ARTICULATION OF FEMALE DESIRE IN ARITHA VAN HERK'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Aritha van Herk is a sensitive, alert and the best known contemporary woman writer who calls herself a feminist and a postcolonial writer. She occupies a very prominent place in Canadian literary scene. She is labeled as the "best quick change writer" of Canada as she ceaselessly experiments with different types of fiction, criticism and non-fiction, opening a new way of articulating feminine concerns. Her debut novel *Judith* appeared in 1978 and it won the prestigious Seal First Novel Award, making van Herk visible in the Canadian literary scene.

Van Herk writes about women striving to be independent and about women's search for complex female identity. She chooses evocative strong female roles which are inspired by representative women in the Biblical texts and ancient mythology. Judith of her first novel *Judith* (1978) is linked to both the Old Testament figure of the same name, who beheaded the warlord Holofernes, and the Greek Sorceress Circe, who turned Odysseus's men into swine. Her's is an innovative attempt to rewrite the mythological stories from feminist perspectives in the modern times. She rewrites the myth of Arachne in another novel.

Her second novel *The Tent Peg* (1981) is a story of a woman who later disguises herself to be a man to enter a geological expedition team as a bush cook. Since frontiers were always the domain of men, and women were not allowed to enter this domain as "they were considered bad for morale", van Herk tries to rewrite the experience from a different perspective by allowing her protagonist Ja-el to venture into the man's world. Both *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* are considered anti-male novels by many critics as the female protagonists in these two novels escape into a world of their choice by transgressing and subverting the patriarchal norms to enjoy freedom and to liberate themselves from the patriarchal bondage.

Her female protagonists are always in search of freedom, autonomy and space to explore self. The same spirit is echoed in her third novel *No Fixed Address: an*

amorous journey (1986) which is a parody of the picaresque novel. Here she shows Arachne Manetia, an underwear sales woman, driving a Mercedes car across the prairie to subvert the masculine practices of both selling lingerie in the small towns and enjoying the freedom to move from place to place in her car. By her constant movement she is trying to counter the notion of a fixed address, which is stereotypical for a woman who has supposedly a fixed entity, grounded in the assigned gender roles. She does not stick to her parents as she grows up as a child "unwanted" by her mother. She does not stay with one lover as she does not want any fixity in relationship. She enjoys sex and kills her partner to liberate herself from the burden of relationship. She does not want any fixed address like other women seeking contentment or happiness. Rather she establishes a relationship with the wilderness of the west which is much liberating. Arachne's revolt against the patriarchal norms displays the foregrounding of desire, the desire to cross both the geographical and sociological boundaries to create her own space.

Her fourth novel *Places far From Ellesmere, a Geografictione: Explorations on Site* (1990) strategically goes beyond genre classification to merge fiction, autobiography and literary criticism in order to create a new type of fiction. She subverts the male writing by rewriting Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and questions the gender stereotype in this classic novel where Anna was brutally punished for her "desire". She transports Anna to Ellesmere Island, away from Russia, a different geographical landscape and tries to re-read gender stereotypes for giving Anna more freedom and autonomy. Anna the character of *Anna Karenina* is granted that freedom to start her journey anew with a fresh and different beginning in the company of the author/narrator. Anna is relieved of the suffocation that she has been subjected to till now, enabling her to look at the world from a distinct feminine angle.

Restlessness, the fifth novel shows a rendezvous of the female character Dorcas with a hired assassin, Derrick Atman. Van Herk tries to show the homesickness of Dorcas as she wanders around as a courier. Restless Dorcas tries to embrace the "still centre of death" as she thinks death would ultimately give her

peace and freedom. Apparently, Dorcas's desire to embrace death for freeing herself from the state of restlessness is unnatural. Yet van Herk considers this desire to be crucial since it gives Dorcas a chance to choose death for herself and face the consequences.

Apart from fictional works van Herk has to her credit equally competent critical works. *In Visible Ink: Crypto-Frictions* (1991) reveals van Herk's continued interest in ficto-criticism where she tries to combine fiction and criticism. Van Herk creates a style of her own and takes delight in the art of linguistic play as she reconstructs or revises classical, Biblical and Canadian figures and landscapes. *A Frozen Tongue* (1992) is a collection of van Herk's essays and ficto-criticism. *Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta* (2001) is her critical historical work about the formation of Alberta. *Audacious and Adamant: The Story of Maverick Alberta* (2007) is her latest work of non-fiction.

This study intends to show van Herk's ways of articulating female desire. Desire in this study does not imply any amorous and erotic sense as such. Desire here is a deeper longing to reach a certain goal, which is otherwise forbidden for women in a patriarchal society and culture, a wish to encroach on that territory that has so far been a male preserve/domain. Even the territories/frontiers are gendered both geographically and psychologically. Desire allows one to free oneself from all bondages. Desire is primarily connected to the understanding of the structure of the female self. Van Herk has dismantled the patriarchal notion very convincingly in her fictional works by granting the female characters more autonomy and freedom of choice. Aritha van Herk, considered to be a literary law breaker, "the best known literary outlaw, Judith of genre" has been ceaselessly experimenting with the ways of articulating the female desire. The present study attempts an in-depth study of such experimentation.

The thesis is divided into the following chapters:

1. Introduction
2. Feminism and Postcolonialism in Canada
3. Desire: Its Connotation and Psychological Aspects in van Herk's Novels

4. Geography and Gender

5. Genres-----van Herk's Exploration and Experimentation

6. Conclusion

In the first chapter, "Feminism and Postcolonialism in Canada", it has been argued that there is a close link between feminism and postcolonialism. Postcolonialism is a critical and much contested term. The term was applied exclusively to the discursive practices that were historically produced prior to colonization in certain geographical parts of the world. But at present it is more of an abstraction available for figurative deployment in any strategic redefinition of marginality. The term "postcolonial" remains elusive and controversial despite many efforts to define it. Postcolonial literature refers to the writings produced in the former colonies of Britain and other Western powers. Therefore post colonial literature is the literature of Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, and the Caribbean region, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South-Pacific Island Countries and Sri Lanka. Leela Gandhi (1998) has defined postcolonialism as a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and crucially interrogating the past. Postcolonial criticism is very much an engaged scholarship, concerned with unequal relations of power, keen to shift attention away from a little England's context to the wider non-European world and is alert to textual representations of non-Western people and environment. In listening out for the voices from the margins and for the voices of resistance and dissent, postcolonial critics are frequently involved in the work of constructing an empire which "writes back" to the metropolitan centre.

The methodology of postcolonial studies links it to other new humanities especially feminism, cultural studies and gay/lesbian studies. These new humanities seek to recover marginalized voices and knowledge while exploring the mechanisms by which these have been obscured and silenced. Feminist and Postcolonial theories have followed "a path of convergent evolution" as Bill Ashcroft et al said (1995:249). Both feminism and postcolonial theory have concerned themselves with the study and defence of marginalized "others" within repressive structures of

domination and, in doing so both have followed remarkably similar theoretical trajectory. Feminism and the postcolonial theory alike began with an attempt to simply invert the prevailing hierarchies of gender/culture/race and later on came to accept the poststructuralist invitation to refuse the binary oppositions supported by patriarchal/colonial authority.

It has been shown in this chapter that the dual subjugation of women is a reality even in a settler country like Canada. It is true, as observed by the critics, that women are doubly colonized because of the differences in class, race and gender. Van Herk's texts are full of such implications. Settler experiences show women to be doubly marginalized.

The second chapter "Desire: Its Connotation and Psychological Aspects in van Herk's Novels", is an attempt to project a larger canvass for female desire. Here "desire" refers to women's desire as social, political, communal and aesthetic rather than simply as erotic as Tillie Olsen has shown in the stories of *Tell Me a Riddle* (1962). In van Herk's works female body speaks not of a discourse of erotic desire, but of a different set of yearnings: for justice, for wholeness, for "circumference", in the Dickinsonian sense of the word (Hedges and Fishkin: 1994: 58). Desire has its manifold forms such as: geographical isolation/location or "situated" desire, ecological/biological desire, natural and naturalized desires for the "other", desire for difference/to be different, desire for the forbidden, "separation identity", the desire to separate, desire to destabilize binaries, to maintain opposites, to oppose and subversive or destabilizing desires. We are to see how the desire of any kind forms the material of the textual world that we encounter. Van Herk's fiction embodies the desire to claim the female space, and demand equal recognition based on capability and potentiality of women. It is women's wish fulfillment in order to create a female world-view. Patriarchy all throughout the history has been defining, demarcating and streamlining the territories for women that are quite different form man's territories and apparently less challenging, less adventurous and less moving. In a sense, otherization takes place at large. Van Herk articulates the desire for the forbidden, exhibiting an urge to destabilize the binaries. There is a strong urge to

dismantle the patriarchal stereotypes in order to articulate the desire of the female heart.

It has been argued here that a woman's strong desire could be articulated in a powerful manner provided she is resilient enough to accept the challenges of patriarchy. The female quest for self, identity and autonomy is based on the commonality of women's experiences of oppression and suffering. However, the ways and means of attaining that autonomy and making an identity and constructing a self could be varied and multiple depending on the local context.

The third chapter "Genres: van Herk's Exploration and Experimentation" shows that a given genre may have a conventional or an intrinsic significance. It has been alleged that women can not write about difficult subjects as they mostly write about their individual experiences of oppression which is considered to be trivial and insignificant. Women's writing was often labelled as weak, vapid, and pastel. It was too subjective, solipsistic, narcissistic, autobiographical and confessional. It was also argued that women lacked imagination and the power of invention. But the women's movement in the early and mid seventies generated a grand fermentation of ideas, exuberance in writing, a joy in uncovering the taboos and in breaking them, and a willingness to explore new channels of thoughts and feelings. Many things happened in the field of women's writing. Language was being changed to articulate female discontent and to rewrite everything from the women's point of view. Genres were no longer locked in boxes and women writers started creating and redefining genres according to their need for articulation.

Aritha van Herk explores geofeminism in all her novels by introducing female characters who have integrated a close-knit link with the wilderness and the west. In her novel *Judith* (1978), she projects a revisionist geofeminist retelling of the classical myth of Circe through the protagonist Judith's quest for her essential self-hood. *The Tent Peg* (1991) is a novel about a young girl fighting a modern battle against the prejudices of male chauvinism in a mining camp in Yukon. In *No Fixed Address: an Amorous Journey* she appropriates two traditional domains of the male

hegemony ---driving and selling lingeries. She has experimented with a new genre, "geografictione", in *Places far From Ellesmere*, combining geography, fiction, autobiography and criticism in a new mode, making the readers a part of the narrative. In the process she writes the biography of Ellesmere, the remote Arctic Island. Always searching for a new genre to tell her story, van Herk introduced many critical concepts such as ficto-criticism, crypto-friction, geografictione, mapping, intertextuality, buchaneers and fictioneers etc.

Patriarchal norms try to contain women in a fixed state; women are not ready for that. Rather they try to cross boundaries, to transgress and trespass. Genre forms are wonderful area where they could prove this act of transgressing and trespassing by experimenting with new modes of articulation. Despite the hostility of the male authors and critics, van Herk has created a unique place for herself in the Canadian literary scenarios with her innovative introduction of new genres to suit her needs.

The fourth chapter "Geography and Gender" tries to see that the contemporary writings on "geography" are filled with assumptions about gender as well as empire. It is not that geography serves the sole purpose of empire building by extending and occupying territories. Geography is also equally important in other contexts. The female responses to sights and scenes or to landscapes are wonderfully unique to geographical imaginations. The quest for truth, discovery, self-realization and self-actualization is as much a male as a female desire. The recently developed gender theory proposes to explore "ideological inscriptions and the literary effects of the sex/gender system". Literary and cultural theory has brought many new issues to the forefront including the question of masculinity into the feminist theory. Van Herk's works appear to share a more general preoccupation of modern Canadian women writers with the question of regionalism and regional writings beyond the "local colour" for investigating into the more complex female identities. Recognizing the complex interrelatedness of geography and psychology and geography and power, she has produced a series of novels in which the female protagonists continually try to re/invent themselves past the boundaries of their destined regions----the home, the

family, the domestic and patriarchal location and the stereotypical construction of women.

This study tries to show that geofeminism becomes a part of regionalism in Aritha van Herk's novels and other writings and that it has given her a lot of scope for interpreting and re-interpreting gender in the geographical context. Geography provides a larger scope to women to situate themselves as they want to and also to re-locate them in the modern times from a new perspective. Especially in the Canadian context she is more desirous of the Arctic space which remains exotic as a masculine domain, unrepresented by women. So with the help of geography she has liberated Anna from the patriarchal tentacles and transported her to Ellesmere, an uninhibited northern island. Thus she opens our eyes to the possibility of freeing the stereotyped female characters from the age-old bondage. Geography grants that wonderful scope for transporting ourselves to a suitable landscape to tell our unheard tales without any interference. This is linked to the utopian possibility of feminism. This study also tries to show that fictional possibility of geography has created a new avenue for feminist writers to map themselves in a new territory. It is observed that in all the five novels of van Herk, all the female characters---Judith, Ja-el, Arachne, Anna and Dorcas deviate from the so-called patriarchal construct to live their lives as they want. Each one chooses previously unheard fronts such as the profession or occupation of a pig farmer, a bush cook, a travelling sales woman, a sojourner, and a courier. They boldly articulate their desire and constantly work out to fulfill it, accepting all the challenges. It leads us to think about an alternative world which awaits us with all the possibilities of fulfilling dreams and desire.

Women have started realizing the need to grab the opportunity to construct their own identities by articulating their "desire" which is so vital in one's life. Through her powerful rhetoric and linguistic play Aritha van Herk has brought the women's issues to the forefront and has continued to ask fresh questions about identity, self and autonomy. A fulfilled desire makes one think of a new desire, as one can not be satisfied with whatever has been attained so far. The aim is to bridge the gender gap in all spheres and to occupy the restricted territories and forbidden provinces. Feminist literature could be a meaningful tool for that.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled *Articulation of Female Desire in Aritha van Herk's Novels* being submitted to the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Tezpur University, Tezpur, Assam in part fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, has previously not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Dated:25 June 2009

Swapnalee Kakaty

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled *Articulation of Female Desire in Aritha van Herk's Novels* submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University, Tezpur in part fulfillment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of research work carried out by Ms Swapnalee Kakaty under my supervision and guidance.

All help received by her from various sources have been duly acknowledged.

No part of the thesis has been submitted elsewhere for award of any degree.

Dated: 25 June 2009

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Swapnalee Kakaty

The following abbreviations of the titles of Aritha van Herk's novels and critical works have been used in the thesis:

Judith J
The Tent Peg TTP
No Fixed Address: an amorous journey NFA
Places Far From Ellesemere PFFE
Restlessness R
In Visible Ink IVI
A Frozen Tongue FT

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

People often recall either to mock at or to look into critically what Aristotle had said about women. He said, "A male is a male in virtue of a particular ability, and a female in virtue of a particular inability" (*Generation of Animals*, I, 728a: 82). Depending on the biology he harped on "lack" in women and relegated women to Okios or household rather than the public realm by noting emphatically that "the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the one rules and the other is ruled" *(Politics* :1254b 10 tr by B Jowett quoted in Lefkowitz and Fant p 38). After centuries Lacan talked about the 'lack' in female and went on to argue that this lack or castration fear would never keep women at par with men and that women are the subjugated class. Man is the norm and woman is the deviant, man is the subject and woman is the object/other. Freud had almost similar observation from psychoanalytical view that women suffer from 'penis envy'. He could not conceive of women except in negative terms. Freud asserted that the castration of women was a reality that they had to accept. He thus forced them into a feeling of inferiority.

Such endless debates and counter-debates have been going on since long. Feminism has taken the 'gender issue' seriously and feminist discourses all over the world debated the issues related to the woman's life, experiences and representations. The second wave of feminism in the 1960's and 1970's had critically examined the issues of women's oppression at all levels along with their subjugated position. Feminism started as a movement more than a century ago with Mary Wollstonecraft demanding that women should be treated as equal to men. Witnessing the deprived condition of eighteenth century middle class English women she pleaded to treat women's minds as respectfully as men's. "The cultural devaluation" of women is witnessed across the cultures and countries/nations. Feminism as a movement or ideology emerged as a way to define women's right as autonomous beings, concentrating on perennial issues of equality and difference. The driving force of feminism is the realization of women's inferior or secondary

position in the patriarchal society. Wayne Fraser in the preface of *The Dominion of Women: the Personal and the Political in Canadian Women's Literature* (1991) used the term "interior colonization" to describe women's position in a patriarchal society. This interior colonization has made women largely an oppressed group and victims of socio cultural impositions. It is the power politics prevalent in the society that had given the scope to men to become authoritative agents and thus to generate masculine order and control women through the male-world-view. The all pervasive influence of the male-world-view pushed women to the category of "other" as theorized by many critics, and they were even pushed to a marginalized position in the name of "difference" between male and female biology/anatomy. Hence the feminist movement aims at adjusting the power balance through emancipation of women and demand a "space of their own" where they can have freedom to articulate themselves as human beings and take part in the mainstream discourses.

Feminisms have provided a larger network to women across nations and cultures to articulate their thoughts on the issues of injustice/inequality and subversion/silencing and oppression/marginalization and so on, overlooking the differences that arise out of race, class, sexuality, nation, tradition, culture, economic condition and religion. As feminism focussed more on the commonality of experiences and representation of women in the beginning of the movement, it helped theorizing the experiences of women as well as the oppression of women. The achievement of feminism is that it has really helped to initiate changes in the situation for women to some extent in different socio-cultural milieus. This, in turn, has helped women to articulate various marginalized experiences of different races, communities, tribes, and cultures. By admitting and acknowledging the differences of women's experiences in different socio-cultural contexts because of differences in race, class, ethnicity, and religion, etc, feminism has widened its horizon to create a space for women. The history of feminism has highlighted the oppression and subjugation of women, asserting that the nature of oppression significantly varies from culture to culture, nation to nation and even religion to religion.

Aritha van Herk is a Canadian novelist, short story writer, essayist, editor, literary critic, a feminist and a postcolonial writer who has been projecting feminist

issues very powerfully in her writings. She was born in Wetaskiwin, Alberta in 1954 to Dutch immigrant parents, Meretje (van Dam) and William Herk and was raised on a farm. Van Herk was educated at the University of Alberta in Edmonton where she studied Canadian literature and Creative writing. She teaches Creative Writing and English literature at the University of Calgary. Aritha van Herk is widely known as a feisty feminist writer very much concerned with gender and language. She is a postmodern writer of wicked word-play prowess, and a prairie writer whose work reconfigures the Canadian West. Van Herk is Alberta's best known contemporary female writer who even asserts her postcolonial position as an immigrant writer. Van Herk says that feminist theory in particular remains vital for her. At the same time, postmodern and postcolonial theories also influence her writings, both fiction and criticism. Her contribution to literary world is very significant as she experiments with different kind of writings.

Judith, her first novel about a secretary turned pig farmer has been widely translated and earned her the Seal Canadian First Novel Award. She rose to prominence with the publication of her first novel. She was selected as one of the Canada's most promising young writers in the 45 Below Competition for her second novel *The Tent Peg*. This is one of the remarkable fictional works written about the Canadian north from a feminist perspective. This novel was written from a woman's perspective to dismantle the notion of patriarchy. Many consider her first two novels *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* anti-male novels as the female protagonists in these two novels escape into a world of their choice to enjoy freedom and autonomy. *No Fixed Address: an amorous journey* is a parody of the picaresque novel that follows the travels of Arachne Manteia, an underwear saleswoman. It was nominated for the Governor General's award for fiction. *Places Far From Ellesmere, a geografictione* (1990) crosses genre boundary by merging fiction, autobiography, travel-writing geography-writing and literary criticism. She depicts places through geographical mapping to show that even literature creates maps of places and people in its own way. *In Visible Ink: Crypto-frictions* (1991) reflects van Herk's continued interest in ficto criticism. She tries to assert that no form of writing can exclusively stay apart from each other. *A Frozen Tongue* (1992) is a collection of essays and ficto

criticism. *Restlessness* (1998) is a new kind of novel that deals with an intense affair with the idea of death. Her last two publications are about Alberta, trying to historify Alberta. The first one, *Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta* (2001) conveys something of the mysterious bond between people and place that defines what it means to be an Albertan. *Audacious and Adamant The Story of Maverick Alberta* (2007) is her latest publication. Both her creative and critical writings have been widely published and her works have been translated into ten languages.

Aritha van Herk is a Western Canadian writer who delights in the art of linguistic play and in the reconstruction or revision of classical, biblical and Canadian figures and landscapes. She started writing because as she has confessed: "it gave me a chance to inhabit a world that no one else had access to...I started making up a world that I thought was better than the one was living in" (1989:109). This implies, perhaps, that fictional works provide immense scope to articulate the desire of women. Patriarchy imposes lots of restrictions on a woman's life because of which she is not free to follow her own path. Hence she takes delight in writing about the possibilities of the world than its mundane probabilities, as it is believed that writing has proved to be therapeutic for women. Moreover, for a woman to tell her own story is to liberate herself to attain an autonomous selfhood. Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera observes that the written word opens a terrain of relatively free expression to women, into which taboos and secrets may be released. She exhorts African women "to write bravely and fiercely". Vera writes, "The woman I am is inside the writing, embraced and freed by it. For me writing is light, a radiance that captures everything in a fine profile. This light searches and illuminates, it is a safe place from which to uncover the emotional havoc of our experience" (1999: 2).

Van Herk appears to be in love with words and with language as she says referring to language, "that simply fed my desire to make stories to make fiction". Challenging the male defined myth that women's only place is home, she has been constantly engaging herself in imaginary emancipation of women through her fictional construct. Fiction is always enchanting for van Herk as it offers a kind of freedom to break away from the male-determined order and also to show new positionality for women. She says, "but for me fiction is----is like heaven! That's

where I want to be; I want to be in fiction! And fiction posits its own kind of heaven" (1989: 110).

Experiences of an individual require some kind of translation, and fiction provides a wonderful canvas for such a translation of experiences that becomes much more inspiring for articulating unexpressed/unfulfilled desire. In her fictional works van Herk posits women who take certain kinds of desires in their fists and say, "I am gonna try and do what I want to do even if I fail". That is the spirit of her strong courageous woman characters who are self-reliant, and who know what they are doing to fulfill their desire and are ready to accept the challenges and responsibilities that their choice entails.

This study attempts to focus on self-fulfillment and self-actualization in Aritha van Herk's novels, utilizing the perspectives offered by contemporary feminist literary theories. The study tries to analyze the strategies adopted by van Herk to articulate female desire in her fictional works. Desire in this study does not imply any erotic sense as such. Desire here is a deeper longing to reach certain goal/destination, which is otherwise forbidden for women in a patriarchal society. It is an eager wish to encroach on that territory which has so far been a male preserve/domain and from which women are invariably excluded. Even the territories/frontiers are gendered both geographically and psychologically. Desire allows one to free oneself from all bondages. Desire is primarily connected to the understanding of the structures of the female self. Van Herk has granted autonomy and freedom of choice to the female protagonists in her novels. She has made Judith a Secretary turned pig farmer in *Judith*, J.L a disguised bush cook in a geological expedition in *The Tent Peg*, and Arachne an underwear sales woman moving in her black Mercedes car from place to place in *No Fixed Address*. She has re-created/re-invented Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* to undertake a self-actualizing journey to fulfill her unfulfilled desire in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, and also portrays Dorcas as a courier who arranges her own murder by hiring a professional killer in *Restlessness*. These fictional works center on the articulation of female desire. Women no longer suppress their desire to become what they want to become, what they want to attain. Rather they are willing to create their own space, by re-inscribing gender. A self-

reflexive feminist discourse has already emerged dismantling patriarchy's mechanism of domination and control, and incorporating re-visionist and recuperative reading. The praxis may be re-visionist reading or recuperative reading/analysis; its main purpose should not only be the interpretation of literature in different ways. Rather taking resistance as a dominant mode, the purpose should be to change the world-order, change the perception controlled or regulated by patriarchy. A feminist discourse must assert woman-centric view by retrieving the marginalized women's experiences. Aritha van Herk's works attempt such a retrieval.

Aritha van Herk, considered to be a literary lawbreaker, "the best known literary outlaw, Judith of genre," has been ceaselessly experimenting with the ways of articulating the female desire. This study is hoped to throw some light on such experimentation.

This study is divided into the following chapters:

1. Introduction

2. Feminism and Postcolonialism in Canada

3. Desire-----its connotation and psychological aspects in Aritha van Herk's Novels

4. Geography and Gender

5. Genres: van Herk's Exploration and Experimentation

6. Conclusion

Chapter-I

FEMINISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM IN CANADA

I

> Feminism, like writing is an intriguing unknown, the mystery of what will follow our suggestive punctuations.
> [Aritha van Herk. 1991:137]

It is said and widely believed that feminism is a means and methodology to articulate female discontent over the control-mechanisms or dominations of patriarchy. The female discontent is articulated in different ways depending on local situations and culture-specific issues. Feminism is not something that was deliberately planned or designed. It evolved out of women's experiences of oppression, exploitation, discrimination, subversion and marginalization at certain times, places and social-cultural contexts. Feminists emphasize the need to validate women's personal experiences and subjective feelings to seek justice and demand equality. A feminist believes that women as a group are treated differently from men in the name of biological differences and they are subjected to personal and institutional discriminations at all levels. Society is structured in such a way that it generally and obviously works for the benefit of men rather than women. Feminism is not only a social and political movement but also a "set of intellectual positions". It is also an intellectual commitment today with the institutionalization of feminism and gender perspectives in academia that demands justice and equality for women and end of sexism in all forms. It incorporates activism, commitment to action and a whole range of new ideas to eradicate the discrimination at large to make it a better or an equitable world to live in. Feminist ideas are usually progressive and are linked to social progress based on a healthy gender relation which is so vital for women's movement.

Feminism as a movement and ideology is constantly evolving; it is a continuous and ongoing process to redress the socio-political, cultural and economic oppression of the women. Over the years much have been debated and theories have been formulated and conceptualized to define and to demand a woman's right as an autonomous being. Even then at times it becomes quite problematic to define feminism. Because feminism is not feminism but feminisms as the concept of feminism is based on diverse and multifaceted groupings of concepts and actions involving changes in the existing socio-cultural structure of the patriarchal hegemony. Feminist struggle is definitely not against man as such; it is against patriarchy or "the rule of the father", against the social system which gives men primary position in the social set-up. As Dumont says, "the protests are not directed against individuals but rather against the institutions, structures, norms and values that shape the oppression of women as a group" (Dumont, quoted in Pettman: 1992: 272).

That is why feminism aims at changing the world order and the attitude of man so that their attitude would no longer be hostile and antagonistic; rather it would be humane to grant breathing space and autonomy to women, enabling them to talk about their desire freely. It implies commitment to change the social structure to make it less oppressive to women and men too. So Teresa Billington Greig, an English suffragette, activist and political theorist maintains that feminism seeks "the reorganization of the world upon a basis of sex-equality in all human relations". She further says that it is a movement,

> which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the woman and man as the foundation of law and custom
> (Greig: 1911: 158).

Even Gloria Steinem the American feminist activist believes that feminism is, "the belief in the full social, economic and political equality in man and woman"

(Steinem: 1983:15). This claim for "equality" makes many people uncomfortable as the physiological differences between a man and a woman comes to the forefront which can never be challenged. How could a woman and a man be equal as they are so different in their physical appearance? Moreover, even the psychologists have proclaimed psychological differences between a male psyche and a female psyche, which make their behavior, attitude, thinking and approach different. The physical and psychological differences between men and women hold back many people even today from thinking about the equality that feminism insists on.

