

Literature and Gender

Section A & B

Paper-IX (Option-i)

M.A. English (Final)

Directorate of Distance Education

Maharshi Dayanand University

ROHTAK – 124 001

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M.A. English (Final)
Literature and Gender
Paper-IX (Option-i)

M. Marks : 100
Time : 3 Hrs.

***Note:** Candidate will be required to attempt five questions in all, choosing one question from each of the five sections. Questions will be based on the prescribed texts with internal choice i.e., one question with internal choice on each of the units.*

SECTION–A

UNIT–I Toril Moi

"Anglo-American Feminist Criticism" from Sexual/Textual Politics by Toril Moi.

UNIT–II Simone de Beauvoir

The Second Sex ("Myth and Reality", 'Woman's Situation and Character', "The Independent Woman")

SECTION–B

UNIT–III Virginia Woolf

Mrs. Dalloway

UNIT–IV Alice Walker

Colour Purple

UNIT–V Shashi Deshpande

That Long Silence

Unit I - Toril Moi

Introduction

Simply put, feminism is an attempt to read literature from a female viewpoint, whether the text is written by a male or a female. Nevertheless, the focus is on the former, as feminists try to uncover male strategies, overt or covert, with which woman's place as secondary to man is naturalized, i.e. she is by nature secondary and subservient to man. Feminism has a long history in creative and critical writings. Creative writers, the best among them, have always been conscious of the subordinate role a woman is made to play in any culture. So they have all along voiced her sentiments. Think of Shakespeare's women: there may be shrews and nagging women in his plays, but on the whole women in Shakespeare outdo men with their sterling beauty and intellect. It is aptly said that Shakespeare has no heroes; he has only heroines. Again, consider, for instance, Webster Duchess: if she becomes dishonest to herself and others, it is under the male pressure.

This is, however, not to deny that a woman will have a different experience, as, for example, the scene of Henchard selling his wife in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Ironically, many females also tend to appreciate the male reading. So, it is our reading which is faulty, that it is male dominated. Feminist literary criticism attempts not merely to balance, but also to subvert male reading and thereby create a climate for female writing both in creative and critical domains. The feminist movement with its political agenda is of recent origin, though its feminine phase started long back with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. Some eight decades later, John Stuart Mill published his *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. In America, Margaret Fuller, one of the transcendentalists contributed to the feminine phase of the movement with her survey *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Indeed, even after the publication of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) the movement was not overtly political, it is only during the 1960's that the political tilt was markedly visible, particularly with the publication of Kate Mellett's *Sexual Politics* followed by Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977).

As we shall shortly see, feminist literary criticism is not homogeneous. It encompasses, on the contrary, a rich variety of approaches developed during the last fifty years or so with remarkable alacrity. This is characteristic of all other post-structuralist movements. There, of course, are excesses within feminist literary criticism, and that is where the Toril Moi's critique is situated. Moi deconstructs the feminist over-emphasis on sexual politics by balancing sexual with textual politics. She calls it Sexual/Textual politics, precisely because a text is a system of differences. A text on sexual politics cannot but be a system of male as well as female politics. It cannot be either/or. Moi likes to situate sexual-political debate with most-structuralist mode, especially deconstruction. By textuality, Jacques Derrida means largely what the structuralist mean by the term: anything that can be known as a text within a system of differences in Sansure's description without positive term. Consequently, because a text is a system of difference without a positive or privileged term, i.e. with a "centre"; textuality is subject to a certain stability or undecidability. It is the dimension of undecidability that separates the structuralist from the deconstructive version of the text.

For Moi a feminist literary text is ruptured from within. This is what makes it a text, and not a piece of propaganda. It does not mean that it obliterates its political content, but the political aspect is put across aesthetically. There is always "a politics of aesthetic categories as well as the implied aesthetics of political approaches to art," Moi observes at the end of the chapter "Anglo-American Feminist Criticism", in *Sexual/Textual Politics*.

Published in 1985, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literature Theory* is a critique mainly of Anglo-American feminist criticism, particularly of its radical politics developed at the cost of the aesthetics of politics. Preliminary to her discussion regarding the failure among Anglo-American feminist criticism, Moi takes up to discuss the pioneer of modern feminist critics, Virginia Woolf, in order to defend what the radical feminists like Showalter have dumped her dead in androgyny. Moi sub-titles her Introduction to the book: "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf." She answers this question by saying that quite a few feminist critics are afraid of Virginia Woolf. It is not, of course, surprising that many male critics also found Woolf "a frivolous Bohemian and a negligible Bloomsbury aesthete," but the rejection of this, what Moi calls "great feminist writer" by so many of her Anglo-American feminist

daughters requires further explanation. The rejection of Virginia Woolf by both males and females across the Atlantic is due mainly that she could side neither with the radical feminists, nor with the male chauvinists.

As distinguished feminist critic, says Moi, Showalter, signals her subtle swerve away from Woolf by talking over, yet changing Woolf's title. Under Showalter's pen *A Room of One's Own* becomes *A Literature of their own*, as if she wished to indicate her "problematic distance from the tradition of women writer she lovingly covers in her book. Moi finds Showalter's reading of Virginia Woolf heavily imbalanced because of her often unconscious theoretical and political assumptions. Moi, therefore, attempts to rescue Woolf from Showalter's criticism before offering a different positive reading of the writer of *A Room of One's Own*.

Showalter devotes most of her first chapter to survey Woolf's biography discussing *A Room of One's Own*. The title itself of the Chapter "Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny" speaks for Showalter political bias, i.e. Woolf, according to Showalter, does not exclusively treat female elements. This becomes apparent in Showalter's definition of androgyny as "full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements" a myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition. So, for Showalter, Woolf's greatest sin against feminist is that "even in the moment of expressing feminist conflict, Woolf wanted to transcend it. Her wish for experience was really a wish to forget experience."

Showalter's critique of Woolf's androgyny, i.e. having both male and female characteristics is, indeed, severe. She calls it "a flight away from a troubled feminism." It is a commonplace of literary criticism, and in fact, of all criticism that we tend to read a writer not in the spirit in which he/she wrote, but we judge him/her from our own position. This is what Moi has, for a change, done. Her point of view is that a text may be about sexual politics, but being a text, it has its aesthetics, i.e. it views sexual politics not in opposition, but in harmony of sexes. It is not that Woolf is not concerned with the plight of women over the ages. Indeed, she is deeply pained to see women worn to death by men. Just because Mrs. Ramsay could not say that she loved Mr. Ramsay, the latter wore her to death. Men have always held women as secondary. They were thought inferior, because men wanted to be superior. Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? How many books are written by women in comparison with those written by men? These are some of the questions that Woolf tries to answer in the backdrop of what men thought of women. They were thought shallower in the brain; nevertheless, women were also revered by quite a few men; Goethe, for example, honoured them, though Mussolini despised them.

Woolf's image of women is not unilateral, as the radical 'gender' feminists wish it to be. It is because her reading is subtle and psychological. If a man like Mr. Ramsay insisted a little to emphatically upon the inferiority of women, they are concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority. That was what he was protecting rather hot-headedly and with too much emphasis, because it was a jewel to him of the rarest price. Life, as Woolf adds, for both sexes, is arduous, different, a perpetual struggle. Both lack self-confidence. They then resort to thinking that other people are inferior to oneself, as Adler posited. It may be wealth, or rank, or sex. These are pathetic devices the patriarch resorts to in order to claim that he is by nature superior to the great number of people. It must indeed be one of the chief sources of his power. His wife happens to be one of his minions. If she calls a spade a spade, that he is a snob, she will then be dubbed as an arrant feminist. She wounds his vanity. Women, according to Woolf have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice their natural size. This has combined to puff man's ego, enabling him to create the material civilization out of swamps and jungles. Whatever may be the use in civilized societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic actions. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insisted so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, men would cease to enlarge. That, Woolf says, serves to explain in part the necessity that women are so often regarded as inferior to men.

With her tongue in cheek, she further says: For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks. Showalter calls Woolf's irony 'wimsy', not serious enough to make the writer of *A Room of One's Own* a thorough-going feminist. Woolf, none the less is serious, as she blames women's humiliation at man's hands on men's instincts which are not within their control. Dominated by these instincts men have for centuries tortured women, beaten them, chosen for them their husbands and thus decided their destinies before they were hardly out of their cradle. But

paradoxically, she ever remained an object of poetry. This points again to the paradox of her existence – her poetic and her prosaic self, her fiction and her fact. She herself can neither write nor paint, though she is the source of poetry and music. As Woolf writes:

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact, she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.

What one must do with this monster of contradictions in order to bring her to life is to think poetically and prosaically at once and the same moment, thus keeping in touch with fact, but not losing touch with fiction either. It is not that male poets do not face sufferings, but the difficulty in the way of women becoming writers is infinitely more formidable. She does neither possess a room, nor has money of her own to be her independent self. What is then she to do? Should she bear hatred for the other sex for that what the latter has done to her? Woolf is an idealist, believes as she does, that she cannot hold herself back. Sufferings of women outrage an absolute reason. On the contrary, they add to the dramatic value. In this cosmic tragedy, men are, argues Woolf, no longer the opposing factions; she need not waste her time against them; she need not climb on the roof and ruin her peace of mind longing for travel, experience, and a knowledge of the world that were denied her. All the same, she is evolving. Give her another hundred years, give her a room of her own and five hundreds a year, let her speak her mind and leave out of half that she now puts in, urges Woolf, and she will write a better book one of these days. She will be a poet, for poetry is in her. Her anatomy is her text, i.e. her sex is her own textuality. But it is this poetry in her which is still denied. She still has no tradition.

But the woman, Woolf further urges, should not feel depressed. One way of coming out of her limbo is to laugh (Medusa's last laugh), but without bitterness, Woolf exhorts. She should laugh at the male's vanities – point out that black spot at the back of his head, as did George Eliot, pointed as she did, at the back of Casaubon in *Middlemarch*. The woman artist must make use of comedy, as Jane Austen did – for to be comic is to be truthful. Comedy is her forte, indeed. A true picture of man as a whole (Woolf's emphasis is on the whole man and woman) can never be painted until a woman has described that spot. That is her vision as an artist. The woman as an artist is as good as James Joyce's young man as an artist. As an artist, she has not to think merely in terms of sexual difference nor is she strive for novelty or so-called originality. Rather, she should penetrate reality which permits her to reveal treasures beyond scope of the average mind. She should lay bare, as a scientist does, the heart and structure of things and in doing so purify and intensify the feeling which the current appearances are too confused and contradictory to evoke.

This vision that the man has a dark spot at the back of his head (he could not see it for himself), is to be evoked without bitterness – not holding his weakness for his woman to scorn and ridicule of set purpose (literature shows the futility of what is written in that spirit).

This is what Woolf means by the woman becoming truthful; she must express what she likes to express as an authentic self. Her comic vision should be Horavian, but not that of Juvenal. This vision can be shared, provided one is not obsessed with gender difference. Virginia Woolf favours rhythm rather than pattern. In fact, pattern with variation becomes rhythm. She is not for the elimination of difference between sexes. Sexes can assert their difference without being contradictory. Colours, for example, as Bernard Bosanquet says, may clash or they may harmonize. Sexes too should not abolish differences but reconcile them in a higher unity. In essence, as Virginia Woolf finds that thinking of the two sexes different, apart from the coming together – entering the cab, or meeting at the corner, is an effort: "It interferes with the unity of the mind," she adds. What she means by "the unity of mind" is that "the mind has so great a power of concentrating at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being." It can "separate itself from the people in the street, for example, and think of itself as apart from them, at an upper window looking down on them. Or it can think with other people spontaneously, as for example, in a crowd waiting to hear some piece of news read out."

The human mind, accordingly, has its gestalt. There are two ways of viewing the world; if it is viewed as external, it appears to be texture of conflicting forces setting to resolve their oppositions in the most economical fashion. If,

however, viewed from within, it takes the appearance, rather of conflicting ideas which are seeking logical resolution. Woolf's logic, of course, is not the logic of linear inference, but of spiral inference – not the logic of Descartes, but of Hegel's dialectics, which supports that initial antinomies are reconciled in a higher synthesis. The correlation of species and the history of sexes have causal explanations, but they can also be viewed as the working out of the logical principle of non-contradiction.

Woolf's woman as an artist follows the principle of non-contradiction, that she can see a wood where ordinary women think there are only trees. She as a sociologist can also discover a crowd which something more than men and women who make it up. Sexes in Woolf's psychology and sociology, art and science, are not capable of standing in separation. The deepest and loftiest achievements of men and women belong not to the particular sex in his/her repellent isolation. Human achievement, on Woolf's view, depends upon the capacity of one sex to engage in activities which carry him/her outside the individual self, in family and society. Woolf is for an open rather than a close society of sexes.

This is the ground of her androgyny – the co-existence of sexes, in the body and the mind: “that in each of us two powers preside, one male, and female:

...and in the man's brain the men predominate over the women, and in the woman's brain the women predominate men. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating.

She further observes: If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with man in her. Woolf quotes Coleridge to support her viewpoint – that a great mind is androgynous. It is when the fusion takes place that a mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. She then refers to the creative mind to say that perhaps a mind that is purely masculine or feminine cannot create. The test of a great book is that it shows the consciousness of the two minds – masculine and feminine together – neither partial to the one nor to the other. One can read any play by Shakespeare to see the dramatist's impartiality in the matter of sexes.

What Coleridge meant by his statement and Shakespeare earlier showed in his plays was that an androgynous mind is less apt to make these distinctions than that a single-sexed mind. For Coleridge, there is even no distinction between men, birds and beasts; nor between great or small. In Shakespeare, daughters are viewed at par with sons. What Coleridge perhaps meant was that an androgynous mind is resonant and porous; it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent, undivided. It is a mind – semitransparent. In fact, as Woolf also says, one goes back to Shakespeare's mind as a type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly or woman-manly mind, though it is impossible to say what Shakespeare thought of women. In essence, one should not seek to know what Shakespeare thought of either women or men. He was an integrated mind, not sharply conscious of either sex.

Woolf's androgynous view of man-woman relationship does not amount to any kind of sacrifice of one over the other. Here is truly a deconstructive view as against Showalter's feminism which attempts to keep the two sexes apart—in clash, not in harmony with each other. Poststructuralism sought, on the contrary, to neutralize naturalization of woman. Woolf approached the problems through her aesthetics. A fully developed creative mind, like that of Shakespeare does not think specially or separately of sex. It is, however, harder to be another Shakespeare in the feminist phase we are passing through these days. Woolf's own age had been as stridently sex conscious as our own. She feels that the more women raise the feminist views, the greater is the desire in men for self-assertion. As a result, men, says, Woolf, are “now writing only with the male side of their brains.” Such books as by Galsworthy and Kipling are unreadable as far as women are concerned. They lack suggestive power. And when a book, adds Woolf, lacks suggestive power, however hard it hits the surface of the mind it cannot penetrate within.

Woolf thus pleads for harmony between sexes for the creative mind to write great poetry. It is, therefore, prosaic to conclude that it is necessary to have five hundreds a year and a room with a lock on the door if one is writing fiction or poetry. All that a woman needs (if she has five hundreds a year and a room of her own it is indeed a support) is intellectual freedom, i.e. to be free from sex-consciousness, notwithstanding what women have suffered in terms of natural and social debilities. This is particularly necessary for women to be creative. Woolf pleads for a marriage of minds. Sex-bias is uncreative both for men and women. The whole of the mind, the

marriage of opposites, has to be consummated. Woolf's plea is poetic. That is what we singularly miss in the feminist rhetoric today. She asks women to write all kinds of books so that they have not to feed themselves on one diet. Like Bacon, she seems to lay stress on widening one's horizon by reading many subjects and writing on them. Eventually, women will possess money enough to travel and to idle, to contemplate the future or the past of the world. At the same time, she upbraids women for not exerting enough, for not taking advantage of some opportunities offered to them. They must breed children, but they must also have time on their hands to read and write. Shakespeare had a sister, now lying obscurely buried at the cross-roads. She is still part of all womankind. She can be resurrected in the minds of women of tomorrow, provided the latter are prepared to live a common life. That is what Woolf calls "reality" or truth, for it is the whole which is logically prior to parts, to a fragmentary experience. The whole of experience of men and women – is the clue to reality, value and freedom.

Woolf's idealism has put off many feminists, who call the writer of *A Room of One's Own* an old-fashioned rhetorician. Of those who follow her footsteps, perhaps the most notable is Toril Moi. Moi is particularly attracted by Woolf's broad-mindedness, which Showalter calls the "impersonality" of *A Room of One's Own*, an impersonality that springs from the fact that Woolf uses many different personae to voice the narrator, leaving the critic not single unified position but a multiplicity of perspectives to grapple with. Showalter is indeed puzzled over Woolf's position. So the entire book becomes for Showalter elusive.

This elusiveness, according to Moi, is interpreted by Showalter as a denial of authentic feminist state of mind that keeps the politics apart from art. Showalter emphasis in her critique of Woolf is based mainly on the formal feelings of *A Room of One's Own*. Moi, on the other hand, shifts the focus of the book from its form to its content—its theoretical assumptions about the relationships appear to be existential—a text should, she says, reflect the writer's experience, and that the authentic the experience is felt to be by the reader the more valuable is the text. Woolf's may not be an existentialist in her approach to life, but she does behave in the flux that makes life flow, breaking barriers among others of sexes.

Obviously, Woolf's essay is not political in its divisive sense. Curiously, Showalter alludes to Lukacs in her defence, though she, on the whole, cannot be accused of Marxism leanings. In this regard, she in her theory is closer to Woolf, rather than to Marxists. Lukacs was a major champion of the realist novel. He praised great realists, like Balzac and Tolstoy, succeeded in, as Moi says, in representing the totality of human life in its social context, thus representing the fundamental truth of history: the "unbroken upward evolution of mankind." Further, proclaiming himself a "proletarian humanist", he states that the object of proletarian humanism is to reconstruct the complete human personality and free it from the distortions and dismemberment to which it has been subjected in class society. For Lukacs, any art that represents the division of complete human personality into a public and private sector contributes to the mutilation of the essence of man.

Showalter and following her, Patricia Stubb's complaint against Woolf is that she has failed to create new models, new images of women. This is despite the fact that Woolf has consistently attempted to project a new woman asking her to realize her station in life in order to improve her lot by taking advantage of opportunities available to her to be her creative self. This is how she can free herself from further mutilation of her personality. However, this may be done without hatred against the male sexes, for that would not be creative.

Moi finds Showalter's position flawed, because she pleads for a revolutionary view of women, as Marcia Holly, following Showalter does, betraying their traditional humanism. Holly's revolutionary woman is a strong, happy tractor driver. What feminists such as Showalter and Holly fail to grasp is that traditional humanism they represent is in effect part of patriarchal ideology. At its centre, Moi says, is the commonly called 'Man'. As Luce Irigaray or Helene Cixous would argue, this integrated self is in fact a phallic self, constructed on the model of the self-contained, powerful phallus.

Rescuing Woolf

After deconstructing Showalter's criticism, while borrowing the tools of deconstruction from within her text, Moi proceeds to rescue Woolf from adverse feminist criticism. Moi feels that the major drawback in Lukacsian perspective implicit in much feminist criticism is that it proves itself incomplete of appropriating for feminism the work of the greatest British woman writer of the twentieth century, i.e. Virginia Woolf. Woolf was, according to Moi, not only a

novelist of considerable genius but also a declared feminist. She deplores the fact that the later feminists have failed to produce a positive political and literary assessment of Virginia Woolf's texts.

According to Showalter, a literary text should yield certain security, a firm perspective to judge the world, but paradoxically, she also seems to practice 'deconstructive' form of writing, one that engages with and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse. In her own textual practice, Woolf exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning. According to Derrida, language is structured as an endless deferral of meaning, and any search for essential, absolutely stable meaning must therefore be considered metaphysical. There is no final element, no fundamental limit, no *transcended signified* that is meaningful in itself and thus escape the ceaseless interplay of linguistic deferral and difference. The interplay of signifiers will never yield a final, unified meaning that in turn might ground and explain all other.

It is in the light of such textual and linguistic theory that Moi reads Woolf's playful shifts and changes of perspective than a willful desire to tease the serious-minded feminist critic. Through her conscious exploitation of the sportive, sensual nature of language, Woolf rejects the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology. She asks the male author to become responsible to his female part in order to be a great writer, as she implores the female to shed her exclusive female consciousness. In fact, in undermining essentialism separately of male and female, she underlines the metaphysics of androgyny. She is therefore naturally skeptical to the male-humanist concept of essential human identity. Human subject, on Woolf's view, is a complex subject, rather than simple, living a separate life of his/her own. she thinks of the common life which, she finds, "is the real life, and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals – and have five hundreds a year each of us and rooms of our own..."

The term "individuals", as used by Woolf, is a synonym not for separate individual, but the whole. Her "individual" is not particular, in accordance with class and members. She rejects the account of individuality because she thinks that true individuals achieve unity when they fit together as parts to in an organism – a flower, a poem or a machine. Whenever parts fits together in a larger complex and differences mutually supplement each other to form wholes, then the principle of unity is found. Mostly we are not conscious of this unity, because like the air we breathe, or the light by which we see, it is too obvious we become conscious of this principle of individuality, chiefly in those situations where we had not expected to find if, as for, for example, in "Gusev" as story by Tchekov quoted by Woolf in "Modern Fiction". It so happens in the story that some malady spreads among the sailors on board a ship. When a sailor dies, others throw the boy overboard and the gossip begins, but then Gusev, the captain himself, dies. His dead body looks like a carrot or a redish. He is also thrown in the sea. It is at this point Tchekov underlines our common destiny – that we are mortals for all our differences. The emphasis is laid upon such unexpected place that at first, says Woolf, it seems, as if it were no emphasis at all, and then, as the eyes accustom themselves to twilight and discern the shapes of things in a room we see how complete the story is, how profound and how truly in obedience to the vision of Tchekov has chosen this, that, and the other and placed them together to compose something new.

Woolf's is an ideal aesthetic view of individuality – she sees a wood, where we thought there were only trees. That is why she rejects the conventional view of poetry. Tchekov's story cannot be called 'comic' or 'tragic'. Individuality, in her sense of the word, is spiritual. For that matter, she criticized Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy for their materialism. She asks the truly modern novelists to look within, and life, it seems, is very far from being like this example; for a moment, she further asks, an ordinary mind on an ordinary day—it receives myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent; they come from all sides. As Mrs. Dalloway goes buying flowers for her evening party, her mind recalls innumerable impressions—they fall like atoms and shape themselves. She goes back in her memory lanes. She was eighteen then and was possessed with a choice. Two roads diverged, one leading to Welsh and the other to Richard. She chose the latter and that made all the difference in her life. With Walsh, everything has to be shared, and she wanted a private space, a room of her own, metaphorically speaking. Now after years, she recalls how mistaken she was. To compensate her longing to be with others, she now throws parties.

The emphasis of the novel falls unexpectedly not on 'this' but 'that', that we, feeling the gravitational pull of attraction, are drawn toward others. This pull is all the more potent between sexes, provided we have the habit of freedom and courage to

write exactly, says Woolf, “what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves. . . .”

