in visual representation? This is the most essential question that this unit will delve in. Also, in relation to gender and power structures, we will see how through visual representation, the question of 'empowerment' arises. (The word 'empowerment' suggests multi-dimensional ways by which women increase their economic, social, educational, economic and political power.) How is women's empowerment being represented in contrast to male dominance and above all what is the reaction of the mass audience to it? Here, we will look into all these issues through a study of some unique and challenging visual representations. As we will see, individual spontaneity and cultivation of the self of the woman is often in conflict with social parameters.

In an earlier unit (see MWG 003, Block 2, Unit 1), we have come across the notion of the 'gaze' and its impact on gendered visual representations. The question of the gaze is also crucial to our study here because it is always characterised from the observer's point of view. The feminist theory asserts that the 'gaze' is an imposition of the male way of viewing the world that indulges in an unequal power relation and domination of women as passive objects of libidinal excitement. The examples that we will analyse will probe into women's desires, pleasures and passions, issues often seen as pernicious to society.

This violence ranging from physical to psychological can be traced from the private, 'inside space' within domestic walls, to 'outside spaces' or the public sphere at large. By 'inside space' we mean not only a cocooned dark space of suppression and shameful, domestic secrets, but also a space of association of personal memories; 'outside space,' on the other hand, is often a boundless expanse of alienation and identity crisis because of one's inability to locate oneself in that space. Edward Relph, the famous geographer has explained that "to be inside a place is to belong to it and identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with the place" (Relph, 1976, p. 49). It is therefore clear that 'insideness' and 'outsideness' refer to topographical aspects than to mere physical presence. In this unit our discussion of selective visual representations will reveal how women have suffered from a sense of 'placelessness' and existential insecurity till

unbearable violence gives way to 'resistance'. (The theory of resistance relates to individual right and protest to defend oneself.) This 'resistance' in visual representation is often represented with an alternative critical gaze subverting the feminine stereotyped image. Let us have a quick overview of how this alternative critical gaze developed.

We will see how diverse visual representations have led to a substantial critique of social norms and an attempt for heterogeneous space for the individuals. Let us explore such unique representations of the quest for liberty and emancipation of women through radical representations which challenge the conventional and attempt to overcome oppressive traditions.

4.4 GENDERED REPRESENTATIONS IN FILM

Above, we have looked at the politics of representation and how the 'gaze' may be implicated in violence. In this section, we will draw out some further implications of representation with the help of feminist perspectives in the context of film. Let us begin by looking at feminist film theory and representations of courtesan culture in cinema.

Check Your Progress:

What is Representation? Try to explain briefly how it may be linked to violence and power in a patriarchal society.

4.4.1 Feminist Film Theory

Feminist film theory developed as an outcome of second wave feminism that started in the early 1960s, which demanded social equality irrespective of sex and gender. Feminist Film Theory strongly rejects the objectification of women in films and questions the location and use of women's images as the source of pleasure for male subjects whose needs determine the narrative flow of such films. So feminist film theory not only vehemently criticises the passive role of women in films but also attempts to overthrow such sexual stereotypes by giving voice to individuality irrespective of sexual difference. Transgressing the borderline between male gaze and female objectification, Feminist Film Theory has attempted to represent women from women's perspectives. We will analyse some of those unique Indian films where sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly women are empowered with a voice of their own or at least the camera represents the woman from her point of view. Let us begin by looking at representations of courtesan women in Indian cinema.

4.4.2 Documentary Representations of Courtesan Culture

From times immemorial Indian cinema has revealed a fascination for documenting and representing courtesan culture in exotic ways. We cannot forget such evergreen masterpieces like *Pakeezah*, *Umrao Jaan* or *Zubeidaa* with their haunting music, sexualised choreography and glamorous exposition of the figure of the courtesan as an ever aspiring object of desire. In such films, the remarkable texture of sadness mingled with sensuality and exotic music and imagery all seem to draw one into a fugitive world of life and passion; a world that nostalgically revives the old glory of the Nawabi culture of ancient Lucknow or Delhi.