It virtually needed centuries to strengthen women's movement against exploitation, oppression, suppression, differentiation, discrimination, domination, marginalization and subjugation to reach the present stage of feminism that is the Third wave of feminism. The first wave mainly dealt with the Suffrage movement. It was an outgrowth of the anti-slavery and abolitionist movement in which women fighting for the rights of Blacks in the United States realized that they themselves lacked some of the rights they were fighting for the others. The second wave dealt with the inequality of law and customs as well as the other inequalities in social and cultural contexts and it was sparked by the publication of Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) in the U S. More recent transformations of feminism have generated a Third Wave. Third wave feminists often critique Second Wave feminism, as it did not pay attention to the differences among women due to race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, region and religion etc. Significantly it emphasized "identity" as a site of gender struggle because a woman's racial and ethnic identity puts her in a different position of struggle for gender equality. Women are much more diverse than the second wave feminism thought them to be. Feminists in the third world and the black and ethnic minority feminists in metropolitan cities and settler states have drawn attention to those differences and have challenged Western feminists to take account of their own national, ethnic and class positioning. Women encounter discrimination because of their physiological difference and constitution which is taken to be fragile and delicate by patriarchy. The formulation of the concept of "woman" has become very challenging since differences amongst women are wide. According to Elizabeth Spelman, "being a

'woman' is not the same thing as, or reducible to, being a 'female'. Women are what females of the human species become, or are supported to become, through learning how to think, act, and live in certain ways" (*Inessential Woman*:158). Feminist theory has been concerned in recent years with the differences within the term "woman" far more than it has been concerned with making global statements about "woman". Feminist theory has included the diverse experiences of women to formulate the concept of woman.

Feminism is generally taken to be a phenomenon of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of the Anglo-American studies of the women's movement acknowledge some forerunners in the English and French revolutions. They also acknowledge individual figures such as Ann Hutchinson. Feminists like Ann Hutchinson were "feminists in action" rather than theorists. They used their ideas to modify or organize social forms in which women might be free of male power and domination. Recent studies of French feminism claim a longer past and identify Christine de Pizan (1364-1430) as the first woman to have the feminist views. She was the first feminist thinker to ignite the four century long debate on women which came to be known as "querelles des femmes". De Pizan in her allegorical work, *Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) criticizes many of the misogynist traditions that her world had inherited, including those of Aristotle. De Pizan affirms that the knowledge of such female notables as Minerva, Sappho and Isis has benefited the world more than the thought of Aristotle which had dominated the western European thought from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century (Margaret Schans: 36 [1.38.5]). Joan Kelly writing in *Women, History and Theory* (1984) calls Christine de Pizan the first modern woman. Kelly in her study brilliantly projects a substantial four hundred year old tradition of women thinking about women and sexual politics in European society before the French Revolution. Kelly says, "Abolishing all forms of hierarchy in every domain of power, means practicing feminism wherever we are" (Kelly: 1984: xiii). For Kelly feminism was "a perspective on social reality as well as a social movement" (ibid: xviii).

Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) virtually devised all the demands of the women's movement------the right to education, legal representation, the right to vote, the right to property and admission to profession, etc. Wollstonecraft was the first crusader who articulated very boldly the causes of women's subjugation and its perpetuation in society. She identified male power as the root cause of society's problems. Her writing was a reply to the Enlightenment anti-feminist Rousseau, who argued that because female nature was different from male, women's rights must be different from men's. Wollstonecraft insisted that women' nature was basically the same as men's---free, rational and independent. But men in general employ their reason to justify their inherited prejudice against women, rather than to understand them. Mary Wollstonecraft who envisaged an alternative social system, proved the need for it with her own life as she was deserted and betrayed by her lovers, vilified by her contemporaries and posterity for her stand on feminism, and died in childbirth at the age of thirty eight. In the words of Margaret Fuller, she was "a woman whose existence better proved the need of some new interpretation of woman's Rights than anything she wrote" (in Showalter: 1971:10). Her book is considered to be the first feminist work in the 18th century. Her radical notions on women's issues at that time infuriated men and caused a lot of controversy. Horace Walpole expressed his determination of never to read *A Vindication...* and went to that extent of attacking the author as a "hyena in petticoats". She was also described as one of the "philosophizing serpents we have in our bosom". But there were a few sympathetic men who felt for the women's oppression. One of the most extraordinary men of his century John Stuart Mill in his essay *Subjection of Women* (1869) held the view that women's position was not natural but the result of political oppression by men. His wholehearted endeavor was to uphold the view and convince people that the legal subordination of one sex to the other was wrong and it was one of the chief hindrances to human improvement. His effort was to make women inclusive to the social structure and distinctly visible group. Mill recognized the abilities of women and strongly pleaded for their right to enter any trade or profession and their right to practice arts. He vigorously advocated their right to vote. Mill believed that the liberty of the individual was absolutely necessary for the development of the society. However, the Seneca Falls Declaration

of Sentiments and Resolutions drawn and signed at the obscure village, Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 is taken to be the beginning of an organized movement for women's right. One of the pioneers of the Resolution Elizabeth Cady Stanton believed that only through the exercise of the franchise would they be able to eradicate the existing legal, economic and social inequalities affecting women. They had the firm conviction that "woman is man's equal". In course of an interview Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared, "In discussing the right of woman, we are to consider first what belongs to her as an individual, in a world of her own, the arbiter of her own destiny" (Dubois: 1981:247). Since then women across the globe have been fighting against political, economic, and cultural oppression and against all sorts of domination on the basis of the commonality of their experience.

Feminism as a socio-political movement experienced a resurgence in the late 1960s and early 1970s especially in Western Europe and the United States. This brought about a number of changes in the developed countries influencing the developing countries too. New feminist movements started in the late 1960s. As a growing, ever evolving concept feminist theory and politics include subjects like the body, class and work, disability, the family, globalization, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science, the self, sex work and sexuality, etc. The strong wave in the 1960s and1970s led to theorize woman's discourse. Throughout the '70s and early eighties many feminists rested comfortably with a politics of identification. Identifying with other women became an important ethical commitment; a way of "ensuring accountability", as Rich put it. Charlotte Bunch a feminist activist and a theorist from North America pointed out that feminism is not about adding in women's rights, but about transforming society so that feminism may be called "transformational politics"(1981). Because everything affects women, every issue is a women's issue at large and there is a feminist perspective on every subject. Aiming to dismantle all "systems of domination" as bell hooks, an African-American feminist critic proclaimed, the feminist project is continuously challenging other's blind spots along with its own blind spot. hooks explains: "The feminist focus on coming to voice—on moving from silence into speech as revolutionary gesture. As metaphor for self-transformation, it has been especially

relevant for groups of women who have previously never had a public voice" (hooks: 1989:12).

The present day feminist thought encompasses a moral vision and emerges as a holistic, anti-militaristic and life-affirming philosophy. Julia Kristeva suggests that, "feminism must operate in a third space that which deconstructs all identity, all binary oppositions, and all phallogocentric positions" (Pollock: 1992:163).

The critics and theorists of the first wave of feminism agreed with Plato that men and women are in essence identical and sexual differences can be seen as superficial rather than constitutive. The second wave of feminism had given emphasis on differences. Rather the differences were valorized. Dealing with the differences that arise out of political, philosophical and psychoanalytical positions Audre Lorde says, "In our work and in our living we must recognize that difference is a reason for celebration and growth rather than a reason for destruction" (Lorde: 1984: 101).

Despite the differences between the first wave and the second wave, two factors united them i.e., an emphasis on social reconstruction and a unified concept of gender identity. "Identity" is the core subject for feminist critics and the multiplicity of feminine identity has become a vital theme for the third wave of feminism. Feminist discourse in the late 1990's foregrounded issues of identity, difference and their implications for feminist politics. With time it moved into the discourse of "differences" of race, class, age, religion and region etc. among women. Catherine Mackinnon has appropriated the term "difference difference makes" (Offen: 1988:139) for the current issues of differences in the feminist discourse. This bivalent debate frames the theoretical perception of the present day French feminist argument. The question of difference has been valorized by black feminist very forcefully along with the third world feminists. It is acknowledged that women as a group experience many forms of oppressions, injustices and sexism, but the nature and degree of such oppression and sexism is different. It is class-oriented, race-oriented, ethnic group-oriented, and region and religion-oriented too. So the common label for feminism is not appropriate. As such, Alice Walker, an African-

American novelist, poet, essayist and an activist coined a newly defined term "womanism" in her book *In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983). The term "womanism" provided a definite alternative to "feminism" and could better address the perspectives and experiences of Black women and Women of Color. Walker emphatically says, "womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender" (Walker: 1983: xi).

The feminist movement led by white middleclass women focused mainly on oppressions based on sexism ignoring the oppression based on race and class. Hence womanists pointed out that the black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of the white women. So the white, middle class, and heterosexual women's demand for equal rights and their fight against oppression have been scrutinized particularly by the black feminists. Asserting their ethnic and racial identity these black feminists articulated their specific desire.

A search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self have become the primary focus of feminist literature. The issues of multiple identities of women and identity politics (with theoretical perception) have become the central points of feminist critique. Linda Alcoff says that identity must always be conceived as a construction, not as a fixed entity. So it is in a flux. Identities are constituted differently in different social, historical and cultural contexts. Identity categories can neither be stable nor internally homogenous. 'Identity' being a big and crucial question, the concept of woman itself became debatable in the 1980s and 1990s. The social and cultural meanings attached to each woman's gender might be so different that it becomes almost meaningless to describe one woman in terms of another. The concept of 'woman' is pivotal in the formation of the feminist theory. But it is problematic as it is crowded with the "over determination of male supremacy". The multiplicity and diversity associated with women have been problematic for many feminists as these lead to multitudes of argument, theory and belief. Hence Julia Kristeva declines to accept a single definition of 'woman' or 'female expression'. She exhorts us to listen to the 'multiplicity of voices', to be conscious of the fluidity and abundance of possibilities attached to the search for 'difference'. For Kristeva women also speak and write as 'hysterics', as outsiders to male-dominated

discourse. She also doubts, whether women should work out an alternative discourse. Rather than formulating a new discourse, women should persist in challenging the discourses that stand. Kristeva says:

> If women have a role to play...it is only assuming a negative function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society. Such an attitude places women on the side of explosion of social codes: with revolutionary movements (Kristeva: 1974: 166-7).

For Luce Irigaray women have a specificity that distinguishes them from men. Refuting the definition of women given by Plato and Freud as "irrational, invisible, and imperfect (castrated) man", Irigaray argues that because women have been caught in a world structured by man-centered concepts, they have had no way of knowing or representing themselves. But she offers as the starting point for a female self-consciousness the facts of women's bodies and women's sexual pleasure, precisely because they have been so absent or so misrepresented in male discourse. Irigaray's work aims at revealing a perceived masculinist philosophy underlying language and gestures, leading us towards a "new" feminine language that would allow women to express themselves. Monique Wittig the French feminist says that "woman" does not exist for us; it is only an imaginary formation, while "women" is the product of social relationship. Wittig built on Simone de Beauvoir's theory that the concept of woman is cultural rather than natural. But she went on to identify women as a political class. According to Wittig's analysis, "women are a political class like Serfs in feudal times. Just as Serfs were tied to the land for labor, women were tied to the home for labor" (in Shaktini: 2005: 2).

It is acknowledged that women are oppressed in various ways------by sexism, classism, homophobia, racism, ageism, ableism, etc., and one cannot identify one form of oppression as fundamental. Women suffer from oppression in all societies because they are women. The oppression varies in form and degree and is shaped and may be multiplied by their class, race, culture, religion, age, nationality and

many other factors. As Elizabeth Spelman observes, "No woman is subject to any form of oppression simply because she is a woman" (Spelman: 1988).

Catherine Mackinnon claims that to be oppressed as a woman is to be viewed and treated as sexually subordinate (Mackinnon: 1987). Iris Marion Young describes five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and systematic violence (inWartenberg: 1992:175). Any such oppression is unjust, inhuman and wrong. Hence the goal of feminism is to end all oppressions of women.

II

Canada has witnessed multi-faceted women's movement. The contrasting and conflicting images of women reflect the diversity of the Canadian female experience. It is assumed by a few people that women's history in Canada reveals a strong preoccupation with the 'articulate white middle-class women'. But at the same time scholars and academicians attracted by diverse feminist politics have seen the other unique aspect of it. It incorporated innovative issues related to those women who fell outside the mainstream such as the native women in fur-trade-society, farm women and working class women. While working on working women feminist historians were influenced by the labour history and by the tradition of historical materialism. Working class women have received much greater attention in recent years. Feminists have explored the lives of working-class women and poor women including the immigrant and minority women who left few written records and who would have otherwise never captured the public attention. Feminist historians from working-classes and non Anglo-Saxon backgrounds have opened up study of minority women and feminist analysis of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Class, race and ethnicity have been analytical categories to inform the lives of all women including the privileged ones as well as the working-class, immigrant, native and black women and other women of colour. The uniqueness of

Canadian feminism is that rather than celebrating the white middle-class women's experiences it tries to critique their experiences. Gisela Bock, a German feminist notes in *Women in European History* (2002) that women's history has the possibility of doing much more than recovering a history of women's past lives. It can shed light on gender relations and provide new understanding of general history. In Canada recent studies have revealed that women's lives are no less rich or complex than men's and significantly women's lives do not necessarily share the same rhythms.

The sociological perspective has led one to assume that an individual's experience of femininity or masculinity originates in the social structures and organizations of nations in various forms and Canada is no exception. Being female/woman or male/man has an immense and transient impact upon the Canadians. Males are often esteemed more highly than the females. The cultural devaluation of female is also largely visible in Canada. Many women in Canada face such problems as faced by the Third World Women, in particular native women, immigrant women, disabled women and women who are members of less visible and marginalized minorities.

The suffrage movement in Canada got under way in the 1860's and it developed out of the problematic issue of Emily Stowe. She was rejected by Canadian Medical Schools because of her gender. She passed from an American School and became Canada's first female physician. She started working for societal reform. It is because of her efforts that the University of Toronto admitted women in 1886. Dr. Stowe and other like-minded women regarded vote for women as instrumental in opening the way to other reforms. In 1876, Dr.Stowe started the Toronto Women's Literary Club. She deliberately avoided the word suffrage, considering it too bold (Cleverdon: 1974:19-20). The struggle for women's political rights in Canada was started by women with strong feminist commitment. The latter wanted to break down the barriers against women entering into prestigious occupations. The movement also involved religiously motivated people having interest in other types of social reform. Supporters of the vote for women mainly

were conservative, Anglo-Protestant members of the upper middle class and their priority was strengthening the family through social and moral reform (Chafetz and Dworkin: 1986:118). There were feminists who interrogated women's accustomed place in all social institutions. On the other side, privileged women playing their traditional role as protectors of home and family displayed ladylike concern to dismiss/banish drunkenness, licentiousness and indecency from the streets of Canada. Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which is considered to be the largest of the turn-of-the-century women's organizations, adopted prohibition as its major issue. Though a few feminist activists were trying to bring changes in the lives of the Canadian women with revolutionary zeal on justified grounds, feminists were rather insignificant and unpopular minorities. Strong dominant leaders like Nellie McClung led the Canadian women's struggle for the vote. Her motto was "never apologize, never explain; get the job done and let them howl". The suffragists argued that since they do not have a share in making laws, it was unjust to pay taxes and obey laws. They were of the opinion that states needed women's point of view as male-run legislatures failed to pass protective laws for women. The issue of women's vote was associated with a wide range of social reforms relating to factory working conditions, alcoholism, poor health and diet among working people in Canada. These multiple issues evoked responses from middle class women organizations such as the WCTU, the National Council of Women among urban women and the women institutes among rural women. These organizations played a vital role in the Suffrage movement. Women secured the federal vote in 1918 and provincial vote between 1916 and 1922 in every province except Quebec. In 1940 Quebecois women secured the right to vote. Between 1916 and 1925 women became eligible to be members in the House of Commons and in all provincial legislatures except Quebec and New Brunswick. In 1929 the British Privy Council amended the British North America Act and ruled that "for the purposes of section 24 of the British North America Act, women were qualified persons and thus eligible to be summoned to the senate". That was an important victory. It needed almost half a century to win the right to vote and remove this bias. Many men were of the opinion that "women did not have the mental capacity to comprehend political problem". Ultimately women got the voting right and attained a sort of legal emancipation, but

the real social and cultural status of women remained the same. The Suffragist movement did not change women's place at home, and in the workplace, or alter community attitudes about the sexes (Errington: 1988:73). During the 1920s and 1950s women's organizations such as the YWCA, the Canadian Federation of University Women, the Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the Women's Institutes, L'Association feminine d' education et action sociale, professional teachers and nurses associations and local church groups worked silently for reforms of different kinds. Though publicly visible active social movements diminished, some organizations and individuals continued to struggle through those years.

The late 1960s witnessed the emergence of the second wave of the women's movement that continued for a long time. In the present century, with the advent of the Third World feminism it entered a new phase. Now it has become one of the most profound political and cultural phenomena. Every Canadian's life has been affected by this movement. The Canadian segment of the worldwide movement is made up of hundreds of groups, both small and large, some concentrating on a single issue, some on complex, wide ranging political agenda. The contemporary feminist movement in Canada formally started with the activities that led to the Federal Government's 1967 decision to establish a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Morris: 1980). It was considered to be the first success of Canada's re-emerging feminist movement. There were various factors which encouraged the second wave of feminism, but remarkably the currents of intellectual thought in Canada, United States, and Western Europe showing concern about equal opportunity and human rights issues were pivotal for reconsideration of women's position in society. The second wave of feminism started amidst social and political turbulence and openness to change. The Voice of Women, an organization formed in 1960 to oppose nuclear weapons, played a vital role as a link between the New Left activist groups in Canada, and the mainstream, upper-middle-class women's organizations. Equally important was "the 1996 reorganization of a large number of existing Quebec Women's Organizations into the Federation de femmes du Quebec and the Association feminine d'education at d'action sociale" (Black: 1988: 83). The establishment of a Royal Commission on the Status of Women was the first success

of Canada's re-emerging feminist movement. Laura Sabia, President of the Canadian Federation of University was the person behind the setting up of RCSW. The Commission was set up to enquire into the situation of Canadian women, and to recommend the steps that might be taken by the Federal government to ensure equal opportunity for women with the men in all aspects of Canadian society.

Feminism as mentioned earlier does not speak with a single voice. So there is no one feminism but feminisms. Of course there are certain basic premises shared by all feminists, such as: "all believe in equal rights and opportunities for women, all recognize that women are oppressed and exploited by virtue of being women and all feminists organize to change" (Adamson et al: 1988: 9). Within this wide range of commonality there exists particular culture/region specific interpretation of women's oppression and exploitation and also the recommendation/demand for change. Both feminist scholars and activists prefer to differentiate among liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism.

Liberal feminism is a branch of the Western tradition of liberal political thinking that believes in freedom and equal participation of individuals in the society. Liberal feminists like other group of feminists consider discrimination against women to be unjust and wrong, but they do not regard the oppression of women as a structural feature of the capitalistic economic system. So they do not advocate overthrowing of the system. Rather, liberal feminists look forward to the state to bring about women's liberation through legislative measures. Hence the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, National Action Committee on the status of women, the Canadian Advisory Council on the status of women can be accommodated in the liberal political tradition. Contemporary liberal feminism does not challenge the foundations of Canadian society, but is willing to work within the existing parameters. So the liberal feminist voice has turned out to be accepted public voice of feminism that has increased public awareness and acceptance of feminist aspirations for change. This branch has played a significant role in bringing about important reforms in Canada.

Socialist feminist branch takes Marx's and Engel's' writings on women as the basis for analyzing women's oppression. It identifies state/government as the site of the patriarchal capitalist power. It opposes the traditional gender division of labour in the family and labour force and the inferior legal status of women. At the same time, it strives for women's control of reproduction, for their freedom to choose contraception and abortion. Socialist feminists hold that women's liberation will occur only under socialism and socialism will be established with the liberation of women. Their aim is to abolish gender bias and class division. In Canada Socialist feminism has found political affinity with New Democratic Party as they criticize the states activities, and want the state to work for women rather than against them.

Radical feminists reject the basic framework of society. They critically evaluate women's situation. Radical feminism considers women's oppression to be the fundamental oppression and argues that patriarchal oppression goes deeper than class oppression. It concentrates on "the intimate interactions of everyday life with no theory of the state" (Maroney and Luxton: 1987: 16). Radical feminists "tend to see the root of women's oppression in either woman's biological capacity for motherhood or innate, biologically determined male aggression, as manifest in rape, which makes men dangerously different from women" (1997: 17). Radical feminists share with Socialist feminists the premise that the dominant male culture promulgates patriarchy and denigrates women. The conviction that male female relations are inevitably oppressive to women led radical feminists like Mary Daly to observe that female separatism is the only answer. According to them, women need a woman's space, a space free from male intrusion where women can help each other, regain control over their own bodies and develop a women's culture. Reproductive freedom is at the top of their agenda. Radical feminism was an important current in the Canadian feminist movement of the 1970s. Its doctrines were much influential to the point of establishing rape-crisis centers, shelter for battered women and campaigns against pornography. Canadian women from diverse backgrounds got together to fight an important battle in the early 1980's constitutional crisis. Canadian women became successful in getting section 28 into the Charter on gender equality provisions. The constitutional issue was a reformist

issue, but women's involvement in Canadian constitution-making in the early 1980's was a mass involvement. Women with the belief that Canadian society was egalitarian were attracted to the movement. Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) was established in 1985 to support equality for women through the litigation. The objective of LEAF was to see that the Charter of Rights and freedom guarantees were neither restrictively interpreted nor ignored by the Canadian courts. The constitutional battle also showed the divisions within Canadian feminism.

The National survey result in the 1990s indicates strong approval of the goals of the women's movement in Canada. Seventy three percent agreed that "overall, the women's movement has had more of a positive effect than a negative effect on Canadian society". At the same time significant numbers of Canadians are perturbed and furious with feminism's challenges to the status quo. Many men consider them to be the target, although fight is not directed against individuals but against institutions, structures, norms and values that lead to the oppression of women as a group. The women's movement is also endangered by the indifferent attitude of many young women to feminism. The "I am not a feminist but..." syndrome has affected these young women but they enjoy the fruit of feminism in different ways. They ignore the real position of most women's lives--------the violence inflicted upon females because of being female, the 'feminization of poverty' which simply means that most of the poor are women and kids, and so on. The strength of the feminist movement has been further fragmented by the number of issues taken up by feminism. Feminists work for equitable pay, position and pensions for women, quality affordable day care; control of reproduction capacity by women themselves, fair symbolic representation of women in the mass-media and religious teaching. They work against occupational and education barriers, violent abuse of women, compulsory heterosexuality, discrimination against women of colour, immigrant women, disabled women, and old women. Apart from all these the political activities carried out by feminists also include peace and environmental movements.

Women's movement is greatly complicated by the regional, ethnic and social class divisions among women in Canada. Both Anglophone and francophone sectors

share common issues like reproductive rights, peace and environmental issues. But due to the language barrier the feminists working in Quebec are isolated from English Canada and vice versa. Similarly native women and immigrant women's problems are different from other Canadian women. It is evident that the women's movement has been troubled by class cleavages since the beginning. A majority of the feminist activists were well-educated middle class people finding difficulty in understanding the distinctive concerns of the working class women. But one good thing is that white middle class feminists are fast becoming more sensitive to the perspectives and problems of the women from other social-classes and cultural backgrounds. Canadian feminists have learnt through the years to understand the nature of the worldwide oppression of women.

Throughout the period of struggle of the women's movement Canadian feminists acknowledged their sisterhood with women around the world. Even then, four interrelated issues still remain paramount. The first issue is the feminization of poverty. Not only in Canada but also throughout the world, the poor are disproportionately women and children. The second is the issue of work in the labour force and home. If women do not have fair access to job training, employment opportunities, and equal pay for work of equal value and affordable day care of decent quality, they remain financially dependent on men and subjected to their authority. The third issue is the continued struggle for reproductive freedom, that is, the control over all aspects of their fertility. The fourth issue is the issue of violence against women, that is, the consequence of gendered societies in which male power predominates. With such issues the literary activities of the feminists are coming up in a big way in Canada where men take the upper hand to construct and transmit knowledge. Feminist writers are encroaching on those forbidden territories with their powerful texts opposing male hegemony.

With the advent of postcolonial theory in academia feminism has attained a new dimension. The term postcolonial is used to analyze the processes by which people or social "subjects" occupy new positionalities in the period after direct colonial rule. Postcolonialism has in recent decades, opened up avenues for the formerly colonized nations to let out their marginalized experiences through literary

activities and to form a literary platform to write back their experiences from a new perspective. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin) state that the term postcolonial covers, "all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft et al.: 1989: 2).

According to Leela Gandhi "postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially interrogating the colonial past" (Gandhi: 1998: 4).

Postcolonialism has paved the way for the third world literature or third world feminism or third world women's writings in metropolitan universities where theory is formulated to analyze a systematic mode of articulation. In the 1990s postcolonialism took into its consideration what was neglected in the 1970s---- women and indigenous people along with migrant and diasporic writers as their situation was considered to be representative of postcolonial writing. As Gina Wisker says:

> When we use colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial criticism we consider how through other writing, discussion and behaviour, the Other----different peoples----were denigrated, stereotyped, disempowered, silenced, rendered invisible etc., and in so doing we open up new understandings of the subject position of the other (2000: 18).

Feminism and postcolonialism are contested critical areas. It is argued that women are in a double or triple position of colonial subordination through gender, race, class and economic position and they write out against this as a postcolonial response. European women experienced discrimination and subordination in the masculine domain of the Empire. But they were the part of the same race or social group. Compared to them native or subaltern/marginalized women were doubly or

triply marginalized. They were marginalized not only on the ground of gender but also on account of race, social class, religion, caste, sexuality and regional status. Silencing and subordination have been a shared experience for colonial people and women. Wisker maintains; "women writers speak out not only against the triple burden of race, class and gender, but against a history of colonialism which has silenced and subordinated them" (Wisker: 2000: 32).

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1988) postulates that the subaltern female subject is not allowed to voice herself. She asked, "Can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak: 1988 [1985]:285). Her argument is built on the point that the combined workings of colonialism and patriarchy make it extremely difficult for the subaltern, making her doubly disempowered and secondary, to articulate her viewpoint to represent herself, as she is absent as the subject of agency. Gender division and discrimination were apparent among the colonized. Postcolonial writing is usually taken as writing which resists colonialism and its power politics, both during and mainly after the colonial period. Postcolonial writing includes writing both from the colonized nations of the "third world" and also from the "white settler societies". Helen Carr illuminates the ways in which sexual and colonial domination are paralleled. Carr maintains:

> In the language of colonialism, non-Europeans occupy the same symbolic space as woman. Both are seen as part of nature, not culture, and with the same ambivalence: either they are ripe for government, passive, child-like, unsophisticated, needing leadership and guidance, described in terms of lack----no initiative, no intellectual power, no perseverance, or on the other hand, they are outside society, dangerous, treacherous, emotionally inconsistent, wild, threatening,

> fickle, sexually aberrant, irrational...lascivious, disruptive, evil, unpredictable (Carr: 1985: 50).

The history of feminism and its preoccupation show certain similarities with postcolonialism. Leela Gandhi writes, "At one extreme, and similarly to feminism, postcolonialism approaches such questions of epistemology and agency universally; that is to say, as questions which are relevant to a generalized 'human condition' or a 'global situation'. Just as feminist theory/criticism is 'one branch of interdisciplinary inquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience' (Green & Kahn 1985, p 1), postcolonialism of the sort defended by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* takes colonialism, or more specifically, European colonialism, as a way of organizing the experience of 'more than three-quarters of the people living in the world today' (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p1)" (1998:168). It was observed that:

> Early feminism like the oppositional form of postcolonialism tried to subvert structures of domination while both feminism and postcolonialism have tried to write back the marginalized into the dominant discourse (Ashcroft et al.: 1989: 175-176).