Woolf thus insists that our relations is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women! And reality is flowing experience, not divided in its, with the whole; it permits the artist to reveal treasures beyond the scope of the average mind, the kind of mind Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy possessed and which has “a living, breathing, everyday imperfection. . . .” A great artist whom Woolf would call ‘spiritual’ is the one who lays bare the heart and structure of things. She calls it the vision of the artist. The vision reveals to the artist that we should achieve reconciliation without scarifying differences in a higher unity, as it happen in love.

The deconstructionist of today points out an endless play of difference. Finite minds are like (borrowing from Hegel) “copulas”; they share the same experience. Woolf was aware of the unconscious substratum. The unity of finite minds are unconscious. Her language reveals her awareness. The Hogarth Press, founded by Virginia and her husband, published the first translation of Freud’s central works, and when Freud arrived in London in 1939 Virginia Woolf went to visit him.

For Woolf, as for Freud, says Moi, unconscious derives and desires constantly exert a pressure on our conscious thoughts and actions. For psychoanalysis the human subject is, as we have seen earlier, is a complex entity, of which the conscious mind is only a small part. If a similar approach is taken to the literary text, it follows that the search for a unified individual self or gender identity or indeed textual identity in the literary work must be seen as drastically reductive.

Thus, Moi argues, that Showalter’s recommendation to remain detached from the narrative strategies of the text is equivalent to not reading it at all. For instance, to accept the human subject—a female or a male as a simple entity is to miss the whole subject who is a unified self, and in whom unlimited unconscious processes shape our conscious self. Woolf may not be overtly psychoanalytical Moi has sought her to be, but she does recognize the inner life. Conscious thought, of course, over-determines us, but within it a multiplicity of structures intersect to produce unstable constellation liberal humanists call the ‘self’. These structures, according to Moi, encompass not only unconscious sexual desires, fear and phobias, but also a host of conflicting material, social, political and ideological factors of which we are equally unaware. It is this highly complex network of conflicting structures, the anti-humanist would argue, that produce the subject, rather than the other way round.

A Woolf’s text does not remove differences, but reconciles them into a higher unity. Her concept of unit is an aesthetic one. As an artist, she envisions a pluralistic view of an individual or a text, for that matter, in which, as in the poetry of Mallarme, for example, abrupt shifts, ellipses, breaks through the strict rational defences of conventional social meaning. Woolf, as we have seen, strikes against literary conventions, precisely because conventions inhabit the artist to put the emphasis on ‘that’, the uncircumscribed spirit.

In appreciating this uncircumscribed spirit in Virginia Woolf, Moi finds in Julia Kristeva her ally. For Kristeva, modern poetry juxtaposes the conventional social structure with symbolic language. The latter prefigure a total *social* revolution. She calls such writing revolutionary, analogous to sexual and political transformation, and that by its very existence testifies to the possibility of transforming the symbolic order of orthodox society from inside. One might, says Moi, argue in the light that Woolf’s refusal to commit herself in *A Room of One’s Own* to so-called rational and logical form of writing, free from fictional technique, indicates a similar break with symbolic language, as of course do many of the techniques she deploys in her novel.

Kristeva’s reading of literature, as that of Moi, is psychoanalytical. Together they read Woolf in the Freudian psychoanalytical framework. We have already seen that Woolf has some affinity with psychoanalysis, but this not to say that Clarissa Dalloway represses herself and thus becomes a cold but a brilliant woman highly admired in patriarchal society. But Kristeva supports this view and thereby discloses the danger of paying the price on the part of the woman for preserving her sanity in the male order. On the other hand, *To The Lighthouse* tells a different story. It is in this novel, Kristeva’s feminism echoes the position taken up by Virginia Woolf some sixty years ago. Mr. Ramsay in the novel represents the metaphysics of the male ego – whereas Lily Briscoe, the artist, deconstructs the opposition in order to live as her own woman, without regard for the crippling definition of sexual identity to which

society would have her conform. It is in this sense Moi attempts to situate Woolf's crucial concept of androgyny. It is not, as Showalter argues, a flight from fixed gender identities, but a recognition of them falsifying metaphysical nature. Far from fleeing such gender identities, because she fears them, Woolf rejects them because she has seen them for what they are. She has understood that the goal of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct their death-dealing binary opposition of masculinity and femininity, showing that they are the same and yet different, different and yet the same. In short, they are androgynous.

In her fascinating book *Toward Androgyny*, published in 1973, Carolyn Heilbrun set out her own definition of androgyny in similar terms when she describes it as the concept of an 'unbounded and hence fundamentally indefinable nature.' In this regard, Woolf is not a feminist, for no feminist would desire androgyny, as it blurs the distinction between the two sexes. But Moi, being a thoroughgoing deconstructionist, would stress with Kristeva that a theory which demands the deconstruction of sexual identity is indeed authentically feminist. In Woolf's case, the question, Moi thinks, is rather whether or not her remarkably advanced understanding of feminist objections prevented her from taking up a progressive political position in the feminist struggle of her day. In the light of her novel *Three Guineas* (and of *A Room of One's Own*) the answer to this question is surely 'no'. According to Moi, the Woolf of *Three Guineas* shows an acute awareness of the dangers of both liberal and radical feminism. The greatest danger lay in the direction of radical separation of the male and the female. Woolf sought that this position between submission and revolt is synthesis. This subsumed the earlier two stages. Woolf is a Hegelian, as we have earlier seen, but in seeking to resolve the conflict, she did not sacrifice difference. She still favoured women's right for financial independence, education and entry into profession – all central issues for the feminists of 1920's and 1930's.

Another feminist Nancy Topping Bazin reads Woolf's concept of androgyny as a union of muscularity and femininity – precisely the opposite, in fact, of viewing it as the deconstruction of the duality. She is of the view that androgynous solution of the novel consists in a balance of the two sexes. Moi feels that a combination of Derriden and Kristevan theory, then, would seem to hold considerable promise for the future feminist reading of Woolf.

It, however, does not mean that there are not critics of Marxist leaning, stressing the materialist aspect of Woolf's politics. One such critic is Michale Barrett. Her aesthetics of androgyny, however, resists her materialist position she advances in *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf's politics and aesthetics, as Kristeva has argued, cannot be separated. She refuses to accept the binary opposition of aesthetics on the one hand and politics on the other, locating the politics of Woolf's writing in her textual practice. That practice is of course much more marked in her novels than in most of her essays.

A detour of Anglo-American feminist makes Moi perceive a pattern of reading Woolf through the traditional of aesthetic categories, relying on liberal humanist version of Lukacsian aesthetics, against which Brecht so effectively polemicized. Against this reading Moi in the first chapter of *Sexual/Textual Politics* offers a better understanding of the political nature of Woolf's aesthetics. But Woolf's kind of anti-humanist reading is yet to be written, though its intimations are available in Parry Meisel, and though written by a male who is by no means an anti-feminist, is nevertheless primarily concerned with the influence of Woolf of Walter Peter. But this too is a doubtful conclusion. To date, she has either been rejected as insufficiently feminist, or praised on ground that seem to exclude her fiction. While Moi waits for a balanced appraisal of Woolf to come, she blames feminists for subscribing to the humanist aesthetic categories of the traditional male academic hierarchy. The only difference, she says, between feminist and a non-feminist critic is this tradition then becomes the formal political perspective of the critic. This political perspective has delayed Woolf's appraisal as the progressive, feminist writer of genius she undoubtedly was.

Two Feminist Classics

After setting her goal of doing justice and paying homage to Woolf as a great mother and sister in her "Introduction" to *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Moi takes up to analyse the whole range of Anglo-American feminist criticism in order to see where it failed. She begins her analysis with the resurfacing of feminism in the 1960's. It was the time when the women's vote was won. This political event gave feminism a political force in the western world. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963. American women participated in civil right movement and later protested against the war in Vietnam. This revival of feminism was overtly political. The women activists were themselves

politically committed – they were not afraid to take a stand and fight for their views. This feminist stand was, however, neither new, nor coincidental. Its history goes back to the nineteenth century. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Antony, struggled for the abolition of slavery.

In the twentieth century, politically progressive movements – anti-war movement, for example, convinced women that there is discrepancy between male activists egalitarian commitment and their crudely sexist behaviour towards female comrades. Eventually, in 1960, women increasingly formed their own liberation groups, both as a supplement and as an alternative to other forms of political struggle in which they were involved.

Moi thus traces the development of politically conscious feminism. In the 1970's, there were, she says, already many different strands of political thought in the 'new' women's movement. Robin Morgan characterized its NOW (National Organization of Women), the organization earlier founded by Betty Friedan. The latter had declared that the "only hope of a new feminist movement is some kind of new barely emerging politics of *revolutionary feminism*. Broadly, this movement was both anti-capitalist and separatist. In literary criticism too, this tendency to politicize the movement has been surfacing from the day of the publication of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1927), followed by Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Katharine M. Roger's *The Troublesome Helpmate* (1966), Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968) and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969).

It is interesting to note that these literary studies were not a central factor in the early period of the new women's movement. This movement was the product of a struggle mainly concerned with social and political change. It called for institutional changes through literary criticism. As Moi puts it: For many feminist critics, a central problem has therefore been that of uniting political engagement with what is conventionally regarded as 'good' literary criticism. However, the 'good literary' criticism has the smack of male-dominated, neutral, goody-goody criticism in which women have all along suffered. Thus it became difficult for women literary critic to reconcile the 'good' literary criticism with feminism of political hue. The aspiring feminist critic, then, Moi says, has apparently only two options: to work to reform those criteria from within the academic institution, i.e. to be a 'good' literary critics, producing a judicious critical discourse that strives to maintain its feminism without grossly upsetting the academic establishment, or to write off the academic criteria of evaluation as reactionary and of no importance. For example, in its early stages of feminism, Libian S. Robinson chose the second option, i.e. not to subscribe to the academic or literary values.

However, hers was not a typical response to the apparent dilemma. Women in the departments continued, on the whole, to preserve 'good' literary values at their own cost, since they could not balance the two – the literary and the political values. This has been the situation during 1980's, except Kate Millett, who managed to bridge the gap between institutional and non-institutional criticism. In this regard, Moi also praises Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women*, and though the book was published a year earlier to *Sexual Politics*, it was less successful in comparison, probably because it was more successful in reconciling the literary and political values. That is precisely the reason for Moi to take up *Sexual Politics* first in this chapter on "Two Feminist Classics."

Kate Millett: *Sexual Politics* (1969)

Moi praises *Sexual Politics* tongue-in-cheek, saying "surely (it) must be the world's best-selling Ph. D thesis." The book earned Millett an academic degree at a reputable university and had a powerful political impact on a world-wide audience both inside and outside the women's movement.

Divided into three chapters: "Sexual Politics", "Historical Background", and "The Literary Reflection", the book begins with Millett's thesis about the nature of power realization between sexes, and goes on to survey the fate of feminist struggle and its opponents in the nineteenth and twentieth century and ends by reflecting on the position of women in the works of four novelists D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Miller and Jean Genet.

This was no doubt a refreshing study, as it, Moi observes, broke away from the ideology of American New Criticism which ruled American academics in 1950's and 1960's, and which in the name of the autonomy of the text eschewed

talking about social and cultural contexts embedded in it, Millett argued that these contexts must be studied if literature was to be properly understood.

However, the most striking aspect of Millett's critical studies, according to Moi, is the boldness with which she reads, what Moi calls 'against the grain' of the literary text. Hers being a reader-oriented approach avoids reading a Miller's or Mailer's text from the conventional respect for authority and the intentions of the author. Her reading is obviously post-structuralist. Her analysis openly posits another perspective of the conflict between reader and author. It is thus that Millett exposes the underlying premises of the work. She forcefully defends the right of the reader to reject the received hierarchy of text and reader. Millett's reader has a priority over the text. As a reader, Kate Millett is thus neither submissive nor lady-like: her style, according to Moi is that of a hard-nosed street kid out to challenge the author's authority at every turn. Her approach destroys the prevailing binary of text/reader. The reader accordingly in *Sexual Politics* is not a passive/feminine recipient of authoritarian discourse, and such is exactly the stance suited to feminism's political purpose. Happily, she does assert feminism without sacrificing the literary aspect of the text.

Unfortunately for later feminist critics, the positive aspects of Millett's study are entangled with a series of less-successful tactics. They even blame it on Millett for her extreme reluctance to acknowledge any debt to her own feminist precursors, for example, that of Simone de Beauvoir's. Similarly, it is alleged that she does not acknowledge on her the influence of Katherine M. Roger's study of misogyny. It is also a fact that she dismissed Virginia Woolf in one brief passage. On the contrary, except for a brief analysis of Charlotte Bronte, Millett's major concern is how male writers like Lawrence, Miller, Mailer and Genet project females. In the same vein, Millett mentions the contribution of John Stuart Mill, but not of Wollstonecraft. Again, she chooses to read French homosexual Genet's texts as representations of a subversive perception of gender roles and sexual politics, but never mentions women writers like Edith Wharton or Doris Lessing. According to Moi, Millett seems to give birth to her own text at the cost of any mother-figures'.

Nevertheless, Moi ironically defends Millett by saying that since her purpose is to define the 'essence of politics' as power, male writers manifest the political power brazenly. Her definition of sexual politics is simply this: the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex. This definition is elaborated through her reading of the four male novelists of the twentieth century, the most blatant among the anti-feminists. Her reading in this regard is pertinent; it is remarkably unified, giving, as Moi says, a powerful fist in the solar plexus (Lawrence's favourite phrase) of patriarchy. The beauty of her analysis is that every detail is organically subordinated to the political message.

In her scheme of things, she obviously finds all her feminist precursors irrelevant, because they have not defined sexuality in political terms. As Moi further says: for to devote much of her book to analyse patterns of subversion in women writers would unwittingly undermine her own thesis about the remorseless, all-encompassing, monolithic nature of sexual power-politics. Millett's purpose is thus served by her single-minded pursuit to uncover the political nature of sexual oppression on woman. She of course becomes reductive in the process, because she finds a single cause of patriarchal oppression – power politics. She finds that the courtly and romantic version of love, as suggested by the sociologist Hugo Beigel, as "grants" which the male concedes out of his total power. Both had had the effect of obscuring the patriarchal character of Western culture and in their general tendency to attribute impossible virtues to women, have ended by confining them in a narrow and often remarkably constricting sphere of behaviour.

Moi finds Millett theory of patriarchal oppression limited. It is because of her limited perspective that Millett had to employ rhetorical tropes in order to prove her point. But together her limited perspective and her rhetoric make her study inaccurate or truncated, as she fails to account for opposing theories. For example, her treatment of Freudian and post-Freudian theory suffers from her blindspots. She set out to prove that Sigmund Freud was beyond question the strongest individual counterrevolutionary force in the ideology of sexual politics during the period. As Moi writes: it is difficult to pin down Freud to a single unified position, precisely because the unconscious itself refuses any monolithic view of human personality, and secondly, Freud constantly revised his position. But Millett in her unified

vision straight goes to call the unconscious “a form of biological essentialism” – that’s a theory that reduces all behaviour to inborn sexual characteristics. Millett writes:

Now it can be said scientifically that women are inherently subservient and males dominant, more strangely sexual and therefore entitled to sexually subjugate the female, who enjoys her oppression and deserves it, for she is by her very nature vain, stupid, and hardly better than barbarian, if she is human at all...

Millett, according to Moi, is mistaken in her view of Freud. Her rejection of Freud rests largely on her distaste for what she takes to be his theory of penis envy, female narcissism and female masochism as inborn. For Freud, it is now argued that even sexual identity is an unstable subject position. Further, female narcissism has come to be seen as an expression of female power. Similarly, female’s penis envy is found to be a manifestation of the little girl’s need to establish a sense of her own identity as separate from her mother, a process which is crucial for her later development as a creative writer. To cap it all, Millett misunderstands the whole ideology of sexual oppression as if it were conscious, well-organized conspiracy. She ignores, as Cora Kaplan argues, that even women may unconsciously internalize sexist attitudes and desires.

In view of these later readings of Freud and the general sexist position of male ideology of power, Millett’s *Sexual Politics* has lost much of its force. Her reading of feminism today appears to be seductively optimistic in comparison with later feminist studies. But if we accept with Freud that all human beings – even woman – may internalize the standards of their oppressors, liberation can no longer be seen solely as a logical consequence of a rational exposure of false beliefs on which patriarchal supremacy is based.

On the whole, Millett is not only reductive in her approach, but also that her readings for that are flawed, as is shown by Patricia Spacks. Spacks finds Millett’s study of Charlotte Bronte’s *Villette* mistaken. Once again, the blame may be put on Millett’s monolithic conception of sexual ideology that, Moi says, renders her impervious to nuances, inconsistencies and ambiguities. For instance, her reading of Mailer is flawed, as she finds everything in him utterly black or untaintedly white.

Moi’s whole discussion of Millett’s reading of feminism is charged with irony. It is an irony of Millett’s literary criticism that she is reductive and rhetorical. As a literary critic, she pays little or no attention to the formal structures of the literary text; here is a purely content analysis. She also unproblematically assumes that the identity of the author, narrator and hero when this suits her case, as for example, “Paul Morel is of course Lawrence himself.” Such statements abound in *Sexual Politics*. After all, it is a research work written for a degree. It has its obvious flaws; it is simplistic and mechanical application of a thesis establishing the relationship between literature and social and cultural forces.

Towards the end of her analysis of *Sexual Politics* Moi gives up her irony in order to directly attack Millett’s reading of literature from the reductive feminist position:

Sexual Politics, then, can hardly be taken as a model for later generation of feminist critics.

It is simply because she is not confronted with, except *Villette*, the problem how to read women’s texts. Can they be read in the same splendid anti-authoritarian fashion? asks Moi. Kate Millett’s criticism is in the main imbalanced on the side of politics, preoccupied as she is with the abominable male. She can give us no guidance on these matters.

Mary Ellmann

As we know, Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking About Women* was published a year before Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*. Moi takes up this book violating the chronology of publication, because the book never became as influential as Millett’s among feminists at large, precisely because it was less political. As Moi characteristically puts it: The more narrow appeal of Ellmann’s essay is probably in large measure due to the fact that *Thinking About Women* does not deal with the political and historical aspects of patriarchy, independently of literary analysis. Indeed, Ellmann herself put it in her

preface “I am more interested in woman as words”, an approach that gives her book a direct appeal to feminists with literary interest, though it is quite clearly written for a general reader rather than a specialized academic one. Even otherwise, in matter of footnotes and bibliography, in particular, which are sparsely used, Ellmann’s book caters to both political and literary value without over-emphasizing either of them. Nevertheless, *Thinking About Women* too broaches the political question. That is why Moi has counted it among the classics of feminism with an overtone of politics. Indeed, together with Millett’s essay, *Thinking About Women* constitutes the basic source book of inspiration for what is called, says Moi, “Images of Women” criticism, i.e. feminism which searches and finds female stereotypes in the work of male writers and in the critical categories employed by male reviewers commenting upon women’s works.

Moi reads Ellmann’s thesis in the text as follows – that the Western culture at all levels is permeated by a phenomenon Ellmann labels: “thought by sexual analogy”, i.e. by simple sexual differences – male and female temperament, as for example, William James tough-minded and tender-minded people. Ellmann calls this analogical thinking ludicrous and illogical unnatural of sexual thinking. Accordingly, men are deemed stronger than women, and the reproductive role of women is found to be more prolonged and more arduous than men. Ellmann argues that in the modern world the reproductive capacity of woman has socially become almost obsolescent, and the physical strength of men gratuitous. We should therefore no longer feel the need to think in sexual stereotypes of the “male = strong and active” and “female = weak and passive” kind.

As Ellmann finds, these sexual categories influence all aspects of human life, not least the so-called intellectual activities. What is distressing is that books by women are themselves considered womanly – poor and matronly. Women are associated with formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy, and finally “the two incorrigible figures” of the witch and shrew.

Ellmann continues to dwell on women’s stereotyping in *Thinking About Women*, that the male is assertive, which the female takes it away, that her literature itself non-assertive and non-linear. Fortunately, since 1960’s, much modern writing has sought to resist or subvert authoritarian modes of writing, creating the condition for a new kind of writing by women, like, for example, by Dorothy Richardson, Compton-Burnett and Nathalie Sarraute. Ellmann surprisingly forgets to name Virginia Woolf. At this point Moi comments: we can see when her distaste for authority and also traditional realism takes her.

Ellmann associates authority with the male over the female voices, both in creative and critical writing. It no doubt is a fact, Moi concedes. Women writers, as Ellmann in the end of *Thinking About Women* shows, employ various strategies to cope with the patriarchal onslaught. She shows how Jane Austen, for instance, undermines the authoritarian voice of the writer by her wit and irony. She assumes that authority and responsibility are incompatible with amusement. Ellmann’s praise for Jane Austen’s prose is also handy to her own way of writing. *Thinking About Women* is, Moi says, is itself an ironic masterpiece. Therefore, Moi does not treat it ironically as she treated Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*. Ellmann displays wit throughout her book. It is an important part of her argument. Ellmann’s sardonic humour contributed to the warm critical reception of her book, though ironically enough some critics were unable to resist the temptation to couch their praise in precisely stereotypical terms that Ellmann denounces. The typical response to *Thinking About Women* is that it is “a funny feminist book”, whereas it should have been a serious, direct and undramatic statement. The point is that for all that we know what feminists are, as Moi also ironically points out, dreary puritans. Had Ellmann addressed herself without warping her judgement, she would have straight gone out of poetry. This is a poetic statement and therefore ironic. This is, as Moi says, all the more reason for praising Ellmann as an exception to the rule. Or as Ellmann herself puts it, when discussing the way in which sexual analogy infects the praise of work that deserves a ‘sexual’ approval:

In this case, enthusiasm issues in the explanation of the ways in which the work is free of what the critic ordinarily dislikes in the work of a woman. He had despaired of ever seeing a birdhouse built by a woman; now here is a birdhouse built by a woman. Pleasure may mount even to an admission of male envy of the work examined: an exceptionally sturdy birdhouse at that!

Quite a few feminists have also praised *Thinking About Women*, precisely for its distinctive voice of a women, as for

example, Patricia Mayer Spacks said that Ellmann's discourse on femininity consists in its display of a particularly feminine sort and function of wit, what she calls feminine evasiveness. The opponent who would presume to attack her finds her nowhere she was when he took the aim. She (Ellmann) embodies woman as quick-silver, always in brilliant, erratic emotion. But Spacks, as Moi says, evade the concept of *irony* in her praise of Ellmann perhaps because this has never been considered as specifically feminine mode. Instead, she centers on the accusation of "evasiveness", and tries to invent a new feminine stereotype – evasive, changing, and erratic.

But, according to Moi, this is itself an evasiveness, for it is surely to miss the point of Ellmann's style. Moi attempts to show that it is precisely through the use of satirical devices that Ellmann manages to demonstrate that the very concept of masculinity and femininity are social constructs which refer to no real essence in the world, and second that the feminine stereotypes she describes invariably deconstruct themselves. For instance, the stereotypes of mother is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Throughout the book, Ellmann shows how various stereotypes are both ideal and horror, valorization and vulgarization, sacred and profane—inclusive as well exclusive. She demonstrates how "the Mother" as a stereotype slides from the venerated idol to castrating and aggressive bitch.

