
UNIT 9 CLASS

Structure

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt about the dynamics of race and ethnicity in the framework of postmodernism. Here, we will examine the issue of gender and class in a postmodern context. In order to understand the concept of class, we will begin by looking at it within the framework of the discussion of women and work, while drawing upon a Marxist feminist understanding of the notions of class and of work. We will distinguish between Social Constructivist and Essentialist Feminist positions and discuss the arguments of Postcolonial Feminists. We will also see how postmodern and postcolonial influences, especially as they relate to issues of gender and language, are reflected in literary fiction. These are some of the issues that we will examine in the upcoming sections of this unit.

9.2 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this unit, you will learn about:

- The theory of class in terms of its origins within Marxism;
- Intersections between Marxism and feminism and the notion of class;
- Distinguishing features between Social Constructivist and Essentialist Feminist positions;
- The arguments of Postcolonial Feminists and Postmodern Feminists; and
- Postmodern and postcolonial influences in literary fiction.

9.3 BACKGROUND: MARXISM AND FEMINISM

You have already studied about the Marxist theory of class in the context of gender in MWG 102 (Block 2, Unit 6). It would be helpful for you to review what you have learnt in the earlier unit before beginning your reading of this one. Let us now review briefly some of the ideas we have come across earlier.

Marxism

Class relations were first examined closely by Karl Marx, in developing what is now called the theory of Marxism. A member of a class in society was so placed in relation to his or her labour or ownership of resources. Poor people (in Marx's term the Proletariat) usually had only their own labour, or the ability to work, while the rich owned resources, such as land or industry for which they would hire labour, or people to work. Marxism describes this as the basic relation between classes in the period of capitalism. Marx argued that the proletariat was subjected to ideology in the form of religion, which kept them in a state of false consciousness. In this state of false consciousness they did not recognise themselves as an oppressed group. His solution required the proletariat to recognise their similarities with each other, as members of an oppressed class, and make that the first step towards rejecting ideology and moving out of false consciousness. In other words Marxist theory made it possible for a group to identify itself as a 'class' where members shared similar conditions of oppression.

Marxist Feminism

As we have seen earlier, Marxism was a theory of society, but it was quickly taken over by women's groups to articulate the condition of women within society. For such groups who were beginning to look at women's conditions from feminist perspectives, class based analyses first emerged from the use of Marxist theories. These began with theoretical debates about women's work, or labour, and women's location in society. These debates began primarily with the second wave of feminism, in academic inquiries about the nature of women's oppression in contemporary society. But there was also the influence of left wing politics among trade unions and feminist groups in the US, UK and much of Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where women formed a part of the work force. It was Marxist feminist theorising which first allowed women to speak of themselves as a separate 'class' within the existing social structure.

It was in feminist discussions that the concept of work, and the peculiar nature of women's work first came into focus. While earlier women's movements struggled against patriarchal norms which confined women to the home, a fresh look at women's lives revealed that the home too was a site of labour and work for the women, although society was structured in a way as to render this work invisible.

Marx had theorised that the working classes are alienated within capitalist society, as they become mere units of labour in a complex chain of production. Taking this further, feminists argue that women are doubly alienated, by the simple method of not recognising their labour as productive. Women's work especially in the home is usually assumed to be unskilled and/or of little value, since it does not directly contribute to profit making capitalist industry. Marxist

theorising allowed women to look at themselves as a group, subjected to an Ideology which kept them in a state of False Consciousness.

Some theorists argue that the division of resource-building and nurturing tasks between men and women respectively, within the family, is a natural phenomenon. Women are able to birth and raise children and men are not. Early Enlightenment thinkers in Europe (Rousseau, Mill, Kant) shared this point of view when it came to understanding the role of men and women in society. First wave feminism merely attempted to gain for women certain legal and personal rights- for example the right to vote, to education and to own property. Given that women were not seen as citizens, but rather as the ward of their male guardians, the right of the individual woman was the first step for feminists.

As we have seen above, the issue of gender and class is closely tied to the ideas of the human being and work, which was first theorised within Marxism. In most societies women were confined to a particular kind of work, related to the domestic space and to child-rearing which was not compensated by wages. On the other hand, since the woman did not participate in the economic arrangements outside the home, she was not valued as highly as the man. In other words society was structured in a way that kept women entirely occupied doing tasks that were crucial to its functioning, but at the same time denied her any value as the person who performed these tasks. This is what Marxist Feminists refer to as the invisible work of the woman.