Feminist and postcolonial theories have followed "a path of convergent evolution". Both theories have concerned themselves with the study of marginalized "others" within the restraint of dominant power structure. While working even in defense of the marginalized classes both have adhered to a quite familiar theoretical course. Feminist and Postcolonial theories accepted and welcomed the poststructuralist call to resist the binary opposition upon which patriarchal and colonial authority constructs itself. These theories originated in the attempt to invert the prevailing hierarchies of gender, culture and race. Some writers even feel that imperial colonial and postcolonial discourses can be seen as "allegories of gender contests" (Williams and Chrisman: 1993: 18). Postcolonial feminist work has indeed looked at the differences between gender experiences according to the race and class of women, emphasizing the need to contextualize the particular local cultural issues.

Regarding the Western, white feminism, postcolonial critics, especially the west-based women critics of colour questioned its basis in liberal humanist thinking and its appropriation of gender issues based on common experience of marginalization. During the reemergence of the feminist movement in the 1970s in Europe and the United States feminist analysis of power emphasized primarily the common experience of oppression. While emphasizing that commonality, the cultural differences, ethnic differences, racial differences and differential experiences of powerlessness were ignored. Every thing was defined and judged in an endorsing manner from white American and European point of view, neglecting the experiences of the "other" women. This first nation, white-centric endorsement was interposed by black women, immigrant women and also Third world women, women from the Caribbean, the Pacific region and Africa. Other postcolonial women writers insist on diversity and layeredness of women's experiences and try to foreground the specific experience of their own existence. In this context Trinh T. Minh-ha says that both as women and as postcolonial citizens these women writers concentrate on their own "distinct actualities" (1989). Emerging from varied socio-cultural positions, these women writers stress the necessity of diverse styles and speaking positions in their works. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak they practice "frontier style" that favors crosshatched, fragmented, and choric forms (Boehmer: 2006: 219). They are of the opinion that their writing demands a different response from the Western women and the colonized men. The postcolonial interest lies in multiplicity, hybridity, diversity, representation and location which intensifies the emerging concept of women's multiple powers. It also leads to acquiring a new position to articulate women's selfhood. Apparently, Canadian women writers write by marking the cultural and regional differences, concentrating on Canada's history and myths of wilderness, its US dominance and British shadow, all of which make their literature different.

Canada is settler country like Australia and the Canadian is a "settler-invader". Whether Canada was once a colony and can Canada be truly called a postcolonial country have raised many critical queries. Canada's and Australia's relationship to their mother country is often like one of the margin to the center, making their

experience relevant to a better understanding of colonialism. No doubt, their colonial situation is different from that of other former colonial countries because of their comparatively shorter struggle for independence, and their loyalist tendencies towards the mother country which colonized them. Their situation also varies due to the absence of problems of racism or of imposition of foreign language. No doubt that Canada has a less oppressive history than the African countries, India and the West Indies. But when one considers the Indigenous and less-favoured people in Canada, one sees a history of oppression. Colonialism strongly affected Canadian history and still influences Canadian culture, since dependence is not relinquished by decree. Canada became "Dominion of Canada" in 1867 when officially it ceased to be a colony of the British Empire. But signs of economic and cultural dependence on the mother country remained visible long after 1867. Hence Northrop Frye in his preface to *The Bush Garden* states that Canada is, "the only country in the world which is a pure colony, colony in psychology as well as in mercantile economics" (Frye: 1971: iii).

Canadian critic Mary Louise Pratt adds that in a colony there is belief that reality is elsewhere, outside the colony: in this aspect, she contends, Canada suffers the burden of colonialism and dependence similar to one experienced by the Latin America (1985). Diana Brydon claims that,

> Canada as a nation was created by imperialism and all that it entailed: theft of the land from original inhabitants, genocide, massive immigration from around the world, exploitation of our labour and our natural resources by imperial power (Brydon: 1984: 101).

Canada's significant literary characteristic is that as a Northern country amidst environmental hostility it still maintains the survival myths. Canadians are even questioning their identity as it is sealed under the US or British influence and dominance. They still sense a kind of uncomfortable pull while using words for their

experiences. Hence Robert Kroetsch says; "...there is in the Canadian word a concealed other experience, sometimes British, sometimes American" (Kroetsch: 1974: 43).

Canadian and Australian critics have observed that settler societies share the same experience with those societies which have experienced the full force and violence of colonial domination. In the white colonies a system of internal colonization strictly separated the settler society from the native population. Whites in those settler colonies were subordinated to their white counterparts during imperialism. That is why the settler demands a new visibility. White colonial society was itself marginalized/repressed. It remained subordinated/secondary to British Empire and suffered from "cultural cringe" (A.A. Phillips: 1950). Responding to such a situation, settler and Creole writers felt the need for an authenticating history to validate their distinct subjectivity from a particular geographic and cultural perspective. So they enthusiastically search for myths of origin, tales of early pioneering, sagas involving settlers, trekkers or bush-cutters in the interior and try to project it in their writings. Significantly, perhaps the most powerful commonality found among settler/Creole and native writers was the problem of self-fashioning—finding a position of cultural integrity from which to speak. The period of decolonization represented a time of growing cultural self-assertion and national self-consciousness in the erstwhile colonies. The founding editor of *Canadian Literature* George Woodcock called this "the rising up of national pride". There was no anti-colonial revolution, no bloodshed, no fight for independence, and no struggle as such in settler countries. Still Australian, New Zealandian and Canadian writers shared with their counterparts in the decolonized nations a desire to shake off the relationship of colonial dependency. Though never as severely marginalized, settler writers had undergone deep mental anguish and pain for the cultural mimicry produced by metropolitan domination. Hence these writers searched for an identity distinct from Britain. Australian writer Patrick White described his experience of growing up in a settler country as 'being permanently at a remove from Australian reality'. Ian Mudie, a Jindyworobak poet spoke of white Australians as being 'merely aliens in our own land' not orient to the continent, lacking a 'frame of native

reference'. In the similar way in Canada a sense of rootlessness was prevalent. The Canadian critic Northrop Frye described Canadian identity in the 1950's and 1960's as a "via media or via mediocris", divided between regional loyalties and the colonial cultural authority and also between British traditionalism and American modernity (Boehmer: 2006: 205). Frye also believed that the basis of Canadian identity and self-expression was to be found in the nation's obsession with its vast natural world, the Great North. Settler people perceived themselves as essentially cultural migrants, overburdened with values and attitudes that belonged to an older or other world. The Canadian novelist Margaret Lawrence observed in the 1970s that Canadians "needed to write out of what is truly in the face of an overwhelming cultural imperialism directed from both Britain and United States"(1970: 17). She believed that it was necessary for Canadian writers to fight against this dependent state of mind. Margaret Atwood in *Survival* (1972) argued that Canada had to make itself known to itself, to develop a distinct self-consciousness to conceptualize its 'here' in relation to a colonial 'there'.

From these critical views and inquires it is seen that Canadian culture was affected by colonialism and hence it can produce a literature which condemns colonialism and emphasizes the need for decolonization. Though apparently such literature would be different from other postcolonial literatures, as it subverts colonialism in different ways, it could remain postcolonial in nature. So, postcolonial texts can be described as those texts which speak against any kind of imperialism and colonialism, subverting and deconstructing the discourse of the colonizers. The postcolonial writers challenge conventional form, voice and content and introduce "new ways of perceiving" the world by rewriting the traditional European texts which previously served imperialism. Postcolonial Canadian texts challenge the colonial mentality which considers British Canadian as the central voice with the authority to define "others". Susan Rudy Dorscht says, "Even white middle-class Canadian writers have felt alienated, despairing, uncertain and groundless" (Dorscht: 1994: 141).

Along with Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence and Rudy Wiebe, many other white Canadian writers have produced texts which subvert the imperial British narrative and present new alternatives to a colonizing discourse. Aritha van Herk, Susan Swan, Leonard Cohen, Robert Kroetsch and many other white Canadian writers have been producing postcolonial texts that speak against the oppression imposed by a central power. The new voices of male and particularly female postcolonial writers articulating and transforming experiences of double/triple marginalization have changed the literary landscape.

Chapter-II

DESIRE: ITS CONNOTATIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN ARITHA VAN HERK'S NOVELS

I

Just as everyone has geography
Just as everyone has a history
Just as everyone has desire
You can't go round pretending
That you desire nothing.
[Aritha van Herk: 1994]

Whenever "desire" is referred to in terms of feminist discourse, the instant implication goes to amorous and sensual. Among the wide range of meanings and implications that dictionaries and thesauruses have provided, for a female writer it is always related to the claim or demand and urge for equal opportunity, equal right and equal share in this world to live a meaningful life. Desire is so vital in one's life that "one can't go round pretending that he/she desires nothing", as van Herk maintained. Desire is the natural longing that is excited by the enjoyment or the thought of anything good, and that impels to action or effort for its continuance or possession. It is an eager wish to fulfill a dream, to obtain or enjoy. A wish may be for what is remote or uncertain or even for what is recognized as impossible. Desire is often borne out of subconscious need, drive and much of how we feel and hence what we do. In the western world, desire is considered the way of life. This is the land where dreams come true. In this society one must always be reaching for something better, something

more. But for women things have remained different and oppressive which has put them in marginalized position. Tillie Olsen in *Tell Me a Riddle* (1956) describes women's desire as social, political, communal, esthetic rather than simply as erotic. The female body in her work speaks not a discourse of erotic desire, but of a different set of yearnings, for justice, for wholeness, for circumference (Olsen: 1962). Olsen's narratives, critical and fictive, resist reduction of the representation of women's bodies to narratives of female erotic desire. Olsen's insistence in *Silences* (1962) on a larger compass for female desire is one of the dimensions of her work that remained powerful to contemporary women readers.

Female desire has been a major feminist theme. Feminism has also given different dimensions to female desire. Contemporary theorists have tried to reconceptualize desire in positive terms. Rosalind Coward says in *Female Desire*: "Female desire is constantly lured by discourses which sustain male privilege" (1984: 16). Lack and desire are synonymous. When one does not have something and when one feels a sense of loss then one actually feels the desire for that lost thing. Lack implies an incomplete and unachievable wholeness. Desire relates to the need to possess, to have, to own, to control. Desire is a part of who we are, and it contributes to our sense of identity. Life can be constructed largely by desire. Desire is not simply related to body, it is present in everything we do. We simply discover more versions and forms of it and that is a wonderful legacy of feminism's discussion. Aritha van Herk attempts to "de-sire realism" to explore how notions of realism may be changed when women's desire is voiced and given shape through narrative. She writes in *A Frozen Tongue*:

> So powerful a force is desire, that it influences every act of creation and by extension, the whole syntax of religion: place, time, background, sex, form. Region is that which defines the artist, desire that which drives her (1992).

Desire creates fantasy as one imagines having/possessing that which one desires. The powerful imagination creates pleasant reverie that ultimately can replace and become a reality. Desire and fantasy seem to be closely related. Desire has its origin in the experience of satisfaction. As Freud analyzed, if desire is articulated through fantasy, then fantasy itself is a mediator between the subject and their wishes and the negation of their desires in reality. Desire requires the support of the fantasy, where the fading subject faces the lost object that causes his/her desire. "Desire is a metonymy because the object that causes it, constituted as lost, makes it displace permanently, from object to object as no one object can really satisfy it"(Lacan [1977] (1959) p175).

Fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints. It is a literature of desire which seeks that what is experienced as absence and loss. In expressing desire fantasy can operate in two ways--------it can tell of, manifest or show desire or it can expel desire when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity (Jackson: 1986: 3-4). Fantasy in literature deals so blatantly and repeatedly with unconscious material that it seems rather absurd to try to understand its significance without some reference to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical readings of texts. For it is in the unconscious that social structures and "norms" are reproduced and sustained within us. Psychoanalysis directs itself towards an unraveling of the social laws, trying to comprehend how social structures are represented and sustained within and through us in our unconscious. Psychoanalytical thinker Melanie Klein's (1882-1960) work shows that fantasy is a precondition for any engagement with reality. Fantasy is the primary means by which we establish some relation to the world; it is not as escape from reality but that which mediates between the inner world and external reality. Psychoanalysis makes fantasy central to the self, because it sees human behaviour as driven to a large extent by unconscious fantasy. Literary fantasies, expressing unconscious drives are particularly open to psychoanalytic readings and frequently show in graphic forms a tension between the laws of human society and the resistance of the unconscious mind to those laws.

Fantasy provides a range of possibilities out of which various combinations produce different kinds of fiction in different historical situations. Fantastic literature suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, as it opens up that which is outside the dominant value system. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of the culture and makes what has been silenced visible.

The "fantastic" derives from Latin *phantasticus* which is from the Greek *phantasia,* meaning that which is made visible, visionary, unreal (Jackson: 1986:13). In this general sense, all imaginary activity is fantastic, all literary works are fantasies. As a critical term "fantasy" has been applied rather indiscriminately to any literature which does not give priority to realistic representation and myths and legends. It includes folk and fairy tales, "utopian allegories", dream visions, surrealist texts, science fiction, horror stories, etc. that present realms other than the "normal". Mikhail Bakhtin's study *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* places modern fantasies as descendants of a traditional literary genre: the *menippea.* The *mennipea* moved easily in space between this world, and underworld and an upper world. The *menippea* conflated the past, the present and the future and allowed dialogues with the dead. States of hallucination, dream, insanity, eccentric behaviours and speech, personal transformation, extraordinary situations were the norms. He wrote, "Characteristic of the *menippea* are violations of the generally accepted, ordinary course of events and of the established norms of behaviour and etiquette, including the verbal...Scandals and eccentricities destroy the epic and tragical integrity of the world, they form a breach in the stable, normal course of human affairs and events and free human behaviour from predetermining norms and motivation (Bakhtin: [1984]: in Jackson: 1986: 15). Jean Paul Sartre claims that fantasy assumes its proper function: to transform this world. "The fantastic in becoming humanized, approaches the ideal purity of its essence, becomes what it had been" (Jackson: 1986: 18). In this regard Jackson writes that Sartre defines the fantastic as the literature in which definitive meanings are unknown: objects no longer serve transcendent purposes, so that means have replaced ends. According to Joanna Russ "fantasy embodies a "negative subjunctivity"---that is, fantasy is fantasy because it contravenes the real and violates it. The actual world is constantly present in fantasy, by negation ...fantasy is what *could not have happened*;

i.e. what *cannot* happen what *cannot* exist... the negative subjunctivity, the *cannot* or *could not* constitute in fact the chief pleasure of fantasy. Fantasy violates the real, contravenes it, denies it, and insists on this denial throughout" (Russ in Jackson: 1986: 22).

In literature and outside literature fantasy is an enormous subject. Literary fantasies appear to be "free" from many of the conventions and restraints of more realistic texts. Hence it refuses to observe unities of time, space and character, self and other, life and death, do away with chronology and distinction between animate and inanimate objects. Literature of the fantastic has been claimed as "transcending" reality, "escaping" the human condition and constructing superior alternate secondary world. The notion of fantasy literature is seen as fulfilling a desire for a "better", more complete unified reality. So it is defined as an art form providing vicarious gratification despite the non-theoretical approach of the English criticism.

Lacan says, fantasy provides the pleasure peculiar to desire------ a pleasure in which fulfillment of various kinds is hallucinated rather than sought in the real world. Psychoanalytic aspect of desire is triggered in Lacan's Mirror phase, where the image of wholeness seen by the baby in the mirror creates a desire for that being beyond this phase. Lacan argues that the subject, separated from itself by language, feels a sense of absence, of being not fully present, and thus desires wholeness. He calls this sense of something missing as the 'object petit a'. We constantly put ourselves into the subject positions of language and cultural codes in seeking to fulfill the futile desire for wholeness. For Freud as well as Lacan desire is the subject's yearning for a fundamentally lost object. Freud says that any search for object is in fact an attempt to re-find it. On the other hand, Lacan believes that the object of desire is located prior to desire and functions as its cause. Lacan reconceptualized Freud, using post-structuralism. He saw desire as a social phenomenon and psychoanalysis as a theory of how the human subject is created through social interaction. Desire appears through a combination of language, culture and the spaces between people. The concept of desire is at the centre of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a theoretical, ethical and clinical

point of reference. Hence in psychoanalysis, what is important is to teach the subject to name, to articulate, to bring this desire into existence:

> That the subject should come to recognize and to name his desire: that is the efficacious action of analysis. But it isn't a question of recognizing something which would be entirely given.....In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world [http/nosubject.com/desire].

Desire is a major concept in psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalytic criticism focuses on ideas like "identity", "desire", "sexuality", "the unconscious" and "lack" and these are based on the framework of the main ideas of Freud and Lacan. Lacan follows Spinoza in arguing, "Desire is the essence of man". Desire is simultaneously the heart of human existence and the central concern of psychoanalysis. However Lacan always talks about "unconscious desire", as unconscious desire forms the central concern of psychoanalysis. It is only possible to recognize one's desire when it is articulated in speech. Hence, the articulation of desire comes to the forefront while discussing and raising voice to the female discontent. There is a strong urge to dismantle the patriarchal stereotype in order to articulate the desire for a female heart. We see in *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* that both Emma and Anna had to pay heavily for straying outside the bounds of what a woman is permitted to desire. They were killed as they could open up to talk about their passion which was not permitted by the patriarchy and the male authors conformed to those norms. So van Herk desires to write some male *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* to subvert conformity to norms.

According to Hegel desire is the incessant human effort to overcome external differences, a project to become a self-sufficient and self-conscious subject. Human desire articulates the subject's relationship to that which is not itself. It finds satisfaction through the transformation of difference into identity, when a relation to

something external to consciousness is discovered to be constitutive of the subject itself. Thus desire is intentional and is always a modality in which the subject is both discovered and enhanced. Hegel claims that "self-consciousness in general is desire" (1807:167). For Georg Simmel, "the possibility of desire is the possibility of objects of desire" (1900: 66). He further observed that, "In desiring what we do not yet own or enjoy, we place the content of our desire ourselves... we desire objects only if they are not immediately given to us for our use and enjoyment; that is, to the extent that they resist our desire" (ibid). Alexander Kojeve working on Hegel maintains, "Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the desire of the other... that is to say, if he wants to be 'desired' or 'loved', or, rather, 'recognized' in his human value.... In other words, all human, anthropogenetic Desire...is finally, a function of the desire for 'recognition'" (Kojeve: (1947) [1933-39] Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Trans. James H. Nichols Jr. New York and London: Basic Books: 1969: 6). Human desire, or better still, anthropogenetic Desire, produces a free and historical individual, conscious of his individuality, his freedom, his history, and finally his historicity (Ibid).

II

Aritha van Herk's desire is to claim the female space and equal recognition based on capability and potentiality of women. It is women's wish fulfillment in order to create a female world-view. Patriarchy all throughout the history has been defining, demarcating and streamlining the territories, which are conceptual, metaphoric, and physical, for women. These are quite different from men's territories and apparently less challenging, less adventurous and less moving. Since "passivity" as binary opposition to male "activity" is attributed to women, everything offered to them seems fervourless. Women are to be the nurturers and home makers as expected by

patriarchal culture and without the freedom to dream and desire, to have their own independent share in this world. To deviate from the cultural norms was unthinkable for many women as any deviation would outcast them.

Aritha van Herk articulates the desire for the forbidden, exhibiting the urge to destabilize the binaries. Van Herk in her fictions creates her heroines who "actively desire something for herself". Hers is simply not an attempt to re-read/re-interpret the male-authored texts though she has done it in her *geografictione Places Far From Ellesmere* while reinterpreting Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin* from the feminist point of view. Most of the times, however, she powerfully talks about creating one's own female space to breathe and grow through feminist writing. The universal feminine urge to self-actualize by transcending the all pervasive gender-specific constraints, discriminations, domination and bias is the dominant force of van Herk's feminist writing.

Hinting at the feminist movement of the late 1960's Maren Lockwood Carden says, "The new feminism is not about the elimination of differences between the sexes; nor even simply the achievement of equal opportunity; it concerns the individual's right to find out the kind of person he or she is and to strive to become that person" (1974: 2). Feminist critics have displayed interest as well as suspicion towards the concept of desire, variously defined. Catherine Mackinnon, for example, states that she has selected "desire" as a term parallel to "value" in Marxist theory, "to refer to that substance felt to be primordial or aboriginal but posited by the theory as social and contingent (1982: 2). Mackinnon distances herself forcefully from the use of the term "desire" to be found both in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existential Psychoanalysis* and in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In these works, Mackinnon argues, the concept of desire entails sexual objectification, which for her is "the primary process of the subjection of women" (1982: 27). To substantiate her case she quotes first Sartre:

> but if I desire a house, or a glass of water, or a woman's body, how could this glass, this piece of

> property reside in my desire and how can desire be anything but the consciousness of these objects as desirable (Sartre: 1973: 20)?

She also mentions Delluze and Guattari's view of man as "desiring machine". She insists that women are not "desiring machines" (1982: 27). Women's desire is born out of deprivation and suppression. They are not allowed to live and dream, and realize their full potentiality by patriarchy. This innate desire of every woman to experience the full freedom in order to become what they want may be linked to the concept of self-actualization. Self-actualization is the desire to realize one's full potential or to maximize one's capabilities.

Self-Actualization is a term coined by the American psychologist Dr Abraham H Maslow. (The idea of self-actualization was originally created by Kurt Goldstein in his famous book *The Organism: a Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man* (1934)). He put forward the concept as:

> A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself. What a man can be he must be. This is the need we may call self-actualization... It refers to man's desire for fulfillment, namely to the tendency for him to become actually in what he is potentially to become everything what one is capable of becoming...(1968: 33).

Kurt Goldstein in his *The Organism* says that self-actualization is the tendency to actualize, as much as possible, its [the organism's] individual capacity in the world. Goldstein defined self-actualization as a driving life force that will ultimately lead to maximizing one's abilities and determine the path of one's life. Abraham H Maslow later used the term in his article, "A Theory of Human Motivation". He used the term self-actualization to describe a desire, not a driving force that could lead to realizing

one's capabilities. He did not feel that self-actualization determined one's life; rather, he felt that it gave the individual a desire, or motivation to achieve budding ambition.

Maslow refers to the fulfillment of an individual's particular (and positive) innate potentials as self-actualization. Another American psychologist Carl R Rogers describes this as "actualization" and he reserves "self-actualization" for a special part of the actualizing tendency; our efforts to fulfill our learned, conscious conception of ourselves. Maslow believed that man has a natural urge to healthiness or self-actualization. He also believes that man has basic, (biological and psychological) needs that have to be fulfilled in order to be free enough to feel the desire for the higher levels of realization. He even believes that the organism has the natural, unconscious and innate capacity to seek its needs (Maslow: 1968). Man has an internal natural drive to become the best possible person he can be:

> ...he has within him a pressure toward unity of personality, toward spontaneous expressiveness, toward full individuality and identity, toward seeing the truth rather than being blind, toward being creative, toward being good, and a lot else. That is, the human being is so constructed that he presses toward what most people would call good values, toward serenity, kindness, courage, honesty, love, unselfishness, and goodness (Maslow: 1968:155).

Maslow says there are two processes necessary for self-actualization: self-exploration and action. The deeper the self-exploration, the closer one comes to self-actualization. If we look into the characteristics of the self-actualization we find that a self-actualizing person happens to be a realistically oriented person. He/she is unthreatened and unfrightened by the unknown and has a superior ability to reason, to see the truth, and is logical and efficient. A self-actualizing person enjoys himself/herself without regret or apology, and has no unnecessary inhibition. For him/her thoughts and impulses are unhampered by conventions. His/her ethics are

autonomous and motivated to continuous growth. Self-actualization is the desire to realize one's capabilities. According to Maslow a new discontent and restlessness will develop unless the individual is doing what he individually is fitted for. Both Maslow and Rogers describe the self-actualizing person as one who has personal autonomy and who is free to make choices.

The literary works with feminist concern instill a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying women who are self-actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on men. It is important to recount experiences that the reader can identify as her own experiences that are perhaps shared by many women. A search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self have become the chief concern of women in literature under the influence of feminism. The subject position an author takes up defines his/her revolutionary position. There lies the desire to talk about the female space or inner space as that way literature can serve the cause of liberation. For women writer there is the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography to be explored.

Desire has its manifold forms such as ----geographical isolation/location or "situated" desire, ecological/biological desire, natural and naturalized desires, desire for the "other", desire for difference/to be different, desire for the forbidden, "separation identity", the desire to separate, desire to destabilize binaries, to maintain opposites, to oppose, and subversive or destabilizing desires. We are to see how the desire of any kind forms the material of the textual world that we encounter.

Allowing ourselves to speak out our desires for "women" including our desires for affiliation, identification, solidarity, and dialogue, we recognize that categorical appeals need not name a "reality" we accept as fixed or immutable. Rather we can speak to the constructions within which we live though we may point out to something beyond them. Rosemary Jackson says: "In a secularized culture, desire for otherness is not displaced into alternative regions of heaven or hell, but is directed towards the

absent areas of this world, transforming it into something "other" than the familiar, comfortable one" (1986:19).

Desire may be as much a foundation for recuperation as identification. Women are to collaborate with each other not only by identifying with victimization and silencing; rather, they are to collaborate by desiring or at least by identifying with the desire of other women. Insofar as the critic recuperating a women's text identifies its heroine or its author as herself, she rescues not another woman, but an aspect of her own being. Arnold E Davidson says that women writers have nonetheless created the most striking reversals of the western formula, some such as Anne Cameron's *The Journey* by merely executing a gender reversal of male patterns of violence and domination, others such as Aritha van Herk's *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* by challenging patriarchy in more complex ways (1994).

Davidson offers a persuasive Lacanian analysis of van Herk's castration imagery as a strategy for resisting the law of the father by dephallicizing the penis. In *Judith* the female protagonist Judith does a man's job better than a man, dressed in "barn clothes". She exchanges her roles with Jim for castrating her piglets as she is upset at the way Jim did it. Judith takes the knife, a traditional symbol of man's power from Jim and succeeds in castrating the piglets without causing much pain to the pigs. Her power threatens Jim's masculinity: "Jim held him silently, sweating, his eyes averted from hers in some other icy cast of fear. She could almost have asked him to lie down on that bale, had she done it with the same coolness and finesse that she tackled them, she who had never before held that blade in her hand..." (J: 176). But what threatens Jim liberates Judith. As she castrates the piglets, she comes to terms first with her city lover and false image of femininity she had adopted to please him, "plucking her sleek eyebrows, rolling her straight hair into curls thrusting golden posts through the holes in her ears. Did all that and then resented his acceptance of it as his due, his casual, "you look lovely tonight Judith"" (J: 175).

The issue of the female's desire to strive to be masculine is receptive to postmodern debates as the issue has seen the female gender trying to shift from femininity to masculinity and thus challenging the previous conventions of celebrating the female position in the social structure. Many feminist theorists of Western society at present believe that female desire concerns the increasing support for women's choices, contrary to previous theories which set ideological expectations denying the maternal realities and [demonizing] the nuclear family (Devine: 2004). Recent feminist theories have provided insight into various concepts of desire through many forms of representation. It becomes obvious through physical and mental desire, and the desire to conform and lack of desire to conform. The movement of feminism is affected not only by the postmodern world because of its various theories but also by its ability to be fragmented and interchangeable through the strands and degrees of feminist aggression.