In most of these movies, the courtesan is represented as a Muslim woman who is being forcibly driven to the 'trade' and is imprisoned forever in the shimmering world of exoticism and passion. The courtesan's difference from rest of the women of the world is that her sexuality is not calibrated by her power of procreation but by her unattainability and ubiquitous charm. The code of behaviour and attitudes of the courtesan are usually represented from a male point of view. The camera zooming in on particular gyrations, the expressive gestures of eyes, the distanced yet uncontrollable charm and evocative lyrics are reflective of the license and the pleasure of looking at the 'other' from a stereotypical masculine gaze. Laura Mulvey in her influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has aptly observed how "woman ... stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of

meaning” (Mulvey 1989, p.15). The courtesan on the Bollywood silver screen has been predominantly the signifier of widespread fascination with inexhaustible sexuality, forbidden love, forsaken womanhood and gender asymmetry.

Another very well known film of this genre, Shyam Benegal’s *Sardari Begum* which belongs to Khalid Mohammed’s trilogy stories (*Mammo*, *Sardari Begum* and *Zubeidaa*) is a cinematic representation of the life of Begum Akhtar, a very famous vocalist. The eponymous character presented in the film is shown by Benegal as the revolutionary Muslim woman who is ‘different’ from the symbolic axis of a traditional courtesan and has never conformed to the society. For the first time, the elusive courtesan character represented is no more the site of a clandestine sexist iconic figure but an immensely talented woman whose passion and love for music has turned her into an outcast. More than being represented as the ‘Other’, *Sardari Begum* is a rebel in her society associated with wisdom and talent. *Sardari Begum*’s death causes political upheaval and religious turmoil reflecting multiple facets of the society; but it also paves the way for a young woman journalist (who incidentally happens to be her niece) to explore Begum’s talent behind the veil. When Tehzeeb, the journalist unravels *Sardari*’s private life, an entire gamut of mystery is disclosed. She is revealed as a talented versatile Thumri singer who is looked down upon for following her passion. Exploited by several men in her life whom she has mistaken as well-wishers and supporters in her career, *Sardari*’s character as a courtesan is challenging because she disregards all the roles society wanted to thrust on her. Instead of being recognized as a talented singer, she is relegated to the status of a prostitute. The film offers a sharp criticism of the traditional mindset according to which talented women are chastised for having the courage to follow their passion. Such a revolutionary character in the film is presented to the two younger women (*Sardari Begum*’s daughter and niece) as an inspirational figure.

Benegal’s representation of Begum conflicts with traditional courtesan fantasies. Against the contemporaneous themes, such a daunting documentation of a revolutionary character goes against the grain of a conservative society; neither does it conform to patriarchal representations of romanticised masculine aspirations and expectations. Instead, woman’s prowess and courage, and her attempt to give shape to her art and passion offers a voice which women have been seeking for themselves. The movie is a representation for a change against the ‘otherness’ of woman since Benegal shatters the image of the rapacious sexuality of a courtesan. Benegal’s courtesan lives with courage and conviction in an alienated world, against which she struggles with the strength of her talent. Whether it is Tehzeeb’s upsurge against her staunch Muslim father or much aged partner who being the editor of the journal has never supported her to explore *Sardari*’s life,

or it is Sardari's revolutionary daughter Sakina, Sardari Begum's life epitomises for these two women the spirit of revolution and an attempt towards 'resistance'.