Clearly then, Ellmann's method deconstructs the female stereotype in order to show that it is both a disadvantage and an advantage. She among other narrative devices employs the tactical use of first person plural 'we' on both sides of deconstruction—for folly and wisdom, for ourselves as well as for others. This aligns the reader instead of alienating him. Moi says that this narrative technique cannot be labeled "feminine evasiveness", since it is an integral part of a general rhetorical enterprise that seeks to deconstruct our sexual categories in exactly the same way as the reader's aggression here is both fostered and defused. Moi feels that the effect of Ellmann's irony is to expose two different aspect of patriarchal ideology – its solidity and its vulnerability. Ellmann does no where regard the patriarchal ideology, as does Millett, as a consistent and unified whole. On the contrary, her deconstructive mode illustrates the self-contradictory tangles that emerge as soon as one aspect of ideology is confronted with another.

In essence, *Thinking About Women* abounds in examples of this deconstructive, decentring style. Ellmann's favourite method, according to Moi, is to juxtapose contradictory statements while depriving the reader of any authoritative comment: "When men are searching for truth, women are content with lies. But when men are searching for diversion of variety, women counters with them stultifying respect for immediate duty." One may add many more examples, which Ellmann supplies and does not supply in order to show that men are not better off in relation to women, nor women worse than men. Lasic does not work in the world. The limit of one also shows the limit of the other sex. In fact, as Ellmann herself says: "it seems impossible to determine a sexual sentence," and quotes Virginia Woolf to reinforce her view. For Ellmann, then, sexuality is not visible at the level of sentence construction or rhetorical strategies. Neither sex appears to be good or bad for much. Spacks thus misreads Ellmann's elusiveness as a disguise to bide her anger, which is women's metaphysical cause. But as Mikail Bakhtin has shown anger is not the only revolutionary attitude available to us. The power of laughter as Helene Cixous in "Castration and Decapitation" also shows, can be just as subversive, when carnival turns the old hierarchies upside down, erasing old differences, producing new and unstable ones.

And though Ellmann's study is not exactly Bakhtinien undercutting what she wants to say. There is indeed, enough non-ironic in her study to support the view that she is a serious-minded feminist. For example, her last chapter "Responses" employs a fairly direct point of view.

Images of Women Criticism

Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* besides being a more balanced book, reconciling the demands of politics and literary values, is also known as one of the precursors of "Images of Women" criticism, which Ellmann tries to deconstruct. In her the images of women are not fixed but fluid. But somehow *Thinking About Women* has been a source of inspiration for researchers in the field of feminism. According to Moi: In American colleges in the early 1970's, the great majority of courses on women literature centred on the study of female stereotypes in male writing. She refers to articles printed in the central collection of essays titled *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminine Perspective*. The book was published in 1972. It met the need of rapidly expanding market, particularly for researchers

and general readers who wished to read what men have made of women. The books presented its reader a feminist perspective. Its editor Susan Koppleman Cormillon stated that the idea of collecting images of women came to her from her own experience in teaching women's studies.

This pioneer study about images of women in literature and life, will, the editor hoped, be a useful tool for raising consciousness not only in classrooms but also for those not involved in the academic world. In its 21 articles contributed by both men and women, predominantly by women, for there were only two articles by men, the book reflected the stereotyping of women by writers belonging both to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All the contributors criticized the sexes for their creation of 'unreal' female characters. They accused women writers of being more culpable than male writers in this respect, since they, unlike the men, betrayed their own sex. The editor further claimed that the book offered an occasion for communicating between experience of the author and that of the reader. In fact, the dominant note of the volume was to make a bridge between the life of the author and the life of the reader. In her essay, Florence Howe presented this demand for autobiography in realism, taking literature itself to be the most reflective of the life experience of the novelist.

As Moi writes: Such an emphasis upon the reader's right to learn about the writer's experience strongly supports the basic feminist contention that no criticism is value-free; that we all speak from a specific position shaped by cultural, social, political and personal factors. It is, on the other hand, authoritarian and manipulative to present this limited perspective as 'universal', feminists claim. Thus, feminists hold that it is democratic to supply the reader with all necessary information about the limitations of one's own perspective at the outset.

Moi finds chinks in this argument, questioning whether it is possible to make one's own position clear. Hermeneutical theory based on Martin Heidegger's phenomenological existentialism undercuts this assumption that we know our world too well. We are, on the contrary, always in ambiguity, because the world in which we live is too closely involved; it helps or hurts us. According to Moi, we cannot fully grasp our own horizon of understanding: there will always be unstated blindspots, fundamental presuppositions and 'pre-understanding' in the Husserlian sense of the word, of which we are not aware. Psychoanalysis, she further states, informs us that the most powerful motivations of our psyche often turn out to be those we have most deeply repressed. It is therefore difficult to believe that we can fully be aware of our own perspective. If we believe Merleau-Ponty, the world we live in is ambiguous.

What Moi means to say is that it is difficult to say that what we call our experience of life is authentically our own. We find it difficult to be subjective. In this regard, women's narcissism is a debatable point. Even the best of our own experience may not be our own – we may just parade clichés. Moi then points out that our reading of *Images of Women in Fiction* may turn out to be *false* images of women in fiction written by both sexes. There is a world of difference between real life and its reflection in literature. For instance, as the editor of the volume herself points out that no woman in fiction shaves her legs, as most American women in life do, following the oppressive nature of the male demand for well-shaved women. It is questionable that art can and should reflect life accurately and exclusively in every detail. On the other hand, poetry, as Matthew Arnold says, is a criticism of life. Arnold, for instance, offers his criticism of life in terms of his perception that whereas life is a chain of being we tend to read it in isolation – the divisions in relation to our divided aims, not in its variety. So, the real world is what the artist perceives it to be. Berkeley rightly said that to be is to be perceived.

Such a view, as Moi also says, refuses to consider textual production as a highly complex, 'over-determined' process with many different and conflicting literary and non-literary determinants – historical, political, social, ideological, institutional, generic, psychological, and so on. Instead, she feels, writing seems as a more or less *faithful* reproduction of an external reality to which we have equal and unbiased access, and which therefore enables us to criticize the author on the grounds that he or she has created an incorrect model of reality we somehow all know. The real, accordingly, is not only something we construct, but a controversial construct at that.

Moi's contention is that literature is not an autobiography. On the other hand, it is the author's perception of life – call it reconstruction or reproduction. Shakespeare probably never in his life found himself naked and mad on a heath. *King Lear* nevertheless reads 'authentically' enough for most people. Therefore, she is of the view, no writer can achieve a total reproduction of reality in fiction. The 'real' is vast but his or her perception is short. Moi thus broaches the question of realism. No perception of reality excludes its form – its aesthetic ideal, i.e. what is and what might or

ought to be. There is no poetry of content without its corresponding form. Physical poetry, as John Crowe Ransom says has its counterpart in Platonism. In this sense, all poetry worth the name is both physical and metaphysical. It is at once modernist and formalist. In *Images of Women in Fiction*, the double rejection of modernist literature and ‘formalist’ criticism highlights, according to Moi, the deep realist bias of Anglo-American feminist criticism. The real and ideal, the content and the form should correspond to each other.

The “Images of Women” critics, Moi strongly feels, downgrade literature, finding it lacking in ‘real’ experience according to own standards of they count as ‘real’. As a text of reality, they ask us to compare the character’s life with that of the author and also check it further by using sociological data. Reality is not as simplistic and monolithic as that. Still Moi gives these critics of *Images of Women in Fiction* credit for their enthusiasm for pursuing women’s cause:

For a generation educated within the ahistorical, aestheticizing discourse of new criticism, the feminists’ insistence on the *political* nature of any critical discourse, and their will to take historical and sociological factors into account must have seemed both fresh and exciting to a large extent those are precisely the qualities presumed to-day feminists critics still strive to preserve.

Women Writing and Writing About Women

Moi’s praise of feminists’ shift of emphasis to the historical and sociological, notwithstanding, it remains a fact that it was a simplistic approach of tracing images of women in male writing. And the trend did not predictably last. Another shift lay in waiting to take over. From about 1975, interest started to focus exclusively on the works of women writers as a group. As early as 1971, Elaine Showalter forcefully argued that feminists must focus on creating literature of their own. Her view gradually gained acceptance. As we have seen *Images of Women in Fiction* two male contributors but the volume contained more analysis of male writers than of female writers and often makes a negative attitude to works of women writers. Moi traces a decisive shift to female writers around 1975 when Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olson began to compile anthology *Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose* (1978). This was a significant shift because surprisingly what women critics were writing about women’s literature was not being published in respectable numbers and not readily accessible to concerned students and teachers. The anthology has no male contributors, and all its essays deal either with theoretical questions or the works of women writers.

Moi calls the publication of the volume the beginning of the second phase of feminism. However, the phase also produced non-feminist writing’s, such as Patricia Beer’s *Reader! I Married Him* (1974). The book, though not dogmatically anti-feminist, denounces feminist preoccupation with ‘value-oriented’ scholarship. She claims that her book is not written for fanatics, but for discerning readers: “(I felt) that the subject might be of interest of readers who, without being necessarily either students of English literature or supporters of women’s Lib, had a concern in the novel and the cause of female emancipation.”

Beer is obviously both fascinated and repelled by the ‘women’s Lib’ label, because she hoped to find more readers among the avowed feminists. In fact, Beer proposed to situate herself equidistantly both from the male and female fanatics. In appealing to both, she failed to please either. The book, Moi rightly says, is of no substantial interest to students of feminist approach to literature.

In the 1970’s, there major studies appeared on women writers – Ellen Moer’s *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’. *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). With these books, feminists come-of-age. These three studies together form the edifice of feminism. They were read and admired. Their writers became the classics of feminist criticism.

These three books, indeed, defined a distinctively female tradition in literature on the ground that, as Elaine Showalter puts it, “the female tradition comes from the still-evolving relationship between women writers and their society.” For the first time, feminism received its direction, that it is society, not *biology* that shapes women’s different literary perception of the world. The three critics adhered to this, though still differing between themselves regarding how exactly society does and should form their perception.

Ellen Moer: Literary Women

The book *Literary Women* is the result of long reflection on the need to treat writers as a separate group. The process of thinking on this aspect started as far back as the year of the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Moer earlier thought that treating women writers as a separate group was of no use, but then besides the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, many other things made her think that women writers need to be treated as a class apart. For one, that feminists already practice a segregation of major women writers unknowingly. It has enabled them to have a deeper understanding of the real nature of women's history. Thus Moi records that Moer came to mirror the development of many academic women from her suspicion that male writers have always treated female writers unequally, that politically too it was necessary to view women writers as a distinction group if the patriarchal strategy of subsuming women under the general category of 'man' and thereby silencing them was to be effectively countered.

Moer's was the first attempt at describing the history of women's writing as a powerful under current running parallel to the male tradition. This study, since it mapped an unknown territory for the first time, received popular acclaim. It was received well as a catalyst, a landmark book by Ellie Olsen, among others. Indeed, it deserved high praise, though at times, says Moi, the book lapses into sentimental hyperbole. Predictably, the book lost its new shine in a few years time. Besides its enthusiasm over the discovery of a new terrain, the book is not really satisfactory either as a literary history or as literary criticism. It is, as Moi finds, too engrossed in circumstantial details, too unaware of any kind of literary theory to function well as criticism, and far too limited in its conception of history.

In fact, Moi notices a naiveté in Moer's conception of history as if it were a chronical (in the medieval sense), of noting what the chronicler finds worth noting. History for Moer comes to mean: history writes itself. According to Moi, this belief in the possibility of a neutral registration of events sounds strangely out of place in a work that is, after all, avowedly feminist in approach. Feminism claims to be, on the contrary, subjective in its approach as it gives a over-view of the field of English, American and French writing by women in the period stretching from the late-eighteenth to the twentieth century. In addition, it gives plot summaries, biographical details, including biographical anecdotes which serve as interesting and useful preliminary introduction, but as Moi says, the book can hardly be studied as a pioneer work, a stepping-stone for the more mature feminist literary histories that emerged within a year or two of publication, books like *A Literature of Their Own* and *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Elaine Showalter: A Literature of Their Own

Showalter herself disagreed with Moer's emphasis on women's literature as an international movement, that it was an undercurrent, rapid and powerful. She, on the contrary, agrees with Germaine Greer that women writers could not enjoy lasting fame, though celebrated in their own lifetimes, they seem to vanish without trace from the records of posterity. What Showalter emphasized was the women's writing has no consistent history; there are of course broken links of the chain. Therefore, it is difficult to speak of a women's movement. Instead, women's is sub-movement, a sub-culture, and as such we can speak of an undulated terrain of female writing similar to a sub-culture – "Austen peaks, the Bronte cliffs, the Eliot range and the Woolf hills". Accordingly, Showalter has three stages of feminism corresponding to three stages chained to be common with literary subcultures – imitation or feminism, protest or Feminist and self-discovery or Female. The Feminine phase begins, according to Showalter, with appearance of male pseudonyms in 1840 and lasts until the death of George Eliot; the second phase, passes through the Feminist phase from 1880 to 1920 and the third, Feminine phase starts with 1920 and is still continuing. This is what Moi calls it: the guided tour of the female literary landscape in Britain since the 1840's. However, her major contribution, according to Moi to literary history in general, and the feminist criticism in particular, is the emphasis she places on the rediscovery of forgotten or neglected women writers. Moi praises Showalter for her efforts in bringing to light so many hitherto unknown women. The book is immensely informative. Nevertheless, it is not flawless, but its flaw is

not found in the enthusiasm and respect Showalter betrays for the subject, but in stretching the difference between sexes, politically in thinking them separate on the basis of its unstated theoretical assumptions about the relationship between literature and reality and between feminist politics and literary evaluation. Moi has already hinted at his flaw in her defence of Virginia Woolf in the Introduction of the book, and will again find fault with Showalter's theoretical assumptions, in the fourth chapter of *Sexual/Textual Politics*.

A Madwoman in the Attic

A madwoman in the Attic by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar is once again as a massive book, incisive in its study of major women writers of the nineteenth century – Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, the Brontes (particularly Charlotte), George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson. The book is important, as its aims at providing us a new understanding of the nature of the “distinctively female literary tradition of the nineteenth century. In addition, it aspires to elaborate an ambitious new theory of women's literary creativity. The book begins with an attempt at arriving a feminist poetics, particularly with reference to male literary assertion and coercion.

Gilbert and Gubar in *A Madwoman in the Attic* show that the nineteenth century presents artistic activity as a fundamentally male quality. So and so writer ‘fathered’ his text, as God created the world, was a common view of creativity, as if the male were a cosmic Author, the sole legitimate creator. Gilbert and Gubar feel that under such thinking, women writers have a rough time coping with the consequences of such a Phallogocentric myth of creativity. As a result, women creativity imaged male fantasies too. This explains the absence of images of femaleness. However one such image they entertained was that of ‘eternal femininity’ – i.e. of angelic beauty and sweetness: from Dante's Beatrice and Goethe's Gretchen and Makarie to Coventry Patmore's ‘Angel in the House’, the ideal woman, as Moi comments, is seen as a passive, docile and above all, a *selfless* creature. But to be selfless is not to be noble; it is to be dead. Behind her angelic beauty lurks the monster, the obverse of the male idealization of women is the male fear of femininity. The monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless; she acts on her own initiatives. She is the one who tries to be alive and her own self. She is like Shakespeare's Goneril and Regan and Thackeray's Becky Sharp or worst Sphinx, Medusa, Circe, Kali, Delilah, and Salome, all of whom possess duplicitous arts that allow them both to seduce and to seal male generative energy. She has, as Gilbert and Gubar find, something to tell but may choose not to tell – or to tell a different story. She is inscrutable, and therefore beyond men's understanding. She, indeed, is enigmatic. Thus the women face the question of defining themselves. If the author is already defined as male, how can she venture to take up the pen at all? This has been the cause of female anxiety in the nineteenth century, particularly for those women who wish to write from their own point of view. But it was a difficult position for them – writing in the anxiety of authorship. So her writing becomes roundabout – for they expressed themselves against the oppressive effect of dominant patriarchal modes of reading. As Emily Dickinson put it: “Tell all the truth but tell it slant”, i.e. to tell truth deviously – not straight, but crookedly, indirectly, with irony. Hence, women's creativity turns out to be palimpsestic – works whose decisions conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning, as Gilbert and Gubar say. Indeed, to be a woman writer was a difficult task, simultaneously conforming and subverting patriarchal literary standards.

But Gilbert and Gubar regard the female voice as authentic, though duplicitous. In the title itself of their book, they refer to the madwoman in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. She is Martha Mason whom her husband keeps in the attic. She is, according to Gilbert and Gubar her author's doubt, and image of her own anxiety and rage. Indeed, as they say, much of the poetry and fiction written by women “conjures up this mad creature so that female authors can come to terms with their own unequal feelings of fragmentations, their own keen sense of discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be.

The authors of *A Madwoman in the Attic* find the above feature common to all the nineteenth century novelists studied in the book. All of them identify themselves with this monster of the woman. Hence, the figure of the

madwoman becomes emblematic of a sophisticated literary strategy. This provides with a revolutionary edge. Jane is sweet, but Martha is a monster who tries to burn herself and the whole house. She is an unmanageable counterpart of the angelic image of Jane. Thus, Gilbert and Gubar develop the whole series of binary oppositions sane/mad, women/monster, sweet/raging, angel/devil. Theoretically, Gilbert and Gubar, maintain the identity of author and character. They, in fact, insist, as Millett does, that the character is the author's and through this raging double women novelist surreptitiously express their anger, while at the same time the female novelists articulate for themselves the closely destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained.

So there is, Gilbert and Gubar postulate, a *real* woman hidden behind the patriarchal textual face, and the feminist's task is to uncover her truth. Moi finds it difficult to appreciate this ingenious argument. She quotes with approval Mary Jacobus' criticism of *A Madwoman in the Attic* that its authors postulate an "unstated complicity" with the autobiographical "phallacy", whereby male critics hold that women's writing is somehow closer to their experience than man's, "that the female text is the author, or at any rate a dramatic extension of her unconscious. Moi calls the kind of argument – a design that hides the real. It is reductionist, as has also been the case with psychoanalysis and Marxist criticism. Gilbert and Gubar have only one point to emphasize, that anger is the only possible positive signal of a feminist consciousness. *Jane Eyre* thus becomes in their arsenal the greatest armour and its madwoman their revolutionary woman. The gentle irony of Charlotte, Moi says, is lost on Gilbert and Gubar. The authors then sacrifice literary value for political. Naturally, the explicit rage and moodiness of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* furnish them with superb grounds for stimulating exegesis.

Besides, their insistence that provides the only true meaning of the text, i.e. the novelist's anger ironically undermine Gilbert and Gubar's anti-patriarchal stance. The relationship between text and author is hierarchical. But to their own disadvantages, Gilbert and Gubar quote Edward said in this regard. According to Moi, if we are truly to reject the model of the author as God the Father of the text, it is surely not enough to reject patriarchal ideology implied in the parental metaphor. The author should not be regarded as a transcendental signified, if we wish to demolish the whole edifice of his authority. We should proclaim with Roland Barthes the death of the author. According to Barthes, to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. When the author is found to say what he means, the text is explained and that moment is the moment of victory of the critics.

Do Gilbert and Gubar mean to win? A text, is multiplicity. We cannot fix meaning to it. Moi's objection against the authors of *A Madwoman in the Attic* is that they search for a fixed meaning of the text in the authorial voice as the essence of the text—unified and monolithic. This remains Gilbert and Gubar's ideal. On the contrary, the scattering of leaves of women's creativity as in Mary Shelley's account of Syble is for Gilbert and Gubar sickness and disease. The good text for them is an organic whole.

But this emphasis on integrity and totality as an ideal for women's writing comes to, says Moi, aping a phallic construct. As Luce Irigaray and Jacques Derrida have argued, patriarchal thought models on as positive values on the central assumption of the phallus and logos as transcendental signifiers of western culture—its values are good, true or beautiful. Against these transcendental signifiers, passive value, i.e. female values are chaotic, fragmented, negative, non-existent. The phallus, accordingly, stands for a whole, unitary and simple form, as opposed to the terrifying chaos of the female genitals. They are still labouring under the patriarchal aesthetic values of New Criticism.

What Moi finds amiss in Gilbert and Gubar's thesis is that in recreating a lost female they fall into the trap of the male aesthetic mould; they seem to recreate a mighty woman, rather than accept her womanly self who remains a woman without losing her freedom to be her moral self. This raises the question of revising a feminine aesthetics that seems, in these particular respects to lead to the old patriarchal and authoritarian dead end.

Theoretical Reflections

Moi in trying to revise the very theoretical basis of feminine aesthetic, takes up to examine the existing feminist theory in her study of three female theoreticians—Annette Kolodny, Elaine Showalter, and Myra Jehlen. In her preliminary

remarks, Moi points out that Anglo-American feminist critics have been mostly indifferent or even hostile towards literary theory, what they have often regarded as a hopelessly abstract 'male' activity. Fortunately, this attitude, Moi finds, has begun to change during the 1980's. In order to trace the beginning of the change, she has chosen these three precursors for the purpose. According to her these three feminist critics are fairly representatives of Anglo-American feminist criticism from the theoretical point of view.

Annette Kolodny

Moi regards Annette Kolodny as the first to break the theoretical silence among feminist critics. In this respect, Moi takes up Kolodny's essay 'Some notes of Defining a "Feminist Literary Criticism"', first published in *Critical Inquiry* in 1975. Kolodny in her 'notes' claimed that she was the first to broach the subject and she called her definition 'exacting'. She specifies that the study of women's writing is a separate category. She claimed this separation on the "assumption that there is something unique about women's writing. She was anxious to discover this distinct nature of women's writing, and adopted for this purpose the method of comparison and contrast, choosing the masculine mode for comparing it to that of the feminine. Thus she proposed a kind of feminist comparativism, much as Jehlen was to do six years later.

This comparativism obviously involved a painstaking analysis treating each author and each separate work of each author as itself unique and individual. Then slowly, we may, Kolodny thought, over the course of time and much reading "discover what kind of things recur and, more important still, if things recur". This methodology of having no presuppositions before beginning to read a text is good to the extent possible, but even Husserl who advanced this phenomenological approach was not very sanguine about its application, unless we are very careful and consistent in our approach or else, as Moi also says we are likely to be influenced by our unconscious preconceptions. Kolodny herself locates among others two most important features of women's writing: reflection and inversion, but being over-cautious, she finds these features not distinctively unique in women's fictions, because male writers also use them. She then comes dwell on the use of distinct images which woman alone use. This is another trap she falls in unawares – the trap of New Criticism and even of imagining of the kind Caroline Spurgeon used in trying to underline the uniqueness of Shakespeare through the use of his imagery. Kolodny, in fact, stages a coup in this regard by going back to the traditional view of literature, particularly its historicism. She even recommends that feminist criticism should be "obliged to separate political ideologies from aesthetic judgements", since as she puts it, political commitment may make 'dishonest critics of us'. She ends her essay by claiming that the aim of feminist criticism must be "the re-franchising of women writers into the mainstream of our academic curriculum through fairer, non sex biased, and more judicious appraisal of their work. Moi is doubtful about the success of Kolodny's approach, because retracing the journey backward through this reformism, i.e. going back to square one will be untenable.

In her later observation on the question of separating politics from feminist studies, she reflected that in order to find a honoured place in academic, feminist criticism must enact a true dialogue with its male counterpart in order to remove suspicion that feminist literary criticism is subversive. She even asked for soul-searching on the part of feminist critics themselves as to what ends their judgements serve and what conceptions of the world or ideological stances do they help to perpetuate. Moi comments: This is one of her most valuable insight.