At the heart of the feminist thought is a desire for social change which constitutes its utopian quality. A suggested sense of unreality becomes an important element of utopianism. Feminist thinkers have endearingly meditated over and conceptualized societal structures which guarantee women their right place in the scheme of the system. Hester Eisenstein has used the word 'utopia' in a different sense, modifying its fictive and dreamlike connotations. For Eisenstein the utopian element is inherent in the intention of creating a picture of an alternative society. It actually aims at changing the current reality by means of creating a model, or pieces of a model of a society organized along different lines (Eisenstein: 1984: xiii). The feminist utopia presents a totally different picture where structures of power also get transformed. Eisenstein says:

> In my understanding of the term 'feminist', then I see an element of visionary, futurist thought. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that, as a part of the eventual liberation of women, will change all human relationship for the better. Although centrally

> about women, their experience, condition, or 'estate', in Juliet Mitchell's formulation, feminism is also fundamentally about men, and about social change (Eisenstein: 1984: xiv).

Hence the desire of a feminist is for an equitable world, a world in which women and men can be equal and different. The feminists envisage a world free of male privilege and male hierarchy and authority over women. Toril Moi in her analysis of Helene Cixous's concept of *ecriture feminine* calls it an imaginary utopia. Cixous denounces equation of femininity with passivity and death which leaves no positive space for women. Toril Moi sumps up Cixous's whole theoretical project as the effort to undo the logocentric ideology: to proclaim woman as a source of life, power and energy and to hail the advent of a new feminine language that ceaselessly subverts the patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes with phallocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women (1985: 105). Cixous's vision of feminine/female writing as a way of re-establishing a spontaneous relationship to *jouissance* of the female body can be read as a utopian vision of female creativity in a truly non-oppressive and non-sexist society (ibid). Feminist utopians are confident of change in the existing situation and therefore they create images and ideas that have the power to inspire to revolt against oppression and exploitation. The utopian element in feminist thought is embedded in the realities of women's life in contrast to other utopias. It is revolutionary in nature as it aims at changing woman's place in society. According to Toril Moi, feminist thinkers like Julia Kristeva envisage a society in which "the sexual signifier would be free to move; where the fact of being born male or female no longer would determine the subject's position in relation to power, and where, therefore, the very nature of power itself would be transformed" (Moi: 1985:172).

III

Aritha van Herk's novels open up new vistas for articulating female desire and experiencing desire which is "unsuitable desire" in patriarchy. She destabilizes fixed

gender roles by allowing her heroines to move freely as they desire. Her protagonists are strong women who are ready to accept the challenges encountered in attaining autonomy to define and structure their lives. When they plan their new lives they never look back in agony or remorse. On the contrary, they chalk out their new strategies for living in new set ups which is very much empowering and liberating. By articulating and acting on their own desire, the female protagonists challenge the norms of the conventional narrative. Recognition and articulation of one's own desire can be a quest in itself. Aritha van Herk wants to posit women who had certain kind of desire in their fists and says in an interview with Hartmut Lutz: "I am gonna try and do what I want do to even if I fail" (1989:112). In the novel *Restlessness* Dorcas tries to do what she wants to do, and in the process fails. She says to her assassin:

> I thought traveling would give me a perspective, a point of view, a character. Such a long and zigzagged search, and I managed to fail. I say this to my killer. "I failed".
>
> "Failed?"
>
> "I looked for a person I could be. I searched for—ha, how Canadian of me—an identity" (R: 81).

The search for a female selfhood is closely linked with the Canadian search for an identity. She asserts repeatedly, "I am a Canadian". Dorcas says, "I discovered in myself homesickness to die in Canada" (R: 165). She wants her self-erasure because she says:

> My own disaffection, my inability to deal with mundane cruelities. I want to destroy the day-to-day abrasions of life's oblivious plot. I can no longer swallow guidebook advice. Here is your street, here is your work, here are the people you must nod and smile at, whose only goal is to make others trip and fall, whose only desire is to set the innocent on fire (R: 90).

The realization of desire does not consist in its fulfillment, but in the reproduction of desire as such. Desire should generate new desire and always make way for new desire. Van Herk says, "Desire has to teach us not to diminish as we grow older" (Verduyn: 2002: 25). In *No Fixed Address* Arachne is marginalized by both her gender and her class. But Arachne finds the tool to break out of her marginalized position; these tools are sexuality and violence. Arachne's desire is to go on defying and breaking the codes of living. Hence by entering the profession of sales and driving, by being a rogue, a kidnapper and a murderer she crosses almost every boundary.

Aritha van Herk's desire is to play with words and language as she has done it in coining the term "geografictione", a title she has given to the novel *Places Far From Ellesmere*. The "e" at the end suggests the female sense which is an important move to make her language different from the usual male language. Dale Spender in *Man Made Language* claims that "the English language has been literally man made" (1980:12). She has made the observation that "one semantic rule which we can see in operation in the language is that of the male as norm" (ibid 3). While postulating that idea Spender follows the works of Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) on language and reality. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which refers to the "linguistic determinism" and "linguistic relativity" says that one's reality is constructed by one's language and that differently structured languages give rise to different realities. The central tenet of their theory rests on the idea that language determines the way we see the world. Spender's underlying argument is that language perpetuates and contributes to gender inequality. In a patriarchal society, women as the subordinated group are kept in that low position since language and its meanings are invented and controlled by men. More emphatically she argues that women are oppressed through sexist labeling. Even the generic uses of the terminology such as "he" and "man" make women invisible and therefore powerless. The need to coin new words and meaning arises there. She believes that language constructs reality and that women are trapped by man made language. At the same time they are excluded from it. In order to become visible, women must necessarily become linguistically visible.

Judith, the protagonist of the van Herk's novel *Judith* grows up on a pig farm as an only child outside the town Norberg. She opts for a life in the city when she is in her late teens. Disillusioned with city life, she returns to the country where like her father, she runs a pig farm. This is a self-conscious act of defiance and self-assertion. By becoming a pig farmer Judith tries to come to terms with the Oedipal relationship she had with her father. Judith's father is a symbol of authority and genealogy, who used to treat his daughter ("daddy's girl") like the son he never had. Even as a teenaged girl Judith found it difficult to get any satisfaction from her boyfriends as she would always subconsciously look for her father in her boyfriends. And then invariably she would find the boys deficient or incomplete. After the death of her father, she acquired her own farm and at that point of time she realized that "it was really [the father] she [had] wanted" all along (J: 117). Judith buys a pig farm and runs it alone against all odds and in spite of the neighbour's skepticism. In the beginning Judith is greatly dissatisfied. The difficult relationship with her father seriously affects her. She passes through a difficult phase, remains tense and silent and can hardly get along with the pigs or her neighbours. She strikes up a friendship with her much older neighbour Mina and takes her son Jim as her lover. She more or less forces herself to go out with Jim, but their relationship is badly hampered because of her unconventional and provocative behaviour. Judith's quest for self-fulfillment culminates in the scene where she castrates the young pigs confidently without the help of Jim. She acquires the freedom in living with the pigs in the firm, in the country of Alberta. She experiences a real satisfaction while choosing to live as a pig farmer. She decides to make this new place her home with freedom and autonomy.

Aritha van Herk's novels *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* present women who achieve power by adopting traditional symbols of men's power and then combining these with traditional symbols of women's power to create new images of power for women. Judith in the novel *Judith* is drawn on mythic images from *The Odyssey* and *The Apocrypha*. She is portrayed as a woman who is more capable than men around her and yet sexually much desirable. She has given up her job of secretary, sexy

wardrobe, and fashionable hair style to realize her dead father's dream of running a pig farm. Judith is skilled in performing a man's job better than a man. She can do it when, dressed in "barn clothes" (J: 181). She becomes frustrated as she finds that Jim's technique for castrating her piglets is "awkward and the cut was not clean and deep but a swipe at the surface nerves" (J: 174). She deliberately exchanges the role and presides over the pig's emasculation:

> She reached out her hand, now sure and fearless, so perfectly knowing. "Give me that thing, and you hold this pig down"....And she slipped them [the piglet's testicles] out of him so easily, so swiftly presiding over his emasculation like the savage witch of pragmatism that she was (J: 175).

In *The Odyssey* the image of Circe is double. She uses her power to transform Odysseus's men into swine and robs Odysseus of his courage and manhood. In Greek mythology, Circe was the enchanter who transformed men into animals. She turned Odysseus's crewmen into pigs. Van Herk uses these two images of Circe for Judith. Judith takes the knife, a traditional symbol of male power, from Jim and succeeds where he fails. Having proven herself in the man's world, having rejected the false images of womanhood received from her city lover and her father, having looked into the mystery of life itself by cutting open the piglets' scrotums, Judith turns into the beautiful goddess Circe who can draw her Odysseus to her bed. This novel clearly shows that women's power resides in succeeding at masculine occupations, in asserting equality, claiming sexual freedom and growing up. The real power lies neither in the knife nor in sex, but in the ability to choose, understanding what that choice necessarily prohibits, and yet embracing the choice totally. The combination of modern re-writing of the old myth of Circe and realistic descriptions of life in rural Alberta results in an intelligent and amusing story about a woman finding and making her own way.

In *The Tent Peg* van Herk restates the images of feminine power as delineated in *Judith*. The female protagonist J.L of *The Tent Peg* enters a mining expedition camp at Yukon as a cook, disguised as a man. Women were not allowed in the mining camp. Men used to believe, "Geology is a man's field" as Jerome, one of the miners, declared. According to him "it's impossible to work in a camp with a girl. It's bad for morale" (TTP: 28). This was the stereotypical notion in Canada where frontiers were forbidden territory for women. Jerome further says, "Women. They're nothing but trouble. No matter how you treat them, they always want more. You've got to let them know who's boss right from the start" (TTP: 97). Men have their own attitude and pre-conceived notions about women. They need women only for their gratification. They dump them and blame them after their use. J.L. says to Cap, "Just like a man, blame a woman for everything, even his hormones" (TTP: 105). When the woman becomes too strong and holds her head high "She's a witch" (109), as Cap says of J.L. Van Herk tries to break away from the age-old convention. She allows the protagonist Ja-el to be in the difficult terrain, in the wilderness to experience that freedom to venture into a so far forbidden territory. The protagonist uses her name as J.L. to enter the camp. Her name reflects a biblical allusion, as she explains: "I was really named after a person in the Bible. J, A, dash, E, L. People used to string it together so it sounded like "jail". I didn't like that, so I decided I would go by my initials, J.L." (TTP: 14). She was sure everyone would take J.L to be a male name as "initials stand for man". She says: "Only one gender has initials, the rest of us are misses and mistresses with neither the dignity of anonymity nor the prestige of assumption. All men are equal" (TTP: 23). She deliberately does that as she says, "I wanted to head for nowhere and look at everything in my narrow world from a detached distance. I wanted it so much that for weeks I schemed, I lay awake concocting ways to get here without lying" (TTP:23). She experiences her life as "a cab driver, a waitress, a secretary..." (TTP: 49). J.L. fulfills the desire to go to north which was restricted for women. So Milton wonders when he comes to know about J.L. "The cook is a girl. They said there weren't any girls up north" (TTP: 44). She even fulfills her desire to write the initials like men. She also subverts the typical masculine image of power by taking the gun. Moreover, she appropriates another

image of masculine power, the masculine language. J.L liberates herself amidst the landscape, away from the conventional life of a woman, tied down to the domesticity and to the cultural norms and social inhibitions. Though she is with nine men, she knows how to protect herself. She disarms those who make any advances to her. Franklin, one of the men in the camp, says: "She's like a pillar in the middle of the camp. We all shuffle around her, matrixed" (TTP: 168), because everyone tries to get close to her and share their worries and anxiety. She enjoys a different life out there cracking jokes with them, drinking beer, singing and dancing and riding in the helicopters. Ivan gives her a chopper ride with Thompson and he observes that she is not like other women:

> J.L's eyes are wide and she's laughing out loud. Thompson is busy pointing out landmarks to her. And all of a sudden I realize that she does not like cooking or washing dishes so much. She didn't come up here for that (TTP: 94).

Thompson is curious to know why J.L. insists on coming to the bush. Though she cooks and washes the dishes she seems to possess some deeper urge. She is not there at Yellowknife to cook. She may look ordinary with her small and thin body, but she has something daring and unusual. He says, "She wants to fly, I can feel how much she wants to" (TTP: 141).

Amidst the nuisance created by Jerome and Cap in the camp she keeps her cool. Though at times she gets frustrated still she remains composed and very firm. Milton says, "She makes me feel scratchy and bad, like I've done a sin just looking at her" (TTP: 148). She misses her "Siamese friend" Deborah and writes to her. But there is no trace of regret and hesitation for the choice that she made to experience the wilderness and strangeness of life in the magic place of Yukon. She takes over the masculine symbol of power by using a gun to save herself when Jerome wanted to rape her. In the episode where she first learns from Mackenzie how to handle a gun, J.L. identifies her new found confidence with the northern landscape. She says,

> It made me realize my own power, that I could turn a gun on them and pull the trigger, that up here there are no rules, no set responses, everything is new and undefined, we are beyond, outside of the rest of the world. There are no controls here (TTP: 86).

She even picks up very fluently the masculine language that these men use. The life she lives may not be sanctioned by the traditional patriarchal society. However, she has the courage to accept all the challenges while making her choice, and there lies actual freedom. J.L turns out to be a woman with a mission, revealing a feminist agenda. "I find myself waiting angrily", she says in an inner monologue addressed to her friend Deborah, "for that promised period of peace. I'm beginning to think that unless we take some action ourselves, it may never come. It's time we laid our hands on the workman's mallet and put the tent pegs to the sleeping temples, if ever we are going to get any rest" (TTP: 173). At times J.L. wishes to be a man as she has seen the life of man to be much simpler, less troublesome and less restricted by the society than the life of a woman. Men do not become victims of gender discrimination and segregation. Gender becomes an advantage for them to place them at a privileged position. J.L. says,

> I've never been taken for a man before, although I sometimes wish I were one. It seems so much simpler for them, everything is clearcut, laid out from the moment they're born. They do not have the questions and doubts that get laid on our backs, the bundle of faggots we carry and carry. I've tried to throw it off, fling it on the ground and abandon it, but although I sometimes lose a stick or two, the weight is still there, old myths and old lovers, old duties, my mother's warning voice, my infallible conscience (TTP: 37).

She analyses the happenings in the camp. The men are working hard to find the uranium and gold. There is a sense of competition among them to be the first to discover something to earn name and fame and to be in the good book of the company. She introspects, "And me, I clear the dirty dishes from the table, step around their feet and heat a pail of water to wash up with. There is something comforting in the familiar work, in my hands' movement from memory, an orchestration we women grow up with" (TTP: 59).

The issue of women's autonomy is related to the question of choice, and to the freedom to choose and prioritize needs. Considering identity as the corner stone of women's struggle, a new woman emerges, a woman conscious of her "choices/preferences" and responsibilities. Men are quite apprehensive about this woman. In van Herk's *The Tent Peg*, Milton reveals this apprehension, and dilemma. He says, "She's not the way a girl should be, but she can cook" (TTP: 82). Milton even discovers that she is different in other respects too, "She doesn't drop her eyes when you stare at her, just stares right back" (TTP: 101). J.L.'s confidence makes him apprehensive of her, "She doesn't sing while she works, she whistles, she is defiant, she thinks she's as good as any man. When girls get like that, they're no good to marry" (TTP: 178). She can cook. That does not mean that she is not capable of adventure and romance. She does not go to the bush only to cook, but to realize her dream of asserting her independence. She wants to savour the silence in the wilderness, away from her humdrum existence. J.L is not contented with her cooking and washing. She has a self, a self that she always guards and questions. When all the men go to sleep she thinks, "Sponge, a woman is a sponge. We can be infinitely compressed, infinitely engorged, and still spring back to our own shape. And all for them, all at their whim and mercy" (TTP: 64). She wonders how women can internalize everything. She just can not avoid wondering,

> why does it seem that we're never taught how to do this, we simply know, we know the smoothest, most efficient way of making food and giving food and clearing up the remains of food, nourishes always. And

perhaps why, when we are angry, we have a
tendency to break, yes dishes (TTP: 59).

Aritha van Herk portrays J.L as a self-conscious woman who, in her own way, fights against gender discrimination. Some men are conscious of such discriminations. Mackenzie reprimands Jerome for opposing J.L's inclusion in the camp, "you're behaving like a schoolboy who wrinkles up his nose and says 'Girls ugh germs'" (TTP: 28-29). She desires something more, maybe the thrill of flying in a chopper, digging the ground with the diggers, moving towards an unknown territory for adventure. She enters the camp in disguise as that is the only alternative left for her as men believe, "women just don't belong out there" (TTP: 29). J.L's act of entering the bush camp in disguise by using initials like men is just one of the strategies that women use to attain autonomy and fulfill their desire. According to Aritha van Herk the real power lies in making a choice and living with that choice without making compromise. J.L. appears to have gained that power.

Aritha van Herk's third novel *No Fixed Address: an amorous journey* deals with a woman who is always on the move, challenging boundaries of male dominated space. This novel is a parody of the picaresque novel. The protagonist, Arachne Manteia roams around in a black Mercedes to North and West to sale lingerie, her venture marking female infiltration and inscription. Arachne Manteia is the only daughter of a teacup reader Lanie and unskilled labourer Toto. Unwanted by her mother, Arachne is often left alone at home. She grows up to be a rebellious woman, and in her youth she leads the Black Windows gang. Leaving school early she becomes a bus driver in Vancouver and meets cartographer Thomas who left his precious map in her bus. Maps are important for Arachne. Like words, maps resemble an extra-textual reality. Arachne goes beyond maps and words. She drives Thomas to his home town Calgary in her black Mercedes. She inherited this car from Gabriel, one of her mother's teacup reading clients. Like the biblical archangel, Gabriel proclaimed the annunciation of her name, Arachne, the Greek equivalent of a spider. Spiders eat each other when there is nothing else to catch. Arachne, a travelling sales woman of woman's underwear, catches men, even kills one and leaves a thread before and after spiraling her web like Canadian roads and trails. Mythical Arachne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

defies the gods, and wins the weaving contest for which she is punished not by death but by suspending in the air with a noose round her neck. Arachne ruthlessly pushes ahead her dissent from fixed addresses.

In the italicized section on "Notebook on a Missing Person" of NFA Aritha van Herk says, "For centuries women suffered the discomfort of corsets, padding, petticoat, griddles, bustles, garters and bust pads" (NFA: 2). In the same short section earlier she contemplates on women's undergarment and says, "The goal, it is important to remember, to aid physical attractiveness, a standard inevitably decided by men" (NFA: 2). The author desires to write on the subject as "no art, no novel, no catalogue of infamy has considered the effect of underwear on the lives of petty rogues" (NFA: 3). So Arachne discards undergarment to revolt against the practice of keeping women trapped in underwear.

No Fixed Address represents a more spectacular transgression of gender stereotypes and generic border as its picaresque female character Arachne spins through rural Alberta and the Rockies in her vintage black Mercedes till finally she disappears off the map somewhere up in the Yukon. She has entered into male domain by driving a car and peddling lingerie for women. It is an attempt to subvert the dominant patriarchal domain. Arachne denies having a fixed address as it will tie her down to the conventional societal bindings like her friend Thena. Thena expressed her frustration in front of the poet whom they meet, "I am a housewife par excellence. First class neurotic, valium-motivated, divorced, tied to two bratty kids and mad as hell" (NFA: 165). Arachne can never think of such a life. She says to Lanie: "Marriage, mother, is not the haven of refuge for me that it was for you" (NFA: 45). Though she comes back after her journey to Thomas's house she does not want to be trapped in a relationship which will be suffocating for her. She knows "women are cherished for being soft and pliable, for their grace. Instead Arachne displaces mass" (NFA: 90). She takes Thomas for granted, "Her lover, her Apocryphal lover, the one who will linger and stay"(NFA: 94) because "Arachne has learned to get her pleasure first, catch what she can, has trained her body to pleasure itself. The man can be anyone as long as he's half decent. Think about yourself or you're doomed. Men don't

think about you" (NFA: 53). It is the desire of a woman to reverse the role of man and woman in the society. So van Herk portrays Arachne as a radically different woman. Thomas is the house-keeper, and it is not expected that Arachne will ever be the "angel of the house". Van Herk writes,

> Arachne is perfectly capable of domesticity. She deprecates it-----"who'd waste their life cooking and cleaning?"----but there are days when she can be caught and held by the probity of sink and stove, of market and vacuum cleaner. Thomas usually takes care of that angle of life, but when he's not around, Arachne can experiment, refresh her sense of the horror of what she calls house arrest" (NFA: 27).

Arachne condemns that role, that fixity and wants more freedom including sexual freedom. Thomas manages the house, keeps the things in proper order and entertains the guests despite working as a cartographer. Here van Herk has reversed the stereotypical domestic role by making Thomas to look after the house. Van Herk reverses the gender roles and makes Arachne ignore her typical "feminine" rituals:

> She is also unwilling to indulge in the polite rituals that are expected when a woman is connected to a man. She refuses to accompany him to topographical survey parties and she will not provide him with even a minimum of domestic service. He is the one who hangs clean shirts in her closet, he is the one who does the marketing, who stands with a fork lifted beside the stove. It is true that Arachne is often away, but even when she is home she is absolved; he bring her the beer in frost-cold glasses, he follows the roar of the vacuum, while Arachne tracks in air and dust, litters the living room with her samples, her order forms, her road life" (NFA: 47).

Arachne knows what she is doing------"she knows she betrays him, but in another sense she doesn't, he is her Apocryphal lover" (NFA: 89). It is found out that, "Thomas has reformed her, turned her from street urchin into a passably respectable------not lady, Arachne will never be a lady-----person" (NFA: 140). Her refusal to become a lady is an expression of her self assertion.

This novel proves to be a feminist frontier fiction as Arachne pursues her romantic quest to map the inner territory of desire, leaving geography and realism behind. While traveling to sell lingerie she frequently crosses the boundaries. She transgresses into new territories by creating her own map. She makes a web like the Greek mythological figure Arachne. She catches men, enjoys sex and abandons them at her whims. This novel suggests the desire for travel, mobility and escape. Finally, Arachne moves into the west, into the vast wilderness and disappears leaving traces in the scattered panties here and there. The act of disappearing appears to be liberating as the wilderness and the landscape provide the desired freedom. Disappearance here does not mean death. As van Herk says, she has used the language differently to give it a feminine connotation. Arachne's journey is the first stage in a feminist move into the forbidden territory. This theme is enlarged in *Places Far From Ellesmere* and *Restlessness*.

According to van Herk *Places Far From Ellesmere* is about how one writes places, how one writes biography or autobiography of places, as opposed to the autobiography of a person. It is about geography and fiction and she has blended that efficiently to tell a story of 19th century Russian female famous/infamous character from the 20th century feminist point of view. She has taken the help of geographical locale Ellesmere to relate gender to geography. Generally new lands/frontiers are taken to be "virgin land" to be encroached/occupied/penetrated by some adventurous robust men. But here van Herk uses this less frequented Arctic space as a "free/blank" space to be occupied only by women to form an island, "woman as island". Metaphorically this place will be the place for all women as "all women are Annas" awating to be rescued and transported to a place which will be their place free from

patriarchal tentacles and bondages: "And Ellesmere is a fat island, the tenth largest in the world, fat with flesh of heated snow, of dazzling cold. Fat with distance, with unreachability, with mystery" (PFFE: 96-97). This less explored Arctic landscape has given van Herk scope to free the fictional character of Tolstoy, Anna to have a fresh beginning in the modern context.

> Tolstoy sets her up, the initial Anna so full of vitality and energy, so easily able to fire the blood of those who connect with her. Turns on her, changes her from that vibrant body to vamp. And then, even worse, he's pissed off for her indefensible position, imposes childishness and jealousy, spends the rest of the novel writing her as having failed him. you always suspected this, but now you are certain. Terror of women=terror of the north. Lost in one frozen waste or another, lost to women or the wiles of Ellesmere (PFFE: 123).

This island is contextualized as a woman amidst nature. This speaks about the fictional possibility of creating a self and an identity for a woman. The unexplored island Ellesmere has given the novelist the scope for situating Anna and hence all women to write their own texts, to articulate their desire and to look at the things from a distance away from conventional bindings. She believes that all women suffer like Anna, they are caught in their orbits, "between children and husbands and lovers, their needs and desire". Ellesmere is an imaginative construct that gives way to the emerging idea of "woman as island". Ellesmere promises self-fulfillment and self-expression in its unreachability and cartographic representation, "Ellesmere is a happy island, happy in its strange remoteness, its inaccessibility" (PFFE: 105).

Ellesmere becomes a symbol for the new text to be written by/about women to evolve a new way of looking at things while reading one's own text "cautiously". So she says, "Go north, Anna, go north. If there are westerns, why can there not be northerns?" (85). And van Herk's desire is to rewrite everything, "Anna. All Annas

women written by men, now re/read by women. The reader un/reading the Anna" (PFFE: 85).

In *Restlessness* van Herk talks about the traveler's desire. "To be present but invisible is every traveler's desire, and yet that very invisibility is the crux of traveling's voyeurism" (R: 33). Dorcas apparently leads a desirable and glamorous life traveling across the world working as a "top-of-the-line" courier. She travels "to compose a private self and give her the space to breathe" (R: 32). But she gets sick of staying in the hotel-rooms as she hardly stays at home. She thinks she leads a "substanceless life" (R: 9) and is haunted by loneliness and homesickness. She confesses, "My prolonged and pathological restlessness terrifies me" (R: 64). She tries to find a place to call it her home. She is in search of identity and meaning in her life, she is "eager to recognize herself". She says "unable to apprehend myself, I admit to my evasions, my continuing journeys, as acts of self-trickery. I have always believed that I will apprehend myself elsewhere, for at home I am evasive as a veil" (R: 37). She feels restless and her desire for self-erasure and ultimate freedom through death is borne out of her restlessness. She says,

> Restlessness. A given. My restless heart, my restless travels, my restless bed, my restless contact lenses, my restless fingernail polish, my restless boots, my restless coffee grinder. Buses, taxies, airports suitcase straps, lost earrings, forgotten raincoats, cheesy movies, smudged mirrors. Restless everything. Restless restlessness (R: 77).

Unable to find any satisfaction in her travel and in the company of her "dear one", her unnamed lover, she hires an assassin, Derrick Atman to kill her. Of course she hired other assassins previously to kill her. But those assassins failed to give her a desired end. She wants to embrace the "still centre of death" as death seems to her "as sweet as a vanilla candle, as heliotrope as the sun itself" (R: 57). Though it seems to be unusual, her desire to "be erased" (R: 13) is a valid desire for her. She introspects deeply and says,

> I RUN AWAY. I play hide and seek. I practice kinematics. I LOOK FOR innovative ecstasies, ways of coming home, ways of decamping, ways to abandon the scene of uncommitted crimes. Rootless. Castaway. Robinson Crusoe without an island, and certainly never with a Friday, eager to break the monotony (R: 44-45).

She expresses her desire: "...I wait to arrive at a destination I am destined for" (15). Her assassin Derrick Atman discovers her fascination for the city, Calgary. So he wonders about her decision and says, ""You seem to love this city so much. My experience has been that those who want to die care for nothing, defend nothing, make every space and emotion a void"

"Simple. I want to become a ghost story""(R: 159).

And earlier quoting Christina Rossetti's famous line, 'when I am dead, my dearest, Sing no sad song for me.....' she says, "I want to be forgotten" (R: 80). And she wants a professional assassin as unprofessional assassins believe that "decisions of desire are accidental, unplanned and not their responsibility. They believe a woman makes herself available because she is there" (R: 29).