In contrast to Benegal's film, Muzaffar Ali's 1981 film *Umrao Jaan* (remade by P. Dutta in 2006 with a different cast) fails to show any such victory of the courtesan Umrao who is gifted with a phenomenal poetic talent. Originally named Ameeran, the courtesan is later honoured with title 'Umrao Jaan' for her extraordinary performance. In both the films, Umrao is ostracised and left in darkness. The movie is based on the documentary novel called *Umrao Jaan Ada* by Mirza Hadi Ruswa. Victim of human trafficking, Umrao is represented as the object of transient pleasure for kings and Nawabs but imprisoned for ever in the panoptical space of seclusion. Umrao is the perfect embodiment of the desirable courtesan. Her poetic and intellectual bent of mind, however, has remained in oblivion since her artistic gift is only used as a form of entertainment for male pleasure. Umrao is not daring; rather, she is represented as helpless under patriarchal assault. She conforms to society after being thwarted by her family and her lover is merely a tool appropriated by the patriarchal system. Thus, we can see that the courtesan woman who has been the patriarchal subject of pleasure and erotica, may be represented from entirely different perspectives in films like *Sardari Begum* and *Umrao Jaan*.



Source: Muzaffar Ali's Movie *Umrao and Nawab Sultan* The Times Of India Group, 1981

4.4.3 Resistance and Transgression in Indian Cinema

One of the traditional representations that Indian cinema has always glorified is the melodramatic sacrificial and self-effacing Indian woman. Manju Jain in her book *Narrative of Indian Cinema* (2009) comments:

“When detached from subjectivity and selfhood, rape is no more personal anguish of a violated self, but is reified into a narrative prop in which the moving force is usually male desire. The several protests against ShekharKapur’s representation of the rape in *Bandit Queen* had to do with what Arundhati Roy called his ‘Woman-as-Victim-Arithmetic’. Female agency and victimhood in the difficult context of patriarchy and the structural violence and power disparities that it facilitates gain interesting, if controversial, visibility in the representations of mainstream Bombay cinema”.

(Jain, 2009, p. 151).

The stereotypical representation of the suffering woman is well defined by Jain. RitwikGhatak’s ‘The Cloud-capped Star’ or *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, 1960 is an invigoratingly striking film based on the tragic protagonist Nita of a middle-class intellectual family which has been forced to survive in a refugee camp after East Pakistan’s partition. Ghatak has presented Nita in a bleak, gloomy atmosphere where Nita’s expressive eyes speak more than her words. The crude reality of the exploitation of Nita by her family at the cost of the complete sacrifice of her desires, wishes, dreams, love and life is delineated in the chiaroscuro of light and darkness. Dispensing with the stereotypical representation of charismatic and alluring heroines, Ghatak’s cinematography is exclusively centred round an ordinary woman living a humdrum life in her torn slippers and saree. When the tormented and uprooted soul protests at the end for a gasp of life and the desire to live, it is too late. Her evocative frenzied anguish and clamour is lost in the ravages of a distorted tormented self and Ghatak’s movie becomes a protest against the glorification of women’s suffering. Sparsely sentimental, the evil of exploitation in the name of sacrifice and devotion is revealed in the movie. Though Nita has been the glittering star, yet in the inhuman world of greed and self-centredness, she is obscured by the canopy of insatiable dark clouds of desires of the society. The thrill is not in Nita’s physique but in the manner that Ghatak has outstandingly singularised the uncommon in the common. The repressive trauma of Nita’s life is expressed through various talismanic images like rain drops, empty branches of the tree or the thudding sound of the rail that penetrates and shatters unfulfilled dreams. Coupled with marvellous music and evocative sound effect, the movie penetrates its audience with a revolutionary spirit.

Another largely controversial documentary film based on the trials and tribulations of a real life character, Phoolan Devi, is ShekharKapur’s 1994 National award winning movie *Bandit Queen*. It has been a sensationalized by the media because of Phoolan Devi’s own objection that the director has exploited and commercialised her story of molestation and rape. ShekharKapur has challenged this assumption by countering that the

protagonist herself has tried to abnegate her past because of several political reasons. In a violent protest against the film for deforming and distorting her life story, Phoolan Devithreatened to burn herself alive in front of the Indian Board of Film Censors if the film was not banned. The film shows several deviations from Mala Sen's biography of Phoolan Devi which she personally is said to have dictated to Sen. There have been several biographies on Phoolan Devi but none have been subjected to the issue of validating the authenticity of the facts to such an extent. Why? We may speculate that a movie based on such an 'outrageous' woman character has aroused a lurid and captivating response from its audience.