This articulation of women and work, did not take into account the lives of working class women, who were already forced to work in two shifts, taking care of the family unit and participating in some wage earning activities. Further it did not take into account the specificities of cultures other than the West, where social structures may be significantly different. Post-modern and Post-colonial feminists bring these two points into focus, and argue for a context and culture specific articulation of women's problems and their solutions. In this way they argue that women become a specific class within society. The composition and diversity of this class is crucial to feminist political positions.

Feminist positions were further refined during the second wave, when we can begin talking about the differences between social constructionist and essentialist approaches. These approaches become critical in the context of postmodernism since they enable contemporary feminists to look at culture as well as literature from these varied perspectives. Before we turn to such postmodern perspectives, let us first try to understand some of the basic differences between these approaches.

9.4 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM VERSUS ESSENTIALISM

You are already familiar with the term 'social constructionism' since we have looked at it in the context of sexuality earlier (see MWG 101, Block 3). Let us try to place it within a historical context here in order to understand it better. Second wave feminism from the 1960's to the 1980's emerged when the individual rights of women were firmly entrenched in democracies across the world. The basic right of a woman to approach the state as citizen was established. Now feminists further argued that there was no difference between men and women other than the difference in anatomy or physical bodies. For

all the behavioural differences that were observable among women and men in society- feminists had a clear explanation- they argued that all differences between men and women were socially constructed. What this means is that women and men are different because they have been trained to act differently within their social and cultural contexts. Individuals are rewarded or punished for particular kinds of behaviour from the time they are children and learning to adapt to their social contexts, in a process called socialising.

Feminists following this line of argument suggest that there is no essential difference between men and women apart from this socialising. Feminists who reject this theory in favour of a belief in the notion of gendered differences are called Essentialist feminists. They argue for some essential difference between men and women which is more than merely their physical difference. Social constructivists argue that the process of socialising has so far been guided by Patriarchy and that it is the effort of feminists to neutralise and re-structure this process, in order to bring back a balance in the relationship between sexes. Social Constructivists are also credited for introducing the term 'gender' to differentiate between men and women. While 'sex' refers to the biological condition of being male or female, gender refers to the socially constructed role of man or woman. Here, you may wish to review the work of feminist like Judith Butler, which we have looked at earlier in MWG104.

The position of Social constructivist feminists and Essentialist feminists are theoretically irreconcilable. The abiding difference is the nature-nurture divide. While social constructivists place gender roles in the realm of nurture alone, essentialists argue that it is at first a condition of nature. Simple everyday observations such as 'men don't cry' or 'women can't read maps' point to a deeper theoretical position which argues for a basic and integral difference between men and women which can be traced back to an essentialist position. Essentialist feminists argue that while men and women have inherent differences, it is due to the ideology of Patriarchy that male traits are given tacit approval while female traits are tacitly belittled.

In both positions however, the common factor is the projection of the term Patriarchy, which feminists identify as the ideology which keeps women in a state of oppression. Feminist theorists eventually part ways with Marxist theorising, but they retain the basic structure of identifying a group (women) oppressed due to a particular ideology (patriarchy) which leaves the oppressed in a state of false consciousness. This explains the feminist thrust on 'consciousness raising' groups in the west during the second wave of feminism.

The Social Constructivist position denies any essential difference between male and female beings by birth. Rather, it suggests that culture and society play a significant role in creating differences between the genders. These feminists argue that ostensibly 'natural' differences between men and women are actually the result of different treatment given to men and women. For example they argue that nurturing during childhood plays a big role in determining the differences observed between men and women. Feminist historians and anthropologists argue that culture, religion and social class have played a central role in shaping women's lives. Thus to the Enlightenment thinkers of the 19th century, who argued that women were more naturally suited to domestic tasks, these feminists countered that this was not a 'natural' but a 'constructed' condition.

Simone de Beauvoir in her classic feminist text *The Second Sex* (1949) had first argued that “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” This famous phrase was later modified and used by Monique Wittig in a public lecture of the same name (Wittig, 1992). Beauvoir sees gender as socially constructed and specifically in such a way that the feminine becomes the opposite of all that is seen as masculine. She makes a forceful argument that the subject of all ethics and metaphysics is the male ‘subject’ or ‘self’ while the woman remains his ‘object’ or ‘other’.

This line of argument has been sustained by a large number of feminists through the decades. American feminist Betty Friedan, examined the social conditions which make essentialist positions of gender possible, in her 1963 publication *The Feminine Mystique*. More recently Judith Butler in her 1990 publication *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, claims that gender identities are in a state of flux and may be reviewed over time.