Dorcas's assassin is her own creation, the perfect agent of her desire. She goes on imagining the perfect type of assassin who will try to understand and ask why she wants to die. She says "I wanted to die, and not one of those assassins ever noticed" (R: 30). Derrick Atman fits the description she has invented for herself, "a man who looks rather like Bruno Ganz in *Wings of Desire*" (R: 38). Her desire for death, for the assassin's careful, faithful touch, is lustful: "an act of hunger" (R: 8). While talking about her own desire, Dorcas also pinpoints the desire of the "other woman" who is virtually present in the narrative. That woman is seen through the window of the hotel room of Dorcas. Pointing at that woman she says, "The woman standing there, face tilted slightly away, hair shading her eyes, will be me, finally apprehended, and willing to be found. Eager to recognize herself. At last"(R: 37).

Her appointed assassin Derrick Atman tries to find out why Dorcas wants to embrace death. For him such a successful woman with diverse experiences of life would be in love with herself, with the places and her dear ones. The author tries to show that a woman who wants to assert her self cannot ignore her innermost desire even if the fulfillment of the desire leads to erasure: "Delivery girl, all my life's urgency has come from without, and for once, for once, I want to be in charge of my own conclusions, my own delivery, Is that an act of hubris"(R: 56)? That is her queer desire but she justifies it, "Some people want to die at the zenith of their lives. They imagine they can never be happier, they want to stop at that peak"(R: 65). This text speaks not only of a woman's desire, but also at the same time, a reader's desire, as "people long for what they have never done"(R: 44).

With such strong and self-actualizing woman characters Aritha van Herk is trying to bring out the feminist issues relating to autonomy and selfhood to the forefront. Although utopian, her novels articulate the strong female desire in such a way that is usually not found in other texts.

Chapter III

GEOGRAPHY AND GENDER

I

Doreen Massey, a pioneer feminist geographer says that "The intersection and mutual influences of "geography" and "gender" are deep and multifarious. Each is in profound ways, implicated in the construction of the other: geography in its various guises influences the cultural formation of particular genders and gender relations; gender has been deeply influential in the production of geographical" (Massey: 1994:177). Feminist theorists have been making rigorous enquiry about the relationship between gender and geography in its various dimensions.

Geography defines itself as the study of the earth's surface, the space within which the human population lives. It seeks to understand a person's life in relation to places, habitations and environmental conditions that comprise his or her geographical world. As Richard Hartshorne, an American geographer maintains in his work *Perspective on the Nature of Geography*: "Geography is concerned to provide accurate, orderly and rational description and interpretation of the variable characters of earth's surface" (Hartshorne: 1959:12). According to William Hughes "This is 'a description of the world'---that is Geography. In a word geography is a science---a thing not of mere names but of argument and reason, of cause and effect" (Hughes: 1863 quoted in Baker: 1963: 66). Geography tries to locate a place accurately with certain inherent attributes and represent its location effectively through maps. The study of geography disentangles the factors that lead to particular spatial patterns. However, geography is primarily associated with writing----writing about the earth. It constructs the physical existence of landscapes, territories and boundaries in words. Physical geography is about space and territories. But in the

politics of culture, geography, especially political geography, is more an ideologically motivated discursive construct than a description of the physical location on the globe. John Moss attempts to define geography as follows:

> Trying to define geography: the imposition of knowledge on experience in a specified landscape. That's what I mean to say; but its so terse it seems evasive. Geography is essentially propriocentric; it does not exist outside our awareness, but is entirely separable both from us and our presence within it. The mind opens like an eye on the landscape, and defines what it sees in terms of itself. The eye measures light; distance and direction---Geography articulates our solipsistic vision of the world as knowable, what we mean it to be (Moss: 1994: 1).

The new approaches to geography have made it truly interdisciplinary in nature. One can reformulate questions about geography in the context of gender roles, space, place and time even while using traditional materials. The outcome of such approaches and studies is a growing realization that geographic differences of topography, vegetation, climate, urbanization, transportation networks, availability of power sources, labour pools, and access and proximity to market, etc. create different social structures that determine gender roles and behaviour.

As a widely popular literary genre, fiction defines itself as a product of human imagination, thought and action. It refers primarily to "mental structures". The transforming power of literary imagination is quite amazing. All mental activities are supposed to be fictional and imaginary because they shape materials which are inherently shapeless. As mental structures, fictional representations, though often considered to be false, are accepted as true for their psychic coherence. We must go on relying partly on these fictions, since there is no other way of making sense of things. Fiction seems to be relativist, because it sensitizes us to the limitations of our own and other people's outlook. As a literary genre, fiction is inherently geographical. The world of fiction is made up of geographic locations, settings, landscapes, perspectives and horizons which build up psychic patterns of

the characters as well as their physical groundings. Partly real and partly imaginary places and spaces are occupied by the fictional characters in the fictive world, which the narrator explores along with the reader. Fiction represents a field of varied, sometimes competing forms of geographical knowledge and experience, leading one from a sensuous awareness of places to the enlightened idea of a region and a nation. Geography and literature may not be considered as the combination of two essentially different disciplines, objective and subjective, real and imaginary, but are to be seen as overlapping and interconnected discourses that intersect each other at different levels. Following this, it may be asserted that the worldliness of literary texts and the imaginativeness of geographical texts conjoin to create the wonderful world of fictional writing. J Wreford Watson observes: "Geography without passion is about as alive as a body without blood-----ready for the gravediggers... we ought to say of landscape not only---this is what it looks like, but this is how I feel it...[it is] the poet who gets to the real issues [of geography], because [s]he is of them. [S]he voices them as prime experience" (1983: 391-392).

Geographers had for many years used literature as a source of evidence about past landscapes and privileged the novelist's ability to capture the subjective place. Geographers tried to emulate the literary style of the great regional novelists. Recently geographers have begun to show interest in literary analysis and in other conceptions of geography besides traditional forms of landscape interpretation. Margaret Atwood says in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) that literature is a map, a geography of the mind. It is believed that geographers' interest in literature began with Walter Scott and Thomas Hardy and extended to Arnold Bennet and other "regional novelists" (Darby: 1948, Paterson: 1965, Gilbert: 1972, Hudson: 1982). These regional novelists have an obvious appeal because of the incorporation of "real" places in their novels. They transform the real place through their imagination into creative "geographies of the mind" (Lowenthal & Bowden: 1976). John Barrell (1982) examines how localities and space in Hardy's fiction are constructed and mapped out by the characters in course of the novels and also how Hardy manipulates the narrative to reveal to the reader a range of different subjective geographies rather than trying to identify "real" places

in the Wessex novels or attempting to write a 'regional geography'. Even Faulkner, Lawrence and many other novelists have created "partly real, partly imaginary" worlds to give regional uniqueness to their fiction. William Faulkner is most deeply "southern of southern writers"----the setting and scene of his novels, is his legendary "yoknapatawpha" county. Yoknapatawpha county of Faulkner's legend is based closely upon the Oxford and Lafayette county geographical fact. The South and its people form the subject of his fiction. Hardy and Faulkner particularly mythicised landscapes of "Wessex" and "Yoknapatawpha" in their respective fictional works. Lawrence, on the other hand, could never forget "Eastwood" and "Hags Farm". Hardy was the great model for provincial writers of genius .He forced the literary world to listen to him and caught the vivid imagination of geographers. Geography builds up the psychology in a sense because a place determines the temperament and outlook of a person as she/he is inseparable from its surroundings. To put it in other words, no one can be "outside geography" and its influence. Thomas Hardy's and William Faulkner's usual obsession with a place, in an intimate sense, indicates a desire to *forget the words* to engage with more fundamental, palpable realities of life, that is the land, the regions, physical labour and instincts, traditional agrarian mores, and folk culture. Their fictional worlds define man's identity largely through his relationship with his environment. Nigel Thrift employs the concept of "hegemony" (from Gramsci) and "structure of feeling" (from Raymond Williams) in an attempt to relate the representation of place in literature to wider cultural processes. Taking as examples the representation of the front in World War 1 and significance of place in John Fowle's novel of English middle class life, *Daniel Martin* (1977), Thrift explores the relationship between "lived experience" and "literary significance": "Every literary representation of place is an inherently political creation... just as every reading of a text offers the possibility of challenging received ideas about the politics of place" (Thrift: 1983 in Jackson: 1994: 44).

Different novelists have used certain geographic places as the setting of their novels and thus immortalized those places. Mark Twain's Mississippi, Jack Hodgins's Vancouver, Robert Frost's New England, Alice Munro's Ontario and

Margaret Lawrence's Manawaka are the examples of fictionalization of regions to tell stories and to show the affinity of characters with the locality. So a place, a location or simply the geography can be powerful once articulated in language for it transforms the inanimate into living beings, and humanizes a place. The outlines, the contours of a place can be constructed in the mind as place can be a mental construct. However, Aritha van Herk makes a difference by using a different language to create material context for a gendered space. It is also seen that geographers have no interest in symbolic representation of places in literature. A conventional understanding of a place is as a particular physical location which is characterized by fixed sets of social characteristics (Women and Social Group: 1997). The place can be seen as an "[I]ntersection of sets of social relations which are stretched out over particular spaces... (and) the distinctiveness of place is seen to rest in the combination of social relations juxtaposed together in place and the connections they make to elsewhere"(ibid).

As Susan Morgan maintains, "one key meaning of looking at place is looking at the conventions of a range of particular historical discourses; considering both that place entails history and that place is always framed by the points of view of other places" (1996: 10). Nicholas Entrikin argues for the centrality of place in the construction of subjectivity in contemporary society. Entrikin says, "Place presents itself to us as a condition of human experience. As agents in the world we are always "in place" much as we are always "in culture". For this reason our relations to place and culture become elements in the construction of our individual and collective identities" (Riegel and Wylie: 1997: ix).

Place is a topographical, a mappable location, whereas "space" is rather more abstract and malleable as a concept. It was the minds of people that offered fertile ground for investigation with the concept of people's sense of place providing a focal point for studies. In social geography the idea that "people make places" is at the core. Social geography is an analysis not only of how people make places, but of how they think they do so; it is concerned with the perception behind the patterns. Places differ physically and the nature of physical differences means that people are constrained to interpret the structural imperatives differently in different place. Out

of these differences have arisen different cultures, different sets of collective ideas—about how to survive and to organize social life. People create structures in the context of places and those structures then condition the making of people. Doreen Massey writes: "from the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clear gendered messages which they transmit, to straight forward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but...also reflects and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood" (1994:179).

Place, as represented in language is not static or unchanging. Spaces, landscape, home are not containers in which history unfolds. They are rather concepts produced through social processes and human actions, through acts of imagination that create maps. Stories are a necessary part of this imaginative mapping. Writing a place not only puts that place on the literary landscape but also inscribes on it certain local identities. The places constituted in fiction in the geographical sense formulate the very nature and character of the characters. John Bemrose's novel *The Island Walkers* (2003) depicts the story of one family and shows how their lives are shaped by the town, its geography, its textile mills and the resulting social divisions. The novel displays skillful evocation of place. The novel begins with a visual description of Paris, "a town of two rivers" peopled by "the play of ghosts on the sloping face of a dam" (2003: 1).

Space is a social product, always specified by a definite relationship between the different instances of social structure----the economic, the political, the ideological, and the conjecture of social relations that results from them. In a variety of contexts, space is conceived of as a woman. Because a woman can conceive and contain, and sustain life forms. In the western tradition, Plato inaugurated the theory of space and its production with the metaphor of the female body (Best: 1995:184). Throughout history spatial entities such as nations, cities, homes and arguably, repeatedly womb-shaped utopias, have frequently been bounded by concepts of the personified woman. Sue Best shows how the feminization of space works as a pervasive practice in conceptualizing a "safe, familiar, clearly defined entity, which because it is female, should be appropriately docile or able to be dominated" (ibid: 183). Luce Irigaray's work has consistently pointed to the workings of the basic

problem of "the exploitation of the body matter of women" in the symbolic process (1977: tr 1985: 85). Drawing attention to the ways in which traditional philosophical oppositions such as time/space, subject/object, culture/nature continually exploit the body matter of women, Best has shown how the hierarchical ordering of these oppositions with women always featured as the complimentary, subordinated term, repeatedly provides malleable matter for man's intellectual project (Best:187). Feminism has been trying to show how the stereotypical hierarchy in the social structure based on gender puts man at the higher and privileged position. It is the body of a female that ultimately succumbs to exploitation or to the male gaze just as a place becomes primarily a subject of the male gaze.

II

Gender signifies a cultural and social construction, a meaning imposed on the biological body of male and female and a code of cultural prescription on how to behave like a woman and a man. Post-Freudians defined gender simply as the consciousness of being male or female, that is, as a sense of masculine or feminine identity acquired through the processes of socialization or internalization. The concept of patriarchy has been used to explain why sex becomes gender. In a wider sense patriarchy means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society. It implies that in the social structure men wield power and women are deprived of access to such power. According to Gerda Lerner "patriarchy is a historic creation" (1986: 212). In *Sexual Politics* Kate Millet writes, "Our society... is patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political offices, finances—in short, every avenue of power within the society including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands" (1971: 25). Millet argues that patriarchy as an institution is so deeply

entrenched that it runs through all other political, social and economic forms, whether of caste or class, feudalism or bureaucracy. Patriarchy's biological foundations are very insecure, while gender distinctions are overwhelmingly cultural. A primary goal of the feminist theory is to analyze gender relations----how gender relations are constituted and experienced. The study of gender relations includes distinctive feminist issues such as the situation and representation of women and the analysis of male domination and control in the dominant structures of the society.

Gender happens to affect women adversely in all professional and academic fields. Masculinity and femininity are perceptions and psychological attributes acquired through the process of becoming a man or a woman in a particular society at a particular time. The concept of gender enables us to think of masculinity and femininity as historically and culturally variable rather than fixed by nature. Gayle Rubin in her landmark essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975) identifies a universal sex/gender system and argues that in every society, a system is in place, a special mechanism that converts sex into gender. Rubin says, "Each society has a sex/gender system----- a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention" (1975: 165).

Feminist theory articulates a new kind of knowledge which is constructed by rendering visibility to the previously invisible component of "gender" in all discourses produced by the humanities and social sciences. In terms of its fundamental significance and impact on literary studies during the second half of the twentieth century, feminist theory matches the major conceptual developments like Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Feminist concepts seek to analyze and understand the material conditions through which gender has been constructed within specific languages and bodies of literature. The strong wave in the 1960's and 1970's helped to theorize women's discourse. In the 1980's feminism concentrated on transforming the intellectual fields, and in the 1990's it began playing a major role in directing the focus of academic studies on to "otherness", "difference", "hybridity", and the "question of marginality". The gender issue is of central importance in the formation

of feminist theory. Gender is the social and psychic meanings which cultures assign to the biological differences. As Monique Wittig says, "There are not two genders; there is only one; the feminine; the masculine not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general" (1983: 64). Men are the norm and women are defined in relation to them, as deviation and hence the "other". Gender identity is continually reinforced and naturalized through language and social structures. Feminists have denaturalized gender and demonstrated that masculinity and femininity are unstable categories that vary across cultural and historical periods. Contemporary feminist writings explore a new kind of sensibility regarding the multiplicity of women's identity grounded on gender, race, class and sexuality.

Recently developed gender theory proposes to explore "ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/ gender system." Literary and cultural theory has brought many new issues to the forefront including the question of masculinity into feminist theory. Taking gender as the fundamental analytical category feminist criticism brings margin to the center. Even contemporary writings on "geography" are filled with assumptions about gender, as well as empire. Victorian London witnessed gendering of the public space. The central figure of the city was the man in the street in an affirming manner. Woman was excluded from everyday urban experience. Apart from being positioned as prostitute, or street walker, women were spectral absences from this theorization of the city. They may be part of the finishing of the street, objects of erotic fantasy or longing, the locus of sexual and moral transaction and contamination; but they have no active agency.

Feminists confronting the gendered relations at all levels reacted in various ways. Helen Buss noting some of the patterns of women's responses to their new found lands in Canada suggests that far from communicating the kind of "terror" that Northope Fry discovered in his reading of primarily masculine works, women's accounts convey a different ethos. According to Buss all the women autobiographers react to the strangeness of the Canadian landscape by merging their own identity in some imaginative way, with the new land (1994). Moreover, she urges literary critics to begin to see through "ungarrisoned eyes" and suggests that the "interconnection of self, other and land" is a "female vision of the land". The

wilderness plays a vital role in formulating Canadian consciousness. The spatial location of Canada makes it a mysterious land which is full of challenges and adventures. Patriarchal conventions do not allow women in Canada to venture into the wilderness for unveiling the mysteries as men do. Patriarchy has demarcated both the spatial and literary/metaphoric territories for women. So the desire arises out of the patriarchal conventions and impositions. The women writers try to cross or transgress the boundaries by making wilderness an exotic subject of exploration. The wilderness has been explored literally as well as metaphorically by the Canadian women writers to articulate their desire.

For a long time wilderness was associated with the unmapped and unknown territory of the human psyche. Wilderness has been used metaphorically to denote the private and inner landscape. In modern feminism there have been many attempts to set up systematized patterns of opposition to conventional social etiquette. Thus dualistic concepts like nature versus nurture, rational versus irrational, and the woman as object and subject have become a code of analysis in women's writings. Postmodern feminism, however, goes beyond such categorizations. The writer's search for female space transcends binary oppositions. A journey into the wilderness to assert selfhood may result in the fictionalization of the real self. Van Herk does that in *Places Far From Ellesmere*. In a way, she writes about her own life while writing about Edmonton, Edberg and Calgary, and desires for an 'island of woman' in Ellesmere. By challenging authority and tradition, the writer questions the stereotyped images, cultural and social patterns and seeks an outlet for patterns of selfhood within geographical dimensions. For a pluralistic culture bound country like Canada this journey into the wilderness in search of selfhood is relative. Patterns are overthrown, and in liberating the self new patterns of enclosures are formed. The search for an essential female nature is still indicative of the social rather than the natural construction of woman. Landscape is not merely a reflection of the wilderness of the human psyche but a reassertion of the continuity of human life. The haunting survival of the past in the present is a dominant theme both in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) and Marian Engel's *The Bear* (1978). *Surfacing* is impregnated with the voyage to a presumed Canadian essence located

in an inhospitable northern nature and *The Bear* portrays continuous flights to nature. The female unnamed protagonist comes back to her home in the wild forest in *Surfacing*. In the same way, in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, Aritha van Herk finds solace only in Ellesmere Island as it is uninhibited and remote. One can observe that geography provides the scope for restructuring gender identity. It can also offer a probable alternative world for women. While looking for alternative to fulfill their desire women go on dismantling the socio-cultural structure, breaking the myths, and overthrowing the barriers.

Contemporary writings on "geography" are filled with assumptions pertaining to gender as well as empire. It is not that geography serves only the sole purpose of empire building by extending and occupying territories. Geography is instrumental in other aspects too. The female responses to sights and scenes or to landscapes are wonderfully unique to geographical imaginations. The quest for truth, discovery, self-realization and self-actualization is as much a male as a female desire. Annette Kolodny in *The Lady of the Land* (1975) and *The Land before Her* (1984) tries to trace the metaphorical representation of the land as feminine entity throughout American history. She has embarked upon a revisionist history of American attitudes towards nature through an analysis of the role of feminine metaphor in American life and letters challenging the virtual absence of women from the mythology that surrounds the American frontier experience. The survey that Kolodny made of American literary history shows how the new world was consistently envisaged as a source of male gratification, a virgin land to be tamed. She incorporates the innumerable but contradictory ways in which men uses the attributes of *virgin mother* and *mistress* to refer to land. Writers still use the image that centers on the metaphor of the *land as woman*. People are still bound by the vocabulary of the feminine landscape. Masculine images stress the existence of a virgin land to be "taken" and "possessed", a "Garden of Eden" with infinite possibilities of exploitation. But feminine image, by contrast is of a garden to be cultivated and domesticated. There is much evidence of the material struggle that the women have to wage for building their homes under the trying conditions of the frontier life in Canada. Susana Mudie's *Roughing It Under The Bush* offers such

evidence. At the same time, a parallel struggle went on to find an alternative language in which to express that female experience. Women set about making their own mark on the landscape. Geography was once described as the "mother of all sciences" and considered as a "robust manly science", due to the chauvinistic attitude of the male geographers. They thought it was male prerogative to explore territories and conquer the entire horizon. Nikolas H Huffman in *Thresholds in Feminist Geography* (1997) notes that traditionally the fields of geography and cartography have had a masculine bias and they had systematically excluded women. He points out that exclusion of women can be seen in the ensuing history of cartography, and that masculinity is reflected in maps as images of power, communicating world order as well as world views, and also in the virtual silence about women in the disciplinary discourse of academic cartography.

III

Geography as context and container for action has long been a concern of both literary critics and historical geographers. But in recent years there has also been increasing interest in the active role of landscape in literature, both as symbol and as constitutive of plot and character (Brosseau:1994). John Berger Cosgrove shows how the concept of landscape formed a bourgeois "way of seeing" during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This concept was very much rooted in the spirit of Renaissance humanism and in the exercise of power. He says, "Landscape is in fact a way of seeing, a way of composing and harmonizing the external world into a scene, a visual unity... Landscape is thus intimately linked with a new way of seeing the world as rationally ordered, designed and harmonious" (Cosgrove: 1989:121). If the argument is that a landscape is "a way of seeing", then there will be potentially as many ways of seeing as there are eyes to see. One may deduce from this that there apparently will be a male and a female perspective of seeing, experiencing and

writing about places and people (Cosgrove: 1989). In cultural geography there is a move from a world of exterior surfaces and appearances to an inner world of meaning and experience. In part, seeing is intertwined with the landscape tradition, with how landscape is looked upon by explorers and settlers as well as latter-day developers and real estate moguls.

For geographers, a plurality of cultures also implies a multiplicity of landscapes. As a pluralistic country Canada provides ample scope for negotiating with the multiplicity of landscape in literature. The features of landscape may project the themes of sacrifice/victimization and choice/free will on to the novel. The elements of landscape are explored by the novelists. As Margaret Atwood has shown, because of victimization and powerlessness women characters are often caught in the "Rapunzel Syndrome" in particular geographical contexts. On the other hand, Aritha van Herk's heroines talk about the choice they make to liberate themselves and to create an identity of their own. Van Herk's exploration of landscapes has occupied an important place in the feminist discourse of self-reflexivity. She is interested in the unexplored landscapes of Canada, as well as the unexplored areas of human myth and possibility. Van Herk's landscapes, in *Places Far From Ellesmere* help the reader to map a new activity, a way of seeing and learning and reading that is not possible in Calgary, Edmonton, Edberg:

> You are closer to Russia than to home: reading is a new act here, not introverted and possessive but exploratory, the text a new body of self, the self a new reading of place. The closest you can get to Anna's Russia and still remain at home is this north: the closest you can get to home and still read Russia is this north; the closest you can get to reading and still know story is this undiscovered place: the farthest possible reach of all reaches, this island paradise, this un/written northern novel, this desert un/kingdom (PFFE: 113).

The narrator makes it clear that what the mapping in this text has produced is another fiction. Reading is embodied while the body itself becomes text. The narrator leaves Edberg for Edmonton, Edmonton for Calgary and Calgary for Ellesmere Island in her journey of self discovery/recovery. The narrator imagines Ellesemere Island as the perfect place on which to write a new fate/ destiny for Anna, the heroine of Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina who is resituated by van Herk in order to write a new destiny for her. Van Herk takes it for granted that everyone knows the story of *Anna Karenina*. So she begins to criticize Tolstoy by making patchy referencs to the original text just to remind the readers. She gives the reason for her interest in Anna as a subject of her novel in the section "ELLESMERE, woman as island":

> Anna Karenina should have escaped to Ellesmere. If Tolstoy had suffered her, if she hadn't been a woman created and governed by a blind and obstinate man. This is a remedy you want to propose to her, Ellesmere, as if it were a nectar she could swallow or inhale. A consummate escape from Vronsky and Karenin, Ellesmere, that most northerly of extreme Arctic island, probably un/named when Tolstoy invented her, probably unheard of, like Anna herself. A lost heroine. Lost in Russian, lost in love, lost in nineteenth century. The especial lostness of an invented character whose inventor revenged himself on her through the failings he invented for her. Anna. Her paginated presence makes you want to rescue her, offer her alternatives. Read her again, give her a second chance, another life, a different fiction (PFFE: 77).

She says,

> So you take Tolstoy's eight hundred and fifty pages as a lesson, to solve a problem in how to think about

> love: to solve a problem in the (grave) differences between men's writing and women's writing; to solve a problem in sexual judgment. To investigate viscera and mirrors; passions and polemics. Even though you know you'll be stuck with Tolstoy, that the order and the rules are male, that he writes Anna no choices.
>
> You are trying to learn indifference, practice scientific curiosity.
>
> You want to read yourself (in a mirror) and Anna a fictinal mirror of a male reading of women. Perhaps you can un/read her, set her free. There on that desert island, between the harebells and the blue dreaming of glaciers (PFFE: 82).

Canadian experience with nature is generally compared with the American experience. Ecofeminist writings in the 1980s seem to suggest that women have a more evolved connection to the natural world than men. Some ecofeminists believe that Western philosophical systems of hierarchical dualism have organized a world in which women are subordinated to men, emotion to reason, body to mind and nature to culture. In this broad conceptual frame, women share a degraded social position with non-human nature. As Lee Scheweninger says, the primary tenet of Ecofeminism as a philosophy is, "that the same patriarchal world view motivating the oppression of women and minorities motivates human oppression of nonhuman nature as well" (1993: 38). Both are "resources" for male exploitation-----overused, overvalued and denied full subject status in patriarchal thought. Ecofeminism works against the colonization and occupation of both women and land/nature and builds on the belief that the juxtaposition of the objectives of feminism and ecology will be effective as both project liberation. Ecofeminism rethinks and revalues the

traditional association between women and nature often used by patriarchal ideology with negative connotation. Hence Ecofeminist believe that we can not end the exploitation of nature without ending human oppression and vice versa. Partially distancing herself from such a belief on certain grounds, van Herk formulates a new concept of "Geofeminism". Geofeminism becomes a part of her growing sense of regionalism. She strongly upholds that as a woman she belongs to the "region of woman", and also asserts that she belongs to the region of "west", and that is how she brings geography closer to gender. She has always been obsessed with the frontiers of "west" and "north" which are quite appealing for the mysterious gestures and myths attached to them. According to W M Verhoven, van Herk has tried to realign her quest for self-realization and self creation with the trinity of "race, class and gender" by privileging often in provocative ways, the "other" or "absent" categories of the (Canadian) "west", and "woman" as part of feminist regionalism or Geofeminism (1997). She believes that region is not only a place where one lives, but also a specific way of looking at the world. She also recognizes the complex interrelatedness of geography and psychology and geography and power. One of the strongest elements of regionalism is identified as "otherness" and there lies the affinity with the women who are also identified as "others" by patriarchy. Van Herk puts an effort to define "otherness". As an immigrant Dutch Canadian van Herk finds it easy to hint at her "otherness" from the Anglo-Canadians. "West", particularly her province Alberta, is different from the center of power, Ottawa and Toronto. Above all, Canada itself is other than the traditional centers of culture in Europe. She writes in *A Frozen Tongue*: "I take perspective of my particular region: my place, the west; my background, first generation child of immigrant parents: my sex, a woman: my form, fiction: and finally, my work, a writer" (79).