The biography of Phoolan Devi, marked by a double marginalisation for being a low caste woman, is striking because Phoolan never reconciled with the idea of objectifying herself. Phoolan, whose original name is Phulwa, is no doubt subjected to innumerable tortures and molestations but her objection with the movie has been that rape and molestation is used in an exaggerate manner for the purpose of sensationalism. Although the movie appears to be a projection of the subaltern's point of view, feminists have not supported such representations since the projected audience of the movie is implicitly considered to be patriarchal. Phoolan is charged with innumerable murders of the Thakurs and Zamindars in reality, and her criminal personality is hyper sexualised in the film with the help of heavy adornments and titles like "the beautiful bandit" or "the goddess of flowers." Such an inherent voyeurism remains trapped in clichés and strictures. Even though Phoolan Devi is shown to be vigorously dynamic and authoritarian, yet she is artfully captured in the lens like a docile lover in complete control of the embrace of her lover. The deployment of sexual violence and rape has been the primary motif in the movie neglecting the struggle of the low caste woman as a unique example of woman power who was able to protest against the power hierarchies of a patriarchal society and a prejudiced class system.

What then, we may ask, is the ultimate aim of projecting such a character? Has this newly emerged woman Robin Hood been presented as the exemplary character of hope whose quintessential power and struggle for justice and retribution is channelled in the form of encouragement for the downtrodden, the poor and the oppressed 'second sex'? Or is it merely a form of sensational entertainment with titillating spectacle directed towards the male audience? Irrespective of being different from the run-of-the-mill Bollywood masala world of songs and dances, the movie fails to represent in an explicit manner the resistance and insurgency of the subaltern. That Phoolan stands alone with raw vengeance and crudeness deconstructing the expected codes of womanhood is itself an example of resistance. Phoolan Devi has resisted the subjugation and domination of a patriarchal society. However, to what

extent has the movie been successful in belonging to the category of 'resistance literature and art' is doubtful. From an untouchable low caste fisherman's daughter, subjected to childhood marriage, assault and violence, this Rebel of the Ravines has become a member of the Indian parliament in 1996. Her life shows a metamorphosis from suffering, abduction and violation, to resistance, rebellion, leadership and execution of power. Her negotiation with the Indian government in 1983 under the then prime minister Indira Gandhi and her subsequent surrender is a statement of empowerment. Arundhati Roy explains the politics of representation of Phoolan Devi in a film review titled 'The Great Indian Rape-Trick' in the following words:

"Phoolan Devi the woman has ceased to be important. (Yes of course she exists. She has eyes, ears, limbs hair etc. Even an address now) But she is suffering from a case of Legenditis. She's only a version of herself. There are other versions of her that are jostling for attention. Particularly ShekharKapur's "Truthful" one, which we are currently being bludgeoned into believing" (Roy, 1994).

Although Kapur's *Bandit Queen* opens with the promising subtitle "The True Story of Phoolan Devi," it ends up being less realistic in its effort to project Phoolan Devi as a larger than life character and fails to be oppositional or different from other traditional male-centric representations.

Here, we have looked at resistance and transgression from a feminist perspective in the context of the visual representation of Phoolan Devi's life narrative. In the upcoming section, we will look at resistance in the context of alternative sexuality as represented in Indian cinema.



ShekharKapur's *Bandit Queen*

Source: <http://www.apotpourriofvestiges.com/2013/07/bandit-queen-1994-film-analysis.html#.Uho-jRunqdc>

Activity:

Watch any one of the movies discussed in the previous sections. Critically analyse the film from a feminist perspective by jotting down ways in which the film resists normative patriarchal representations of the female body and women's life narratives.