Essentialist feminists argue that there are in fact core biological and psychological differences between men and women. They question the values placed on these differences. For example, they argue that a woman’s ability to bear and nurture children need not be in conflict with her ability to participate in economy. In fact it is a patriarchal approach to the question which will see these two roles in conflict. Further certain traits of women such as non-linear articulation or emotional lucidity are negated by patriarchal ideology which adds negative valuation to these qualities such as ‘irrational’ or ‘sentimental’. Thus, essentialist feminists suggest a solution which provides an alternative set of social values and ethics. They accept a sex-based division in society but insist on a re-examination and a re- evaluation, so that female traits and qualities are reaffirmed and not belittled.

While most feminists today take a position of qualified essentialism, theorists like Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous (discussed later) do posit a specifically female sensibility, which they then build on while theorising women’s writing. One of the most creative positions in this regard has been that of Gayatri C. Spivak. In her work *In Other Worlds* (1987), Spivak recommends a strategic essentialism in which an essentialist position is temporarily accepted in order to bring about some political change. In the remainder of this unit, we will look at some of these postmodern and postcolonial feminist positions in the context of the Marxist theory of class. We will also look specifically at how these positions may have influenced fiction and literary styles.

Check Your Progress:

List some of the differences between Social Constructionist and Essentialist feminists. Which position sounds more convincing to you? Why?

9.5 POST-MODERN AND POST-COLONIAL POSITIONS

Feminist positions in the West grew in response to existing social theories and feminist theories moved away from the Marxist view of women and work. Theories of race and the fact of colonialism could no longer be ignored.

Theorising women's work and the family became significantly more complex given the differences in circumstances for women of colour or those from post-colonial societies. The development of Psychoanalysis offered another tool to understanding the subject. Feminist post-colonial theory is concerned with the struggle against oppression and injustice established by hierarchical and patriarchal social structures, dominated by the hegemonic white male. Imperialism is seen as the product of a phallogocentric society, which aids the constitution of the 'other'. This 'Other,' whether the Native or the Woman, is then subjugated and dominated.

Postmodern feminists argued that most social systems have centered around an exchange of women by men, through various kinds of kinship patterns. However, with capitalism the focus shifts from kinship to commodity. Women who participate in capitalist economy have an increasing ability to be economically independent and step out of expected kinship structures. Post-modern feminists also critique earlier feminist schools of thought such as the liberal, radical or Marxist schools. Deconstruction and post-structuralism in general challenge their uni-dimensionality and over-valuation of the experiences and challenges faced by a small class of women.

9.6 POSTMODERN FEMINISM

You have already learnt in the previous two blocks of this course about how the development of postmodern and post-structuralist theory towards the end of the last century made a lasting impact on feminism. The post-modern concern with multiple voices, the lack of a master narrative and an exploration of social practices and their impact on the subject are just some of the areas of shared interest with feminist theories.

Post-modern feminism leans heavily on social constructivist theories arguing that gender is a construct of language, or discourse. Judith Butler argues for this position in *Gender Trouble* (1990), while Luce Irigaray argues that the 'feminine' is constructed largely as the 'other' of masculine. Both draw heavily from the earlier work of Simone de Beauvoir, who was the first to spell out the processes by which women were constructed as *The Second Sex*, which was also the title of her path-breaking text on gender in society.

Criticising the Essentialist position, Butler argues that bodies as well as dispositions may be socially constructed. This contests the basis of the Essentialist position that sex is biologically determined but gender is socially constructed. Further, post-modern arguments highlight the centrality of language to human experience. Feminists argue that the balance of power in the real world is mirrored in the way experience is structured by language in the discursive world. Thus, the inequality of genders begins at the moment we enter language in order to express our experience. Feminists further argue that the evolution of language over time suggests that it may be reshaped to overcome these dis-balances. Thus, this brand of feminism sees language as a location for political struggle.

The shared principle among post-modern feminists is the assertion that the use of language involves an acceptance of a certain structure. This structure is predicated on a gendered binary value system where the female is the Other. It is this calling into question of the structure of language that also makes them Post-structuralist feminists. Below, we will look briefly at a few examples of

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such postmodern positions adopted by different French feminist theorists, about whom you have already studied in detail in previous courses (see MWG 001, Block 4, Unit 3; MWG 004, Block 3, Unit 1 & Block 4, Unit 2). You may find it helpful to review the relevant sections in the previous units in order to obtain a better grasp on these approaches.

