

Throughout history, women were treated as sexual objects. Gauri Deshpande expresses about this position of woman in her marriage in her poem "Man and Woman".

That she could with such ease | Be slaved by your skilful hands
| Beggars heart and from Himalayan heights | Condescend to warm
your bed | Stiffer your manhood | And bear your spawn."

Further Gauri Deshpande in her poem "The Eclipse" says that a woman becomes a lonely being, that makes her identity which is thrust upon her forcibly:

When from the good fortune | Of smiles and caress | We move into the
inexplicable | Unintelligible darkness | Of sorrow, delay, departure,
suspicion (1-5).

She is also very much concerned about women's problems and very well depicts the urge of women to share their pains and pleasure with other women in her poem "The Female of the Species":

Sometimes you want to talk | About your love and despair | And the
ungratefulness of children | A man is no use whatever then .

While Gauri Deshpande frankly writes about sexuality and identity in her poems, Mamta Kalia speaks through ironical language about ordinaries as Rashmi Bajaj says " Her poem deals with frustrations of a woman's life in and outside the house, boredom of married life and chaos values in society". (Bajaj, 1995, p. 19) Like other women poets she also portrays her fear of losing her individuality and identity.

"I cook, I wash, | I bear, I rear, | I nag, I wag, | I sulk, I sag.... | ...I am no
more Mamta Kalia. (Anonymous 5-8, p.18)

Marriage for a man allows him progression and self- advancement. But for a woman it is virtually reduced to the status of a maid. Mamta Kalia complains of the effect of being a house-wife on her individuality and seems to be frustrated and dissatisfied. Her use of ironical language is considered as the only medium through which she can express the inner conflicts of a woman in her poem "They Made Love" who finds no pleasure and enjoyment in sex:

They made love | And ate sandwiches | And looked at each other's face-
Two empty cans (1-4)

All above mentioned modern Indian women poets have opened up their minds to manipulate the readers mind to understand the new woman world which they want them to see. Fulfilling Helen Cixous' assertion " bring women to writing from which they have been driven away..." (Cixous, 885) . Kamala Das', as Bruce King says " opened areas, in which previously forbidden or ignored emotions could be expressed in ways which reflect the true voice of feeling. She showed how an Indian woman poet could create a space for herself in the public world" p.50. (King , 1987, p.152). Adhering Kamala Das, the other poets Mamta Kalia, Gauri Deshpande and Sunita Jain have chosen a highly confessional tone for their poetry because it is the strongest outlet, as they felt, to give up vent to their pent-up feelings. As women writers they tend to raise the confessional trait to the level of a specific universal appeal because " the best confessional poetry is that which rises above subject matter to achieve some sort of victory over pain and defeat, poems which are glosses

on the triumph of life” (Rosenthal,1967,p35).Through their confessional mode of expression they tend to fulfill the suggestion of Cixous who asks the women to write about herself and about women, thereby she can bring other women to writing. “Everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman.”(Cixous,p.881) By making an adroit attempt of Helen Cixous' Écriture feminine in their poetry the above said Indian women poets establishes a new point of view about a woman's body through which the phallogocentric concepts and controls can be looked into and taken apart , not only in theory but also in practice.

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Women Reading Women in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*

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Abstract: In the novel *The Map of Love*, Ahdaf Soueif has portrayed a living picture of a society where women are reading women conquering the time and space boundary. Language is undoubtedly influenced by society and people moreover we can identify the differences of use of language forms. According to Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Surely the mind has a sex, mind learns their sex...The differences between traditional female preoccupations and roles and male ones make a difference in female writing." (35) Though society plays a part in building this language construct they still like to be conscious about gender of a writer or even a reader. Probably because of this taught and practiced construct of language use but it is true that when a women reads another women it is quite comprehensible which may not be true in the case of the opposite counterpart. This paper gives us the impression of such linguistic and emotional reading; rather I would say interpretations that have been used in the novel by Soueif, *The Map of Love*. This paper focuses on the power of understanding and comprehensibility of women towards other women and discusses the reason and the way it has been done through the use of language, feeling, generations and time. To get the answer it has focused on Culler's theory along with other prominent critics of the field that has worked behind this. It also talks about gendered reading and inherence kind of life incedent through generations.

Keywords: Gender, reading, identity, construct, inherence, parallelism, familiarity. .

Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* has focused on much aspect of life and living but the most appealing one probably is a feminist reading which is presented through the voice of the narrator and the writer's power of writing. There are generations of women and their voice which does not merely represent the life of these women rather the bonding between them. This is one of the unique qualities that have made the novel remarkable. However, the main focus of this paper is the distinction between "masculine" and "feminine" discourse. The male half of the binary pair has been privileged over its feminine counterpart with the effect of male superiority and female inferiority. In his *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Jonathan Culler (1982) addresses these issues and forms several interesting conclusions. Culler says about reading as a woman is: "to read as a woman is to avoid reading as a man, to identify the specific defenses and distortions of male readings and provide correctives" (54). While feminist critics have been able to identify and define masculine forms of discourse they have much more difficulty describing or defining feminine discourse. Many critics have described the gendered discourse. But we need to keep in mind that these are to some extent arbitrary and social construct not

biological. Culler (1982) writes "For a woman to read as a woman is not to repeat an identity or an experience that is given but to play a role she constructs with reference to her identity as a woman, which is also a construct..."(64). If one follows Jonathan Culler's suggestion and reads *The Map of Love* as a women that is resisting the tendency to read as a man. This feminine reading reveals a lot of feminine characteristics of the novel. Anna is a woman whose contribution to the materialization of the novel's flow is undeniable, and included her generations. There are two parts where we find two generations and through the lens of a theoretical perspective we see the development of the story and women in the story. We also see the feminist reading of texts in the novel where we get the impression of the critical reading and understanding of women towards other women. This is visible in the first paragraph of the novel: "fragments of a life lived a long, long time ago. Across a hundred years the women's voice speaks to her-so clearly that she cannot believe it is not possible to pick up her pen and answer." (4) The gap of time could not make a distance between these two women, one who lived hundred years ago and the one who is reading her feelings now-today. We also find the imaginative power of the women, Amal, who is reading the letters and diaries. This is evident in the following lines: After reading the line from the diary, "The child sleeps. Nur-al-Hayah: light of my life." (4) Amal could imagine the feelings and actions which tells us further the strong bond of these feeling and at the same time the reading through the lens of women and feeling from the heart of a woman: "Anna must have put aside her pen, Amal thinks, and looked down at the child pressed into her side: the face flushed with sleep, the mouth slightly open, a damp tendril of black hair clinging to the brow." (4)

Critics like Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Elleman and Kate Millett were among the first to reveal the literary history of women's images and to discuss the dominant stereotyped images of female fictional characters, the history of feminist criticism goes back hundreds of years in time. It can even be traced back to Aristotle's declaration that "The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities," and St. Thomas Aquinas's belief that woman is an "imperfect man." Culler (1982) writes that "women's experience, many feminist critics' claims, will lead them to value works differently from their male counterparts, who may regard the problems women characteristically encounter as of limited interest."(45) Consequently, in the patriarchal society, where women are dominated by male counterpart, writing is the only way left to women to assert individuality and autonomy. Excluded from many social, political and economic activities, women turned to writing. Neither it was not easy for Anna to let the emotion flow on the page nor was it for Amal and Isabel to reveal it and stand in front of another self who has lived hundred years ago, Anna. Ahdaf Soueif probably tried to express the condition of women through the words of a self created character, Anna and later Amal and Isabel. She is just one among the crowd of women who had something of importance to say in fiction. She probably wanted to say and show the best of feminine reading through his novel. As a female writer, Ahdaf soueif has a kind of expression that is different from that of