In her first novel *Judith* van Herk projects a revisionist geofeminist retelling of the classical myth of Circe through the protagonist Judith's quest for her essential selfhood. She tries to reconstruct her identity in the close proximity of nature by throwing her sophisticated secretarial job in the city. She becomes a pig farmer in the rural Alberta and lives a secluded life amidst the pigs and nature without any complaint. Judith liberates herself in the wilderness by discarding all societal

bindings, and making a choice and embracing it totally. The geographical and cultural isolation has given her the space to live her life as she wanted. In *The Tent Peg* the protagonist J.L enters a geological expedition camp as a cook in disguise as she wants to experience life from a distance, away from the conventional living. J.L has the urge to accept the challenges while making her choice to go for expedition with nine men. She turns to a woman with a mission, disclosing her feminist agenda. She utters an inner monologue addressed it to her friend Deborah, "I know that in the end what matters most is how we survive. But I find myself raging, I find myself waiting angrily for that promised period of peace. I'm beginning to think that unless we take some action ourselves, it may never come. It's time we laid our hands on the workman's mallet and put the tent pegs to the sleeping temples, if ever we are going to get any rest" (TTP:173).

Aritha van Herk experiments with another kind of psychological mapping relating it to the cartographical representation of west in her novel *No Fixed Address: an amorous journey*. The protagonist Arachne Manteia moves around in her 1959 black Mercedes car peddling lingerie for women. She inherits the car from her mentor Gabriel and realizes that she can liberate herself by driving away in the highways, moving across different geographical locations at her own will. Not having a fixed address is liberating for her. She is identified as someone outside the symbolic order of home/identity: "There was nothing she could do about her difference, nothing to do but exploit it, call attention to the fact that she was crossing every boundary. It was a way of declaring herself, of drawing a line. She knew where she stood. Outside" (NFA: 116). Arachne's wandering can be associated with van Herk's desire to expand "the borders of the regions we inhabit as women" (Goldman: 1993: 28). At the end of the novel, "...Arachne in her black Mercedes, driving slow and steady, face forward and absorbed, headed into nowhere" (NFA: 260). Arachne disappears into the north, into the wilderness, "This is the ultimate frontier, a place where the civilized melt away and the meaning of mutiny is unknown, where manners never existed and family backgrounds are erased. It is exactly the kind of place for Arachne" (NFA: 258). The final image of Arachne situates her on a road with no end. The narrator states: "There is no end to the

panties; there will be no end to this road" (NFA: 260). As Marlene Goldman observes, "*No Fixed Address* develops a link between the unmapped northern landscape and the cognitive space where women can plot radical alternatives to traditional representations of female identity" (1993: 30).

IV

The fascination of Canadian, Australian and other postcolonial writers with the figure of the map has resulted in a wide range of literary responses both to physical (geographical) maps and conceptual (metaphorical) maps. Physical (geographical) maps are shown to have operated effectively but often restrictively or coercively, in the implementation of colonial policies. Conceptual (metaphorical) maps are perceived to operate as exemplars of and therefore to provide a framework for the critique of colonial discourse. Maps generally stimulate our imaginative and creative capabilities. Maps are multifaceted representations, and cultural constructs. The interpretation of maps, like that of other texts, takes place in dialogic interaction. Moreover, like other cultural artifacts, maps are designed within a certain ideology. As Graham Huggan maintains, "The prevalence of map tropes in contemporary post-colonial literary texts, and the frequency of its ironic and/or parodic uses in these texts, suggests a link between a de/reconstructive reading of maps and a revisioning of the history of European colonialism" (1991:130).

This revisionary process is most obvious perhaps, in the fiction of the Caribbean writer Wilson Harris. In his writings map features as a metaphor for perpetual transformation which encourages the revisioning of the Caribbean cultural history. The fascination of post-colonial writers, particularly of Canadian and Australian writers, with map can be seen in this context as a specific instance of creative revisionism in which the desystematization of a narrowly defined and

demarcated "cartographic" space allows for a culturally and historically located critique of colonial discourse. At the same time, this revision builds up momentum for a projection and exploration of "new territories", outlawed or neglected by the dominant discourses which previously operated in colonial culture and continue to operate in modified or transposed forms in the post colonial culture. Van Herk's heroine, Arachne disappears with the Mercedes car in *No Fixed Address* in search of absolute freedom. The same search is carried on by Dorcas in *Restlessness* and by the author narrator in *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Van Herk asserts: "mapping like language is creation more than representation" (*The Frozen Tongue*: 58).

Mapping becomes another signature for her as she redraws the map by which women's experience and expressions are rewritten and brought to the forefront. She experiments with another kind of psychological mapping relating it with the cartographical representation in *No Fixed Address*. This novel is about a woman, Arachne who inherits a Marcedes car and finds that she can liberate herself by driving away on the highway. She finds a map left in the bus which she used to drive. The map opens up exciting possibilities for her: "It's a map, a beautifully drawn and coloured map of Southern British Columbia twisting roads around the names of hesitant towns. Under the gray light in the bus, the elegant lines convert those curves into longing. Roads, she thinks. There are roads out there" (NFA: 89). The road is the means by which one lays claim to the land, to the territory. Van Herk imagines a western country where the railway and airplanes are absent. The road and the car become a means of self-realization, self-fulfillment and creation of identity for Arachne.

Van Herk calls *Places Far From Ellesmere* her "secret map" where she gives an idiosyncratic map cover that subverts the map's traditional indexical function by refusing to represent actual space. The shape of a woman is presented in the cover page of the novel as a map of "woman island", Ellesmere. She further uses the symbolic North compass sign ironically, making it function both as an indexical sign of map's arbitrariness and as a pointer, directing our attention towards north, to where the "real" Ellesmere island is situated, in the high Arctic. The map is dramatically iconic as van Herk makes her "Woman Island" occupy the very center

of the map, as the only continuous shape among the maps. Her conviction is that after reading PFFE people will make a new sense of Ellesmere Island.

In contemporary Canadian literature these territories correspond to a series of new or revised rhetorical spaces occupied by feminism, regionalism and ethnicity, where each of these items is understood primarily as a set of counter-discursive strategies that challenge the claims of or avoid circumscription within one or other form of cultural centrism. These territories/spaces can also be considered, however, as shifting grounds which are themselves subject to transformational patterns of de-territorialization or re-territorialization. As Margaret Atwood says, "by discovering your place you discover yourself" (1972:113). Her *Surfacing* brings the subject of Canadian national space insistently forward. The proliferation of spatial references, crossing of physical and conceptual boundaries and re-disposition of geographical coordinates in much contemporary Canadian and Australian writing stress the provisionality of cartographic connection and place the increasing diversity of their respective literatures in the context of a post colonial responses to or reaction against the ontology and epistemology of "stability" promoted and safeguarded by colonial discourse.

The role of cartography in contemporary Canadian and Australian writing, specifically, and in post-colonial writing in general can not be solely envisaged as the reworking of a particular spatial paradigm. Rather, it consists in the implementation of a series of creative revisions which register the transition from a colonial framework within which the writer is compelled to recreate and reflect upon the restrictions of colonial space to a post-colonial one within which he or she acquires the freedom to engage in a series of "territorial disputes" which implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the relativity of modes of spatial (and by extension cultural) perception. So while the map continues to feature in one sense as a paradigm of colonial discourse, its deconstruction or revisualization permits a "disidentification" from the procedures of colonialism and other hegemonic discourses, and a re-engagement in the ongoing process of cultural decolonization. The "cartographic connection" can, therefore, be considered to provide that provisional link which joins the contestatory theories of post-structuralism and post

colonialism in the pursuit of social and cultural change. In the 1990s maps and mapping became very popular metaphors in postcolonial and feminist writing and critical theory. At the same time cartography became a hotly debated issue in human geography. Defining literary geography, Graham Huggan maintains that the map (in fictional texts) operates as a vehicle for the reorganization of space which permits the writer to invent and explore 'new territories' or to reassess more familiar places and his/her own relation to them. The map, in this sense, is an enabling construct; yet it may also be a disabling one: maps after all, are by nature reductive, introverted, and even simplistic or distorted (Huggan: 1994: 58). As a feminist cartographer van Herk has invented a new way of mapping female subjectivity within Canadian landscape, relocating Tolstoy's Anna at another point in history which is closer to twentieth century position of feminist resistance. By relocating Anna she tries to suggest alternatives for women to free them from patriarchal bondage.

In Milton's great epic, *Paradise Lost* place becomes essential----"the mind is its own place, and in itself/ can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n." The mind is its own place not its own person, for heaven and hell alike exist in the great Miltonic and Dantesque topographies as realms where personality has reached its end. Even Ruskin says that heaven and hell are to be conceived as real before they can be ideally apprehended. One must be able to locate the own place of the mind as surely as the other places. The mind as its own subjective place (Miltonic phrase) can exist only in an objective place, and when the mind subjectively has gone into hell of personal disintegration, the outer world becomes hell too. We witness this in one of van Herk's heroines, Dorass in *Restlessness*. She is restless, disturbed and so depressed that she meditates on her own death and hires an assassin to get killed in Calgary because she feels only death can liberate her from disintegration. Dorcas is a true melancholic. She is forever journeying and never arriving. She says, "Restlessness settles in the heart like dust, works its way into the cracks of a life's tempo so stealthily that time begins to shriek and warp, movement becomes a respiratory resolve"(R : 34). Her mentor aunt Tante Katje justifies the restlessness. She says, "There's no sin to restlessness. We all have it. We learn to live with it" (R:

173). This implies that restlessness of a woman is borne out of her desire. We get to know "A woman alone is never auspicious" (R: 138). While talking about the desire of Dorcas to erase herself, to be invisible van Herk brings travel and geography very close to integrate the gender perspective. She writes, "You see, in such excursion we transport ourselves to the era we think appropriate" (R: 138). Van Herk brings Calgary into literary map in *Restlessness*. She says that Calgary is a city brimming with individualism, entrepreneurship and can-do volunteer attitude values that may have their roots in the Stempede's cowboy mythology. Calgary is a city for which people want to prescribe an identity because it is so diverse and so young. Through the conversation of Dorcas and Atman van Herk brings many places into context with their special attributes to influence people at large. She believes, "A city has a different biology than a person" (R: 146). People are deeply grounded to their places and this gives them a sense of belonging and culture-specific gender perspectives.

It was evident that the institutionalization of geography had made geography very much gendered, making it a typical male domain and barring the female from entering into the world of exploration and adventure. Women were denied a place in the history of geographers. A due place was denied in the academics. Denied access to the academic training that would confer on them the appropriate status as "scientist", women like Mary Kingsley, Mary Grant, Isabella Bird and Marianne North found that fieldwork in the sense of exploration was as open to them as to anyone with adequate resources. These women geographers were removed from the newly defined label of "geographer". The fieldwork of "professional" geographers was codified and regulated in order to advance scientific learning. Fieldwork as geographic inquiry was limited to a few elite, white males and was fostered in the male club atmosphere of the Royal Geographic Society (RGS) in England and the American Geographical Society in the United States. Women travelers, it was thought, were not truly adding to geographic knowledge, because they were not surveying new lands and therefore could not qualify for membership, although such a requirement of "new" geographic knowledge was never applied to men seeking membership. George Curzon raised objection to women's membership. He

maintained; "Their sex and training render them equally unfitted for exploration and the genus of professional female globe-trotters with which America has lately familiarized us is one of the horrors of the latter end of the nineteenth century" (Middleton: 1982: 13).

The spark that energized many women explorers took them to places that they themselves could not have imagined. It contributed far more to geographic knowledge than it was ever thought of and expected. "Women's way of knowing" could immensely contribute to the rewriting of histories of geography and geography of histories. The stories of women travellers are incredibly varied yet they share some common threads. One is their quite explicit recognition of the personal goals of their travels. The so called objective discoveries of new places were not separated from the discoveries of themselves. The search for a new land or geography can be metaphorically ascribed to the women's search for a "space" of their own which is not already gendered. For the women explorers of the Victorian age, growing up in worlds circumscribed by Victorian standards and expectations, freedom could only be assured by living in places away from that set-up. Women travelled then for quite specific reasons. But actually they were seeking as much empowerment and self-knowledge as "objective knowledge". Their satisfaction was derived not from the external discovery of "new geographies", but from the process of exploring a world in which they could participate in their own terms. This journey into unknown territories and landscapes enabled them to explore what was fascinating and liberating. The inherent ambiguity in the experiences of women explorers necessitated forms of representation that differed from the scientific accounts of their male counterpart. The pre-scientific experiences of women travellers at the turn of the century, therefore, are in one sense more relevant at present for what they can tell us about the role of the outsiders and the methods of observation than for any information about "new" places. The process of exploration involves "opening up" of previously unknown lands and people. The role of explorers is ambiguous as the explorers are outsiders and insiders, observers, yet participants in the lives and lands that they travel through. Travel did not only provide women with an opportunity for self-definition but also enabled them to transgress the gender norms of their times.

Travel acted as an incentive to women as it permitted them to imagine other, freer selves which itself was liberating from gender constraint.

Mapping and language in the broadest sense are unquestionably central to Aritha van Herk's works. Language brings the world into existence by naming. "Language is the ultimate arbiter", van Herk asserts. She further states that "language by naming a place, gives it life existence (FT: 25). In that sense language is comparable to mapping as language and mapping alike give contour to the indefinite. Women were outsiders in the everyday world, by virtue of their sex, and much of their time and energy had been spent in dealing with that fact throughout their lives. The ambiguity of the role of explorer was not new to them. As women, their lives were created around that dilemma. They were certainly the insiders and participants in their culture, yet they always stood outside the structures of power. Women carried that duality of identity into the field with them, and found that such duality served them well. At the home front they were outsiders by virtue of their sex; in the field they were outsiders by virtue of their sex and race/class. Women realized the precariousness of that position. Identifying with the male exploratory tradition was empowering for these women, as it legitimized their own travels and supported their claims to authority over different races. As Birkett points out, at times, their identification with the masculine was so strong that their references to themselves as men were there in writing. As Mary Kingsly, who wrote two books about her West African voyages, maintained, "I have given into temptation and am the third Englishman to ascend the peak" (Birkett:1989:124). Their authority in the field was derived from their role as outsiders, as representatives of the white race. Yet the basis of that authority made them insiders in a culture in which they had no authority. So, "Women travellers continually juggled their identities in the foreign lands to meet these turbulent emotions of sympathy...and found comfort in a role which did not necessitate the resolution of these seemingly insurmountable conflicts of interest" (Birkett:1989:176). Women travellers supported the uniqueness of fieldwork as their inclinations as sympathetic observers could act as a basis for their authority within their own culture. Isabella Bird made a point of note that as a woman travelling alone, she was able to observe matters that others may have

missed, "As a lady traveling alone, and the first European lady who had been seen in several districts through which my route lay, my experiences differed more or less widely from those of preceding travelers: and I am able to offer a fuller account of the aborigines of yezo, obtained by actual acquaintance with them, than has hitherto been given"(Bird: 1987: 1-2).

Fieldwork was based on subjective experience, and women could claim that they provided valuable insights that could not be gained from reading books or studying in the university. As a part of customary practice women's experiences were excluded from historical record. The subjective analysis of the female was always excluded. History as "his story" ignored "her story" which could form knowledge base. Many women travelers wrote their first accounts as mixtures of personal reminiscence and factual observations. They soon learned to distinguish and separate what were defined as different forms of knowledge. Gertrude Bell who was highly educated supported the preciousness of knowledge gained from direct experience. She said, "...often when one sets on a journey, one travels by all the roads according to the latest maps, one reaches all the places of which the history books speak. Duly one rises early and turns one's face towards new countries, carefully looks and laboriously one tries to understand, and for all one's trouble one might as well have stayed behind and read a few big archaeology books. But I would have you know that is not the way that I have done it... here is a world of history that one sees with the eye and that enters the mind as no book can relate it" (Birkett: 1989: 173).

Anthropologists and other social scientists have argued that fieldwork and ethnographic studies are by definition exercises in metaphorical storytelling, and are as much constructions of the subjective realm as of objective realm. (Clifford and Marcus:1986). Discussions of the implications of women and gender in anthropology are more relevant to geography. Barbara Babcock and Nancy Parezo in *Daughters of the Desert: Women Anthropologists and the Native American southwest 1880-1980* say, "Restless and rebellious women seeking freedom from their stays and from their drawing-room domesticity of Boston and New York found in the southwest not only topographical and psychological space, but an

otherness that intrigued and nurtured...as scientists, humanists, romanticists, and activists, they were to significantly shape anthropological understanding, public conceptions and government policies, regarding the Native American Southwest" (Babcock and Parezo: 1988: 2). Prominent women anthropologists Elsie Clews Parsons and Ruth Benedict were like Victorian women travelers. They were also under pressure to conform to male standards of "scientific" Academic Anthropology. They had to stick to the norms prescribed by the male anthropologists. So they left out feminist writing and wrote poetry in pseudonyms. The field of anthropology was gendered too. Many women anthropologists worked in the museum as it was found fitting for women "since it resembled housekeeping" (ibid). Inequality arises because the role of women is generally associated with their inferior status-----socially, politically and economically.

While mapping the geography of gender and the relationship between gender divisions and various spatial organizations within the societies, attention has been paid to the differences in ethnic groups, social classes, and stages in the life cycle. So it becomes obvious that all adventurous and challenging domains, be it frontier, territory or fields, were occupied and controlled by men. Aritha van Herk's novels feature female protagonists who throw away the restrictive and culturally sanctioned "only female" domain and liberate themselves to experience life in their invented territories. According to van Herk, that is the way to restructure the female self and to claim autonomy for women.

The Canadian male writers heavily explored the west. When they realized that they could no longer move to the west they turned towards north and tried to make it their territory. But the question arises, where is the north exactly? It is assumed that north is not a place but a direction, and as such its location is relative. All writings that depict the North typically bear witness to a Eurocentric perspective. Sherrill E Grace writes, "North is gendered, raced, and classed; it permeates all aspects of our culture, from painting to comic strips, from politics to classical music, and it encompasses the entire country from the St Lawrence to the Cariboo, from Labrador to the St Elias Mountains, from Winnipeg to Copper mine, Baffin to Dawson city, Ellesmere to Herschel" (Grace: 2001: 15). She further says that North is multiple,

and elastic; it is a process, not an eternal fixed goal or condition. It is above all, the other, and as such emphatically a construction of the Southern. The very idea of North tends to serve the interest of southern Canadians. Their interest may be psychological, spiritual, physical, material or political. There lies the familiar description of North as deadly, cold, empty, barren, isolated, and mysterious and that provides the way to create a dramatic atmosphere for challenge and adventure. As Robert Kroetsch says, one of the most "likely stories" about north is the narrative of courageous men battling a dangerous, hostile, female "terra incognita" to prove their masculinity and the superior face of their technology, or to die nobly in the struggle, or to map, claim, name, and control unstructured space, even if only on paper (in Grace: 2007:16).

North in Canada is also viewed as a frontier wilderness where white travellers can be physically and spiritually rejuvenated. Emily Murphy has captured this sense while saying that "the northern environment of Canada is a fertile breeding ground where the tired, ailing Anglo-Saxon race, exhausted and numbed by the unhealthy conditions and decadence of the late nineteenth century city life, could be revitalized "(Basset: 1975: xix). But women do not have a long history in Northern Canada. The notion of white women traveling to north and living in north is a rare occurrence even now. Canadian North was a "no place for women". Robert Kroetsch was one of the first Canadian writers to theorize north, as distinct from writing it in novels like *But We Are Exiles* (1965) and *Gone Indian* (1973). In his essay "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition" (1971) Kroetsch distinguishes Canadian writings from American writing by characterizing it as northern. He explains that Canadian writers have "a peculiar will towards silence and this silence—this impulse towards the natural, the uncreated...is summed up by the North" (1971: 11). However, one cannot talk about North, write about, imagine, or depict north without placing it somewhere. Kroetsch insists that this North, "a true wilderness, a continuing presence" is a psychological space and an imaginative trope. The representations of North are as beautiful, powerful, inviting, disturbing, exclusionary, and exploitative as the individuals are creating them according to the accepted notions. Kroetsch says in *A Likely Story*, "The North makes possible a new

story" (2002: 35). Shelagh D Grant in "The Myths of The North in The Canadian Ethos" (1989) writes that the northern heritage endures as an amorphous, obscure, yet recurrent theme in Canadian nationalism. ...the vast wilderness of the region still imparts a distinct character to the Canadian nation, its people, and its institution. Even Rene Hulan writes, "North is the true nature of our world and also our graspable destiny" (2003: 111).

In geographical terms north as a direction is a comparison, a relational term and quantified as "nordicity". Nordicity is one of the few things that most Canadians have in common. The nordicity of national identity is a part of Canadian culture that unifies and shapes collective experience. In literature and culture North is created out of ideas, images and myths. Especially fiction is sometimes seen to create myth in the sense of falsehood and to contribute to the misrepresentation of the northern reality. As a metaphor North can represent many things from the sense of mystery and unknown as projected by Atwood in her novels to the articulation in writing as done by Robert Kroetsch. In literary representation people go north to escape, to prove themselves, to learn something, and usually to leave again. As a setting north can represent the 'wilderness' in an abstract way. Hugh Brody in *The People's Land* describes the myth of the frontiersman, for whom going north is, "going away from the constraints and inhibiting social forces that restrict self-expression 'at home'" (1975: 47). Such quest leads north to a land of imagination as well as a land physically challenged for adventurous characters. North has been the ubiquitous subject in all types of writing including literary history. Northern writing is attributed to Canadian writing which always embodies the physical and human conditions that inform the Canadian spirit and character. North is also symbolic, mythic, a belief and a creation of mind. Rob Shields describes the representation of north as a constant tension of "imaginary north" and "ideological north". Shields uses the term "frontier" to describe the imaginary north as "wilderness", an empty "space" which seen from Southern Canada is white, and blank, while the ideological north is that "empty page onto which can be projected images of the essence of Canadianness and also images to define one's urban existence against" (Shields: 1991: 165).

The North in the Canadian colonial imagination has been organized largely as a feminine place. It has also been depicted as an empty space---- blank, remote, silent and therefore open to exploration. Aritha van Herk calls the north, specifically Ellesmere Island as "that clean swept northern desert of desire" (1990:105). Van Herk uses this blank space of North in the remote Arctic island to re-inscribe the story of Anna Karenina of Leo Tolstoy who depicted a gendered version of woman's desire. Anna was killed/murdered for expressing desire. The vast desolate and unoccupied Ellesmere Island, with its own geography and landscape makes van Herk conceptualize the idea of "woman as island". Transporting Anna from the Russian context to Ellesmere and liberating Anna from the nineteenth century patriarchal bondage, she rewrites every possibility of making Anna truly free. Here geography becomes instrumental in making Anna the representative of all women to look at the world from a new perspective. Travelling to north implies escaping difficult and constrained gendered lives to pursue dreams of greater independence and to rejuvenate in the new experiences. North is depicted by van Herk as a wonderful place because of the freedom and autonomy it offers to women.

The imaginary and ideological north displays certain features such as male community, an individual quest, conquest of nature and flight from civilization. The imaginary north constructed within Canadian cultural nationalism is understood from the representation of the geographical north. North is also used as an apt metaphor to signify many things. Margaret Atwood has used north to convey the sense of mystery and unknown, whereas Robert Kroetsch used it to articulate new stories. North as a setting can also refer not just to a specific geographical area, but in an abstract way, to the wilderness itself. Aritha van Herk writes, "Only the north can teach what reading means, and you are a woman in the north, reading a woman written by a man to whom women were a mystery, a man who did not know what Anna was reading, who pushed her from one side of the book to the other, interfering, manipulative. A northern: *un*read Anna" (PFFE: 133). Typically critics define the Canadian "northern" by contrasting it with the American "western". Writings that depict the North bear witness to a Eurocentric perspective. As John Moss states everything on the Canadian Arctic is in effect, a North West passage,

the expression not only of the traditions, but the geography and history of another world (1987).

According to Aritha van Herk north is a more seminal space that does not permit it to be colonized by the masculine interrogation. North was an open space which did not have a particular discourse attributed to it. North has always allured van Herk. In the north space is larger than one thinks as the points of reference are farther apart. The north is another country. It is also other language/languages. Being a northerner is a state of mind, being enigmatic, being unable to read. Van Herk hears the silence, feels the cold, recognizes the mystery and power of North to erase efface and make her invisible. In *A Frozen Tongue*, van Herk remarks that the "great Canadian North is not something that one can capture easily" and she further adds that " Canadians have not written much about the North" (FT: 282-3). By north she means "the magnificent barren lands". For that matter even a place is a state of mind. Van Herk's creation of the island Ellesmere in the novel *Places Far from Ellesmere* is very much a created space, an invention, an act of imagination. In geographical sense Ellesmere is a part of the Canadian Northwest Territories.

Ellesmere Island is the second largest and northernmost island of the Arctic Archipelago. It is the tenth largest island in the world and lies west of Northern Greenland. It is desolate and inhospitable even by Arctic standards. It was first sighted by the British explorer William Baffin in 1616. Ellesmere Island was explored in the latter half of the 19th century. Earlier there were Inuit settlements. Since the 1950s the island has been the site of many glaciological, geological and geographical expeditions. Jerry Kobalenko exploring Ellesmere Island to the extreme proclaims, "... to me the cold of Ellesmere Island was invigorating, its solitude lyrical. Its historic tragedies had a reality that current event did not" (2002: 1). Even the 19th century explorer Charles Francis Hall said that when he was in the Arctic he felt as though he were in heaven. The Arctic is a landscape of lichens and mountains, snowflakes and icebergs, saxifrage, creeping willow, pebblesground to gemstones perfection, and vast formation of ice, contours of rock, sweeping geomorphic draped with grey and smokey greens, draped with the shadows of wind and the colours of snow. That is the homeland of the Inuit and the Qallunaat. The

Arctic is a place where the masculine individual pushes himself into being. The adventurer goes north to endure the hardship that involves the romance of proving oneself in a rugged setting. But more than this physical reality, Arctic is an idea, a creation of Canadian imagination. For van Herk to be in the Arctic is to be "finally free of words." For van Herk travelling northward means going "beyond the intellectual comprehension or the geographical experience of most of those people calling themselves Canadians" (IVI: 3).

Postmodernism precipitated a more experimental, intertextual form of travel writing in the 1990s. In the same manner van Herk in *Places Far From Ellesmere* travels with Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina to the high Arctic-------a part of geography she reads as a tabula rasa, a space where she may free Anna from the 19th century gender perception and literary conventions that doomed her. In the novel, *Places Far From Ellesmere*, she depicts the Arctic landscape as a blank, white page on which to re-inscribe her story. It is the abstract landscape in which she can rewrite the story of Anna Karenina---- "you are at Ellesmere. You have escaped to Ellesmere. Her Island, "tabula rasa", awayness so thoroughly truant you have cut all connexions to all places far from Ellesmere. This is what you long for. Anna must have too" (PFFE: 77). The author narrator asks,

> And why do you not carry a book written by a woman, one of your own reading your own? Why Anna, a self-indulgent character created by a man who couldn't imagine women enacting anything more interesting than adultery or motherhood. Prescripted choices: mothers, saints or whores. Why Karenina, with Tolstoy at the pen, Tolstoy mad with theological tracts, with pleas for vegetarianism, with fulminations against liquor and tobacco? Tolstoy the sermonizer convinced that women were the seat of corruption, Tolstoy the moralist, Tolstoy the refusnik? A man so childish he ran away from home at the age of eighty two, following his viscera (PFFE: 81)?

She rescues the tragic heroine of Tolstoy, Anna Karenina from the patriarchal clutch. This act of rescuing involves a subversive rereading of the text. She rescues Anna as she feels for Anna, "This Anna needs a friend, a woman friend, a reader" (PFFE: 112). She rescues Anna by re-reading, giving her a second chance, another life and another character. Thus a bonding takes place which is very significant part of feminist writing and reading. That is a part of Aritha van Herk's desire to rescue/rewrite all the stranded characters of male creation/invention. She believes that men not only compel women to live according to their dictates but also invent or construct women. She writes,

> You know at least a hundred Annas, stranded in fictional love affairs written by men who do not know that Ellesmere exists. Come to that, women are all Annas, caught or not, Annas sweating their way from one day to the next. They know the wars within their orbits, between children and husbands and lovers, need and desire and the desperate necessities of symmetry, how they will be always and forever culpable, exiled for their visceras, eviscerated for their exiles (PFFE: 82-83).