Hélène Cixous argues for a difference in the very structure of male and female writing. Male writing has more binary oppositions and linear structure, while female writing has non-linear, lateral structure. She links these patterns to female sexuality and to an experience of the world through the particularities of women's bodies. Inviting women to "write the body" ("écrire le corps") she calls for an experimentation with feminine writing or "écriture féminine". Encouraging women's voices will allow more such expressions of language and these will eventually expand the discourse in new directions.

Luce Irigaray uses tools from psychoanalysis to argue that the female subject enters the world through a language in which it sees itself as the other. To make this language gender neutral in structure, the experiences of the female body, both sexual and otherwise must be articulated, by women. This language will return the sense of 'self' to the woman who only experiences her own 'otherness' in gendered language.

Julia Kristeva accepts that language is structured as a binary, but rejects the idea of man and woman being aligned with the 'masculine' and the 'feminine'. She argues that the idea of making language gender neutral by articulating women's experiences links 'feminine' to the biological woman; the biological woman however, is more than the discourse and is also constantly in flux. Thus, to identify the differences in terms of gender is to merely reproduce the structure of existing language. She argues that the existing structure 'represses' some experiences of the subject in being unable to articulate them. To express these repressed experiences would be to break out of the binary structure of language.

Monique Wittig rejects all notions of an inherently feminine writing. She argues that "one is a writer, or one is not" (Wittig, 1978, p.103-111). Thus she suggests that in language, one may articulate oneself free of one's sex. For Wittig however, the category 'woman' exists only in its relation to 'man'. She asserts a Universalist position suggesting that gender categories may be abolished altogether. In her work *The Straight Mind* (1980), she argues that lesbians may not be called women in the way she defines it, as they step outside the heterosexual domain, which is the key arena for their identification as women- i.e. in relation to a man. Rather than target patriarchy in general, Wittig argues that heterosexual norms guiding society create the oppression of individuals.

Post-modern Feminists argue that the dominant representations of women are not reflections of an unchangeable- biologically given 'nature'. In fact women learn this mode of behaviour through their use of language. They further argue that the language itself determines the limits of the representations of women.

Check Your Progress:

After reviewing what you have read here and in the relevant sections of previous units mentioned in the above section, briefly summarise the main contributions of postmodern French feminist theorists.

9.7 POST-COLONIAL FEMINISM

We have already learnt about postcolonial theories and postcolonial feminism in MWG 101, Block 5, Unit 19, where we discussed the positions of various scholars and theorists in some detail. As you read earlier, Edward Said's, *Orientalism* (1978), one of the founding texts of Post-Colonial thought employs both Marxist and Psychoanalytical categories to account for the condition of the Colonised subject and the Coloniser. Feminists employ post-colonial theorising and argue that the female of a colonised race faces a double oppression, as colonised and as woman. Partha Chatterjee in his *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993) extensively explores nationalist discourse, in which women are represented as the victim as well as the goddess in line with the trope of Mother India. Feminists, such as Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, re-visit these tropes and reject them as limiting and oppressive representations of women (Rajan, 1998).

Feminist critics across the world have remarked about the limitations of Western feminist discourse which was rooted in bourgeois and euro-centric concerns. The discourse also displayed the prejudices inherent in these concerns. Post-colonial feminists, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, rejected the formation of a homogenous group called 'women' at the level of discourse, and insisted on prioritising differences arising out of necessity and circumstance. Politically, post-colonial feminism works in two ways; one, it articulates the pressures of racism and colonialism on non-white and non-western women; two, it critiques the universalizing attitudes embedded in second wave feminist ideas, which also includes the misrepresentation of non-western women.

Post-colonial feminist theorising has questioned nationalism as a constructed discourse. It has shown how this discourse is central to the politics of war, defence and militarisation. In India, feminists have shown how the existing stereotypes surrounding women are amplified in traditional and religious discourses. While doing so they have argued that post-colonial feminism cannot be taken over and modified from the west. Let us now look at the contributions of some important post-colonial feminists.

Gayatri Spivak's most cited essay has been "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). Following Marx, Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' to mark a location of difference. The term 'subaltern' finds its origin in military parlance, where the word referred to soldiers of rank lower than Captain. In post colonial theory, this term has been adapted to mean a group which has no impact on hegemonic power structures of colonial society, but who is at the same time subject to these power structures. The term was initially adapted to leftist theorizing by Antonio Gramsci who identified subaltern groups as those who have no means to political representation.