4.4.4 Representation of Same Sex Desire, Limitation and Restriction

Our last focus of study in the context of cinema will be the area of same sex desire or representation of homosexuality. In this respect, a galaxy of significant movies like Sridhar Rangarajan's *Gulabi Aaina*, Mahesh Dattani's *Mango Souffle*, Riyadh Wadia's *Bomgay* have been path breaking in the Indian film world. To take as an example, let us focus on the short documentary film, *Summer in My Veins*, a movie screened and documented by Nishit Sharan. Sharan made a path breaking entry into the Indian queer scene in 1998 with this biographical film which captures on screen Nishit's discovery of himself as gay and his coming out to his mother and the rest of the family in an unequivocal manner. The Indian film industry lost a very promising director when Nishit died prematurely in a fatal car accident in Delhi. But this documentary movie etched out of his notations kept in his video diary reveals his attempt to represent homosexuality as an equally natural phenomenon as heterosexuality, urging Indian society to accept this fact.

The movie opens with Saran's medical test for HIV, just two days before his graduation. His mother arrives to witness the ceremonious occasion of her son's awarding at Harvard. The entire movie concentrates on the happy jovial mother and the aunts who are shown to be extremely frank and brazen in their salacious jokes about sexuality amongst themselves as well as their children. The open discourse on homosexuality among the three elderly women brings to light the common fear, confusions and doubts about same sex desire. Saran records the details of day to day activity and brilliantly captures random incidents so that when the fragments of incidents are interlaced, it seems to be a reflection of the elementary aspects of life without any dramatic exaggeration. Saran's struggle within himself to come out to his mother is revealed in his own voice in the background, while simultaneously, the camera zooms on his bewildered mother who struggles with the strangeness and weirdness of the situation. Saran himself appears a few times in the movie but it is essentially his mother and aunts who remain the main focus. The film focuses less on Nishit's inner conflict given that Nishit seems to be extremely assured about this aspect of his life. Rather, the focus seems to be more on the combat and perplexity created by his disclosure, his anxiety regarding his mother's reaction, and his desire to treat this fact as extremely natural and nothing bizarre or unusual. The strength of the movie lies in the bold statement asserting that irrespective of the rest of the family and the world at large, and despite his mother's initial shock at the discovery of her son's sexual identity, she supports him unstintingly.

Sharan's life ended tragically when he met with a fatal car accident in Delhi after his immediate return to India. After his death, Saran's mother has attempted to explore all that she could of her son's immortal genius and she has been determined to help the queer community to voice that homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality.

From the world of cinema, let us now turn briefly to the world of painting, to examine the issue of gendered visual representations in this medium. In order to do this, we will take as an example, the work of the famous Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, whose series of self-portraits provide us with a visual record of a life-narrative captured on canvas.

4.5 PAINTING AND FEMINIST ART CRITICISM

The world of painting, an essential medium for visual representation has been predominantly dominated by male artists where women have been prohibited to find entry as artists. On the contrary, the alluring, female body has been the subject of the stereotypical male gaze. Feminists have challenged such limitations and the 1960s women's art movement that emerged especially

in United States has embarked on a new dimension of painting exclusively different from male gaze. The Guerrilla Girls, or great female artists like Caroline Folkenroth and Cindy Sherman are such examples of path breaking painters that unearth feminine experience. Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Are There No Great Female Artists?" (1971) challenges the patriarchal world of painting that has trivialised women artists. Feminist artists have deconstructed the depiction of the female body in the idealised form of Madonna, Venus, Helen or the lascivious goddesses in Indian contexts. In diverse ways, feminists have attempted to evoke woman's identity beyond biological representations. In the next two sub-sections, let us look at the life and work of a famous Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, whose self-portraits challenge the stereotypical representations of the female body by male artists.