In this novel van Herk is engaged in the task of writing women into and onto the landscape of western (northern) Canadian fictions. In reading Anna Karenina "beyond language", the author, presumably vicariously liberates herself from the shackles of masculinist discourse. As a regionalist and feminist, she works through her fiction to rediscover lost stories and myths within contemporary time and space. Van Herk reconstructs the remote Arctic island of Ellesmere in the north of Canada as a borderline site which is both a specific location and a discursive space of feminist exploration. In *Places Far From Ellesmere* woman celebrates the freedom to move through geographical space as an independent being. Ellesmere is both a specific location and a fictive space, a *geografictione* as van Herk describes it. It stands as an exuberant discursive space for feminist exploration. Van Herk presents a new feminist cartography in fiction, developing "disruptive geographies" through textual map. She connects geography and gender very powerfully by moving across

places like Cornwallis Island, Wellington Channel, Lancaster Sound, Devon Island, Grinnell Peninsula and Arthur Fjord. The male writers' appropriation of woman is linked to the male cartographer's appropriation of landscape. Such stereotypical act must be challenged. So making a link with Anna means getting past Tolstoy; and associating with the landscapes means getting past the old male maps. To re-read and re-discover Anna is to re-discover and re-create her island Ellesmere. Van Herk says that on Ellesmere island she finds herself "free to un/read [her] self, home, Anna, the rest of Canada, all possible text" (91). She also insists that the readers "must free [Anna].... landscape of a woman" (131). Even readers become part of the journey of the recovering women. Ellesmere emerges as an alternative world for women as she says, "you are only a body, here in this Arctic desert, this fecund island. Lungs fingers, a stomach, legs and feet" (PFFE: 78), where patriarchy has not been able to exercise its power because of its remoteness and inaccessibility. An alert reader observes that though she talks about Anna, she talks about her own desire of transgressing geographic boundaries, of occupying territories and creating her own landscape.

That is how Aritha van Herk articulates her desire to seek a female world order. Much have been said and done within the feminist discourse about justice and equality. But how differently it is said and projected becomes important to gain new visibility. So van Herk employs different strategies to write about female discontent and possible alternative fulfillment. Fiction does not remain mere fiction in van Herk's work as she experiments a different way of telling the story in each of her novels, incorporating criticism, biography, autobiography, travel writing, geography, and history. The next chapter will deal with van Herk's experimentations with genres.

Chapter-IV

GENRES: VAN HERK'S EXPLORATION AND EXPERIMENTATION

I

> For most critics at the present time, however, genres are widely conceived to be rather arbitrary ways of classifying literature, yet convenient in critical discussion (M H Abrams: 1993: 77).

Genres are taken to be the systems of classification or grouping. Traditional classification of expressive culture originally grouped forms of presentation. Genres are literary types classified on the basis of the conventions of representation with which they depict reality or the phenomenological world. As such, genres have been classified variously at different times and the classifications have been based on variable means. Apparently, it seems to be easy to define genre. But on the point of textual categorization it brings a lot of disagreement. Daniel Chandler believes that genres create order to simplify the mass of available information. It is obvious that categorization enhances organization. Most of the time genre is simply taken to be a mere categorization of types or forms of writing. The common understanding of genre is that it is a relatively trivial concept, a classification system deriving from literary criticism that names types of texts according to their forms (Devitt: 2003:272).

Most genre theories in the past have been concerned with classification and form, with describing the formal features of a particular genre system, a set of classification of literary texts. But genre becomes important when one realizes that it means much more than mere categorization and classification. Because a reader's response to genres is deeply conditioned and it creates the way we approach and respond to a text. Any particular genre conditions us to expect to see a particular form of a text. At the same time it also conditions us to trust and believe in what we are reading. That is the power of genre. I R Titunik says, "genre is not that which is determined and defined by the components of a literary work or by sets of literary works, but that which in effect, determines and defines them"(Clark& Bamberg: 2003: 272). In recent periods, however, genre has taken on far more specific notions of classification, often focused on content. Amy J Devitt in her essay "Generalizing about Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept" insists that it is no longer judicious to adhere to the Aristotleian concept of genre as a classification of literary form and text type. In recent times there has been a tendency to treat genre as "patterns of human experience" and to understand it as a social action (2003: 270). She further says that "the recent conception of genre as a dynamic and semiotic construct illustrates how to unify form and content, place text within context, balance process and product, and acknowledge the role of both the individual and social" (ibid). Devitt asserts that genre is a nexus of situation, culture, and other genres which have an impact on the actions of writers and readers. She suggests that "[g]enre allows us to particularize context while generalizing individual action" (2004:30). Proposing six principles for genre in social setting she says, "a genre reflects, constructs and reinforces the values, epistemology, and power relationships of the group from which it developed and for which it functions"(2004: 63-64). Attempting to define genre Carolyn Miller says, "A rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of the discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" (1984: 151). For Miller genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigencies. The private intention of the writer is connected with the public (reader) acceptance through rhetorical devices. Hence genre can also be a mental construct, a code that leads to active, often

purposeful reading and writing. Appropriating Miller's idea of genre as a social action Charles Bazerman says,

> A genre provides a writer with a way of formulating responses in certain circumstances and a reader a way of recognizing the kinds of message being transmitted. A genre is a social construct that regularizes communication, interactions and relations. Thus the formal features shared by the corpus of texts in a genre and by which we usually recognize a text's inclusion in a genre are the linguistic/symbolic solution to a problem in social interaction (1988: 62).

The notions of genre and narrative are central to all forms of literature and both are means by which the world of human experience can be reconstructed, rearranged and re-imagined. However, genres are not stable and fixed despite the classification and categorization based on form and content and the mode of presentation of human experiences. Genres are not water tight compartments. In today's literature one often notices frequent crossing of genre boundaries and mixing and merging of different genres. This has made genres more interesting and exciting. According to David Russell, genres emerge, develop and change as they are used by writers and readers to "operationalize the same recurring, typified actions of an activity system" (1997: 518). The postmodern phenomenon has given liberty to the writer to experiment with new kinds of genres and the writers have been successfully exploring all possible avenues to create and recreate genres. Tzvetan Todorov maintains, "New genres quite simply come from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination" (1990: 15). Fredric Jameson says that genre has a more pragmatic function in that it is one of the ways writers try to ensure that their text is received and read appropriately (1981). Understanding the difficulty to define genre, Alastair Fowler observes, "Genres at all levels are positively resistant to definition." (1982: 23). He further observes, "Every literary work changes the genre

it relates to [...] consequently, all genres are continuously undergoing metamorphosis" (ibid).

Throughout the Renaissance and most of the 18th century the recognized genres were popularly thought to be fixed literary types. The neoclassic critics insisted that each kind must remain "pure". They proposed rules regarding specified subject matter, structure, style and emotional effect of each genre. Genres at that time were ranked in hierarchy----ranging from epic and tragedy at the top to the pastoral, short lyric epigram and other types taken to be minor genres at the bottom. The emergence of new literary types in the 18th century such as the novel and the poem that combined natural description, philosophy and narrative helped weaken confidence in the fixity and stability of genres.

Since the 1950s genre theory has been revived by some critical theorists, although on varied principles of classification. Structuralist critics conceive genre as a set of constitutive conventions and codes, altering from age to age, but shared by a kind of implicit contract between the writer and the reader. These codes make the writing of a particular literary text possible. However, postmodern and postcolonial literary works have seen the transformation of genres in the hands of different writers. Genres boundaries have been transgressed by bringing in new insights and scope by fusing facts, fiction, history, biography and autobiography. In his "History and Genre" Ralph Cohen hints at the difficulty of assigning a text to a particular genre. He says, "Since the purposes of critics who establish genres vary, it is self-evident that the same texts can belong to different groupings of genres and serve different generic purposes" (1986: 204). A genre is always subject to change by the new text it generates and by each new reading of the texts. Hence genres are constantly redefined, revivified, and transformed intertextually by their literary and cultural contexts to serve the purpose of the writers and critics. Transgression of genre boundaries has empowered writers to experiment with the new narrative mode. Especially, the self-reflexivity of women writers creates a new mode of writing as they search for an alternative world order by transgressing and transforming the traditional mode of writing. Women writers with a feminist concern have been experimenting with new genres. Mixing and merging of genres

and stepping out the conventional genre boundaries allow them to enjoy a certain kind of freedom to articulate the desire of their own.

The French feminists started discussing *l'ecriture feminine* as Mother Tongue to express a unique female consciousness and a feminine tradition in literature--- as it celebrates an intuitive female approach in the interpretation of women's texts. Representing "female sexual morphology" *l'ecriture feminine* sought a way of writing which literally embodied the female, thereby fighting the "subordinating, linear style of classification or distinction." Feminist criticism points out the fictions of the male imagination as not conforming or as conforming too painfully, to the reality of women's lives in the world.

Gynocriticism developed shoulder to shoulder with the Female Aesthetic that believed that women's literature lay as the central concern for feminist criticism, but rejected the concept of an essential female identity and style. Showalter in the late 1970s invented the term Gynocritics that comprehensively suggests the multiple possibilities of reading the world view "as a woman". Gynocriticism is a criticism which concerns itself with the development of a specifically female framework for dealing with works written by women, in all aspects of their production, motivation, analysis and interpretation, and in all literary forms including journals and letters. In her own words, it is a programme to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adopt male models and theory (1979).

In *A Literature of Their Own*, which is considered to be a feminist primer, Showalter says that writing as a production process involves a collective engagement with the culture industry. She outlines a literary history of women writers and produces a history which shows the configuration of their material, psychological and ideological determinants; and thus promotes both a feminist critique, which is concerned with women readers and a "gynocritic" which is concerned with women writers (Selden: 1997: 135). What emerges is a picture of a multitude of women ---diligent, energetic, resourceful, and undaunted by tremendous disadvantages---- struggling to overcome their historical circumstances, seizing and creating opportunities to educate themselves, to achieve economic

independence and to write their own stories, in short to claim their right to be authors. Showalter advances the argument that women have constituted a subculture within the framework of a larger society, to be unified by values, conventions, experiences and behaviour impinging on each individual. Through her research on British novelists Showalter shows that "a special female self-awareness" distinguishes the literature written by women from that written by men. The self-awareness/realization of women writers led them to deviate from the traditional genre classifications while writing feminist texts. Uttering the female discontent women writers pave the way for genre experimentations and explorations, as blurring the genre boundaries become empowering for them.

Canadian writers and critics adopt "gynocriticism" to the indeterminate flowing structures of a multicultural society. Barbara Godard in her anthology, *Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women's Writing* (1986) examines the cultural political contents of feminism while tracing Canada's emergent self-definition. She further starts the procedure of enquiry by which contemporary feminism in academic circles grounded in theories of textuality. This is especially true of the theories of reading developed by Canadian feminists. Linda Hutcheon's critical essays show her formulation that the reader must work diligently towards decoding the author's text for it is equally a "game of the imagination". She further argues that the creative and critical act is simultaneously enacted and the reader, the writer and the critic become one composite identity. Hutcheon's formulations offer opportunities to Canadian women writers to create new genres and to experiment with a new mode of telling their stories and writing literary criticism as well.

Most of the Canadian stories of self-hood are interwoven with the fact of the new world and the lives of significant others. Many Canadian women writers of fiction have presented complex images of women as powerful entities. Canadian women writers consequently challenge the traditional stereotyping of woman. In more recent works, instead of setting up a system of binary oppositions, they explore the intensely subjective and fantastical. It is an acknowledgement of the fact that the feminine experience transcends categorizations. They emphasize the wilderness within enclosures, the fantasy within reality. Canadian literature witnessed in the

1970s and 1980s more female writers coming to the foreground and demanding more attention. They subverted the traditional conventions of fiction, making it more self-reflexive and adopting feminist and parodic modes Narrative forms became experimental and playful. In Canada, female writers work within a more pronounced tradition of female authorship.

Considering the socio-cultural constraints, patriarchal norms and values that women internalized, the very effort to express women's experiences and feelings in writing makes a history. Helene Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1974) is a celebrated manifesto of women's writing which asks women to put their bodies into their writing. This act of putting the women's body into the text has appealed to women writers to create genres of their own. Cixous appeals, "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth"(1981). Cixous suggests that laughter, sex (if not policed by patriarchal heterosexuality), and writing may have liberating effects. Knowing well that writing usually serves the consolidation of patriarchal power, Cixous proposes *ecriture feminine*, that is a feminine or female writing which will escape the restrictions imposed by "the phallocratic system", and will generate more powerful genres.

Female literary studies focus not only on female themes, genres, and styles, but also on the origins and development of larger female traditions. Writings traditionally done by women were like letters, diaries, journals and memoirs, which were considered to be non-literary in nature and so harmless. Feminist criticism has rediscovered forgotten female authors, has rehabilitated ignored ones and in its effort to let women speak for themselves has unearthed much writing of a personal nature, such as letters, travel journals, and diaries that have contributed to a redefinition and expansion of the literary field. Feminism has expanded the canon and has rehabilitated such forgotten genres as the sentimental domestic novels and within the larger literary tradition it has constructed a dynamic canon of writing by women.

Since the mid 1960's women writers, drawing on their personal experiences, have increasingly brought female sexuality, female anguish, childbirth, mothering, rape, and other especially female themes into their work. The genres that are

explored for self hood are---- the public genres of the novel, poetry, travel literature, memoirs and contemporary historical and geographic discourses as well as the private genres of the letter, the diary, and the personal travel journal. Adrienne Rich's concept of "reading as revision", the desire to reveal the unconscious assumptions about gender with which previous generations of readers and critics have read women authors, transcends methodological differences among feminist critics. It is generally assumed that prior to 1700 women's writing lacked significance in the overall scheme of women's writing. The period before 1700 was called the dark ages of women's imagination. Before the Restoration women were exiled into "private and informal literary modes like letters and journals". Bridget Hill defines pre-Restoration literary activity by women as a "private expression of their thoughts in spiritual diaries, letters and poetry" (Ezell: 1993: 33). Jane Spencer in her book *The Rise of the Woman Novelist from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (1986) argues that the eighteenth century saw the rise of a new literary life for women. The period from 1680 to 1730 witnessed the creation of a plethora of women's fiction that has been ignored or dismissed by the historians and literary critics. Women from different backgrounds, different regions, and with different concerns published well acclaimed novels by the end of the 1700. But Ian Watt, in his epoch making book *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957) made only cursory reference to Jane Austen and Fanny Burney ignoring the other women writers. Many critics, in their critical essays classify women's fiction from 1680-1730 as the so called "amatory fiction". The expression "amatory fiction" apparently implies eroticism, but a deeper examination shows the inequity of treating female writers in comparison with male writers at that time. The common ground of the "amatory fiction" of 1680-1730 was the concern for female subjectivity and psychology, expression of female desire as well as social ethics rather than physical desire and love. Aphra Behn and Eliza Heywood were typically concerned with such themes of female subjectivity. Fiction as a favoured genre of women writers has travelled long to reach the postmodern, and postcolonial phase to articulate the desire of women in different modes.

II

A given genre may have a conventional or an intrinsic significance. Many things were said about women's writing. It was said that it was weak, vapid and pastel. It was too subjective, solipsistic, narcissistic, autobiographical and confessional. It was also argued that women lacked imagination and the power of invention and could only copy from their own (unimportant) lives and their own (limited, subjective) reality. They lack the power to speak in other voices, to introspect philosophically and intellectually on grand subjects. And that is why their writings were limited in scope, and were petty, domestic and trivial. The clue to the patchy nature of the feminine literary tradition, as contrasted with the male tradition, lies in social history. The femininity of writing associated with disorder and looseness, instead of the order and tightness in men's mode of writing, may be indicative of the informal approach set in motion by the constant exposure of women to homely chats and grandmother's tales. It has been alleged that women cannot write about difficult subjects as they mostly write about their individual experiences of oppression which is considered to be too trivial and insignificant.

Aritha van Herk dismantles this concept with a lot of challenging ideas as every time she frequently experiments with new types of genre which is a liberating experience for her. She experiments in novel writing with her first novel *Judith*. *Judith* is a story of female empowerment presented through the re-inscription of an old myth. The old Circe myth is told in a new a manner to attribute modern significance to the stories of women. Usually the myths are not questioned; a myth remains a myth with a lot of inherent implications open to reinterpretation. In *Judith* van Herk reverses the myth by turning the pigs to the symbolic presence of human being. She brings Freudian Oedipus complex into the story only to dismantle the myth of it. Judith, the female protagonist asserts her autonomy after the death of her father. She begins to re-live her life after attaining full freedom. While writing the novel van Herk brings in new insights into the Biblical and mythical stories.

Writing was largely considered to be a male preserve, as it was an area of public focus, and women who invaded it felt guilty or made to feel guilty of entering into a forbidden domain. So, women wanted to be like a man or copy man, while writing to gain visibility. History itself is the story of the male line, full of records of deeds and dreams of men. It tells little about the position of women through the ages. The women's movements in the early and mid-seventies generated a grand fermentation of ideas, exuberance in writing, a joy in uncovering and breaking taboos and a willingness to explore new channels of thought and feeling. Aritha van Herk represents that trend while projecting feminist cause, keeping in mind her ethnic, immigrant, and minority position. Eventually, many things happened in the field of women's writing. Language was being re-shaped to articulate female discontent and to rewrite everything from women's point of view. Almost all the women writers strongly feel that the English language has been heavily inflected by patriarchal world-views, leaving no room for the female world view. It is said that patriarchal order silenced women in the realm of literary language, and trivialized and marginalized them in the area of common speech. So, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that common speech has long been the particular domain of women, as the term "mother tongue" suggests. Contemporary women are not "necessarily alienated" from language as a whole. But prefeminist "mothers"/women were angry and felt humiliated at their exclusion from the literary language. It is indisputable that contemporary women are still marked, and in some ways marred by the traumatic experiences of previous generation of "literary mothers/foremothers". Marking this discrimination Aritha van Herk has coined a term, "erectocentric imagination" and argues that it is still alive and living in the Academy and Publishing Houses as well as in the locker room in Canada. Literary language, derived from classical models was the exclusive preserve of men as it is seen that in most western countries women were rarely given any opportunity to learn the classics. Some language usages have, indeed, been the domain of man. The need to change language was emphasized by Luce Irigaray. She maintains: "if we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again" (1977: 205). Even the need to change the

language demands exploration of the genres. Van Herk has experimented with the change of language by giving different connotation to the same language. This is evident in *No Fixed Address* where instead of killing Arachne, she makes her disappear with her Mercedes car in the wilderness. The act of disappearance may be substituted for death. But she does not state that explicitly and provokes the reader to think about the act of diffidence in the form of disappearance. She makes Arachne and J.L adept in using the typical masculine expressions and language. By doing that again she enters into a male domain.

In *No Fixed Address*, she alters the tradition of picaresque hero. Karin Beeler writes in the introduction, "for van Herk, the picara, or female rogue, is a free spirit who defies the traditional restrictions placed on women who have often been housebound"(1998: iii). This genre experimentation helps van Herk to portray Arachne as a rebel, who embodying the freedom of the roads and occupation, overturns patriarchal values. Van Herk makes Arachne cross all boundaries: "there was nothing she could do about her difference, nothing to do but exploit it, call attention to the fact that she was crossing every boundary. It was a way of declaring herself of drawing a line. She knew where she stood. Outside" (NFA: 116). Arachne confesses to Thomas, "I can not fit into your family. I'm a freak. I can't dress right, I can't talk right, I can't eat right. Even my work is wrong. I didn't go to college, I barely got out of high school" (NFA: 109). Similar experimentation in genre is noticed in her last novel *Restlessness*. Dorcas wanders through different parts of the world and admits, "Oh I am a delivery slave. But I'm a picara too, traveling for the sheer hunger of movement, traveling in order to escape my essential laziness. The picaresque tradition historically argues for travel as a self-conscious activity, metadestinational, wickedly aware that it seeks its own extinction" (R: 92). What makes van Herk's genre experimentation more interesting is that it is intertextual. This intertextuality helps to develop a unified theme to explore feminism and writing. She intertextualizes restlessness, homesickness, the diasporic feelings, obsession with place, graveyard, her preoccupation with writing, and feminist concerns. She frequently refers to homesickness, a desire to be home. She writes in PFFE, "where is home?"(71), and gives an answer, "home is a movement, a quick

tug at itself and it packs up. Call yourself a taxi and consult a map. A blur" (ibid: 69). Even J.L. in TPT is homesick. She says, "I want to go home. I want to get out of this plagued camp, I want to go home to Deborah and the men I can predict. I'm tired of being weighed and watched and judged and found wanting every minute of the day. I thought I could be alone here. Instead, I find I'm less alone than I've ever been" (TTP: 106). This search for home is also found in *Restlessness*. The restless Dorcas longing for a home says, "I want to stay home"(R: 81). Dorcas is so possessive about home that she does not want to die at home. She says, "I don't want to make my home a death house" (R: 158). Even when at home a woman may be restless. In PFFE this restlessness is seen as "an historic restlessness" (68) that "RESTLESSNESS SETTLES on the heart like a dust..." (R: 34).

One finds the intertextual negotiations of *Anna Karenina* in PFFE and Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* in IVI. She talks about how Wolf has recreated Cassandra by shifting from the death position (Homer's) to the "speaking" position (Cassandra's):

> Every writer knows of the suspicions Cassandra arouses; she is, after all, not the author/bard, but a character in the epic, and a grossly implicated, or shall we say simply unreliable, character, at that. But while archaeology may be able to inform us that the Trojans died, it is Cassandra who assures us that they live, Cassandra whose speaking surpasses the preoccupations of the poet measuring himself (again and again) against death. Even though she dies (of course) and will die again (past the end of Wolf's fiction): is dying always, even as she speaks the version that no one hears, that no one will believe. They are all listening to Homer. And Homer was your basic realist, not to mention that little streak of policeman he exhibited. Which no writer should forgive (IVI: 197).

Wolf's feminist re-creation of *Cassandra* that subverts the old story resembles van Herk's re-reading of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. The eager wish to dismantle

patriarchy appears in van Herk's fictional as well as critical texts. Writing about the status and values of a woman's work she says:

> ---inside the house is only women's work, arrangements of domesticity. No matter what you do "outside," inside is always women's work, invisible it seems to the patriarchy's great lie: within the family women do not work. That dangerous source of revolution will the moment when work recognizes itself and refuses to be differentiated, when delight and purpose collide, and escape rides the imagination (IVI: 169).

All her heroines are disturbed by this kind of stereotypical division of works, where menial works are skillfully done by women though "nobody teaches them". A woman simply internalizes the patriarchal values and norms, "the strangely morbid internalization of dutiful daughter/sister" (IVI: 162), and the moment she realizes and starts questioning, the trouble begins.

She introduces a new binary, muscle/tongue to replace the "dishes" which is the hallmark for women. She asks the women to fight against gender discrimination with this new binary, "this is a new binary: muscle and tongue; tongue and muscle. In old days, there was only muscle, and that was someone else's, a man's. Muscles were off limits, off duty for women" (IVI: 164). Asking them to do away with the 'dishes' she says:

> Muscle and tongue, stretching themselves into new strength, and maybe her muscles aren't as good as his, but her tongue is better, she knows that. Tongue the most flexible muscle. Replacing the dishes (IVI: 165).

Van Herk is keen on using this "flexible muscle" as a more appropriate tool for women to speak, and to protest. In FT she refers to tongue that is not frozen, enabling women to speak. Her criticism is produced out of this "flexible muscle". She criticizes the male worldview, and the stereotypical attitude of men towards

women. The poet whom Arachne and Thena happen to meet, writes poem on women. For him women are

> Fauns, angels, gold, waterfalls, rice, birds, windows, daydreams, trumpets, jewels, knives, caves, fortresses, bridges, accordions, cookies, chalk, teeth, can openers, grasshoppers, hourglasses, idols, bread, lagoons, magnets, lighting, meadows, mountains, motorcycles, oracles, ninnies, songs, umbrellas, volumes tomes, they are the penultimate muse. (NFA: 163).

And he asks, "How did you like my poetry?" Thena says, "It's typical. Masculine view of the world" (NFA: 163).

Women are even trivialized while musing. They can be anything under the sun except a woman of flesh and blood with her desire. So van Herk's female protagonists revolt to get their equal share in this world. Judith, Arachne and J.L. are conscious women, making their choices and living up to their expectations.

Aritha van Herk has been playing with language by manipulating and changing the usage to make it different from man's language. It is seen that she uses the same language in a different way to connote different meanings with a feminist implication. She does not talk about Dorcas desiring to commit suicide despite her irresistible restlessness in her novel *Restlessness*. Dorcas is a courier who travels throughout the world to deliver valuable items:

> I've spent my life as a working tourist, expected by occupation to travel, expected to shift between borders and currencies as effortlessly as the birds that fly above. It's my job to travel, and I'm required to travel well (R: 16).... I have tried, tried and tried. And trying, I discovered I was infected with a terrible suspicion of myself and my inability to stay still, my dreadful insomnia of place (R: 17).

Aritha van Herk makes Dorcas hire an assassin to get killed, which seems so unnatural. Dorcas says, "I have had to resort to hiring someone, someone who, for a modest fee, will commit a modest act in a modest city" (R: 18). But she does it with a motive to give a new language to her female protagonist to articulate the desire for freedom through death. Dorcas chooses Calgary to die: "A perfect place to die. A city refusing to happen, a city that almost disappeared before it appeared, nagged into existence by the Mounted Police and the railway, the joint of the Bow and the Elbow. Brash, snuff-chewing, toe-scuffing Calgary"(R: 158-59). To express such unfamiliar and strange desire van Herk explores the genre of fiction by using postmodern technique of disjointed narrative. The narrator moves through the different places that Dorcas visited as a courier, explaining the history, characteristics, and the spirit of the places, and making critical comments. Moreover the rendezvous of Dorcas and her assassin Derrick Atman through the city of Calgary on that particular night of her "planned assassin" reveals the anxiety and worries of Dorcas. After so much of contemplation, argument, and bargaining, about carrying her killing, nothing happens as the novel comes to an end with a question: "Is DEATH A happy ending" (R: 193)? At the heart of the novel is the desire that comes to terms with the disillusionment of the world that haunts the women because women do not want to live a substanceless and meaningless life.

Aritha van Herk's critical works, *In Visible Ink Crypto-frictions* and *A Frozen Tongue* are also equally remarkable for exploration and experimentation of genres. IVI reflects largely on women and writing. She writes,

> I always knew my female body had no text, I always knew that words were problematic, inappropriate if not downright dangerous, innately forbidden to me as a woman. The language I grew up within, that I struggle to think and write within, is: Marian Engel: "indubitably male" (IVI: 35).

.....

> And I am up to my neck in it, this shitty, sexy language, shaped and developed by a patriarchal frame of reference, excluding me and all women, a male m(y)nefield of difficulties, words capable of inflicting so much pain, and also so much pleasure (IVI: 129).

She is obsessed with the language and the tricks involved with it. She is very sensitive to the issues of language, gender and race. She never forgets her Dutch origin and always juggles to cope with this duality of language and identity. She incorporates a lot of Dutch words and images in her novels. Particularly in *Restlessness* and *In Visible Ink* she writes even many passages in the Dutch language. She often declares herself as a writer and a feminist. She maintains:

> I am a writer:
>
> I try to live and work as feminist and writer, writer and feminist
>
> What I expect, yearn for, from my writing/women's writing is an articulation of a secret and uninvented language:
>
> I want to dare to inscribe my body on the page.
>
> I want my characters to speak for themselves rather than to speak some doublespeak version of acceptable feminine thought and behaviour.
>
> I want to trouble the reader—to upset, annoy, confuse; to make the reader react to the unexpected, the unpredictable, the amoral, the political.
>
> I want to explode writing as prescription, as a code for the proper behaviour of good little girls.