But the problem arises, Moi says, when Kolodny proceeds from this to a whole-sale recommendation of *pluralism* as an appropriate feminine stance. This she does in order to save feminist criticism from being monolithic, as for example, like psychoanalysis or Marxist criticism. However, Moi does not see that psychoanalysis and Marxist criticism are as unified theoretical fields as Kolodny thinks them to be, nor does she agree with Kolodny's claim that feminist criticism is *that* diversified.

Kolodny herself acknowledges that feminist politics is the basis for feminist criticism, but what constitutes proper feminist politics and theory is subject to debate, as has been the case with contemporary Marxism. Without common political ground, says Moi, there can simply be no recognizable feminist criticism. Kolodny's 'pluralism' would, Moi fears, amount to throwing the baby with the bathwater.

Moi is not against feminist politics, for without its politics the discipline would itself perish. She is also not against the debate within feminist politics. What she is unhappy about is that too much pluralism will dilute feminist criticism to the extent that it would become one among many approaches, whereas feminist criticism with its 'core' political agenda should align itself

with literary theory as such, that goes by the common name, post-structuralism, as all developing and developed disciplines, like post-modernist, post-colonialism, New Historicism, *et al* seek to establish the equality of the marginalized.

Kolodny's intervention in the theoretical debate pays, according to Moi, too little attention to the role of politics in critical theory. It is not that she is not aware of the bane of intellectual neutrality in criticism, but she still seems not to recognize that even critical theory carries with it its own political implications.

Elaine Showalter

While Kolodny tries to skirt politics of feminism criticism, Showalter foregrounds it in her two articles "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979) and "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981). In her first article, she is concerned with woman both as reader and writer. While the woman as reader comes under the category 'feminist critique', the second, i.e. the woman as writer she calls 'gynocritics'. Feminist critique deals with works by male authors, probes as it does, the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. In the second, Showalter explores common concerns of literary women such as the history, genres and structures as well as psychoanalysis of female creativity. Together, the two categories suspect male orientation of existing literary criticism. Showalter moves towards developing feminist poetics with the suspicion that if we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what man have thought women should be.

This makes Showalter forcefully plead for developing gynocriticism – the study of women's writings, precisely in order not only learn what women have felt and experience but also that this experience is directly available in the text written by women. But ironically Showalter's ideal of transparent text, transmitting authentic human experience is again a traditional ideal of patriarchal humanism, whose values she opposes.

In her other article "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" she examines the same issue with reference to four contexts—biological, linguistic, psychoanalysis and cultural criticism. She begins her article asking whether feminist criticism should have a theory. Indeed, she is weary of theorizing finding it a male derive. Nevertheless, she yet feels the need for theorizing. She still, Moi says, employs a division between 'feminist critique' or feminist reading and 'gynocriticism'.

This makes her reject what white fathers—Lacan, Macherey and Engels have said, but again she ends up by extolling as particularly suitable for 'gynocritical' activity the cultural theory developed by Edwin Ardner and Clifford Geertz. Moi finds it to be a glaring inconsistency. By extolling these male theorists, she, as Moi further says, appears amusing for the readers who pursued her so long. In order to come out of this impasse, she relies upon an extensive knowledge of women's texts. Moi, however asks: But what knowledge is ever uninformed by theoretical assumptions?

And so, Moi feels that Showalter's argument in defence of gynocriticism does not advance: the lack of theory of feminist criticism has for Showalter become a virtuous necessity, "since too much theoretical study prevents us from achieving a close and extensive knowledge of women's texts". Thus, she means to resist the male academic hierarchy, but is not able to do so. Her aim, in effect, is to create a separate canon of women's writing, not to abolish all canons. In reading women's text without any theory will amount to creating a new canon, and equally oppressive at that, if the feminist critic is still to sit, quietly and listen to her mistress's voice, instead of her master's, expressing authentic female expression. The feminist reader in this reading is not granted leave to get up and challenge this female voice; the female voice, Moi points out, then rules as despotically as the old male text. Showalter's gynocriticism is obviously caught in a painful dilemma between the new feminists with their 'male' theorist and the male humanist empiricists with their patriarchal politics. This dilemma becomes more glaring, when a women's work refuses to conform to the humanistic expectations of an authentic realistic expression of human experience.

This insistence on authentic human expression as essential feature of Anglo-American feminist criticism is, according to Moi, a fiction. A text, according to Moi, following post-structuralist thinking, is never authentic in the sense it has a unitary voice.

Myra Jehlen

With Myra Jehlen, Moi reaches the end of her detour of "Anglo-American Feminist criticism." According to Moi, in her article "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism" Jehlen seemed to have voiced central concerns among many American feminists. First published in 1981, the article traces the contradiction between what Jehlen

calls “appreciative and political reading.” Indeed, she pleads for holding a balance between these two readings. According to her, prominent feminist critics, Spacks, Moers, Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar suffer from their exclusive focus on the female tradition in literature. She deplores the feminist tendency to create an alternative context, a sort of female enclave apart from the universe of masculinist assumptions”. They, for example, began examining the dominant male culture (Ellmann, Millett), but Jehlen feels, that feminists need to go a step further – they should compare the two readings in order to locate the difference between women’s and men’s. She, therefore, wishes feminist critics to adopt what she calls “radical comparativism.” Millett’s book is, for example, all about men’s writing.

Moi finds a dangerous sliding in Jehlen’s argument, as she makes male criticism as a reference point—a standpoint, as she puts it, from which we can see our conceptual universe. This ambiguity—as Moi calls it, is caused in no small part by certain highly confusing rhetorical maneuvers around the image of Archimedes and his fulcrum. What Jehlen seems to say in invoking Archimedes is that there is no space other than patriarchy to locate feminist fulcrum to move patriarchy. That means that feminist criticism can simply go nowhere else than come back to square one. Such a radical comparativism, according to Showalter would, amount to an abandonment of a feminist enterprise. She defends the study of a female tradition in literature as a “methodological choice rather than a belief”, declaring that though women live in the same world as men do, they at least have a choice of having different ideas and thus can draw a boundary and open to us new vistas of thought, a new way of seeing their problems. Moi would agree with Showalter to this extent but no further when it comes to creating a “female enclave”, because that would be not a methodological choice, but a political necessity.

But the problem facing feminist critics is how to construct a separate reading and writing for women without bringing patriarchal notions of aesthetics, history and tradition. Showalter, herself, says Moi, could not avoid these pitfalls, but she is aware of them, while Jehlen seems to be accepting the male aesthetic categories. This becomes apparent when she approaches the “critical appreciation” as opposed to political readings. She thinks that literature, unlike news, is not biased, and therefore needs to be deciphered. But Roland Barthes argues: “Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. But Jehlen thinks it otherwise. A text for her is an encoded message of its author’s voice, and that message needs to be decoded. It is what she calls “appreciation” of a work of art. She, therefore, argues for the separation of politics and aesthetics in an attempt to solve a perennial problem for radical critics, forgetting that aesthetic values are historically relative and also that they are deeply imbricated in political value judgements. A text, as Moi sees it, is not politically innocent. She even goes to the extent of saying that aesthetic categories carry *automatic* political overtones. For Jehlen, however, ideological criticism is reductive.

Moi now comes to clinch the issue of political vs aesthetic reading: if aesthetics raises the question whether (and how) the text works efficiently with an audience, it obviously is bound up with the political thought without an aesthetic effect there will be no political effect either. And if feminist politics is about, among other things “experience”, then it is already related to the aesthetic. It should, Moi adds, be clear now that one of the chief contentions of her book is that feminist criticism is about deconstruction such an opposition between the political and aesthetic: as a political approach to criticism, feminism must be aware of the politics of aesthetic categories as well as of the implied aesthetics of political approaches to art. That is why, she says, Jehlen’s views seems to her to undermine some of the most basic tenets of feminist criticism.

Summation

In her survey of Anglo-American Feminist criticism, Moi throws light on the fundamental affiliations between traditional humanists and patriarchal criticism and recent scholarship. Despite the claims that Anglo-American feminist literary criticism is already generating new methods and analytical procedures, she can find little evidence of such development. If at all feminist criticism is said to have developed new methodologies, it is at the level of politics. In short, feminists have *politicized* existing critical methods and approaches – they have emphasized Sexual Politics. It is on the basis of its political theory that feminist criticism, says Moi, has grown to become a new branch of literary studies. Feminist critics in this regard are like other radical critics – post-colonial, for example, speaking from their marginalized positions on the outskirts of the academic establishments, they strive to make explicit the politics of so-called “neutral” or “objective” works of their colleagues, as well to act as cultural critics in the widest sense of the world.

Moi's reservation about such Anglo-American feminist criticism are not primarily that it has, for all its claim to be otherwise, remained within the lineage of male-centred humanism, but that it has done so without sufficient awareness. The case of Jehlen is pertinent in this regard. This, according to Moi, entails a high political cost – that for all its avowedly strong political engagement, it is in the end not political enough: not in the sense that it fails to go *far* enough along political spectrum, but in the sense that radical analysis of sexual politics will remain entangled with depoliticizing theoretical paradigms. There is nothing surprising in this: all forms of radical thought inevitably remain mortgaged to the very historical category which they seek to transcend. However, she warns: but our understanding of this historically necessary paradox should not lead us complacently to perpetuate patriarchal practices.

Toril Moi – Her Critical Postulates

Published in 1985, *Sexual/Textual Politics* is a critique mainly of Anglo-American feminist criticism. Indeed, this critique forms the first and the longest part of the book. This part is further sub-divided into four sub-parts, namely 'Two Feminist Classics'; 'Images of Women Criticism'; 'Women Writing and Writing About Women' and 'Theoretical Reflections'. Moi is critical of Anglo-American feminist criticism because in an age where more and more disciplines adopt deconstructive mode of reading, i.e. they seek to neutralize essentialism and thus find a common ground to meet, Anglo-American feminist critics tend to see differences in sexual relationship rather than commonality. This tendency reflected itself in the adverse criticism of Virginia Woolf's androgyny. Woolf's reading of men-women relationship in great writers like Shakespeare convinced her that the mind of a great artist is androgynous; it is less apt to make sexual distinctions than a single-sexed mind. Such a mind was Coleridge who would not recognize difference between big and small and even between men, birds and beasts. Moi refers to such mind to defend Woolf's androgyny which Showalter condemned in no uncertain terms, saying that it was Woolf's defence-mechanism to transcend her woman's sufferings. This is despite the fact that Woolf is deeply conscious of not only hers but also of the sufferings of the whole sisterhood. But instead of wasting her time in anger and hatred toward the male sex, and thereby ruin her peace of mind, she advises women to take heart, adopt an ironic stance, point out the black spot at the back of her male, ensuing in the laughter of Medusa, the last laughter, for one who laughs last, as the adage goes, laughs the best. The Anglo-American feminist critics, Showalter, Ellmann, Millett, to name the prominent ones, fail to appreciate Woolf's artistic/ironic perspective. In fact, as Moi says, it is lost on them. They are, on the contrary, charged with anger against what they all see as patriarchal politics of keeping women low. They virulently charge patriarchal ideology. They feel that women's past is not the same as men's and following Lukacs, art must not represent the division of complete human personality – male and female. Their grouse against Woolf is that she failed to create a new woman, separate from man.

Moi finds Showalter's position flawed, because the latter pleads for a revolutionary view of women. It is thus, the Anglo-American feminist critics betray their traditional humanism which is the very basis of patriarchal ideology – the ideology of the seamless unified self, the phallic self, constructed on the model of the self-contained, powerful phallus. This is Moi's central postulate of her critique of Anglo-American feminist criticism – that is relying mainly on the content ask for an authentic expression without any recourse to the form, i.e. the narrative strategies of the text with which would deconstruct the male hegemony both in her prose and fiction, rather than falling in the trap of humanist patriarchal ideology of a male, unified, powerful and separate.

Moi's whole treatment of Anglo-American feminist criticism is seeped in irony – that in trying to create a manly woman, it is trapped in male ego-centricity. Moi, being a thoroughgoing deconstructive feminist demands deconstruction of sexual identity. She shows an acute awareness of the dangers of both liberal and radical feminists. While the former tends to dilute the rhetoric of politics of their radical counterparts, thus brings aesthetic values to the fore, the latter dismiss aesthetics out of hand and lay stress wholly on the sexual politics.

After her preliminary defence of Virginia Woolf's feminism, Moi proceeds to analyse in her first chapter, "Anglo-American Feminism Criticism", the case of two Feminist classics–Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968). Moi ironically calls them classics of feminist criticism, because they together take up to discuss sexual politics at the cost of aesthetic counterpart, i.e. they concentrate on the content exclusively, suspecting literary values as remnant of male ideology. As such, Millett's reading of the four male novelists

is bold, she reads against the grain, against authority – upsetting the academic establishment or to write off academic criteria of “good” literary criticism of evaluation as reactionary and of no importance. Moi deplores this bold stand of politically conscious Anglo-American feminist critics, beginning with Kate Millett. Nevertheless *Sexual Politics* in 1969 became an instant success. In comparison, *Thinking About Women* published a year earlier was less successful, precisely because Ellmann tried to reconcile political and literary values. *Sexual Politics* brings power relationship to the fore, refreshingly breaking away, as Moi says, from the autonomous New critical reading of literary. But the negative aspect of the book, according to Moi is that Millett does not acknowledge on her the influence of earlier feminists, including Virginia Woolf and even Simone de Beauvoir. She devotes much of the book analyzing, as we have seen, four male novelists – namely Lawrence, Miller, Mailer and Genet – all forming a sexual male nexus. Obviously, as Moi finds, the study becomes reductive. The only trope she uses in blasting male ideology of power is that of rhetoric. Even Freud is called a counterrevolutionary force in the ideology of sexual politics, just not because he happened to be male, but because she is unable to pin him down to a single unified position.

Moi praises Millett for her definition of sexual politics: the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex. She equally praises the writer of *Sexual Politics* for elaborating this definition through her reading of four male novelists of the twentieth century. But her reading being bold strikes Moi for its remarkably unified, nay, powerful fist in the solar plexus of patriarchy. In the process, she becomes as good as a powerful male. That is why she finds her feminist precursors not bold enough to deserve acknowledgement. This bold stance makes her position, though unwittingly of staking her claim that women are different. She is out to prove that women are as strong as men. *Sexual Politics*, according to Moi, does not deserve to be a model for future feminist writing.

Ellmann’s feminism in this regard is subtler than that of Millett in that she thinks that Western culture thinks by sexual analogy. Her book *Thinking About Women* is indeed about women’s stereotyping as weak and passive. Ellmann’s reading of feminism thus gave impetus to “images of women” criticism, which Moi discusses in her next section of the chapter.

Ellmann’s treatment of the feminist issue is subtler, because she employs irony, which Moi regards as a literary trope. In fact, irony is an important part, say, even the principle of a poetic structure as Cleanth Brooks thought it to be. For Moi, *Thinking About Women* is a funny feminist book. In fact, it is deconstructive in style, for it juxtaposes contradictory statement, depriving the reader of any authorial comment, as, for example, “When men are searching for truth, women are content with lies,” reminding us Philip Sidney who in a cryptic remark on poets said: they do not lie, because they do not affirm. But Ellmann is not being elusive. Bakhtin too said anger is not the only revolutionary attitude available with us.

In her second section “Images of Women Criticism,” Moi takes up to analyse Susan Koppleman Cormillon’s collected essays *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminism Perspective* (1972). Taking her cue from Ellmann, the editor reflects in her collection of essays the stereotyping of women by writers, mostly women belonging to the nineteenth century. All the contributors, including two males, criticized both the sexes, women more than men, for creating ‘unreal’ female characters. They accused women for betraying their own sex. They, therefore, wished to make a bridge between the life of the author and that of the reader, so that the fictitious images of women could be replaced by real images. The point that these contributors together make is that they all speak from a specific position shaped by cultural, social, political and personal factors. Moi finds this feminist perspective once again flawed in that it is difficult for beings-in-the-world even to be subjective. In this regard, women’s narcissism is questionable. Even the most subjective of our experiences may be that of others, Heidegger would say. For example, no woman in fiction shaves her legs, as most American women in life do. Moi questions whether literature is a simple reflection of life, literature is no autobiography; it is rather a reproduction of life, contends Moi. Hence, no writer can claim to have reproduced ‘real’ life in fiction. Being reproduction of ‘reality’, no art can exclude form. But Anglo-Americans either exclude form in laying emphasis on content or dismiss content as of no importance while emphasizing form. That is why they (mostly) politicize art or think of art as innocent of politics.

In mostly emphasizing the content of art, Anglo-American feminist critics have no doubt done a salutary service; they have saved the reading of literature from being too abstract, too formalistic. But it has its own pitfalls. In fact, they should be metaphorical in their approach, i.e. as Cleanth Brooks, though a New Critic himself, has suggested that art should pass through the narrow door of particulars and the concrete before emerging into universals. That is, they should have heeded the Kantian advice, that perceptions without conceptions are blind, while conceptions without

perceptions are blind. We need physical poetry, but we at the same time cannot ignore ideals, as Ransom has posited in “Poetry: A Note on Ontology.”

Moi is consistent in her critique of Anglo-American feminist critics; she finds them partial and limited in their approach to art. She is of course no votary of New Criticism. Indeed, she warns us against its too much emphasis on form. She praises feminists for emphasizing the political perspective in art, but she deplors their exclusive political approach. That makes their critique reductive. In her third section “Women Writing and Writing About Women,” Moi’s critical survey changes with the change in feminist perspective. From about 1975, interest in feminist study shifted from images of women criticism to studying the works of women writers as a group. This was a significant shift. Concerted efforts were made to publish and propagate women’s cause through journals and periodicals, seminars and anthologies. Moi takes up to study a representative anthology of the time, *Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose* (1978) edited by Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olson. Not surprisingly all the essays in the volume deal with women writers, blaming it on patriarchy for their plight. It was the second phase in Anglo-American feminist criticism after the first phase of stereotyping of women. In this regard, Moi discusses three major studies—Ellen Moer’s *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *A Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). These studies claim to have found direction for feminist criticism—that it is society, not biology that shapes women’s different literary perception of the world. Ellen Moer adhered to this direction of viewing literary women as a separate group, since male writers tend to subsume their counterparts under the general category of ‘man’, thereby silencing their voice. Moer wished to counter this view. On the contrary, she thought that women writers form a powerful undercurrent. But in her enthusiasm, Moer becomes sentimental and hyperbolic in her treatment of the issue of women writers deserving special attention. The book, according to Moi, is too engrossed in circumstantial details that it failed even to be a true chronicler of the Anglo-American feminist criticism.

Elaine Showalter’s study is more balanced in this regard. She focused on the issue that women writers could not enjoy lasting fame, because they do not form a chain of writing. At best, they remain broken links of the chain – Austen peaks, Bronte cliffs, Eliot (George Eliot) range and the Woolf hills. Women writers thus, according to Showalter form an undulated terrain. There are phases of female writing – feminine of pseudonyms, feminist of protest and female of self-discovery. Showalter’s study is obviously schematic. It is an immensely informative book, but is flawed in that it stretches the difference between male and female writing. It is for the same reason that Showalter could not appreciate Woolf’s attempt to see androgynous relationship of sexes.

A Madwoman in the Attic by Gilbert and Gubar centred on the nineteenth century women writers, mainly Charlotte Bronte. The title itself of the book alludes to Martha Mason, the mad wife of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. The book is important, as it underlines a distinctly women literary tradition of writers who suffered rough time coping with the patriarchal notion that creative activity is a male prerogative. Gilbert and Gubar thus blame it on phallogocentric myth of creativity that women writers – Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Mrs. Browning, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson had to suffer under the patriarchal view of literature. They had to tell the truth, but aslant, as Dickinson put it. In the process, they became duplicitous. Charlotte Bronte, for example, expressed her woman’s anger not through sweet Jane but through raging Martha who was forced to stay in the attic, because she was not sane enough to conform to the patriarchal order. Martha is Jane’s double in the binary series in sane/mad, sweet/raging, woman/monster, angel/devil.

The book, however, suffers because of its reliance on the view that a woman’s experience is more subjective and therefore authentic than that of a man. This is another kind of autobiographical phallacy, as Moi calls it. Gilbert and Gubar contend that anger is the only possible female expression – mad and raging. But it is questionable whether Jane in *Jane Eyre* fits in the binary relationship – sweet/mad. She is herself a formidable woman, questioning duplicitous moral standards of the males she comes across. Martha, the mad woman in the attic is not her double, but her travesty. Once more Gilbert and Gubar fall in the trap of patriarchal duplicity.

Moi in the end of “Anglo-American Feminist Criticism” rounds off her argument in the last section “Theoretical Reflection” by pointing out the pull of Anglo-American feminist critics in two opposite directions – to the rabidly political and the liberal non-political. For this purpose, she chooses three feminist theoreticians, namely, Annette Kolodny, Elaine Showalter and Myra Jehlen.

Kolodny claims that there is something unique about women's writing. For this she compares female imagery with that used by males in general. But imagist methodology puts her back in the New Critical mould of reading the text ahistorically. She, feels that feminist criticism is obliged to separate political ideologies from aesthetic judgements, since, she says, political commitment makes "dishonest critics of us."

Showalter, on the other hand, developed a radical theoretical model for feminist criticism, what she called "Gynocriticism". In her "Toward a Feminist Politics" and "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Showalter urges upon feminists, both readers and writers to develop women's culture, which includes their biological, linguistic and psychological dimensions – a culture which is truly their own within dominant male culture. This is how she feels we can understand what women feel, and not what men think they (women) feel. Moi finds in this theoretical assumption an attempt to create a new canon, perhaps equally oppressive as that of patriarchy. Her insistence on authentic human experience, of women in place of men, is nothing 'new' to offer.

Myra Jehlen seems to strike a balance between political and aesthetic values of a text, attempting thus to save Anglo-American feminist criticism from its exclusive concerns either with politics or with aesthetics. Jehlen derides the tendency of creating a feminist enclave apart from the world of masculinist assumptions. Moi suspects a dangerous sliding in Jehlen's argument, as she makes male criticism her reference point from which to see women's conceptual universe. But Jehlen appears insistent on moving the world by locating her Archimedes' fulcrum within the space of patriarchal ideology and thus to move patriarchy in order to re-enfranchise women writers into the mainstream of academic curriculum through non sex-biased, and more judicious appraisal of their work. Moi, however, does not approve of Kolodny's reformism, because it would mean going back to the old politics of patriarchy.

She thus argues for an exclusive emphasis on aesthetics of women writer. But Moi is of the view that there is no either/or in aesthetical and political categories. The two are bound to each other. Hers is a deconstructive critique of emphasis on either the one or the other. None is thus a privileged category. In laying emphasis on the politics, Anglo-American feminist critics subvert patriarchy, no doubt, but create another hierarchy, and ironically feminist critics have done so without being sufficiently conscious of this pitfall. This, according to Moi, entails a high cost on both sides, whether they alienate from or align themselves with patriarchy. Unfortunately, most of Anglo-American feminists remain, as Moi says, within the lineage of male centred humanism, without sufficiently aware of it. This is like saying that Milton was of Devil's party without knowing it. This is the central irony of Moi's critique of Anglo-American feminist criticism.

Simone de Beauvoir

Unit - II - The Second Sex

What is Feminism?