4.5.1 Frida Kahlo: A Brief Biography

The life and work of early twentieth century Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), have garnered much feminist interest over the years. Famous not only for the starkness and aesthetic appeal of her astounding self-portraits and paintings, but also for her physical hardships following a harrowing accident and her tempestuous relationship to Diego Rivera (her equally famous artist husband), Frida Kahlo is now a well-known name among contemporary art-lovers and critics. Before we examine some of her self-portraits in the context of our course on life narratives, it would be helpful for you to learn about Frida Kahlo's life and unique circumstances. Below you can read a brief biography of Frida Kahlo's life and follow the link provided to look at some of her other paintings:

Box No. 4.1

BIOGRAPHY:

"Frida Kahlo de Rivera (July 6, 1907 – July 13, 1954; **Magdalena Carmen Frieda Kahlo y Calderón**) was a Mexican painter, born in Coyoacán. Perhaps best known for her self-portraits, Kahlo's work is remembered for its "pain and passion", and its intense, vibrant colors. Her work has been celebrated in Mexico as emblematic of national and indigenous tradition, and by feminists for its uncompromising depiction of the female experience and form."

...

"Frida was one of four daughters born to a Hungarian-Jewish father and a mother of Spanish and Mexican Indian descent. She did not originally plan to become an artist. A survivor of polio, she entered a pre-med program in Mexico City. At the age of 18, she was seriously injured in a bus accident. She spent over a year in bed recovering from fractures to her spine, collarbone and ribs, a shattered pelvis, and shoulder and foot injuries. She endured more than 30 operations in her lifetime and during

her convalescence she began to paint. Her paintings, mostly self-portraits and still life, were deliberately naïve, and filled with the colors and forms of Mexican folk art. At 22 she married the famous Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, 20 years her senior. Their stormy, passionate relationship survived infidelities, the pressures of careers, divorce, remarriage, Frida's bi-sexual affairs, her poor health and her inability to have children. Frida once said: *"I suffered two grave accidents in my life...One in which a streetcar knocked me down and the other was Diego."* The streetcar accident left her crippled physically and Rivera crippled her emotionally."

Source: <http://www.fridakahlo.com> (accessed 23-10-2013)

Before you move ahead to the discussion of her work, you can also view most of Frida Kahlo's paintings on this link:

<http://www.fridakahlo.org/frida-kahlo-paintings.jsp> (accessed 23-10-2013)

4.5.2 The Evolution of the Self in Frida Kahlo's Self-Portraits

Frida Kahlo was a remarkable artist who has been uniquely different in celebrating the 'unfeminine' beauty of her own self through her self-portraits. The cliché "Fridamania" much in vogue has celebrated facial hair, moustache and the unibrow, features that were once considered to be abhorrent in female portraiture. Her popularity has reached such proportions that Frida herself has become an industry so that from dolls to bags, dressing screens to wall hangings, we see her eponymous image duplicated and circulated, just as much as the paintings of Picasso, Van Gogh or Warhol.

What is so special about Kahlo's paintings? (Try and assess this for yourself as you look at her individual paintings in the link provided in the previous section.) Her self-portraits, far from being narcissistic, reveal confessions and self-admiration, the pain of suffering and near-death after an almost fatal accident that she underwent, and the trauma of loneliness she experienced during much of her life. As you have learnt from her brief biography, Frida Kahlo, in a horrendous bus accident at the age of eighteen years, almost lost the hope of being alive after her body was pierced and broken in several places, including her spine. This caused her to undergo multiple surgeries and amputations, and to be bed-ridden for a great part of her life. Her passion for painting as the unconditional medium to express her untold feelings is best revealed at this juncture in her life. Despite all the physical and psychological pain she continued to suffer, her stimulating self-portraiture passionately depicts a woman's celebration of the self, and her umpteen explorations of the several strata that remain buried beneath. Kahlo has represented sexuality and feminine desire boldly from a woman's point of view. Even her still-life paintings depicting such innocuous objects like cut fruits lying opened as in the painting *The Bride Frightened at*

Seeing Life Opened reflect this perspective (<http://www.fridakahlofans.com/c0440x.html>). Kahlo's paintings have emerged as her autobiographical deluge where she has articulated in many colours the physical and psychological upheavals that she suffered during her life. Even during her days of dependence on steroids and pain killers, she never stopped to pick up the brush to articulate her buried feelings. Kahlo's art exemplifies the victory of a vehement and unrestrained feminine world that rejects passivity and upholds women's agency even in the most extreme circumstances. One famous example of a self-portrait showing Frida Kahlo surrounded by her beloved wild-life is provided below for you. Here, we can see the stark and bold style with which the artist captures her own essence, the pain which seems to almost strangle her physically, and the determination and steadfastness in her eyes to live on as an artist despite the worst of circumstances.