> I want writing to speak to the reading, articulate woman, make demands on her, refuse to let her sink into a doughy sludge of porridge (IVI: 131).

She was terribly angry and annoyed by the comment of the one of her university professors on women writers. Van Herk quotes him, ""Women", He sneered. "They all write out of their viscera. They never tackle great subjects like war and peace. That's why their writing will never amount to anything"" (IVI: 130). This bitterness and annoyance is intertextualized in *Places Far From Ellesmere.* She writes:

> "Take *War and Peace*," suggests Rudy Wiebe. He would, having once insisted that the reason women will never be GREAT writers is because they do not set themselves great subjects. "Like what?" you asked him then, furious, offended. "Like war and peace," he said in his Yahweh voice. "Women write only out of their viscera." The word viscera in his mouth scornful and repellent, plump with blood and bread. Since then you've learned the viscera of men larger and more dangerous, hidden as they are in an inflated sense of themselves centering the subject of greatness. War and peace exactly what you wish to leave behind in lower Canada. But you take *Anna Karenin* (PFFE: 80-81).

In this critical work she acknowledges that no form of writing can stay apart from other writings and the writers and readers friction each other. In this crypto-friction she brings a lot of intertextual references to substantiate her arguments on genre, fiction, male writers, feminist writers and critics, diasporic feelings, ethnic assertion, language and above all feminism. It combines fiction, literary criticism and autobiography.

A Frozen Tongue is described as a ficto-criticism by van Herk. Here she tries to fictionalize criticism. She uses the term ficto-criticism to refer to the new form of critical writing that involves imaginative/fictive responses to the critical object and alternative relationships between writer, artist and audiences. Since language is central to all her writing, she brings forth language again in this ficto-criticism. She writes, "Language is the ultimate arbiter... Language by naming a place, gives it life, existence" (FT: 25). Being very sensitive to her ethnic (Dutch) background she writes, "Some people would say it is only a matter of adapting to a new environment or adjusting to custom of learning a language. I maintain that it is much more profound, a displacement so far-reaching that it only vanishes after several generations". (FT: 46). The things which she did not put in the utopian framework of her novel while articulating female desire find expression in her critical works. She claims that tongues are never frozen, tongues can speak. This shows her obsession with language play and at the same time her constant consciousness of being displaced, being de-rooted. The constant blurring of genre exemplifies this fact of her life----shifting, moving, negotiating, confronting all the time.

Feminist reading/writing implies narratives showing how women as spectators and partners view each historical incident and change. Territory which was once claimed as the writing preserve of men was gradually encroached upon by women proving their worth in the territory of writing. The unsaid was said in a bold and powerful way to make them visible in the literary arena. Forms became more fluid to accommodate multiple experiences of women. Genres were no longer locked in boxes and women writers started creating and redefining genres according to their need to articulate. That is why there was vitality and urgency in writing by women. A whole new story has to be told with fragments, with disruptions, and with self-conscious and critical reflections. A form has to be evolved which is both fragmentary and coherent and also creative and critical. Its self-reflexivity breaking through reification moves towards a fragmented whole. Otherization is done by the historical separation of the female world, understood in the context of values and practices produced by colonialism, imperialism and immediately palpable racism.

That is why all story-telling, self-expression and self-reification get more and more closely integrated.

Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* reflects on the process of storyfying histories. *Places far From Ellesmere* focuses on the processes of un/reading. It challenges fixed categories of reality, fiction, genre, gender, sexuality and social discourse and shows how they determine representation of women in history and literature. Every unreading becomes a new reading, every un-telling a new telling. To create a space for women, acts of re-reading and search for alternative, self-representation becomes very essential. For that purpose she has created a new genre in PFFE, by combining geography and fiction, calling it "geografictione". To make geography, fiction, and gender more integrated, she divides PFFE into four divisions, and each division is named after four famous places of Canada-----Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary and Ellesmere. These places are fictionalized with their spatial attributes---Edberg, coppice of desire and return, Edmonton, long division, Calgary, this growing graveyard, and Ellesmere, woman as island. She writes in the Edberg section, "Edberg poised on a short, blunt-nosed hill up from the square grid of section lines, of homesteaded homesteaders already swinging through their fourth or fifth or sixth (who's counting?) generations, settlement in the plowed-to-dust bones and maybe-grandfathers who would utter if they remembered a different vowel, hailing themselves from restless settlers trickled out over the northwest like sand from a fist" (PFFE: 13). She also writes "Edberg: this place, this village and its environs. A fiction of geography/geography of fiction: coming together in people and landscape and the harboured designations fickle memory. Invented: textual: un/read: the hieroglyphic secrets of the past" (PFFE: 40). In her exploration of "geografictione" van Herk attempts to write places where Edberg, its geography becomes a text, a fiction. So the reader's task is to invent the textuality of Edberg in its essence to find new meanings. She further writes about Edmonton by bringing in the history of The Hudson's Bay Company: "Edmonton is a reading, an act of text, an open book. Beyond the door it crouches in lanes of leaves, and walking through its crackle you dream fire, river water, frozen breath, summerfallow, never suspicioning that you will turn south, eventually, to the

beautifully groomed cemetery lawns of Calgary" (PFFE: 47). Calgary is portrayed as a "place to run away from, although you claim to have run to it. And everyone pretends to be from somewhere else, not here, no babies born in this city except reluctantly, extracted from their mother's bodies in a storm of protest" (PFFE: 72). Arriving at the last section the narrator says, "your wanderings have passed: explorations on site, a site through which to read, to welcome death, early or late" (PFFE: 141). By describing various places with their characteristics, she seems to have written the biography of the places. She humanizes all these places and makes them participate in the human discourse. She writes about her strong sense of belonging, shows her rootedness, and attachment to the places showing how geography influences human consciousness. She writes, "Edberg has carved itself into the cleft above your mouth. Your nose has an Edberg slope to it, your eyes Edberg's hills. This is your self-geography, the way you were discovered/uncovered in Edberg's reading of your fiction" (PFFE: 36-37). She provides the physical description of Edmonton, and characterizes Calgary and Edmonton,

> If Calgary is famous for its endless and potent light, Edmonton is a city that you learned best through its darkness, never going to bed until dawn streaked five-thirty, and then sleeping through the day. Edmonton: still the darkness of winter and of buildings, of enclosured cold (PFFE: 52-53).

The novel appears to be a travelogue with a lively and thorough description of the places, exciting a traveller's desire. In some parts it becomes a traveller's guide, giving them the clues about different locations, streets, etc. She writes, "As for pleasure, beyond the lost Turkish baths, the restaurants have always been Chinese; the theatres (the Dreamland, the Empire, the Lyric, the Orpheum, the Princess, the Starland) amalgamated filmic frames: the Orchestras and Bands (the Calgary Coloured Quartette) play on. Pleasure domes increase" (PFFE: 64). Travelling is an exploration of sites. So, writing is also an exploration of the possibility of means to capture the experiences in language. Writing becomes an exploration in language.

At times PFFE reveals her diasporic feelings and experiences as they never leave her consciousness. She writes, "you weren't related to anyone: except your three brothers your sister. That was plenty. And as for Dutch names, van Herk was the only one: still is/ still there/ still Dutch. Too bad, you always wanted to be a Sharp or a Smith, a Brown or a Buch" (PFFE: 22). In IVI, she creates a story out of the history of the compulsion that forces one to get displaced from one's root and culture.

> Holland at the end of the Second World War was a deeply stricken and rubbled country. The economy was in ruins, industry was poor, the country was over-populated and congested and opportunities for growth and development very limited. Europe was engaged in a cold war; those who had survived the worst of the occupation dreaded another conflagration. Increasing bureaucracy and government interference made them question their actual freedom: every gesture any citizen made required a permit or at least permission. The Netherland's trade was nil, it lost its major colony (Indonesia) in 1945, and its prospects as an economic power were not good. Prospective immigrants, most of whom were farmers, minded these things a great deal. They wanted to be their own masters, to own their land, and to live without anxiety or interference. They were, they continue to claim, concerned about the future of their children, for whom they wanted every opportunity. In short they were ready to be seduced, or at least the story will claim that they were looking for an alternative to what their war-ravaged country and its "creeping socialism" had to

> offer. The idea of emigration cites these reasons for its own appearance, again and again, as a prototype of the immigrant dream: to find a land of opportunity, unencumbered by a historical moat, where hard work is rewarded by success (IVI: 179).

The feeling of belonging, yet not truly belonging, to Canada, her new home looms large in her works. She adapts comfortably to the Canadian literary conventions and searches for an identity as the other Canadians do. She explores Canadian north, Arctic space, prairie fiction, and Canadian west in her literary works from a feminist point of view. While she is critical about Prairie fiction she says: "Women need be spies here, women need be terrorists. Willing to use the tools at hand" (IVI: 85). Further exploration of women and prairie fiction leads her to discover new aspects of male domination. She says, "I look for the fiction of prairie and I meet the prairie of fiction: male: W O Mitchell, E P Grove, Sinclair Ross, Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch. This great extortionate hoaxes, seductive and noisome" (ibid: 86). She is convinced that "the only way to read "prairie" is to unread "prairie" having external genitals, or to be more precise, inside-out genitals (ibid: 87).

Through the exploration of geografictione in PFFE Aritha van Herk articulates her own desire to be different, and to write differently, not adhering to fixed genre norms. Different stories overlap here. Stories are historicized, criticism is fictionalized, history and geography are fictionalized, and even landscape is fictionalized. The writer's self is fictionalized and readers are included to turn to the characters, making them part of the story as well as the story telling. While writing about the issue of the freedom of women, she criticizes Tolstoy for his arrogance and for making Anna a fallen woman because of her sexuality and for her desire for love. She writes, "This is the moral weight that Anna bears, that crushes her. Created by a man, written by a man, read by man, revised by man; now here on Ellesmere, you dare to set her free from the darkness of pages, her horrid shadow"(PFFE: 122). Though she is fictionalizing a woman's story she is critiquing male literature, male world view, and patriarchy. She writes about her life, makes herself a narrator, and a

critic in the novel, while fictionalizing the possibility of making Anna's life and destiny different.

So many things are happening at the same time----mixing and merging, transgressing and subverting, and re-reading and re-writing. All this makes this novel quite interesting and shows van Herk as a successful genre experimentalist with a feminist agenda. Her agenda is to address the women's oppression and the marginalized/trivialized status of women's life and literary representation. She invents her own genre by blurring the boundary of criticism and fiction to address the female issue. That is why her fiction becomes criticism and criticism fiction-like.

Women's historiography is the history about women---it is not the life history of the noble and the acclaimed. The intention of this historiography is to reveal the extent of participation of women in the fights for reforms in life. Traditional historiography uses a methodology that does not facilitate the study of women's space in society. According to this methodology man stands in the active position, the position of the doer in history. Women are mere subjects in a patriarchal society and they are either studied in comparison with men or portrayed as images of men. This is the tendency seen in the patriarchal historiography. The primary aim of women's historiography is to establish equality in historical enterprise. Historiography succeeds because it can visualize the religious, caste, race, and gender variants. Van Herk writes:

> When a woman declares herself a feminist, she becomes part of a tradition, a continuum, and a history, a powerful cacophony of voices and words. She breaks silence:
> She refuses to let language man-handle her.
> But to arrive at that moment, that identification, that epiphany. The writer, feminist. The feminist writer. An axe that splits the skull (IVI: 130).

She was led towards a pertinacious focus on writing. Van Herk's feminism, as she declares, is never far from her pen. She believes women's writing is an

articulation of a secret and uninvented language. She has introduced many critical concepts like mapping, ideas of crypto-frictions, buchaneers and fictioneers in *In Visible Ink* and frequently she moves between different genres. In fact, mapping as a metaphor invariably comes to her writing in different forms as does language. A map gives contour to the physicality of an object or a place and language maps the fictive landscape. For van Herk language is more than a tool. She uses language to articulate her "intellectual transgressions":

> I am anxious about writing, that I will always find words to articulate my intellectual transgressions, the ideas I circle and circle, watching and writing. I force the two together, write about my reading, read my writing, refuse to function without one or the other implicated in someway, even if only silently, secretly in my head. The conspiracy of bibliophilism. I book my world, I word all possible collisions and encounters, I am enslaved to language, and I enslave my experience to language. Visible ink (IVI: 4).

Van Herk illustrates the concept of crypto-friction which is full of allusions about the writer and the reader, about writing and reading the text. She writes,

> Reader, this amulet of the first and most final of all crypto-frictions is that one can be disappeared and re-written in a language beyond one's own. Herein resides the ultimate illusion of text: you are not reading me but writing, not me but yourself; you are not reading writing but being read, a live text in a languaging world (IVI: 10).

In the essay "Blurring Genres" of IVI, she intertextualizes different definitions of genre to build up her argument that however one tries one can not prevent genre transgression or transformation. She aptly contextualizes Tzvetan Todorv's genre

definition, "Todorov too assists: "Where do genres come from? Quite simply from other genres" (15)" (IVI: 18). Moreover, fictional text has always been encroaching on the critical text. Most interesting critics in Canada are, as Northrope Frye puts it, "authors and poets" first. She brings forth the concept of fictioneer, by saying that "the fictioneer is willing to recognize the existence of genre, its usefulness, its rules to write by" (ibid: 19). She further says:

> The fictioneer lives within a category, a biological species, a generic assignation. Prose, poetry, drama: a world in triplicate. A condition of being that the book must genre itself, must delineate its boundaries. But the rigid stratifications of canonical thought invite transgression, especially here, beyond the border of anywhere, in this generic of the post-partum, post-modern, post-colonial, post-patriarchal, post-mortem, and thus pre--. But that is a tantalizing unknown (ibid: 14).

She introduces the idea of buchaneer, after Hannike Buch, a ficto critic who is "every fictioneer's nightmare". A buchaneer blends and blurs the genres, and writes cryptically. A buchaneer asks the fictioneer not to choose conventions. Hannike Buch has become her own genre with the toughness and resilience that others, including Aritha van Herk lack. Buch writes ficto-criticism, cryptic and full of friction. Van Herk maintains, "Hannike Buch is your buchaneer of ficto-criticism, the double of you fictioneer, Aritha van Herk, who subscribes, most emphatically, or so she claims, to fiction. The fictioneer is willing to recognize the existence of genre, its usefulness, its rules to write by" (IVI: 19). She asserts:

> But Hannike Buch is out there, with her toughness and resilience; she is her own genre, she sets her own priorities. If she goes back to the beginning of this exegesis, she discovers, she has not even progressed past the footnotes lurking at the

> bottom of the page, under the text, behind all arguments (ibid: 34).

Through the imaginary conversation between a buchaneer and a fictioneer, ficto criticism is introduced. It says, "An aerobics class: the pelvic tilt. A reading of the body of the body of language. It is, dear fictioneer, a ficto-criticism, a necessary departure from genre and its expectations" (ibid: 23).

She acknowledges in *In Visible Ink* that no form of writing can stay categorically separate from another. Both writing and reading, reader and writer friction each other, desire the contamination of words. The borderline between fiction and criticism has been a point of convergence where fiction and criticism have assimilated each other's insights, producing a more invented kind of criticism and a new species of the novel of ideas. Mark Currie in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* says,

> If the defection from criticism to fiction represents some kind of vain aspiration on the part of the critic to be a fictional writer, there has been a reciprocal aspiration on the part of the novelists to assimilate the perspectives of criticism into the narrative process....A writer critic may personify the boundary between fiction and criticism, but a theoretical fiction has to be seen as a discourse which dramatizes that boundary or uses it as an energy source" (1998: 53).

As a fiction writer and critic van Herk explores texts, other bodies, other moments arising from the otherness of the writer in the uneasy position of a critic. Her writings become journeys through language and imagination, weaving together the realms of fiction, autobiography, poetry and criticism. One can trace the autobiographical references in the fictional work where she talks about her own life and situation including the diasporic feelings which have already been referred to. She was once a bush cook; she has the experience of adventuring in a geological camp. Her parents had farms, and she travels. These facts are fictionalized in her

work. Van Herk explores a new pattern of writing where she allows her characters to speak for themselves. Her strategy is to trouble the reader, to upset, annoy, confuse and make the reader react to the wrong, the unexpected, the unpredictable and amoral. She wants to explore writing as prescription, as a code for the proper behaviour of good little girls. She wants writing to speak to the reading, articulate woman, make demands on her, and refuse to let her sink into a doughy sludge of porridge. The freedom that feminism has given her led van Herk to write novels about Judith, Ja-el and Arachne, mythic women whose powerful and active stories have been dismissed or obscured and mis-read and demeaned. She also writes about Anna Karenina and Dorcas. Van Herk's endeavor is to re-inscribe their tremendously inspiring rebellions, pointing out the survival of their fragmented stories, and gesture towards the imperative presence of women within all mythologies. Every woman's story, though private, personal, and visceral, has importance for its anger, for its fierce and unrelenting rebellion. Van Herk loves that strength and nerve. That is why she wanted all her fictional women to survive, to conquer, to come out victorious, however unrealistic their ends may be.

CONCLUSION

> "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world".
>
> (Virginia Woolf: *Three Guineas*)

Of the many ways of understanding feminism, literature is merely one, but a significant one. Using biography and imagination, conjoining fact and fiction, indulging in linguistic play and literary crafting, feminist thinkers/writers become the visionaries of a better world, a world without gender discrimination and segregation. So van Herk writes, "that writing is an act of need: to make a mark, to say "I was here"" (IVI: 192). Feminism implies a commitment to change the social structure, so as to free women from all kinds of oppression across the world. To fulfill the global desire of women, feminism has been strategically working through feminist literary criticism and theory. It has been incorporating the insights gained from other social and cultural theories to hasten changes in the patriarchal world view. Feminist theorists are primarily concerned with representations of women in the literary texts. They try to relate those representations to the reality of female experiences and respond to issues relating to identity, autonomy and self. We can not think of separating literature from life as the artistic representation signifies the realities of life, and can suggest remedies and solutions to the problems of the world.

The desire of feminism is to change the situation where despite many waves of feminism women are still marginalized, oppressed, exploited, suppressed, dominated and discriminated against. Its desire is to look at the prevalent system from a new perspective, asserting that women are not inferior, not the "other" and men are not "the norm". It accepts biological determinism and differences, but continues to critique the essentialist view of the world. Denial, rejection, resistance, diffidence,

and subversion are some of the tools that a feminist applies to express her desire. The goal of feminism is to close the gender gap at all levels-----social, economic, political and intellectual. As Toril Moi maintains: "We must aim for a society in which we have ceased to categorize logic, conceptualization and rationality as 'masculine', not for one from which these virtues have been expelled altogether as 'unfeminine'" (1986: 220). And till then the decoding of the meaning of text and context must go on. Deconstruction and re-construction of text, structure, and life should go on ascribing to them new dimensions, meanings and visibility.

In her novels Aritha van Herk has shown the ways of articulating desire as she believes that feminism is also about articulating desire. Feminism expresses new yearnings to make women assert their values, rights and dues for making themselves visible and powerful. She says:

> Feminism as desire: May be a feminist because we expect so much of that desire: Expect feminism to solve everything, when we can only solve one small problem at a time: Which means that we should be allowed to be mediocre; which means that we should not blame our failings on other women; which means we should not patronize by accusing others of being patronizing. Feminism as a great glittering heaped up pile of possibilities (IVI: 135).

Van Herk has explored the "possibilities", and projected the possible and different directions for feminism while articulating somewhat unusual desire of women, not heard of earlier. Such desires are----- to become a breeder of pigs, a bush cook, a picara or rogue, an under garment sales woman, a bus driver, a rescuer of stranded fictional characters in male fictions, and a widely traveled courier. As a sensitive and alert feminist writer van Herk has deployed radical arguments in all her novels and critical works. In *No Fixed Address* van Herk presents Arachne as a picara, or a female rogue, as she believes that a picara or a female rogue is a free spirit who defies the traditional restrictions placed on the housebound women. While

making Arachne play the role of a picara or a female rogue, van Herk has articulated her own desire to deviate from the tradition of picaresque novel where usually the hero is a person of low social standing and his/her travels take him/her on a series of adventures. She emphasizes the possibility of creating one's own genre for articulating female desire. By assuming the role of a picara Arachne fulfils her desire to transgress the boundary set by patriarchy for women. Her friend Thena can not think of such transgression. As Thena was deserted by her husband she is forced to shoulder the responsibility of bringing up her daughters. She can not run away from her responsibilities as she has internalized the patriarchal values and lacks the courage to defy the institutionalized social roles. So she suffers and grumbles, but warns Arachne to be cautious. On the other hand, Arachne goes on making her web like the mythical figure Arachne as she drives through various places, catching the road jockeys, enjoying sex, bullying men, kidnapping men, and even murdering one. She is a liberated woman and makes her choice for living. Ultimately she disappears in the wilderness in search of greater freedom. She declines a fixed address and becomes a nomad who overtly uses her sexuality. Van Herk's strong conviction is that fixity may lead to women's oppression, subordination and marginalization. Refusing to mould herself to the expectation of Thomas's well-bred family, and settling down to wifehood and motherhood, Arachne goes against the expected conduct of a woman. Rather she validates her desire for total freedom by not becoming accountable to anyone, not even to Thomas, her Apocryphal lover. Van Herk subverts the patriarchy by asserting the female sexuality and a woman's autonomy.

She is also very much conscious about her immigrant status and deliberately affirms her hyphenated Canadian identity, a Dutch-Canadian in the postcolonial Canada. In the essay "Writing the Immigrant Self: Disguise and Damnation" she maintains:

> This *I* is not a historian or a sociologist but a novelist, a writer of fictions. This *I* is also the first Canadian-born child of post-Second World War Dutch immigrants to Canada, and

> the novel she has been trying to write for years is an immigrant novel, not so much about her own parents' particular experience but about emigration from the Netherlands and immigration to Canada as profound acts of displacement (IVI :173).

Van Herk uses a number of Dutch words in her novels and critical works without giving English equivalents or footnotes which perhaps imply that as a postcolonial writer she is asserting her Dutch origin, and ethnicity, bringing memory and nostalgia into her writings. In her novels and critical writings she gives voice to the immigrant experiences in a multicultural country like Canada. The eternal longing for the mother tongue and motherland is explicitly reflected in her last novel *Restlessness* and in the ficto criticism *In Visible Ink.* While narrating her state of restlessness to her assassin Derrick Atman, Dorcas says:

> Somehow I can't escape my own sense of fraudulence. I don't belong wherever I am, and I don't belong here". "Perhaps you should have returned to Holland with your parents". "Perhaps. My life would have been different". (*R*: 94).

Van Herk has used postcolonial concepts of the "other", "margin", "center", and "hybridity" to talk about female discontent. She has talked about the "otherization of woman" and "otherization of region" in her prairie fiction. As a novelist van Herk is aware of the East-West dualities: East is normally described as the "center" (of all activities) and West (with its wilderness) as the "margin". Hybridity is noticed in transfusing the Dutch words and Dutch images into her writing. Such hybridity is seen in many postcolonial Indian writers who have Englishized many Indian words, making them widely popular. Even van Herk has referred to Salman Rushdie's word "chutneyfication" in *In Visible Ink* and the Indian word *Mantra* in *Restlessness*. Not only that, she has explored the postcolonial literary practice of re-writing the past, re-writing the history, and rewriting the colonial experiences. At the same time, she goes on critiquing the position and

literary representation of women. Feminism and postcolonialism turn out to be fascinating, provocative and promising tools for van Herk to critique, re-read, re-write, re-visualize, re-contextualize, and re-name every institutionalized practice and subject. She has dealt with the issues of gender, race, and class. However, she has given priority to gender because the essence of selfhood of a woman is inherently linked to her gender.

Feminism aims at providing "woman centered" world views and versions. To be "woman centered" means to be critical about the issues of women's marginality, and oppression of patriarchy. It implies giving equal priority to women in all the discourses. As women make a move to the center from the marginal position they transform the conventional system. The desire to step out of the patriarchal system leads to a questioning of every known system of thought and critiquing of all assumptions, values, orders and definitions. According to Gerda Lerner to come out of patriarchy means "developing intellectual courage to stand alone, the courage to reach farther than our grasp, the courage to risk failure. Perhaps the greatest challenge to thinking women is the challenge to move from the desire for safety and approval to the most "unfeminine" quality of all -----that of intellectual arrogances, the supreme hubris which asserts to itself the right to reorder the world" (1986: 228).

Aritha van Herk has utilized geographical perspectives, socio-cultural aspects, literary tradition, linguistic play and psychological analysis to articulate new manifestations of a woman's desire. She has also shown how desire is connected to the structure of the female self. Van Herk has deconstructed and de-mythified the patriarchal notions and assumptions of the male world view. The precepts and codes advocated for women by patriarchy are overthrown as they seem to be sexist, biased, discriminatory and demeaning. At the same time, she has caused worries and anxieties by encroaching into the ghettoes of male territories, be it physical or metaphorical. Moving to the North and the Arctic space in search of autonomy and self-fulfillment, she has challenged patriarchy, and infringed the male territory. Geography has been deeply explored by van Herk to give a new perspective to feminism in her novels, especially in *Places Far From Ellesmere*. She has proved that women can create an alternative world for women, and geography provides that

wonderful scope as there are places away from patriarchy's influence, awaiting to be named and occupied. The absolutely blank Arctic space at Ellesmere induces van Herk to attribute new meaning to Anna Karenina of Tolstoy. She says,

> Free here of the graspings of most of [ ] man's impositions, his history or fiction or implacable des/scribement, [wo]men either real or invented. You can walk, sleep, read within this pristine novel, waiting to be read, pleasure yourself in its open spine. This geografictione, this Ellesmere. You have read farther than there are pages, travelled farther than there are fictions. You are seduced, a lost woman, reading from within the fiction of all lost/damned/condemned/free women. Knowing that this story, all that is written, can be un/read, uninscribed" (PFFE: 113).

Talking about the need to re-read or un-read the male fictions, she expresses the desire to rewrite/reconsider all those texts which damned women. She has started the process by retrieving *Anna Karenina* of Leo Tolstoy from patriarchal bondage and offering her the free island of Ellesmere to make a fresh beginning with a lot of freedom. This act of retrieving and resituating Anna is a subversive strategy to dismantle patriarchal literary conventions.

Van Herk is critical about the patriarchal practices of confining women to a stereotypical framework. Women have to please men with their good looks and propriety. They have to remain docile and submissive, never questioning and troubling them. Men have always exercised their physical strength and power to dominate women. However, van Herk has portrayed such strong women in her works of fiction who have the toughness and resilience to challenge the stereotyped norms. So she makes Judith discard all those things which made her a victim of gender discrimination and strive for freedom. J.L. enters the geological expedition camp with nine men to experience the northern adventure which is forbidden for women. J.L is confident of her ability to undergo all possible hazards in that camp,

and chooses to be away from the conventional life to enjoy much desired freedom in the wilderness of the Yukon mountain range. These are the strong women who disavow the typicality of women's life and try to break away from that tyrannical bondage to articulate their desire and chalk out their path of life.

Women are the architects of their own lives and destiny. They can change their oppressive situation by becoming self-conscious and aware, by critiquing everything and throwing away the patterns devised by patriarchy. Aritha van Herk has been successful in showing the road to freedom through her novels. To conclude I quote Dorcas who says:

> "That life will continue, that breathing will go on,
>
> year after year? Yes, I believe that" (R: 145).

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