Anna, the main character of the novel. The significance of her contribution to the establishment of a family story lies in the fact that she is a woman and has seen the female identity as a continuous process of “becoming” and thus has reflected its flexibility. So we can see that the life circle is also reflecting on the women characters after a hundred years even. Female identity is represented as subject in process - a subject that is always in progressive motion. Culler (1982) notes that one strategy in the attempt to read as a woman is to “take an author's ideas seriously when . . . they wish to be taken seriously (47).” So, if we understand the intention of Soueif we would be able to interpret and see women characters aptly. Helen Cixous, who was influenced by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida, She argues that women's writings are essential to understand women desires and their demands. The reader cannot understand these demands without the use of feminine style of writing. She urges them to use their bodies, which defined them better than their phallogocentric writings that arise from masculine perspectives. She also urges women to call for their identities, because women were misrepresented in several works of male's writings. Hence, [we] need a real representation of women by women. She also adds that we need female critics to analyze women writings without the use of masculine approach to literature. Women somehow share similar difficulties around the world in their demand for rights. In other words, women's culture share common feature around the world and time as well. They have similar sufferings and experiences. That is what we have seen in Soueif's novel *The Map of Love*. The women are not only significant for the similar kind of pain of these women of generations, but also their importance as individuals within their family and bonding. Exploring the relationships between these women reveals not only alliances between mothers and their offspring, but also natural alliances and inherence between women throughout the generations. Helen Cixous (1976) says “Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, and writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible” (320). This is evident in Amal's imagination. Amal did not just translate the words of Anna she has also tried to translate the look she gave from her photo. “But her eyes are the strangest shade of blue, violet really, and they look straight at you and they say- they say a lot of things. There's a strength in that look, a willfulness.” (5) Amal was deeply sunk into the story of great grandmother and father that she started to see them lively in her dream: “I saw the shadow of a woman. Then the heavy door behind me swung upon and I turned. Outlined against glaring rectangle of sunshine saw (as I had never in life seen) the tall broad-shouldered figure of my great-uncle, Sharif Basha al-Baroudi.” (10)

Although the women characters have seen female identity as a process and have emphasized its flexibility, they could not avoid being subjected to the unjustified claims on their intellectual powers. Thus, they have always been alienated from the mainstream of society. Especially in the 19th century, women were debased for their so-called intellectual inferiority. To read as a woman requires that one approach a work from a feminist vantage and therefore, not regard the work from the purview of

patriarchy. Consequently, in order to read Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*, as a woman, one can analyze the motivations of principal female characters that are thoroughly developed within the work. *The Map of Love* gives us a story of a written memory and a story of a family saga that was uphold by a woman of 1897. The written documents, letters are probably a reflection to colonialist representation of Egypt and Egyptians in literature. Colonial literature is an exploration of a world at the boundaries of civilization; a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification. It is a world perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil. Against this context, Soueif's novel allowed readers to perceive Egyptians and English as well. The Egyptian society described by Soueif has definitive and complex social systems, values and traditions than England. Still she has brilliantly placed her characters within a civilization with a labyrinthine system of governance and laws and time as well. Culler says: "women readers identify with the concerns of women characters." (308) And probably this is why reading Anna's conventional world as a woman, one cannot merely ascribe to the view that one of Anna's great achievements is her ability to keep alive our curiosity for the saga of these ladies of this family. This may remain intact for those reading through a feminist lens. Soueif made a parallelism between the past and present time and generation of the novel. To create a parallelism between what Anna felt in 1897, i.e. in the past, and what Isabel feels in 1997, i.e. in the present, Soueif devotes the second chapter to Isabel: as, in the past, Anna's heart was troubled, which makes her unhappy, now, Isabel's heart is also troubled due to her interest in a man, Omar al-Ghamrawi, Amal's brother, who is fifty-five and is old enough to be her father, as a friend of Isabel points out (17-18). By doing this, Soueif creates a connection between the past and the present, a link, "a parallelism" that highlights the fact that when it comes to hearts and human feelings there is no difference between the past and the present; "What difference do a hundred years – or a continent – make?" (12).

This novel also reveals to the reader how Amal comes to visualize Anna sitting "at the window of her bedroom in the Greek widow's pension, her letters neatly folded, her new journal open on the table." In this way, Amal draws a picture of Anna in her bedroom writing her letters and jotting down her memoirs in her new journal while looking out of her window at the sea, a mental picture that infatuates Isabel to the extent of wishing to make "a film of Anna's life" (64). After that, the reader is given a picture of how Amal imagines how Anna looked like and how she wore her clothes at the time and how Amal re-creates the scene as a whole (65-66). Soueif, in addition to revealing the details of Anna's life and experience to the reader, sheds light on Amal's personal life and that of Isabel. The details that reveal the personal life of both Amal and Isabel show certain similarities between them though they belong to two different worlds of two different cultures and though they are of different ages: "She [Isabel] is at her beginning and I [Amal] am close to my end" (81). What one observes is that both fear, and suffer as well, isolation and alienation, two things that torture man in the