While Marx sees the subaltern as created by structures of society due to the unequal flow of capital, Spivak uses deconstruction to suggest that the subaltern is in fact excluded from social structures, which require participants to represent themselves within it in language. In other words, without access to means of representation, or an appropriate language the subaltern is unable to 'speak' or represent herself. Rather than suggest the need for a new language for representation, Spivak's writings critique existing structures which do not allow the subaltern to 'speak'. In fact she argues that 'creating' a voice for the subaltern would be a false political goal, as this would only delay the

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subaltern's self-expression. The only political move she acknowledges is to reject structures which create the subaltern and clear the way for the subaltern's self-expression.

Spivak uses the example of colonial India in her essay to highlight the role of race and power relations in the construction of the subaltern. All historical accounts of the 19th century ritual of Sati are from British colonisers or Hindu reformers. The performance of sati is the only expression the woman is allowed. That is, within this narrative she performs the action and others 'represent' it. By giving us this example, Spivak points in the direction of the innumerable historical instances in which women are 'present' but unable to 'represent' themselves. This example allows us to understand her argument that the structures of power that prevent the subaltern from speaking must be rejected. In this case these would be race relations during the colonial period as well as gender relations in traditional society.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that there is a relationship to be examined between the representational Woman and real women, which feminism needs to address. She critiques the term 'third world' woman, which merely serves to paper over the myriad differences in women's lives. While she rejects the homogenizing tendency of white, first world feminism, she does not exclude the possibility of common political projects once feminist politics has taken cognisance of the diverse requirements which stem from geography, culture and political history. In "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984), Mohanty argues that feminists from the third world face resistance from the established women's movement, which gives rise to a power imbalance even within a revolutionary discourse.

Ania Loomba gives a different perspective to the tension between feminist and postcolonial ambitions. She argues that on the one hand, postcolonialists affirm that Western colonists attempted to impose Western norms on indigenous cultures. However, many of these indigenous cultures were highly patriarchal to begin with. Many feminists scholars work to undermine these indigenous patriarchal systems, as feminism according to Loomba is a highly Eurocentric movement. She also argues that feminists want to dismantle patriarchal norms, while postcolonialists want to dismantle egalitarian/imperialist norms. She justifies that "women are objects as well as subjects of fundamentalist discourses, targets as well as speakers of its most virulent rhetoric. For postcolonial, third world and anti-racist feminists, the task is to walk the tight-rope between the sectarian demands of religious, national or race-identity, and majoritarian discourses of female emancipation or liberation" (p. 219-220)

Check Your Progress:

- i) After reviewing Unit 19 of Block 5, MWG 101, and what you have read in the above section, briefly summarize the main contributions of postcolonial feminist theorists.

- ii) Do you think that the approaches of postmodern and postcolonial feminists are equally relevant for women in India? If so, why? If not, identify the approach which according to you is more relevant and justify your choice in your own words.

9.8 INFLUENCE ON LITERARY STYLES

In the post-modern articulation, language and representation become central to the problem of women. It is argued that representations of women are limited and in turn limiting on women. Women need to articulate themselves in new and unique ways in order to extend the limits of language and to begin a process of re-presenting themselves. Post-structuralist feminists take things a step further by arguing that the use of gendered language structures already places the woman as the other. Even as she seeks to represent herself, her language limits her representations. Now that we have understood some of the nuances and differences between these theoretical positions, let us examine the extent of their influence on postmodern fiction.

9.8.1 Postmodern Feminist Fiction

Feminists who write within the post-modern aesthetic, often use form, style and language in startlingly original ways. Recent feminist fiction actively seeks change from traditional modes of realist storytelling. The attempt is to create a space for feminine articulation. This utopian impulse derives from the specific political agenda of post-modern fiction with feminist impulses to bring about a change within traditional social structures.

Recent writers use subversive postmodern strategies to challenge the conventions of realism, and by doing so, forge new means of representing reality. This could be seen as the articulation of the feminine. Feminist texts that use postmodern strategies regard reality as a discourse always mediated by representation. In other words, the claim to reality, or 'truth' in a narrative is in fact a subjective account of events where events are re-presented to the reader through language. Post-modernism questions that claim to truth by drawing attention to the subjective aspect of these events. Feminists within the post-modern aesthetic draw out the connection between representations of reality and the material conditions in history. As we have seen Marxist theorists too have linked social structures to modes of production. Feminists like Belsey argue that representations do not reflect a 'real' world but rather one constructed through language. Realism is intelligible as it is conventional. Feminists use realism self-consciously in fiction and draw their readers attention to the artificial and constructed nature of traditional realism and its claims to truth.

Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) is an excellent example of post-modern feminist fiction. Winterson plays with concepts like linear time, stable subjective entities and the limits of language. Her protagonist is the grotesque Dog-woman, who defies conventional representations of women, by being large, ugly, independent and at the same time god-fearing, with a unique moral vision. The novel displays many examples of intertextuality and uses voices from both high literature and fairy tales. Winterson also uses scientific

discourse, in the form of encyclopaedia entries and manuals highlighting their 'objective' style in a playful way.

In Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) another good example of a post-modern, feminist fiction, the author uses magic realism to represent her female protagonist. Her depiction of female characters and the meandering plot, gives the novel a unique form and structure, far removed from that of the traditional novel. Carter's characters inhabit a world where patriarchal logic is very often defied and traditional social structures are explored anew. Margaret Atwood explores the traditional social structure of patriarchy in its extremes in novels like *A Handmaid's Tale* and looks at historical roots of patriarchy in texts like *The Penelopiad*. The exploration of patriarchy as a historical construct allows the reader to question its legitimacy and continued currency.

9.8.2 Postcolonial Feminist Fiction

The end of colonialism brought with it an examination of the colonial past, and an attempt to represent peoples and cultures, which were formally European colonies, without pre-given euro-centric prejudices. A wide and diverse body of post-colonial feminist literature has emerged from formerly colonised cultures in Asia, South America the Middle East, Caribbean and Africa.

Post-colonial Feminists reject the homogenous category of 'woman' created by white, first-world feminism. They argue that location, history and politics play a significant role in shaping subjectivity. Post-colonial feminists assert that women from colonised locations face colonial as well as traditional structures of oppression. These trends in feminist theorising have seen reflection in much feminist fiction. The last decades of the 20th century have seen women novelist bring these feminist concerns into their writing in both content and form. Questions raised by post-colonial feminists have compelled literary studies to focus on power, knowledge, subjectivity and identity and produce political readings of new as well as canonical texts. The question of the voice- or who speaks for the subject- gains extraordinary significance given the link between discourse and power that these theoretical positions imply.

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is an excellent example of a post-colonial, feminist retelling of a mainstream European novel. The female subject at the center of the novel is a marginal character from one of the most loved Victorian novels, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. The novel gives a first person account of the experience of displacement due to colonisation and its deep impact on the sense of self. The role of geography on memory and on a sense of subjective well-being is brought out poignantly in the central character's internal disintegration as she moves further and further from her childhood home, in terms of time and distance.

In 1997 Arundhati Roy broke new ground for the Indian novel in English with her *The God of Small Things*. The novel looks at caste and gender oppression, with a forbidden love story between a high caste woman and a low caste man at the heart of it. The novel also makes unselfconscious use of Malayalam and experiments actively with style and language in English. Using the speech patterns of the seven year old twins in the novel, Roy brings out the absurdities of speaking English through this deeply anglophile community.

As you can see from the above discussion and examples, feminist ways of looking at class can be witnessed both in theoretical works as well as in contemporary fiction. Attempt the activity given below for a deeper understanding of these approaches.

Activity:

Read either of the two novels mentioned above (*Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys or *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy). Try to analyse how the author has approached the issue of gender and class in the work you have selected. Can you find any links between this approach and the feminist theories that you have learnt about in this unit? Briefly summarise any commonalities that you find.

9.9 LET US SUM UP

We have seen how the term ‘class’ was used in Marxist theory to indicate social classes based on the kinds of work they perform within any society. Marxist feminists used this category as a way of looking at women. Social Constructionist and Essentialist positions which evolved during the Second Wave of feminism gave way to further exploration of the relationship between gender and class by contemporary feminists. In the latter half of this unit, we examined the key arguments of postmodern and postcolonial feminists, which can be linked back to the emergence of these ideas from the Marxist debates on class.

9.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) How have feminists used Marxist theory in articulating women’s position in society? Discuss.
- 2) Distinguish between the Social Constructivist and the Essentialist feminist position with the help of examples.
- 3) Discuss how post-modern and postcolonial feminists draw on the Marxist notion of class to evolve their own positions in the context of gender and class.
- 4) How is the post-modern and postcolonial feminist position articulated in fiction? Analyse any contemporary literary work of your choice from the perspective of a postmodern feminist position on class.

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