It will readily be accepted that women and men have not been treated equally and that woman was not allowed or was not considered capable enough to participate in the various spheres of the society. Feminism is according to me awareness about this fact and a desire to change this state of affairs. This would involve discarding of old assumptions, questioning the pre-defined norms and inviting new perspectives. It is not possible to define feminism in concrete terms because more than being something tangible it is an ideology and a stance that is taken in favour of a woman. It is important to get this clear that feminism is not something that is adopted only by woman; rather there are many men who are feminists. According to feminism, women are eligible for equal political rights and should be socially and culturally viewed as equal to men. Feminism argues that women are also worthy of respect in the society just like the men and they should not be scorned for the mere fact that they are women. Also it intends at removing unreasonable biases and prejudices.

It is important to understand these three terms:

Female: It is a biological position in terms of sex, which is natural and given.

Feminine: it refers to the qualities attributed to females. To be feminine means to possess a set of culturally defined characteristics.

Feminist: it is a political position, which comes from the distinction between 'female' and 'feminine'.

History of Feminism

Earlier, women had nearly no rights. They could not vote, they could not own property and they were treated with absolutely no respect or regard. They were, in fact, considered to be of no value on their own. Women were expected to do just one thing and that was to stay at home and take care of their husbands and children. If a woman did choose to work outside of her home, there were few jobs to choose from. Most women worked as clerks, nurses, schoolteachers and other traditionally female activities. Women began to grow very frustrated and they realized that something had to change.

Gradually, there was an awareness of the discrimination between man and woman and prejudice in gender roles. With Mary Wollstonecraft's essay, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792), there was growing need for an equal status for both men and women all around the world. Her argument focuses on the notion of virtue and rights. If it is assumed that there is a single and only one set of human rights, then it is unreasonable and irrational to treat women differently. And to do so is not only morally wrong but also imprudent and an irresponsible behaviour. According to liberal writers and thinkers, like Locke and Hobbes, it is essential to organize the modern society where same laws and regulations apply to women as well as to men.

Then in 1845 came Margaret Fuller Ossol's book *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, which is regarded as the earliest account of feminist thought and brought to light the sexual and cultural essentialization of woman. This attempt towards woman's emancipation was furthered through the radical idea broadcasted by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Woman and Economics*. It was realized that economic independence is very essential for women if they wish to achieve liberation from the stereotypes resulting in discrimination and disparity.

For the liberal, individualist feminist the movement must concern itself with more freedom for women, a freedom from all social oppression equivalent to man's freedom. And society must reform itself in order to achieve that freedom. This was the central message of nineteenth century liberal feminists like Margaret Fuller and John Stuart Mill, and in recent years this line of feminist thought moved centre stage in North America with the work of Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*, 1963).

In the liberal feminist tradition women must be free to create her own life plan (a central demand of de Beauvoir's argument), with a maximum of access to what is necessary for such success, including reproductive technology, economic fairness in the market place, and whatever adjustments are needed to conventional ways of life: househusbands, day care, family planning, affirmative action, gender-free language policies, maternity leave, wage parity. If we could make these adjustments, then the equality and freedom women desire can be made compatible with a traditional family life in a society organized on liberal traditions. No radical revolution in society or attitudes is necessary. Look after access, education, and economic fairness, and the aims of feminism will be met. For many mainstream feminists, especially in the middle class, this is still the main agenda.

The first wave of feminism in the United States occurred in the 1920's when women fought for the right to vote. It was understood that with voting rights woman could A proposed constitutional amendment was introduced in every session of Congress from 1878 to 1919, but was defeated each time. Finally, in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution giving women equal pay for equal work, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited job discrimination on the basis of gender.

The second wave of feminism arose in the 1960's with the sexual revolution. This wave of feminism is sometimes referred to as Women's Liberation. This time the movement involved issues of reproductive rights (such as birth control and abortion) as well as equality in the workplace and female representation in the government. Many believe that this wave of feminism is still in place today.

Today women have more options than ever. More and more women are going to college and working outside the home. In the mid -1960's birth control became widely available and in 1972, the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* gave women the right to choose whether or not to carry a child to term. Women can now choose when and if to have children; we have more autonomy than ever.

Also, it is believed by many critics that modern feminist movement is closely associated with the Enlightenment for probably two main reasons. In the first place, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed economic changes that drastically changed the situation of women, especially in the middle class, (although some fresh problems were created) and, secondly, the attack on the tradition fostered by the Enlightenment invited a polemical review of the long-standing second-class status given to women in almost all aspects of traditional society. In fact the situation of middle class was the worst.

Simone De Beauvoir makes this point in her discussions of how the French Revolution did not live up to its promise for women: "In the country the peasant woman took a considerable part in farm labor; she was treated as a servant; frequently she did not eat at the table with her husband and sons; she slaved harder than they did, and the burdens of maternity added to her fatigue. But as in ancient agricultural societies, being necessary to man, she was respected by him; their goods, their interests, their cares were all in common; she exercised great authority in the home". Mary Wollstonecraft makes a similar point in her observations that among the poorer classes she sometimes sees a sturdier sense of self among women than in the middle classes who are her main concern.

Toril Moi argues that feminism is "a political project dedicated to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism" and therefore cannot be equated with "femaleness"-which is a matter of biology-and femininity-"a set of culturally defined characteristics". Michael Paynes, in the introduction to *Feminist theory and Simone de Beauvoir*, writes: "As a political movement, feminism requires a sense of its own history, which Moi sees as unfolding in three cumulative phases, corresponding to the generations of European feminism outlined by Julia Kristeva in her famous essay "Women's Time": (1) the demand for equal access to the symbolic order; (2) the rejection of the male symbolic order in the name of difference; and (3) the rejection of the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical."

Types of feminism

There are various movements within feminism. Within any movement there is always scope for differences and disagreements; as a result there can be great disparities or there can also be some sort of overlapping among various

groups. However, this diversity should not be understood as fragmentation of the feminist movement as a whole rather it shows the variety and expanse of thought possible. One can say that these varieties of thoughts and practices are like different flavours of feminism.

Analytical feminism: Analytic feminism applies analytic concepts and methods to feminist issues and applies feminist concepts and insights to issues that traditionally have been of interest to analytic philosophers. Analytic feminists, like analytic philosophers more generally, value clarity and accuracy in argument and use logical and linguistic analysis to help them achieve that clarity and precision. Unlike non-feminists, they insist on recognizing and contesting sexism (practices that take women and feminine things to be inferior to men and masculine things) and androcentrism. Analytic feminism holds that the best way to counter sexism and androcentrism is through forming a clear conception of and pursuing truth, logical consistency, objectivity, rationality, justice, and the good, while recognizing that these notions have often been perverted by androcentrism throughout the history of philosophy.

Analytic feminists engage the literature traditionally thought of as analytic philosophy, but also draw on other traditions in philosophy, as well as work by feminists working in other disciplines, especially the social and biological sciences. Analytic feminists assert the sex/gender distinction, a distinction between the biological concept of sex and the socially constructed concept of gender (non-isomorphic to sex), though they may disagree widely on how this distinction is to be drawn and what moral or political implications it has. Although they share the conviction that the social constructions of gender create a fundamentally unjust imbalance in contemporary social and political arrangements, there is no other political thesis generally held by them.

Analytic feminists, like non-analytic feminists, have written much about social and political issues like abortion, pornography, prostitution, rape, sexual harassment, surrogacy, and violence against women. What characterizes analytic feminism here is the use of logical analysis and, sometimes, decision theoretic analysis (Cudd, 1993). Analytic feminism holds that many traditional philosophical notions are not only normatively compelling, but also in some ways empowering and liberating for women. While post-modern feminism rejects the universality of truth, justice, and objectivity and the univocality of "women", analytic feminism defends these notions. They recognize that to reject a view because it is false or oppressive to women, one needs some rational, objective ground from which we can argue that it is in fact false or oppressive.

An important task for analytic feminism involves investigating the objectivity of science. Helen Longino's *Science as Social Knowledge* (Longino, 1990) was the first such analytic feminist work. Elizabeth Anderson's "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense" (Anderson, 1995) shows how a carefully aimed feminist critique can improve the objectivity of science by distinguishing and illustrating four ways that feminist critiques have corrected the distorted lenses of masculinist science: through the critique of gendered structures in the social organization of science, through the analysis of gendered symbols in scientific models, through exposing sexism in scientific practices and focuses, and through revealing androcentrism in its concepts and theories. In its analysis of traditional philosophical topics like objectivity and new topics such as sexism in language (Vetterling-Braggin, 1981), analytic feminism reveals the blurriness of the distinction between metaphysics, epistemology, and social/political philosophy

Amazon Feminism: Amazon feminism is dedicated to the image of the female hero in fiction and in fact, as it is expressed in art and literature, in the physiques and feats of female athletes, and in sexual values and practices. Amazon feminism is concerned about physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be, look or behave as if they are passive, weak and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine (or feminine), and upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood. Thus Amazon feminism advocates e.g., female strength athletes, martial artists, soldiers, etc.

Cultural Feminism: As radical feminism died out as a movement, cultural feminism got rolling. In fact, many of the same people moved from the former to the latter and they find not much difference between the two. They carried the name "radical feminism" with them, and some cultural feminists use that name still. The difference between the two is quite striking: whereas radical feminism was a movement to transform society, cultural feminism retreated to vanguardism, working instead to build a women's culture. As various 1960s movements for social change fell apart or got

co-opted, folks got pessimistic about the very possibility of social change. Many of them turned their attention to building alternatives, so that if they couldn't change the dominant society, they could avoid it as much as possible. That, in a nutshell, is what the shift from radical feminism to cultural feminism was about. These alternative-building efforts were accompanied with reasons explaining (perhaps justifying) the abandonment of working for social change. Cultural feminism's justification was biological determinism. So notions that women are "inherently kinder and gentler" are one of the foundations of cultural feminism, and remain a major part of it. A similar concept held by some cultural feminists is that while various sex differences might not be biologically determined, they are still so thoroughly ingrained as to be intractable.

Erotic Feminism: This began as a movement in Germany under the rule of Otto von Bismarck. He ruled the land with the motto "blood and iron". In society the man was the ultra manly man and power was patriarchal power. Some women rebelled against this, by becoming WOMAN. Eroticism became a philosophical and metaphysical value and the life-creating value

Radical Feminism: Radical feminism provides an important foundation for the rest of "feminist flavors" and is by many regarded as the "undesireable" element of feminism. Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from approximately 1967-1975. This term refers to the feminist movement that sprung out of the civil rights and peace movements in 1967-1968. The reason this group gets the "radical" label is that they view the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement that aims for an over all social change and had revolutionary spirit imbedded to a great extent. Radical feminism questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on theirs. Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically-determined behavior and culturally determined behaviour in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles.

Eco-Feminism: It is regarded by many as a branch of feminism which is much more spiritual than political or theoretical in nature. Its basic tenet is that a patriarchal society will exploit its resources without regard to long term consequences as a direct result of the attitudes fostered in a patriarchal/hierarchical society. Parallels are often drawn between society's treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its treatment of women. In resisting patriarchal culture, eco-feminists feel that they are also resisting plundering and destroying the Earth. And vice-versa.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism: Marxism recognizes that women are oppressed, and attributes the oppression to the capitalist/private property system. Thus they insist that the only way to end the oppression of women is to overthrow the capitalist system. Socialist feminism is the result of Marxism meeting radical feminism.

Material Feminism: It refers to a movement in the late 19th century to liberate women by improving their material condition. This meant relieving them of the burden of housework and cooking jobs and inculcating the desire to earn their own living.

Moderate Feminism: This branch of feminism tends to involve younger women or other women who have not directly experienced discrimination. They are closely affiliated with liberal feminism and do not think that Radical feminism is any longer viable and in fact consider it rather embarrassing. They tend to believe in feminism as a route to provide women with rights without being referred to as staunch feminists.

Lesbianism: It is important to note here that lesbianism is not essentially a part of feminism although it is in direct contrast to the conventional and traditional concepts of womanhood. Many feminists are of the opinion that through lesbianism complete rejection of the man and their world is possible. But it will not be correct to say that all feminists are lesbians or that all lesbians are feminists. Rather, they are, in spite of their common interests or principles, two very different and distinct groups.

Separatists: These are the feminists who advocate separation from men; sometimes total, sometimes partial. Women who organize women-only events are often unfairly dubbed separatist. Separatists are sometimes literal, sometimes figurative. The core idea is that "separating" (by various means) from men enables women to see themselves in a different context. Many feminists, whether or not separatist, think this is a necessary "first step", by which they mean a temporary separation for personal growth, not a permanent one.

Feminism as Union of Ideology and Activism

Lamont laments (no pun intended) the lack of a sharp genus that can define a concept of feminism. His mistake is the presupposition that such a genus must be an ideology. It isn't, and cannot be, for several reasons all connected to the fact that feminism is just as much a social movement as it is a set of intellectual positions. Feminism describes activism and a commitment to action as much as a range of ideas. Feminist ideas are those that lead to social progress concerning gender relations at a given time and place.

As noted, this range of ideas is bigger - and fuzzier - than a corresponding Randian range of ideas. Objectivism was designed in a hierarchical way as a philosophy, including an emphasis on thought and cognition as fundamental and other mental aspects and activities as derivative. Feminism wasn't designed, but grew out of experiences of certain times, places and factors of social organization. "Correct thinking about the right ideas" would be sufficient to call oneself an Objectivist, but it is not enough to be a feminist. Without a commitment to action and social change one is not a feminist, even if one holds feminist ideas. So in feminism there is a form of "equal worth" between ideas and activism. Feminism is more than an ideology, more than a philosophy. This is why feminism, unlike Objectivism, cannot be defined by a genus that is only an ideology or a philosophy.

Feminism as Historical Entity and Process

Feminism is influenced by, sometimes even determined by, its enemies. In some parts of Africa feminism means a fight against female genital mutilation; in the middle ages it would have meant a fight for witches' right to live; in the Western world a hundred years ago it meant a fight for women's right to hold property, to divorce, to vote, to be recognized as adult legal subjects. And in the Western world today it means a fight against tacit and institutionalized collectivist and misogynist beliefs derived from gender roles and other sex-based prejudices.

The common thread running through these different periods and places is captured by the definition above. It involves a theory about and a commitment to men and women being equals, in all spheres of life - equals in standing, possibility, freedom and range of choice. This is the core of all feminist theories. This "core feminism" or "core feminist theory" doesn't prescribe or presuppose neither differences between men and women nor similarities between men and women, nor does it require excluding men or only furthering women's causes.

Feminists, as a rule, assume that there are few if any inherent, unchangeable differences between men and women; only a lot of individual differences and variation. Patriarchalists claim the existence of many universal and immutable differences between men and women, seeking to understate, marginalize and suppress individual differences in an attempt to create two universal gender forms or essences that everybody must be squeezed into. In other words, Lamont's claim that most feminists are polylogists is wrong. Only a minority of feminists are polylogists; but virtually all patriarchalists are polylogists. They follow a schema of rationalizations starting with biological, immutable gender essences that are used to justify polylogist beliefs about men's and women's minds, and from there they move on to justify different treatment and expectations of girls and boys, women and men, pretending that gender roles are natural, inborn and immutable. One typical example is John Gray's *Men are from Mars, women are from Venus*, which has been concisely and extensively criticized by feminist women and men from Earth.

Feminism and Equality

Equality must mean equality under the law, but it must also mean philosophical and social equality of men and women in daily life. The latter cannot be achieved by legislation. True liberation and individualism means that all virtues and characteristics are individual human virtues and characteristics, open to anyone who is inclined to pursue and develop them. There are no virtues or psychological characteristics belonging exclusively to males, or to females. As a feminist, I support closing the gender gap, not widening it - thus clearing the road for a free, individualist and diverse future.

Feminism, in fact, is plural and dialogic rather than monolithic. Feminist scholars differentiate sex from gender and view the latter as a socially/culturally constructed category. Gender is learned and performed; it involves the myriad and often normative meanings given to sexual difference by various cultures. Feminists may differ in the importance they assign to sex, which is a biologically based category, but the idea that gender norms can be changed is central to

feminist theory. Although sex/gender systems differ cross-culturally, most known societies have used and still use sex/gender as a key structural principle organizing their actual and conceptual worlds, usually to the disadvantage of women. Hence feminist scholars argue that gender is a crucial category of analysis and that modes of knowledge that do not take gender into account are partial and incomplete. Feminist scholars also seek to question and transform androcentric systems of thought that posit the male as the norm. In practice this means not only revealing and critiquing androcentric biases, but also attempting to examine beliefs and practices from the viewpoint of the "other," treating women and other marginalized groups as subjects, not merely objects.

Feminists believe that existing inequalities between dominant and marginalized groups can and should be removed. Therefore feminist scholarship has an acknowledged and accepted political dimension, as opposed to the hidden political dimension of scholarship that claims to be "neutral" and "objective." Although the commitment to feminist politics and organized feminist movements will not be equally stressed in all pieces of scholarship, it will never be denied or criticized (if it is, I would say that the approach is not feminist no matter what the author may claim). With regard to scholarship, the political goal of feminist work is broader than simply a stronger emphasis on women, though that is an important part of it; the goal is to revise our way of considering history, society, literature, etc. so that neither male nor female is taken as normative, but both are seen as equally conditioned by the gender constructions of their culture. A scholarly focus on ancient women does not in itself make an approach feminist, since scholars can and do study women without accepting these premises. When I classify an approach as "nonfeminist," I do not mean to imply that the scholarship is not valid or valuable; however, as a feminist who does accept the premises listed above, I will by definition see such scholarship as preliminary and incomplete.

It can be said that a feminist is interested in studying and understanding gender as a system of cultural signs or meanings allocated by various cultural and social institutions to women and also how these significations are absorbed in our day to day living influencing our perceptions and views. Also, a feminist realizes that the social mechanisms function on the basis of a basic binary opposition--masculine/feminine--in which one term, masculine, is always superior to the other term, and that this privileging, as a result enables men to occupy positions of social power more often than women. Feminism, in fact, is an endeavour to change this misconception of man being superior to a woman and thus, through dismantling of traditional myths and ideological constructions. However, merely studying and analyzing these systems is not enough. It is essential to change these as well. But, this is definitely not an easy task. There could be lot of differences and disagreements regarding the changes that need to be undertaken. Nonetheless, what is significant at the moment is that a voice is to be raised against practices that are not only unreasonable but at times inhumane also and feminism is one such voice that is made audible through the feminist theory.

Feminism as a theory

1. Role of Theory

There are two schools of thoughts regarding feminist criticism: Anglo American School is the brainchild of Showalter. Two other women associated with this are Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar. Anglo American School believes that literature is a representation of woman's lives and experience, which can be evaluated against reality. The associates of this school read literature very closely and the experiences represented in literature are taken to be real and then contrasted with life experiences and there after criticized. The focus is on themes, motifs & characterization. They read the experience in the lines itself.

School of French Feminism: With this school comes an interest in psychology, history, language and representation. It is not really interested in the literary text but in what lies behind the literary text. It does not represent personal experience. People associated with this school are - Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. All these people are influenced by the works of Lacan, Foucault & Derrida and the starting point is post structuralism.

2. Nature Of Language

The language that exists is based on the negative connotations of the female words and positive connotations of male words for e.g. bitching, tittle-tattle, nagging, hysteria, shrillness etc.

The feminists think that the language in which we write is a male language and wonder if there exists a language that can be inherently feminist.

Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (1929) (a collection of essays) is a very significant text. Virginia Woolf makes a distinction between a male language and a female language. She feels that the language used all around is a male instrument of power. English language is hegemonic and it is never VALUE FREE & VALUE NEUTRAL.

There exists no reality as such but only the representation of reality. Male language does not represent the women so they have to find a language which is free from bias.

The French School of Feminist has pointed out the existence of "ECRITURE FEMININE", the term coined by Cixous. This language is free of phallogentrism. Irigaray calls it "womanspeak", meaning the language of women. According to Kristeva, male language is a language associated with authority, order, fathers, repression and control. It becomes a fascist language, a contrast to *écriture* language, which has to do with random thoughts, a slippage from male language, not logical but mere displacement. But in this process, a sense of "OTHERNESS" is created rather than mere "difference". It is often wondered whether it brings about EQUALITY OR OTHERNESS. Although it is a subversion yet brings in an essentialist idea.

3. Value Of Psychoanalysis

Kate Millet in "Sexual Politics" has criticized Freud who seems to be a great hater of women. All psycho-analytic institutions are the ways of reinstating back into the patriarchal order, those who had rebelled against it.

Freud says through his theory, that when a little girl (4-6 years) takes a glimpse of a little boy's penis, she feels a sense of inadequacy. And this sense of inferiority is called "Penisenvy". But as the woman matures, this penisenvy is replaced by the desire to have a baby. Thus, she tries to get over with this inferiority through motherhood. So motherhood for Freud becomes a manifestation of woman's desire to be man. But on the other hand, if a woman acquires masculine aims and intentions like desire for a career and independence rather than motherhood, it means that she has not acquired maturity. And this woman according to Freud becomes neurotic or a feminist. Freud further says that women are less committed to moral principles than men, they are motivated by feeling rather than reason and also women have a reduced sense of justice.

Since Simone de Beauvoir's writing focus upon the situation of women in general and French in particular, it will be helpful to have a brief idea of how the French School of feminist thought develops through the ideas of its associates:

Kristeva and Feminism: Although Kristeva does not refer to her own writing as feminist, many feminists turn to her work in order to expand and develop various discussions and debates in feminist theory and criticism. Some of the elements of Kristeva's thought that are particularly important for feminist theory are: Her attempt to bring the body back into discourses in the human sciences; her focus on the significance of the maternal and pre-oedipal in the constitution of subjectivity; and her notion of abjection as an explanation for oppression and discrimination.

The Body: Theories of the body are particularly important for feminists because historically (in the humanities) the body has been associated with the feminine, the female, or woman, and denigrated as weak, immoral, unclean, or decaying. Throughout her writing over the last three decades, Kristeva theorized the connection between mind and body, culture and nature, psyche and soma, matter and representation, by insisting both that bodily drives are discharged in representation, and that the logic of signification is already operating in the material body. In *New Maladies of the Soul*, Kristeva describes the drives as "as pivot between 'soma' and psyche', between biology and representation" (30; see also *Time and Sense*).

She is now famous for the distinction between what she calls the "semiotic" and the "symbolic," which she develops in her early work including *Revolution in Poetic Language*, "From One Identity to the Other" in *Desire in Language*, and *Powers of Horror*. Kristeva maintains that all signification is composed of these two elements. The semiotic element is the bodily drive as it is discharged in signification. The semiotic is associated with the rhythms, tones, and movement of signifying practices. As the discharge of drives, it is also associated with the maternal body, the first source of rhythms, tones, and movements for every human being since we all have resided in that body.

The symbolic element of signification is associated with the grammar and structure of signification. The symbolic element is what makes reference possible. For example, words have referential meaning because of the symbolic structure of language. On the other hand, we could say that words give life meaning (nonreferential meaning) because of their semiotic content. Without the symbolic, all signification would be babble or delirium. But, without the semiotic, all signification would be empty and have no importance for our lives. Ultimately, signification requires both the semiotic and symbolic; there is no signification without some combination of both.