Self-Portrait of Frida Kahlo

Source: <http://kathleenjonesauthor.blogspot.in/2010/06/pascale-petit-and-paintings-of-frida.html>

Check Your Progress:

What do you know about Frida Kahlo's personal life? Do you think her paintings reflect the traumas she suffered in life? In what ways do her self-portraits qualify to be categorized under the genre of 'life narratives'?

Activity:

How is the female body represented in the works of Frida Kahlo? Try to respond to this question in your own words after viewing some of the self-portraits of Frida Kahlo, and referring to specific paintings to support your answer.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Representation cannot be free from the legacies of society and feminist intervention has revealed how down the ages women have been represented from a male point of view. As a counter discourse to male scopophilia (love of looking/watching), we have come across movies and paintings where the 'gaze' is reversed to reveal a feminist or alternative gender perspective. Further, feminist intervention has attempted to expose how women have been objectified in cultural history and deprived of the right to become the subject of their own destinies and self-representations. Besides the identification of the feminine with the biological body, feminism has also deconstructed the same body as the metaphor of psychological and spiritual reflection. The diversity of representations also extends to queer representations where homosexuality prefigures with new dimensions that have been till date neglected and tabooed. Thus, in this unit we have come across some of those alternative representations to be re-viewed with different meanings apart from traditional masculine iconography.

4.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Analyse the complexity of the term 'representation' in its relation to power with the help of examples.
- 2) How are women represented most of the time in the media? Define the term gaze in the context of gender studies and explain its relation to representation.
- 3) What do we mean by 'resistance' in visual representation? Explain with examples.
- 4) Discuss Feminist Film Theory in the context of Second Wave Feminism.
- 5) Comment on the representation of courtesan culture in Indian cinema and discuss any two movies which deviate from traditional norms.
- 6) Discuss with reference to any one female artist how painting can represent one's protest against traditions.

4.8 REFERENCES

Coetzee, M. J. (1987). *Foe*. London: Penguin.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London, UK: Sage Publication.

Jain, M. (2009). *Narrative of Indian Cinema*. New Delhi: Primus Book.

Kahlo, F. *Biography*. Retrieved October 23, 2013 from <http://www.fridakahlo.com>

<http://www.fridakahlofans.com/mainmenu.html>

Kahlo, F. *Bride Frightened at Seeing Life Open*. Retrieved October 23, 2013 from <http://www.fridakahlofans.com/c0440x.html>

Kahlo, F. *Painting*. Retrieved October 23, 2013 from <http://www.fridakahlo.org/frida-kahlo-paintings.jsp>

Kahlo, F. *Self-Portrait* Retrieved October 23, 2013 from <http://kathleenjonesauthor.blogspot.in/2010/06/pascale-petit-and-paintings-of-frida.html>

Marx, K. (2009). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Rockville, MD: Serenity Publisher.

Millet, K. (2000). *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday.

Mulvey, Laura (1989). *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington: Indian University Press.

Nochlin, Linda (1971). *Realism*. London: Penguin Books.

Relph, E. (1976). *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion.

Roy, A. (1994). Film review: The Great Indian Rape - Trick *SAWNET*, The South Asian Women's Network, ShekharKapur's Bandit Queen. Retrieved October 23, 2013 from <http://www.apotpourriofvestiges.com/2013/07/bandit-queen-1994-film-analysis.html#.Uho-jRunqdc>

4.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Showalter, E. (1987). Women's Time, Women's Space: Writing the History of Feminism Criticism in *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*, 30-44. Indiana University Press.