Just as bodily drives are discharged into signification, the logic of signification is already operating within the materiality of the body. Kristeva suggests that the operations of identification and differentiation necessary for signification are prefigured in the body's incorporations and expulsions of food in particular (see *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Powers of Horror*). The maternal body regulates these bodily "identifications" and "differentiations" before birth and the mother during infancy. Kristeva proposes that there is a maternal regulation or law that prefigures the paternal law which Freudian psychoanalysts have maintained is necessary for signification (see *Powers of Horror* and *Tales of Love*). The regulation or grammar and laws of language, then, are already operating on the level of matter.

The Maternal Body: Following Melanie Klein and in contrast to Freud and Lacan, Kristeva emphasizes the maternal function and its importance in the development of subjectivity and access to culture and language. While Freud and Lacan maintain that the child enters the social by virtue of the paternal function, specifically paternal threats of castration, Kristeva asks why, if our only motivation for entering the social is fear, more of us aren't psychotic? In *Tales of Love*, she questions the Freudian-Lacanian notion that paternal threats cause the child to leave the safe haven of the maternal body. Why leave this safe haven if all you have to look forward to is fear and threats? Kristeva is interested in the earliest development of subjectivity, prior to Freud's Oedipal situation or Lacan mirror stage.

Kristeva argues that maternal regulation is the law before the Law, before Paternal Law (see *Tales of Love*). She calls for a new discourse of maternity that acknowledges the importance of the maternal function in the development of subjectivity and in culture. Kristeva argues that we don't have adequate discourses of maternity. Religion, specifically Catholicism (which makes the mother sacred), and science (which reduces the mother to nature) are the only discourses of maternity available to Western culture. She suggests that the maternal function cannot be reduced to mother, feminine, or woman. By identifying the mother's relation to the infant as a function, Kristeva separates the function of meeting the child's needs from both love and desire. As a woman and as a mother, a woman both loves and desires and as such she is primarily a social and speaking being. As a woman and a mother, she is always sexed. But, insofar as she fulfills the maternal function, she is not sexed. Kristeva's analysis suggests that to some extent anyone can fulfill the maternal function, men or women.

By insisting that the maternal body operates between nature and culture, Kristeva tries to counter-act stereotypes that reduce maternity to nature. Even if the mother is not the subject or agent of her pregnancy and birth, she never ceases to be primarily a speaking subject. In fact, Kristeva uses the maternal body with its two-in-one, or other within, as a model for all subjective relations. Like the maternal body, each one of us is what she calls a subject-in-process. As subjects-in-process we are always negotiating the other within, that is to say, the return of the repressed. Like the maternal body, we are never completely the subjects of our own experience. Some feminists have found Kristeva's notion of a subject-in-process a useful alternative to traditional notions of an autonomous unified (masculine) subject. Kristeva develops a notion of abjection that has been very useful in diagnosing the dynamics of oppression. She describes abjection as an operation of the psyche through which subjective and group identity are constituted by excluding anything that threatens one's own (or one's group's) borders. The main threat to the fledgling subject is his or her dependence upon the maternal body. Therefore, abjection is fundamentally related to the maternal function. As Kristeva claims in *Black Sun*, matricide is our vital necessity because in order to become subjects (within a patriarchal culture) we must abject the maternal body. But, because women cannot abject the maternal body with which they also identify as women, they develop what Kristeva calls a depressive sexuality (see *Black Sun*). Kristeva's analysis in *Black Sun* suggests that we need not only a new discourse of maternity but also a discourse of the relation between mothers and daughters, a discourse that does not prohibit the lesbian love between women through which female subjectivity is born. Kristeva believes that misplaced abjection is one cause of women's oppression. In patriarchal

cultures, women have been reduced to the maternal function; that is to say, they have been reduced to reproduction. So, if it is necessary to abject the maternal function to become a subject, and women, maternity, and femininity all have been reduced to the maternal function, then within patriarchy, women, maternity, and femininity are all abjected along with the maternal function. This misplaced abjection is one way to account for women's oppression and degradation within patriarchal cultures.

Although many feminist theorists and literary critics have found Kristeva's ideas useful and provocative, Kristeva's relation to feminism has been ambivalent. Her views of feminism are best represented in her essay "Women's Time" in *New Maladies of the Soul*. In this essay originally published in 1979, Kristeva argues that there are three phases of feminism. She rejects the first phase because it seeks universal equality and overlooks sexual differences. She implicitly criticizes Simone de Beauvoir and the rejection of motherhood; rather than reject motherhood Kristeva insists that we need a new discourse of maternity. In fact, in "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident," Kristeva suggests that "real female innovation (in whatever field) will only come about when maternity, female creation and the link between them are better understood". Kristeva also rejects what she sees as the second phase of feminism because it seeks a uniquely feminine language, which she thinks is impossible. Kristeva does not agree with feminists who maintain that language and culture are essentially patriarchal and must somehow be abandoned. On the contrary, Kristeva insists that culture and language are the domains of speaking beings and women are primarily speaking beings. Kristeva endorses what she identifies as the third phase of feminism that seeks to reconceive of identity and difference and their relationship. This current phase of feminism refuses to choose identity over difference or *visa versa*; rather, it explores multiple identities, including multiple sexual identities. In an interview with Rosalind Coward, Kristeva proposes that there are as many sexualities as there are individuals.

Cixous and Feminism: Helene Cixous takes up where Lacan left off, in noting that women and men enter into the Symbolic Order, into language as structure, in different ways, or through different doors, and that the subject positions open to either sex within the Symbolic are also different. She understands that Lacan's naming the center of the Symbolic as the Phallus highlights what a patriarchal system language is—or, more specifically, what a phallo(go)centric system it is. Cixous follows Lacan's psychoanalytic paradigm, which argues that a child must separate from its mother's body (the Real) in order to enter into the Symbolic. Because of this, Cixous says, the female body in general becomes unrepresentable in language; it's what can't be spoken or written in the phallogocentric Symbolic order. Cixous here makes a leap from the maternal body to the female body in general; she also leaps from that female body to female sexuality, saying that female sexuality, female sexual pleasure, is un-representable within the phallogocentric Symbolic order. Cixous also discusses writing on both a metaphoric and literal level. She aligns writing with masturbation, something that for women is supposed to be secret, shameful, or silly, something not quite adult, something that will be renounced in order to achieve adulthood, just like clitoral stimulation has to be renounced in favor of vaginal/reproductive passive adult sexuality. For women to write themselves, Cixous says, they must (re)claim a female-centered sexuality. If men write with their penises, as Gilbert argues, then Cixous says before women can write they have to discover where their pleasure is located. (And don't be too quick to decide that women write with their clitorises. It's not quite that simple).

Cixous also argues that men haven't yet discovered the relation between their sexuality and their writing, as long as they are focused on writing with the penis. "Man must write man," Cixous says, again focusing on "man" as a signifier within the Symbolic, which is no more privileged than "woman" as a signifier. In an important footnote, Cixous explains that men's sexuality, like women's, has been defined and circumscribed by binary oppositions (active/passive, masculine/feminine), and that heterosexual relations have been structured by a sense of otherness and fear created by these absolute binaries. As long as male sexuality is defined in these limited and limiting terms, Cixous says, men will be prisoners of a Symbolic order which alienates them from their bodies in ways similar to (though not identical with) how women are alienated from their bodies and their sexualities. Thus, while Cixous does slam men directly for being patriarchal oppressors, she also identifies the structures that enforce gender distinctions as being oppressive to both sexes.

Irigaray and feminism: Associated with feminism and psychoanalysis, Luce Irigaray is a remarkable cultural theorist best known for her work published in France through the 1970s. Psychoanalyst, linguist, and philosopher, Irigaray is concerned, particularly in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974, trans., 1985) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977,

trans., 1987), with exposing how Western discourse has effaced woman as the specular image of man. By contrast, Irigaray carefully avoids enfolded her own ideas as "theory" to avoid an essentialism that will support patriarchy. Irigaray was convinced that identity, if not fully then at least partly, was enacted in "self positioning in language". Thus, she began to look for differences between the regular speech of men and that of women: "it is not a question of biology determining speech, but of identity assumed in language within a particular symbolic system known as patriarchy, and as described by Jacques Lacan, in which the only possible subject position is masculine. Within this system, the only feminine identity available to a woman is that of a "defective" or "castrated" men; women are not symbolically self-defined." Irigaray's thesis, put together in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, is that there might be a possibility of a different and non-masculine discourse. The following are the arguments presented by her:

1. Men are more likely to take up a subject position in language, to designate themselves as subjects of the discourse or action; women are more likely to efface themselves, to give precedence to men or to the world.
2. The use of the first person pronoun, I, by women, does not necessarily indicate a feminine identity.
3. Women are accustomed to being the vehicles of men's self-representation; their own self-representation in language is more or less absent.
4. Women are more likely to engage in dialogue; while men privilege the relation with the world and the object, women privilege interpersonal relations.
5. Women are not, as is sometimes thought, more emotional and subjective than men when they speak; their speech is likely to efface the expression of their subjectivity.
6. Women are less abstract than men, and are more likely to take account of context, they are also more likely to collaborate with the researcher and take research seriously.

Biographical Sketch (Simone de Beauvoir)

Simone Lucie Ernestine-Marie-Bertrand de Beauvoir was born in Paris, on January 9, 1908 into a bourgeois family and was the eldest of two daughters. Her father was a lawyer, whose fortunes declined after World War I, and her mother was a devout Roman Catholic, who raised her daughters in a strict, traditional mode. Simone de Beauvoir began to write when she was eight years old. She was educated in private institutions and as an adolescent she rejected the religious and social values of her family. Simone de Beauvoir studied philosophy at the Sorbonne and graduated from there, writing a thesis on Leibniz. She met Sartre there in 1929, joining his circle. Philosophy was, for her a discussion and study of the essentials of existence-- though she was also fascinated by beauty and aesthetics. She adopted atheism while still an adolescent, and decided to devote her life to writing and studying. At the age of 21 she passed the difficult final examination, agrégation. From 1931 to 1943 she taught philosophy in several schools in Marseille, Rouen and Paris, and was professor at the Sorbonne from 1941 to 1943. During the Nazi occupation of France, de Beauvoir apparently was not involved with the activities of the Resistance, and she continued to work without opposition from the Germans. Following in the tradition of the 18th century 'gadfly' philosophers, de Beauvoir used her background in formal philosophy to voice her sentiments on feminism and existentialism.

Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir met after her studies in the Sorbonne, the beginning of a friendship, which lasted until his death in 1980. This period began what she described as a 'moral' phase of life; the culmination of which was her most important philosophical work, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948). She began the phase with an essay entitled *Pyrrhus et Cineas* (1944), and the earlier novel called *L'Enviée* (1943). No doubt born of the confusion and madness of World War II, de Beauvoir included in her *Ethics* Sartre's ontology of being-for-itself and being-in-itself. She also draws heavily on his conception of human beings as creatures who are free. Freedom of choice, humanity's utmost value, is the criterion for morality and immorality in one's acts. Good acts increase one's freedom, while bad ones limit that freedom. It was to quite an extent that her linkage to Sartre was the reason that she received the unwanted title of existentialist. Among other things, she also was an anti-colonialist, publicly criticizing France's position in Algiers, a pro-abortionist and a socialist with Marxist sympathies.

Some of the Works by Simone de Beauvoir

Fiction: *The Blood of Others* (1945), *She Came to Stay* (1949), *All Men are Mortal*, *The Mandarins* (1957), *The Woman Destroyed*, and *Old Age*

Non Fiction: *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, *The Prime of Life*, *The Force of Circumstance*, *All Said and Done*, *A Very Easy Death*, *Adieux: Farewell to Sartre*

The Second Sex (Brief Discussion of the book)

In the words of Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born a woman but one becomes a woman".

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir traces the development of male oppression through historical, literary, and mythical sources, attributing its contemporary effects on women to a systematic objectification of the male as a positive norm. This consequently identifies the female as Other, which commonly leads to a loss of social and personal identity, the variety of alienation unique to the experience of women. Her works of fiction focus on women who take responsibility for themselves by making life-altering decisions, and the many volumes of her own autobiography exhibit the application of similar principles in reflection on her own experiences.

The framing paradigm of de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, derived from existentialist philosophy, is the binary of Self/Subject and Other. The Self/Subject is the active, knowing subject of traditional epistemology, and is by default male. De Beauvoir argues that the Other, who exists for the Self/Subject in an asymmetrical relationship, is female and feminized, occupying a secondary place in both concrete activity and subjective consciousness. The Other is not an equal complement to the Self/Subject, but rather serves as a projection of everything the Self/Subject rejects: immanence, passivity, voicelessness. This is not to say that the designation of the Other is a simple case of repression. Simone de Beauvoir notes that there are a variety of reasons why women may not resist their designation of Other: lack of resources, close ties with men, and perceived advantages in being Other. While de Beauvoir's comprehensive work raises many interesting issues, what concerns me in this context is her development of a theory of subjectivity and identity. Her famous statement, that one is not born but rather becomes a woman, can be read in this way as arguing that there is no ontological subjectivity that is the exclusive domain of men or women. Instead, subjectivity can be granted or withheld by the society in which potential knowing subjects come to existential consciousness.

One of de Beauvoir's most important contributions to 20th century feminist thought is the separation of "woman" (as a biological entity) from "femininity" (as a social construction). In her attempt to frame the debate as such In this she is not entirely successful, since in her section on biology she paints a very discouraging picture of women's alienation from their bodies; though she views female biology as an obstacle to be surmounted instead of a fixed destiny, the fact remains that women's bodies are constituted as such. Still, this sense of possibilities and the body as a "situation" rather than a "thing" represents as positive a view as can be imagined within a paradigm that depends on transcendence of the physical self. Simone de Beauvoir also argues that biology cannot be understood outside of its social, economic, and psychological context, and that biology alone is insufficient to explain why women are constituted as the Other. She concludes that: "Woman is determined not by her hormones or by mysterious instincts, but by the manner in which her body and her relation to the world are modified through the action of others than herself."

Simone de Beauvoir rejects psychoanalysis as an explanatory framework for a number of reasons. First, she refuses to accept the notion of sexuality as a given, and argues that the psychoanalytic paradigm gives short shrift to female sexual subjectivity, casting it only as a passive, pre-determined. More importantly, she proposes that the psychoanalytic model imposes a normative determinism on women's sexual development, removing all possibility of conscious action. In the traditional psychanalytic model which de Beauvoir cites, women are consistently alienated objects buffeted by the winds of contradictory and male-centred sexual desires, who can achieve no more than an ersatz morality which is an adherence to externally determined standards, not a result of a conscious attempt at transcendence and moral action.

Though de Beauvoir attempts to build a historical model of women's subjugation, she rejects much of the historical materialism of theorists such as Engels. In her view, economic subjugation is insufficient to account for the existential Othering of women, and lacks theoretical complexity as an explanatory perspective. She states: "We must not believe,

certainly, that a change in woman's economic condition alone is enough to transform her. . . ." Despite this rejection, she notes, in line with Marx, that it was "through labour that woman has conquered her dignity as a human being. . ." and that "this [economic] factor has been and remains the basic factor in her evolution. . ." Still, "until it has brought about the moral, social, cultural, and other consequences that it promises and requires, the new woman cannot appear."

Having largely discarded the theoretical streams of biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism, de Beauvoir turns her attention to historical ethnography as seen through an existentialist lens. This is, in my opinion, the weakest part of her argument. In effect, she creates a tautology and falls into the same theoretical trap that she previously critiques. She argues that men's activities within the context of prehistory both repeat and transcend life through invention and creation. Though she ostensibly rejects biology as an explanation for women's Otherization, she nevertheless locates existential immanence in early women's biological capacity to reproduce, stating that women's creative activities would have merely been regarded as reproducing life, rather than creating something new. She neither explains why women's childbearing capacity would only be seen as functional reiteration, nor what evidence exists that women did not themselves create, invent, or shape their physical world in the same way that men did. de Beauvoir's existentialist cast raises significant problems if we are to consider what role self-consciousness would have played in premodern humans. Of what significance would transcendence have been to people who were not using a post-Enlightenment conception of the individual, for example? Though she uses history as a theoretical tool, she ahistoricizes human behavior and existential capacities.

Simone de Beauvoir is theoretically indebted to the work of Levi-Strauss, and situates women firmly in the familiar nature-culture binary. Women represent the chaotic ambivalence of nature, both idolized fertility and reviled uncontrolled sexuality, both life-bringer and destroyer. As de Beauvoir writes, "She is all that man desires and all that he does not attain." Women represent the immanence of the flesh, both maternal and sexual. Women are symbolically All, which is to say nothing. Anticipating the work of the French feminists, de Beauvoir notes that women's mystery is derived in large part from the absence of language in which to understand them; metaphorically they exist in the realm of the pre-symbolic. As Other, women exist only in the way in which the One/Subject chooses to think of himself. In other words, women exist only as they are conceived of by men; they have no existence in their own right.

Also anticipating the work of postcolonial feminists, de Beauvoir draws parallels between women and colonized Others, noting that Others are situated within an unequal power dynamic: "[R]ich America, and the male, are on the master side and. . . Mystery belongs to the slave. . . The myth of woman is a luxury." (289) Again, the Other is held by the Subject to represent that which is chaotic and unknowable; to project undesirable qualities on to the Other is a luxury enjoyed by the epistemologically privileged. De Beauvoir's model clearly privileges the epistemological position of the male. While it is perhaps unfair, given her historical context, to critique de Beauvoir for not thinking outside a Western binary model of male-female, particularly one that posits femaleness as a deficit and maleness as an epistemological standard, I feel this is a relevant point to be made from a theoretical standpoint. De Beauvoir's grounding in European existentialism, based in Cartesian dualism and in post-Enlightenment liberal notions of private property, does not account for other possible ways of seeing the world in terms of the relationship between self, other, and community. In assuming that all societies, for example, give primacy to private property in the same way, and moreover as the exclusive province of men, de Beauvoir creates an artificial social hierarchy that deems patrilineal, property-based societies to be the most existentially developed.

In the next section, de Beauvoir develops her famous truism about becoming a woman by tracing a general history of women's existential evolution from childhood to independent womanhood. Though she rejects psychoanalysis for the most part, apparently scorning the notion of penis envy, she still seems to be theoretically indebted to Freud for the basis of her speculations on childhood subjectivity. Of little boys, she writes: "Because he has an alter ego [a penis] in whom he sees himself, the little boy can boldly assume an attitude of subjectivity; the very object into which he projects himself becomes a symbol of autonomy, of transcendence, of power. . ." Of girls, de Beauvoir writes, "[She] cannot incarnate herself in any part of herself." Thus, because of girls' physical "opaqueness" to themselves, they are unable to externalize their subjectivity sufficiently to develop existential autonomy. Here, it appears that de Beauvoir has either understood Freud too literally to realize that she has adopted much of his framework for childhood

psychosexual development, or that she has anticipated the work of both the French feminists (particularly Luce Irigaray) and the neo-Freudians such as Nancy Chodorow. Subjectivity, for de Beauvoir, seems to begin located firmly in physical characteristics of boys and girls, even though she ostensibly rejects this notion outright. The boy, since he has a penis, projects his Self outward, in the idealized form of cognitive autonomy privileged by post-Enlightenment epistemologists, while the girl, since she has genitals that are "opaque", "hidden" and thus immanent. De Beauvoir argues that once children move beyond interest in excretory functions and their attendant meanings, it is social rewards attached to being male or female (physically and socially) that determine subjectivity.

According to de Beauvoir, girls learn that social rewards are not attached to their epistemological subjectivity. "Thus a vicious cycle is formed: less she exercises her freedom to understand, to grasp and discover the world around her, the less resources will she find within herself, the less will she dare to affirm herself as a subject." (308) Adolescence, states de Beauvoir, involves an existential crisis for women in which they realize they must renounce any claim to being a Subject in order to be desired as an Object/Other. (360) Anticipating feminist cultural theory de Beauvoir notes that it is partially through the act of looking that objectification occurs, pointing out that the male Subject's gaze "insensibly takes possession of the perceived image." Same-sex female eroticism, for de Beauvoir, is reduced to a mutual narcissistic objectification, and/or as an "attempt among others to reconcile her autonomy with the passivity of her flesh." Yet, states de Beauvoir, though they struggle with the conflict of self-erasure to become the desired Object, young women are never truly able to achieve transcendence: "It is remarkable that in all those forms of behaviour the young girl does not seek to transcend the natural and social order; she does not aim to extend the limits of the possible nor to work a transvaluation of values; she is content to display her revolt within the bounds of a world the frontiers and laws of which are preserved." Simone de Beauvoir cites reproduction as one way in which women struggle with their role: in rejecting maternity through abortion, women reject a significant part of their role as Other, and when pregnant, a woman "feels the immanence of her body at just the time when it is in transcendence."

She works with the nature-culture, female-male binary to argue that women's epistemological grounding is fundamentally different from men's by virtue of their biology and experience. According to de Beauvoir, women are devoted to irrationality and chaotic superstition; their time is circular, not linear; they have "no sense of factual truth"; they are not familiar with logic and indeed, "[i]n masculine hands logic is often a form of violence, [and] a sly kind of tyranny." Epistemologically, both men and women are powerless in one another's realm; women's lived experience is undefinable in male terms: "There is a whole region of human experience which the male deliberately chooses to ignore because he fails to think it; this experience woman lives." Women are plural instead of linear reasoners, "[recognizing] that there is not any fixed truth." This division between thinking/abstracting and living/experiencing is responsible, states de Beauvoir, for differences in male and female epistemologies and cognitive processes.

Toril Moi, in *Feminist theory and Simone de Beauvoir*, examines the criticism of and the response to de Beauvoir's writings and is of the opinion that books written by women are treated less as a piece of work and more as a woman in person and the criticism and reaction is, therefore, carries the blemishes of conventional prejudice against the women class. Moi argues: "It is as if the very fact of her femaleness blocks any further discussion of the issues at stake, be they literary, theoretical or political. Instead the critic obsessively returns to the question of femininity, or more specifically to what one might call the personality topos, passionately discussing Beauvoir's looks, character, private life or morality. The implication is that whatever a woman says, or writes, or thinks, is less important and less interesting than what she is" Furthermore, Moi debates that Beauvoir's work is not given the credit for the argument it involves and the issues that are contested rather "politically motivated critiques of Beauvoir contain surprisingly little discussion of politics and much apparently pointless dwelling on her personality and private life". In fact, quite ironically, Moi finds de Beauvoir being "regularly put in a classic double mind: if she writes about politics, she is told that she is cold, unfeeling and unfeminine, but also that her political ideas are simple displacements of her own emotional problems. If she actually writes about her own emotions, however, she is immediately accused of being selfish and unartistic".

In the words of Toril Moi, Simone de Beauvoir is "the most important feminist intellectual of the twentieth century" and finds her and her work to be "always preoccupied with the problems of knowing: knowing oneself, the other and

the world". Her book, *The Second Sex*, had immense on the lives of women and also contributed in bringing about changes in their mind set and regular perceptions about themselves and the outside world. The book forces women to rethink about their roles in the society and interrogate their condition and situation they are, consciously or unconsciously, placed in. Moi asserts the need to 're-read' de Beauvoir in context of contemporary literary and cultural theories, but at the same time cautions against any kind of labeling (pro-feminist/anti-feminist). According to Toril Moi; "The Second Sex is not at all pro feminist; it really is a sort of exercise in traditional patriarchal philosophical arrogance and so on and so on. It is interesting in itself that there are such widely opposing views of Beauvoir. I expect that none of them is quite right. . . One thing is nonetheless certain: it is the problem of the intellectual Woman-her speaking position, her concerns, her conflicts, her intellectual styles-which fascinates me."

Luce Irigaray acknowledges the significance of Simone de Beauvoir's work to modern feminism: "Simone de Beauvoir was in fact one of the first women in our century to remind us of the scale of the exploitation of women and to encourage every woman who was lucky enough to discover her book to feel less isolated and more resolved not to surrender or to be taken in". However she is, at the same time, inappreciative of de Beauvoir's attitude towards psychoanalysis. For Irigaray, "equality" does not mean being equal to men, as this would imply "genocide of women". She argues that it is essential for women to have their own identity and that "there should be womankind as well as mankind". Simone de Beauvoir admits that she finds Irigaray 'interesting' but feels that "anyone who wants to work on women has to break completely with Freud. . . But all of them, even Irigaray, they've always begun from Freud's postulates". Nevertheless de Beauvoir's stance regarding psychoanalysis appears to be quite ambivalent when she states elsewhere: "there's something else I would very much like to do if I were thirty or forty now, and that is a work on psychoanalysis". She admits that the inclination towards psychoanalysis was completely missing- "One of our contradictions was that we denied the unconscious". Simone de Beauvoir lays stress on the accessibility into the world of men and this would result in acquiring equality for women. On the other hand, Irigaray emphasizes on the "creation of difference". For irigaray the terms in which de Beauvoir defines woman as 'other' refers to the "negative side of the male subject, all that he has repressed and disavowed".

“Myth and Reality”

I shall like to begin with the understanding of the term myth. From M.H. Abrams (*A Glossary of literary terms*): In classical Greek, "mythos" signified any story or plot, whether true or invented. In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology-a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. . . Recently the French structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss departed from the traditional view. . . to treat the myths of a particular culture as signifying systems whose true meanings are unknown to their proponent. He analyzes myths as composed of signs, which are to be identified and interpreted on the model of linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure.

Gradually myths are transformed into truths or facts. Once this happens, the perception about the world around is, to a great extent, based on these 'truths' when we believe that something is true we are accepting it as real. Thus, the journey from myth to reality is completed. In other words, the probability becomes authentic fact and reality. Perhaps, the most obvious character generally associated with myths is universality. Myths try and are, in fact, believed to represent Truths, which is the reality. In the process of representing reality, the myths, very soon, happen to overtake reality itself and are transformed into the absolute truth or they determine the truth.

But can there be an absolute or authentic reality? The answer would definitely be in negative because something becomes a truth or reality only when it is represented as one. Thus, there is no reality but only different representations of reality. And these representations are ideologically constructed. Ideology can be defined as a set of ideas or conceptions that are fundamental to the working of a particular society. It is a system of myths, conventions and codes that informs a worldview. Ideologies constitute the conventional way of seeing the world, which is taken for granted by the people as naturally existing without realizing that it is a cultural construct. According to Louis Althusser ideology does not present the reality but only provides means of relating to that reality. In other words ideology refers

to the perceptions and the mind set of individuals. Moreover, ideology builds up an imaginary relationship between people and the real world. As a result individuals are only aware of the world that is projected through ideology. Interestingly, not only the conscious but also the unconscious is shaped by within this ideology. The whole individual is thus conditioned according to this ideology. It is through various images and representations that reality is delivered to its takers and the idea of an authentic reality is simply a deception. Therefore, all representations that allege to reproduce reality are engineered and forged which are then recognized as 'truths'.

Acceptance of or belief in the 'represented reality' or the ideology behind the fabricated truths only transforms the individual into a subject of ideology and the process is called "interpellation". It is the way in which the individual subject is determined by the social norms & codes. But these are tainted with the interests of a particular class or the state. Although they are accepted as being objective and nonaligned but they serve those who are in power and help to sustain it. The acts of interpellation are carried out through the structure that Althusser calls as "Ideological State Apparatuses". These include agencies or institutions that help the state to foster certain attitudes to which the general public readily subscribes. Thus it becomes the function of ideological representations to generate meaning and real facts. Accordingly the world is constructed for the individuals.

Keeping in mind the above mechanism, one can understand how a truth or a fact about woman comes into existence. The characteristics attributed to a woman are publicized as facts and reality, but assuming that reality is a construct and no reality can be completely authentic, one is forced to debate these characteristics with which a woman is defined. The woman is understood through various representations of woman. These representations are, once again, based on certain myths about women. These myths help in formulating some sort of definition for a woman with certain essentialised characters. Thus, we are told what is a woman. In her previous essay, "Dreams, Fears, and Idols", Simone de Beauvoir brings to light various myths of a woman that have resulted in the essentialization of a woman. de Beauvoir asserts the woman has been, from times immemorial, always established as an OTHER: "This arrangement suited the economic interests of the males; but it conformed also to their ontological and moral pretensions." Here it is important to understand the concept of Other.

From ages the world had been divided into binaries that are understood to have their origin in Manichean allegory. Manichaeism was the religious system founded by Manes (Mani) and was based on the struggle between "lightness" and "darkness", representing the powers of Good/Evil and God/Satan. Following this practice, the building of identity involves establishing of opposites as no identity can subsist without its conflicting opposite and both have to be recognized as real and true. Apparently man is the center or 'the self' and in order to acquire his absolute and unified identity he requires the 'other' or the periphery: "There can be no presence of an other unless the other is also present in and for himself: which is to say that true alterity - otherness - is that of a consciousness separate from mine and substantially identical with mine".

This means that the two polarities of self and other merge or blend into one another. Each is a part of another. In other words, one could say that both parties - man and woman - become subject as well as object. If this is accepted and the independent existence of the woman is recognized by man then there could be some sort of harmony. But it is the objectification of woman that is necessary for man to attain self-realization, hence to become a subject. Thus, everything comes down at the mercy of phallo-centric vision - the would, the reality, the woman all have to be represented or defined by him and in his own terms: "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view which they confuse with absolute truth".

One can argue that women in fact, take their essence/identity from nature. "Man seeks in woman the other as nature and as his fellow being. But we know what ambivalent feelings nature inspires in man. He exploits her, but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her, she is the source of his being and the realm that he subjugates to his will; Nature is a vein of gross material in which the soul is imprisoned, and she is the supreme reality; she is contingency and Idea, the finite and the whole; she is what opposes the spirit, and the spirit itself. Now ally, now enemy, she appears as the dark chaos from where life tends. Woman sums up nature as mother, wife and idea; these forms now mingle and now conflict, and each of them wears a double visage."

Woman fits into the role of an Other for the reason that "she opposes him with neither the hostile silence of nature nor

the hard requirement of a reciprocal relation; through a unique privilege she is a conscious being and yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh. Thanks to her, there is a means for escaping that implacable dialectic of master and slave which has its source in the reciprocity that exists between free beings".

Simone de Beauvoir analyzes the myths of woman that have to quite an extent, assumed to be actual facts about women. The myth of woman, or rather the myths of women, wrap up and work in each other's favour to produce an entire system of myths ensuing in the practice of commanding and masking the female sex rather than attempting to explain it. Furthermore, on the basis on these myths-turned-facts some great literary works have been produced. And as literature, (even other forms of art can be considered as well), is regarded as a cultural apparatus. Not only are the works coloured with the writer's prejudices, theories, perceptions and ideologies, they also contribute in the formation of ideas and influences the mind-set of its readers. First of all, it is important to get acquainted with some of the myths that are associated with women.

While it has been declared and accepted by most that "it is the male principle that is truly creative", woman's fertility is considered to be a "passive quality". However, the role of a woman, whether it is in form of Earth, Sea or Womb, cannot be completely denied and thus she has been worshipped and eulogized - "And so it is in periods when there flourishes a vitalist romanticism that desires the triumph of Life over Spirit; then the magical fertility of the land, of woman, seems to be more wonderful than the contrived operations of the male". Nonetheless, man is never comfortable in accepting his "carnal state". The idea of birth and life suggests the inevitability of Death. He finds himself trapped in this cycle, beginning in mother's womb and ending in mother-nature. This fear and dread with regards to birth quite conveniently develops into a myth of child birth. According to the belief the placenta should either be burnt or thrown into the sea and should never be in anyone's possession. This is so because the owner will have a hold/control over the fate of that child. Once the placenta is destroyed, it facilitates the evolvement of an independent individual.

Furthermore, the process of childbirth is regarded as something "unclean" and the one responsible for this, which is the mother/woman, needs to be purified. Even before the child is born, the pregnant woman is often ridiculed and people around are repelled by this sight and especially men would not like to be reminded of their 'germination'. The mother is symbolic not only of birth but also of death and man is frightened of this ambivalence, this dual role. "In all civilizations and still in our day woman inspires man with horror". Once the young girl becomes a woman and reaches her puberty, she "becomes impure; and rigorous taboos surround the menstruating female". Once again there is ambivalence regarding the powers associated with this biological process. On one hand, it is believed to have medicinal character while on the other it is believed to be capable of destroying life and the touch of a menstruating woman is destructive.

But de Beauvoir suggests: "Certainly there is more here than reaction to blood in general, sacred as it is. But menstrual blood is peculiar, it represents the essence of femininity." Gradually it was presumed that this blood, since it flows from the reproductive organs of the woman, is another sign of woman's impurity. Consequently, more taboos are levied. (For instance during this time a woman is forbidden from indulging into sexual relationship as it would destroy masculine energies.) Another myth discussed by de Beauvoir is the "myth of virginity" - "Now feared by the male, now desired or even demanded, the virgin would seem to represent the most consummate form of the feminine mystery; she is therefore its most disturbing and at the same time its most fascinating aspect." In primeval societies men did not accept virgin wives and it was made sure that "the woman (was deflorated before the wedding night".

According to occults the virginal blood is attributed with destructive/evil powers. On the other hand, the same is considered to be favourable for the satisfaction of male egos, turning them into owners or possessors of women - "in the irreversible act of defloration he makes of that body unequivocally a passive object, he affirms his capture of it". Interestingly, de Beauvoir, states that spinsters are labeled as "sorceressors" for the mere reason that they were unable to offer themselves to men. Woman is more of an artifice. She is a property delivered to man. She is the object that the man wants to possess. She is the object, an Other that is appropriated by the man. The paradox that woman is results in ambivalent feelings in man. This position of an Other is as well sanctioned by Christianity - "the flesh that is for the Christian the hostile Other is precisely woman. In her the Christian finds incarnated the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil". Not only does a religious doctrine seem to endorse such views but also literature is a staunch propagator of such beliefs.

Simone de Beauvoir studies find authors to illustrate the 'myth of woman' at work. These five authors are - Montherlant, D.H. Lawrence, Claudel, Breton and Stendhal. Simone insists that "for each of them the ideal woman will be she who incarnates most exactly the other capable of revealing him to himself." According to Montherlant women are just not capable of being anything more than objects - "They are in fact neither observers nor psychologists; they can neither see things nor understand living beings; their mystery is a snare and a delusion, their unfathomable treasures have the depth of nothingness; they have nothing to give to man and can only do him injury." The Montherlant woman, both in the role of a mother as well as in that of a mistress, is the enemy of man and marriage is a "ridiculous thing to do for an "superior man". de Beauvoir also looks into the works of Lawrence and concludes that although he does not condemn woman but at the same time according to Lawrence "she should give up all personal transcendence and confine herself to furthering that of her male". In short, Simone is trying to bring out this fact: "When he describes woman, each writer discloses his general ethics and the special idea he has of himself; and in her he often betrays also the gap between his world view and his egotistical dreams".

In the essay under discussion de Beauvoir asserts that the myth of woman is a "static" myth. The word static means something that cannot be moulded or changed. Therefore, the myths about woman have become more of monolithic structures that cannot be tampered with. The essentialized stereotypes that have been used to define a woman and represent her in various works of literature have become so strong that it is very difficult to liberate the woman from their shackles. The fact that women are experienced by men in different ways does not lessen the power of the one absolute myth of woman. The absolute myth of femininity or woman is that of inconsistency and mystery and all the sub-myths, though contradictory or diverse, ultimately confirm the absolute. For instance mother is equated with life as well as with death. Quite conveniently, the patriarchal society assigns values to woman that seem desirable and useful to them and denies those that will allow her to become a free individual.

Often there is a puzzling mixture of myth and reality in the sense that myths are supposed to be derived from real experiences but they turn out to be quite unrelated to the original. It is important to note that these myths, as a result of their repeated occurrence in works of art, are passed on as "absolute truths" and truth is something that is timeless and cannot be changed. The concept of Eternal feminine would, once again, suggest those characteristics that are associated with and attributed to woman. If a living woman does not comply with these, then she is not to be considered feminine at all. Apparently, the terms defining a woman are correct and cannot be changed, and it is the woman who has to fit into this structured frame. In other words, it means that a real woman can be improper but these features and characteristics cannot be doubted.

Simone de Beauvoir writes: "To pose woman is to pose the absolute Other, without reciprocity, denying against all experience that she is a subject, a fellow human being". It is important to recognize the independent existence of both man and woman in a mutual relationship. This would result in fulfillment as well as liberation of each. This would also mean that each of the two is a subject as well as an object. However, this does not really happen as the woman is denied her individuality. She is not regarded even as a subject with her own set of experiences. Moreover, there are various myths surrounding woman and each of them tries to define her completely. As a result the 'idea of femininity' is distorted at times and constructed at other, which perplexes both man and woman. "As group symbols and social types are generally defined by means of antonyms in pairs, ambivalence will seem to be an intrinsic quality of the Eternal Feminine. The saintly mother has for correlative the cruel step mother, the angelic young girl has the perverse virgin: thus it will be said sometimes that Mother equals Life, sometimes that Mother equals Death, that every virgin is pure spirit or flesh dedicated to the devil."

The symbols and metaphors that define woman are not based on reality. Especially the choice between the two contrasts is made depending, not on reality, but on necessity. Whether it is an individual or society as a whole, the selection depends on the ideology that they entertain. Furthermore, de Beauvoir distinguishes between myth and significance as she says: "significance is immanent in the object; it is revealed to the mind through a living experience; whereas the myth is a transcendent Idea that escapes the mental grasp entirely". Explaining this further, de Beauvoir, quotes some examples. For instance to be in awe with or marvel at the body or, on the other hand, have a dislike towards or have an aversion to certain other facts about woman would be considered as things of significance. On the other hand to regard woman as Death or objectify her as flesh mould far away from significance.

Myth, as we understand, usually favours a single group on an organization. And, among diverse myths about women, one that probably is most advantageous is the "feminine mystery". Quite conveniently anything that is beyond the comprehension of man is thrown into the realm of 'mystery'. All excuses and negativities are, thus, justified. However, it is not completely wrong to call woman as mysterious. Since she is the 'other' for the subject, she is not completely knowable. Some amount of this 'other' is not palpable and is in fact impenetrable by the subject. But Maeterlinck argues that both man and woman, along with some of their experiences are mysterious for each other. However, as always, there is a misconception regarding this - "A mystery for man, woman is considered to be mysterious in essence".

De Beauvoir declares that the mystery about woman "is not the subjective solitude of the conscious self, nor the secret organic life, the word has its true meaning". What de Beauvoir means by this is that the project of labeling woman as mysterious does not reduce her to nothingness or that she is not turned silent and speechless. Rather, it is declared that her "language is not understood," she is there, but hidden behind veils, she exists beyond these uncertain appearances". This puts woman in all the more ambiguous position. It is not possible to give meaning to her existence in terms of a definition. Only actions, jobs and deeds can define this individual - "An existence is nothing other than what he does; the possible does not extend beyond the real, essence does not precede existence". This statement by Simone de Beauvoir has existentialist connotations to it. He is to be measured by his acts. Of a peasant woman one can say that she is a good or a bad worker... but if one considers a woman in her immanent presence, her inward self, one can say absolutely nothing about her, she falls short of having any qualification."

Dwelling further on "Feminine Mystery", de Beauvoir brings to light an "economical substructure". She says that the imaginary and the real can be distinguished on the basis of behaviour. Since man is usually financially independent and happens to be at a privileged position, he (unlike woman) can exhibit his love and affection. However, in certain cases, woman happens to be at a privileged position, then the "mystery is reversed." This implies, that it is the situation and not the sex that is responsible for mysterious ambiguity. The common problem faced by women is their doubts about themselves - "They wonder indefinitely what they could have become, which sets them to asking about what they are". It is important to understand that in reality there is nothing as "essence of femininity" and "her mystery conceals nothing but emptiness". Probably for this reason literature is also never successful in portraying/caricaturing 'mysterious' woman. As the story reaches its end these characters are fully exposed with no mystery left unsolved.

"We can see now that the myth is in large part explained by its usefulness to man. The myth of woman is a luxury". The myths had their origin in man's perception about his own existence and also about the world outside. Also it helped in justifying their own interests and purposes. Thus, it is absolute misconception that a woman must be 'othered' for man to survive - "to recognize in woman a human being is not to impoverish man's experience: this would lose none of its diversity, its richness or its intensity if it were to occur between two subjectivities."

Finally, de Beauvoir comes back to the same question - "Where (What) are the women?" It is true that majority of women view the world through a man's gaze and thus entertain the same ideas or misconceptions and would agree that besides carrying out the female activities it is necessary for a true woman to "accept herself as the Other". Today, women are referred to as the 'lost sex' because of their ambiguous position and situation. Nonetheless, it is not possible to fall back on the feminine mythology. Thus "what must be hoped for is that the men for their part will unreservedly accept the situation that is coming into existence, only then will women be able to live in that situation without anguish".

Woman's character and Situation

This essay concludes Simone de Beauvoir's discussion on the "Situation" (Section V) of women in the society. In this situation she has analyzed woman in different roles and circumstances: The Married Woman, The Mother, Woman in Social Life, Prostitute and Hetairas, and Woman moving from maturity to old age. It will be useful to have a brief idea of what Simone talks about these categories. The section begins with the study of "The Married Woman". Simone de Beauvoir says that marriage is more of a "career" for girls and is the end that must be achieved to give meaning to her life. The society is not much concerned if the happiness of a woman lies in marriage or if she is frustrated; the only way she can define herself is as a wife of so and so. Although things have changed in the modern society yet de

Beauvoir believes that it is rather a period of transition. According to her marriage is viewed differently by a man and a woman. They feel the need of one another but "this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them". For both the parties marriage has its benefits and its restraints, but it is the woman who is doomed to a miserable state of existence and is left with a very few options. Next, de Beauvoir discusses in detail the position and the situation of a woman as a mother. Beginning with pregnancy to her relationships with her children, sons and daughters, it is not an easy life for her. There are also numerous myths associated with the maternity phase of a woman's life; for instance it is believed by psychologists that motherhood brings her equal to man. Culturally and socially "mother" is regarded as "sacred" and summons respect but this is only if she is married. An unwed mother is indicted with the blame of corrupting the society.

Woman is, in fact, tired of being generalized and yearns to be distinguished from the crowd. This desire is fulfilled, to an extent, through her social life. According to de Beauvoir-"Her social duty, which is 'to make a good show', combine with her pleasure in letting herself be seen". She has to be at her best in the house, where she is not very conscious and particular about her appearance or her dress; but to be best outdoors, it is not work that needs much of her attention but her looks and her beauty. Here also it is the society (androcentric) that dictates her: "Woman...is even required by society to make herself an erotic object. The purpose of the fashions to which she is enslaved is not seeking to further her projects but to thwart them". From here de Beauvoir moves on to the discussion of "prostitutes and hetairas" and argues-"The prostitute is a scapegoat; man vents his turpitude upon her, and he rejects her. Whether she is put legally under police supervision or works illegally in secret, she is in any case treated as a pariah". The theories that prostitutes suffer from some mental abnormalities or hereditary problems have long been discarded. Indeed, it is thought by many that poverty and unemployment have a significant role to play in the establishment of this profession.

Simone de Beauvoir asserts that the "character" of a woman is determined by the "condition" of a woman and this condition has remained more or less the same down the ages. The little changes that seem to have taken place are merely on a superficial level. She insists that the stereotypes attributed to a woman are not based on reality. Neither are they the result of the woman's hormonal configuration or her brain structure; rather they are, undoubtedly, socially and culturally constructed. Thus, de Beauvoir attempts to study the varied situations in which women find themselves or are placed and are then defined accordingly. This will facilitate the comprehension of "the eternal feminine" in the totality of her economic, social and historical conditioning".

According to de Beauvoir it is not correct to compare "feminine world" with the "masculine universe". The reason for this is that woman has never been able to form a women's group, which has its own entity. In fact, together they make up a kind of a sub group within the boundaries of a bigger, metropolitan circle and always remain subordinate to the governing authorities, which is definitely male. What brings women together or the foundation and basis of this women's group is only the fact that they are biologically similar; but "they lack that organic solidarity on which every unified community is based". Interestingly, women join up with other sex to carry out various public services. They are to be found working among men in clubs, pubs, salons, fast foods and other social institutions, yet they are to be viewed and in fact, are viewed as a part or an extra ingredient of the androcentric world. Thus, there is this paradox: "They belong at one and the same time to the male world and to a sphere in which that world is challenged; shut up in their world, surrounded by the other, they can settle down nowhere in peace". She is confined to those stereotypes that define her and does not dare to break free of those shackles that do not allow her to be anything else but what is dictated by the symbols and myths. It is not she or her deeds and acts that create these metaphors, rather she has to behave, react and respond according to these symbols and metaphors. This is her world and not only is she enclosed inside, she is also fenced with another world outside. Thus they have no place to be just themselves.

Simone de Beauvoir asserts that "woman herself recognizes that the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it, ruled it, and still dominate it today are men". This means that the reality that is presented about the surrounding world is provided through a male's perception, the vision through which the things around are viewed and understood is again that of a male and it is the masculine interests and privileges that dictate the activities of the world. The society is phallogocentric, that is, it is the man and his ideology that dominates the social set up. Woman, on the other hand, is considered as an inferior being and all the time dependent on the other sex. She readily accepts the

position of the object, she never stands up for her own rights-"shut up in her flesh, her home, she sees herself as passive before these gods with human faces who set goals and establish values". She is more like a puppet who has to perform in the way she is wanted to perform and whose strings are in the hands of a master (male). de Beauvoir feels that a woman is like an "eternal child". In other words, a woman never ceases to be a child, all the time being checked by a senior (which is man in her case), being rebuked if she does not act as expected and, at times, punished as well. Moreover, the condition of the woman is worse than other marginalized groups like slaves, colonized natives, workers, etc. These people have still been called as "grown-up children", but a woman is considered not as good as even this. Nonetheless, they all have to accept and follow the rules and laws put down by other men-the superior beings. A woman has no choice, she is not supposed to take any decision and not even make suggestions but just be an obedient child.

Furthermore, it is believed that women lack technical training and are not comfortable dealing with implements and tools. For her dealing with life is more important and the laws of nature supreme. The world is far beyond than anything that can be conquered. If one has to conquer something then to have complete knowledge about that thing is very important. But this world is full of mysteries that cannot be solved or interpreted through equations. For instance no law of mathematics or physics can really explain how an egg inside a woman's womb transforms into a human being. It is not possible with any technologically advanced machine to accelerate this process or curtail the same. Also woman is all the time working with scientific laws, for which they are assumed to have no caliber to grasp, in the kitchen; the principles of energy and heat are not out of her reach. Added to this is the woman's inclination towards magical and supernatural powers. She does not regard desire as an aggressive force rather it is an attraction. . . she has her own beliefs and superstitions and also trusts them to change the destiny of any individual. All these things are part and parcel of her life.

A woman is always found to be very devoted to, or rather fanatic about, her routine. The reason for this, says de Beauvoir, is that there is nothing innovative, nothing new for her to do. She is expected to do the allotted work repeatedly without any creativity involved in it. For a woman the future is no different from her past in the sense that the same routine, the same action is carried out day in and day out; "Not only is she ignorant of what constitutes a true action, capable of changing the face of the world, but she is lost in the midst of the world as if she were at the hearts of an immense, vague nebula. She is not familiar with the use of masculine logic. . . And in the world of men, her thought, not falling into any project, since she does nothing, is indistinguishable from day-dreaming. She has no sense of factual truth, for lack of effectiveness; she never comes to grips with anything but words and the mental pictures, . . . She is content, for her purpose, with extremely vague conceptions, confusing parties, opinions, places, people, events; her head is filled with a strange jumble".

All this is, in fact, not by choice. She has been moulded and trained to accept the masculine world and its authority. It is the 'reality' and 'absolute truth' for her. Male, often in form of father, husband and lover, is a reflection of god whom they worship and bow to. Their male masters epitomizes not only the qualities like "Order" and "Right" but also become archetypes of "the magic of male essence". de Beauvoir insists that the admiration and reverence that are tendered to these 'heroes and to the laws of masculine world" are not because of some rational thought or some sort of judicious contemplation on the part of the woman; instead it is "an act of faith" and this very soon becomes fanatic in character. It is uncompromising and is not based on any knowledge but is highly unreasonable, persistent, inflexible and quite unintelligent. There could probably be two reasons for this: one, a woman belonging to high strata of the society draws some benefits from the established dogmas of the society; thus, she is unwilling to confront these laws and codes. On the other hand, a woman is aware that she does not make history and unlike a man, is not an active participant in the revolutions and insurrections. As a result, she would prefer to have things the way they are already existing for she believes that if they are distorted or disturbed, she won't be able to put them back together. The fact that during the American War of Secession women were in the favour of the continuation of slavery exemplifies this inertness associated with women. de Beauvoir goes on to clarify this position taken by women: "More generally, she respects the law simply because it is the law, since her faith is blind; if the law changes, it retains its spell. In woman's eyes, might makes right because the rights she recognizes in men depend upon their power".

This quality of acceptance and resignation leads them to be in possession of a few virtues: "They can stand physical

pain much better than men: "They are capable of stoical courage when circumstances demand it; lacking the male's aggressive audacity, many women distinguish themselves by their calm tenacity in passive resistance. They face crises, poverty, misfortune, more energetically than their husbands; respecting duration, which no haste can overcome, they do not ration their time. When they apply their quiet persistence to an enterprise, they are sometimes startlingly successful". However, these positive traits are very often overshadowed and are portrayed negatively. Compromise, acceptance, resignation and adjustment are regarded as woman's weaknesses. Woman would prefer to suffer her regular subjugation rather than opting for something new to which they have not been acquainted and thus have no idea about its consequences. But the woman is not wholly responsible for such passivity. She has never had the taste of liberation and its fruits. The world, for her, has always been and meant to be ruled; and the ruler, unquestionably, has to be a man. Religion, history, mythology and most of other doctrines propagate the idea of man as the supreme-it was Adam who was created for his own sake while Eve was created "for Adam". Thus, there can be no thoughts of protests at all. This is how God planned the world to be and this is how it shall be. Women, if given an opportunity to shape their own lives, to draw their destinies and plan their futures, are surely capable of coming to the forefront. As Simone puts it-"Many of the faults for which women are reproached-mediocrity, laziness, frivolity, servility-simply express the fact that their horizon is closed".

Further, de Beauvoir makes an important observation. She says the sexuality has been attributed as an overpowering character of a woman, but this has rather been imposed upon her: and most of the time she has been deprived of "sexual pleasure" which makes her look for it quite keenly. And when her physical needs are not fulfilled she distracts herself with and finds comfort in aromas, velvets and so on and so forth. There is no doubt that she cashes on her physicality, but then, she is positioned in such circumstances. And once these brief moments of pleasure are over, she once again withdraws into her cocoon. de Beauvoir defends women from these charges: "She often appears to be lazy, indolent; but the occupations available to her are as empty as the pure passage of time. If she is a chatterer, scribbler, it is to divert her idle hours: for impossible action, she substitutes words. The truth is that when a woman is engaged in an enterprise worthy of a human being, she is quite able to show herself as active, efficient, taciturn-and as ascetic as a man". What is being reiterated is the fact that it is man and the phallogocentric society that is responsible for the essentialized character of woman. There has been deficiency of opportunity for her to spread her wings. She has not been allowed to show her capabilities in anything else but culinary and domestic activities. She is not invited to get involved in achievements of greater goals and has been only left for taking care of basic necessities.

It is important to note that woman, as discussed by de Beauvoir, is not a free individual. And only free, independent and sovereign persons can be put responsible for their actions. In the case of a woman, it is the external force that dictates her life and her actions. She is not the decision-maker in matters concerning her and therefore, not liable for the consequences. The world, the masculine society, is hence accountable for her condition and any amount of complaints and grumbles are not able to reach the other end and her voice simply goes unheard. This male universe is embodied in woman's husband who is in charge of her, and by default responsible for her miseries. Even if a woman despises her husband she never opts for going away from him. Rather, she remains attached to him and presents herself as a "martyr" and she reassures herself with this triumph. Her only means of revolt are her tears and hysterical acts. These are the forms of resistance that she resorts to. Compared to a woman, a man accepts the challenges and upheavals of life and is not frustrated, unlike a woman, to an extent to shed tears. This wailing annoys men but, woman, again is left with no choice but to indulge in her sobs to convey her disapproval. There are other subtle forms of resistance that are usually regarded as her negative traits. These should not be seen as her incapability but a way to oppose and defy: "Woman is bound in general way to contest foot by foot the rule of man, though recognizing his over-all supremacy and worshipping his idols. Hence, that famous "contrariness" for which she has often been reproached. Having no independent domain, she cannot appose positive truth and values of her own to those asserted and upheld by males, she can only deny them. Her negation is more or less thorough going; accordingly, respect and resentment are proportioned in her nature. But in fact she knows all the faults in the masculine system, and she has no hesitation in exposing them".

On one hand, women accuse men of being ignorant of life and on the other hand men indict women with lack of having any grasp of the world because they lack in logic and technique. Although woman finds this logic and

principles completely useless for her experiences of life, yet she knows that they are yet another form of masculine force. She finds herself perplexed and confused. There are two choices for her: either she accepts and agrees to the male order and its superiority or she completely rejects them and refuses to get convinced. The second option, however, for her is going too far; so she is left with the first choice and offers her resignation. In this process she is left neither as a complete rebel nor as a complete slave-"man pursues that chimera, a companion half-slave, half-free: in yielding to him he would have her yield to the convincingness of an agreement, but she knows that he has himself chosen the premises on which his rigorous deduction depends".

If the woman refuses to question she is conveniently hushed into silence but in case she questions and raises her doubts she will not get any explanations but charged as ignorant, pigheaded and irrational fellow. Even though, the woman accepts whatever is portrayed as truth by men and their world, but this does not mean that they believe in the fixity of this truth or reality. They do not expect any other principles or laws or even facts other than those presented by the androcentric vision. Yet, they believe in the ever-changing nature of all these things. She is too aware of the ambiguity of all things that are found around her and the masculine world is no exception. She knows that the act of nobility and goodness and decency is all fake; they are just one side of the coin. Man enforces his word but at the same time desires for some sort of disobedience that moulds, in fact, legitimizes the very force he uses.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, man happily follows the Hegelian principle according to which a person is free to indulge in pleasure and fulfill his desires as long as they are within his personal and private domain; but as a citizen and a social being he has to rise above himself and his individual yearnings towards and for the collective welfare. If this is followed then the relation with woman fall under the category of man's private matters and therefore, moral and ethical values can be done away with. It is not important to keep oneself within the prescribed codes of conduct. But when it comes to dealing with other men things are different: "With other men his relations in which values are involved; he is a free agent confronting other free agents under laws fully recognized by all; but with woman-she was invented for this purpose-he casts off the responsibility of existence, he abandons himself to the mirage of his en-soi, or fixed, lower nature, he puts himself on the plane of inauthenticity." There is, thus, an absolute contrast between the man dealing with public life and the man encountered by his wife. He seems to be a big hypocrite in issues relating to childbirth. de Beauvoir gives an example of France where hundreds of Thousands of Women went for abortions when men were proclaiming that abortion was a criminal offense: "They count openly on the woman's willingness to make herself guilty of a crime: her "immorality" is necessary to the harmony of the moral society respected by men".

Another example of man's duplicity is his attitude towards prostitutes-"for it is his demand that creates the supply". They would often criticize such allurements but would not hesitate in indulging in them personally. Quite strikingly, these very men who go to prostitutes have no inhibitions and very casually and conveniently condemn them as "perverted and debauched". Even the rest of the virtuous men would abuse these girls without having a single complaint against the males who draw on such pleasures. Amazingly, the men remain unadulterated after having intimate relationships with the so-called perverted and debased women. Simone de Beauvoir provides an anecdote to illustrate her argument. According to the incident narrated by her two girls of twelve to thirteen years of age were arrested from a brothel and put on a trial. While testifying, the girls gave the names of some very influential people who were their clients. Just as one of the girls was about to give yet another name of an important person, the judge stopped her and advised, rather ordered, that a reputed name should not be "befouled". In other words, the judge was also one of the many clients who were actually supposed to ensure the preservation and execution of moral values and ethical laws. Men, especially those in possession of power, continue to remain respectable and such acts are excused as momentary weakness or lack of control on the part of the man. The girl, no matter how young she may be, is penalized-" she is perverse, corrupted, vicious, fit only for the reformatory".

Perhaps, woman is also not completely untouched by this duplicity. She realizes that man does not act according to the laws laid down by himself; he does not follow his own rules and many times provokes his woman to defy them. The man does not mean what he says and neither does he desire for what he says he wants. Consequently, the woman begins to follow his footsteps. She pretends to offer him something but is not actually giving it to him. On the surface she poses to be true, sincere and very faithful and is always aiming to satisfy her man's yearnings. Yet, she

can if need arise, go for an abortion or even follow birth control methods. Man on the other hand is also all the time showing annoyance and displeasure to her but in hearts of hearts is quite grateful. The relationship becomes a kind of game of deceit and pretense.

Woman has been called a "parasite" who carries out the function of the scrounger. She depends on man in order to be recognized in the society, to feed herself, to reproduce and all this is made possible because of the physical relationship that exists between man and woman and since "she is confined to that function, she is wholly an instrumentality of exploitation". Not only an exploiter, woman ends up being a liar as well. In a man-woman relationship, the man wants and expects woman to become the absolute Other. In other words, man is the Subject while woman is merely an Object, and "at the very moment when she does that, she is exercising a free activity". Thus, in spite of turning into a kind of inert object she still remains very much "a conscious being"; retaining her subjectivity. "She is, then, to feign independence at the moment of obedience, although at another moment she actively plays the comedy of being passive. She lies to hold the man who provides her daily bread; there are scenes and tears, . . . and she lies also to escape from the tyranny she accepts through self-interest." Hence, she carries on this act of deception, which brings some amount of satisfaction to her, and it can also be termed as a sort of revenge that seems quite saccharine on the surface. Later, among the same sex, women ridicule and mock their "dupes". The conversations they indulge into are similar to those that perhaps take place among the servants about their employers when they are left on their own. Just like the servants, women are the victims of their situation- 'woman has the same faults because she is the victim of the same paternalistic oppression; she has the same cynicism because she sees man from top to toe, as a valet sees his master. But it is clear that none of woman's traits manifest an originally perverted essence or will: they reflect a situation". It is not so that men are not aware of this fact. But, in order to sustain the hierarchy in the social set-up they promote such negativities and encourage all the possible contempt. Also, man tends to generalize what has been his experience with the one woman, (who happened to be his wife or lover). "Woman's faults, then, are magnified the more in that she will not try to combat them but, on the contrary, will make an ornament of them".

Women, says de Beauvoir, are never successful in building up a world of their own and therefore, can never be in a position to challenge the men's world. The reasons for this are that women not only reject the logic and rationally based facts and principles but a woman also "lacks the sense of the universal". For her confirmation about something provided by a neighbour carries more weight than that explained scientifically and logically. She highly values knowledge provided in books, etc. but does not make an effort to grasp it. And there is still more to her- "Within her sphere all is magic; outside, all is mystery. She is unfamiliar with the criterion of plausibility; only immediate experience carries conviction-her own experience, or that of others if stated emphatically enough. As for her own self, she feels she is a special case because she is isolated in her home and hence does not come into active contact with other women; she is always expecting that destiny and men will make an exception in her favour", on the other hand, her attitude towards men is fairly ambivalent: "Doubtless he is a child, a necessitous and vulnerable body, he is a simpleton, a bothersome drone, a mean tyrant, a vain egotist; but he is also the liberating hero, the divinity who bestows values. His desire is gross appetite, his embrace is degrading duty; yet his fire and virile force seem like demiurgic power".

However, in looking for the genius in the man, she reverts to one of the several "masculine myths". Moreover, woman maintains an ambivalent attitude towards herself and the world. Woman's world is encircled by that of the males. But this male universe is further chagrined by some incomprehensible powers that are even superior to the power of man. If, hypothetically, it is believed that women join hands with these forces then she will be able to supersede the masculine universe. For the woman, thus, the natural and the supernatural forces become more significant than the terrestrial schemes she endeavours to bring back the order of the mother-the earth and the nature. However, woman is more comfortable in the illusionary world rather than being concerned about reality of her existence. "Hence the fact that while being 'physical' she is also artificial, and while being earthly she makes herself ethereal. . . . Because she is condemned to know only the factual contingency of life, she makes herself priestess of the Ideal".

Furthermore, there is ambivalence apparent in the manner in which a woman regards her body. On one hand the body is considered to be a "burden" in the sense that it is not of much use to the woman but to provide pleasure to others. Also, it is often considered impure because of certain biological forces on which the woman has absolutely no

control. Moreover, it is a "hysteric body", as the reactions and responses of the body in certain situations is beyond the understanding of the woman herself. But, at the same time, "it is also her glorious double; she is dazzled in beholding it in the mirror; it is promised happiness, work of art, living statue; she shapes it, adorns it, puts it on show". Woman is very proud of this possession of hers and forgets the "carnal contingency".

Similarly, woman is offered another doubleness by Nature. Once she becomes a wife and a housekeeper, her freedom to wander in the wilderness is reduced to her ambles in the garden of the house. But this does not mean that the link that the woman had with nature has been broken and now all that she thinks of is food and vegetables and the kitchen and household errands. Rather, she is still absorbed in thought, spellbound and enthralled by the natural occurrences. Most importantly, she can feel and experience the touch of nature through her reproducing powers. Once among trees, by the brook, in the meadow or on the hill side, she is conscious of her individuality; she is aware of 'Herself' as a free human being-"Any woman who has preserved her independence through all her servitudes will ardently love her own freedom in Nature'.

Simone de Beauvoir believes that the concept of "harmony" is one of the keys to the feminine universe: "it implies a stationary perfection, the immediate justification of each element depending on the whole and on its passive participation in the totality. In a harmonious world woman thus attains what man will seek through action: she meshes with the world, she is necessary to it, she cooperates in the triumph of God". Woman has attached immense importance to naturalism while rejecting the idea of logic and other doctrines that are wholly based on principles and reasoning. As a result, she is highly optimistic and believes that, on the whole, things end up being 'good'. Since she is not permitted to act or perform, she is only provided with things. And, as such, she has no alternative but to believe in the 'Good' of these things given to her. The pleasures of liberty and freedom are strictly reserved for man. All that a woman can attain is some peace and serenity while enjoying the sun or the moonlight. Nevertheless, de Beauvoir asserts that this is, in fact, not sufficient to feel the life or enough to live life-"The Good cannot be considered something that is; the world is not harmony, and no individual has an essential place in it."

Furthermore, de Beauvoir picks another very vital aspect of life-religion. She says that there must be some religion that is meant only for women and she writes: "When a sex or a class is condemned to immanence, it is necessary to offer it the mirage of some form of transcendence". It is made to believe that God has delegated his authority to man and thus, if he dominates woman then it has the consent of God. Also, religion comes handy when one needs to suppress and hold back whims and fancies, especially if they are inclined towards a rebellion. In case of women, the existence of God does not help her in improving her lot or to rescue her from the trenches of her male masters. "Woman is asked in the name of God not so much to accept her inferiority as to believe that, thanks to Him, she is the equal of the lordly male; even the temptation to revolt is suppressed by the claim that the injustice is overcome. Woman is no longer denied transcendence, since she is to consecrate her immanence to God; the worth of souls is to be weighed only in heaven and not according to their accomplishments on earth."

Simone de Beauvoir believes that this devotion and honest conviction in god helps woman to come out of that inferiority complex. The woman regards herself as a creation of God without being obsessed with gender differences. de Beauvoir gives examples of female saints-St. Bridget, St. Catherine of Siena who refused to recognize masculine authority. But religious institutions, which are consciously or unconsciously representative of male ideology, make sure that the supremacy of man, after that of God, is not defied and that man's authority is never surpassed. For instance-"The church sees to it that God never authorizes women to escape male guardianship; she [Church] has put exclusively in man's hand such powerful weapons as denial of absolution and excommunication..." that women are always at a loss. Nonetheless, she still finds her faith in Almighty as a safe haven she can take retreat to in order to escape the masculine might. It is because of her belief in God, in His miracles and mysteries that she is able to reject the logic and rationality of man's world. She is the chosen one to give birth to a new life and thus provide another "soul for God'. She considers these as greater accomplishments than getting a grip on scientific laws and understanding the ways of this world-"With the heavenly father's connivance, woman can boldly lay claim to the glory of her femininity in defiance of man".

Interestingly, once woman begins to act and speak in the name of God it becomes difficult to defy or insult her. This is not to say that men cannot attain such a position or that through spiritual authority a woman can take over from

men. Thus, "woman invokes the divine will to justify her authority absolutely in the eyes of those naturally subordinated to her already and to justify it in her own eyes" and, furthermore, de Beauvoir insists that "woman makes religion a pretext for satisfying her own desires". Religion helps woman to attain a direction, it is also symbolic of the figures-father, lover, husband-she looks up to in her life and it also keeps her busy and fills in those empty spaces in her diurnal routine. At the same time it is important to note that religion also "confirms the social order, it justifies her resignation, by giving her the hope of a better future in sexless heaven". Thus, it is not really woman's liberation that is one of the noble agendas of religious institutions and practice.

"It is evident that woman's 'character'-her convictions, her values, her wisdom, her morality, her tastes, her behaviour-are to be explained by her situation. The fact that transcendence is denied to her keeps as a rule from attaining the loftiest human attitudes: heroism, revolt, disinterestedness, imagination, creation, but even among the males they are none too common..." In an official working environment both men and women are equally subordinates to their employer and both have to do their jobs even if it is a repetition or gets monotonous. At home, the woman is at least her own boss while cooking or cleaning and doesn't have to worry about the appearances.

Thus, the study makes an important observation that "all comparisons are idle which purport to show that woman is superior, inferior, or equal to man, for their situations are profoundly different. If we compare these situations rather than the people in them, we see clearly that man's is far preferable; that is to say, he has many more opportunities to exercise his freedom in the world".

The Independent Woman

Simone de Beauvoir begins the essay by informing that as per the French law "obedience is no longer included among the duties of a wife...". First of all it is important to understand that "wife" is one role that is essential for a woman to perform. The society, to quite an extent, regards marriage as the final destination for a woman. It is only through marriage that she can attain some sort of dignity. She is recognized as a wife of so and so. However, the struggle of a woman does not end once she becomes a wife. Although both husband and wife need each other but the condition of reciprocity is seldom found in their relationship. Furthermore, there are some pre-defined "duties" that have to be carried out by a wife. Not only is the "rights" part completely over shadowed by repeated emphasis on the duties of the wife, also these supposed duties become so rigid that they begin to define the very character of woman. For instance, there is a prescribed manner in which a supposedly good wife must behave, live, talk and present herself. A woman always carries the myths and stereotypes attached to her all the time when she walks into various roles and situations. These myths further facilitate marginalization of the married woman who is now not just a woman but a married one and therefore has increased responsibility towards society and her extended family.

The individuality of a woman and her autonomous existence is recognized when she is allowed to cast her vote. Politically, she is acknowledged as a separate entity, separate from her husband. But de Beauvoir says that "these civil liberties remain theoretical as long as they are unaccompanied by economic freedom". It is important for a woman to earn her own living. Usually it is the husband who is considered responsible for feeding her. In other words, her life is completely dependent upon the husband. It is, in most of the cases, very difficult for the woman to survive on her own. There could be various reasons for this-either she is not educated enough to take up some job in an office or she is not comfortable with the idea of going out of the house and working among other people or probably some other problems. And, since she is dependent on man in order to keep herself alive she cannot dare to disobey or offend him at any cost. Thus, for true emancipation of a woman her economic independence is very important. It should also be kept in mind that economic independence not only refers to the opportunities available to a woman to earn her own money but it also suggests that she should be free to decide how she wants to use her money. In other words, economic liberty means that one is able to earn money and also have the right to spend it.

As de Beauvoir writes: "A woman supported by a man-wife or courtesan-is not emancipated from the male because she has a vote; if custom imposes less constraint on her than formerly, the negative freedom implied has not profoundly modified her situation; she remains bound in her condition of vassalage". She believes that it has been only through employment, through attainment of means to earn one's living that the woman has managed to fill in some gap that

exists between the two sexes. The belief that a woman has to be taken care of, both physically and financially, has been dismantled. Working and earning women have proved that they can support themselves financially and that she is no more a burden than a man has to carry on his shoulders. She should not, therefore, be regarded merely as an exploiter (and a parasite) who extracts benefits from her patron. It is only employment and power to earn money that can guarantee her real freedom, which will not be merely theoretical and superfluous but can be experienced practically - "Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator".

The problem faced by women is that they are "not permitted to do anything". In fact, the real problem is that woman is not thought to be capable of doing anything. In a man-woman relationship, for instance, she is never regarded as an equal but always as an Other. It is only man who is privileged to take the position of the Subject and hence, the 'doer'; the woman always remains as an object. She is the inert, passive being who is simply meant to be like this and no other way. She is the silent Other but this does not mean that she does not have a voice; the problem is that the androcentric world is not able to understand her language. Thus, she keeps looking for means, here and there, which will help her to reach that "true self" that has been lost in playing different roles and living a life which is dictated by myths and stereotypes created by the society. And, it is either through religion or at times through love that she is able to regain her self.

But if a woman is able to earn, things are different for her - "When she is productive, active, she regains her transcendence; in her projects she concretely affirms her status as subject; in connection with the aims she pursues, with the money and the rights she takes possession of, she makes trial of and senses her responsibility". It is not that women are not aware of the benefits of employment. It is important to work even if it is not a very cushy job. Even a floor scrubber feels proud of herself because of the mere fact that she is self-independent and self-sufficient. This helps to boost the self-confidence, which women need in order to come out of their inferiority complex. Nevertheless, de Beauvoir insists that it is not so that "the mere combination of the right to vote and a job constitutes a complete emancipation". Working of women does not put an end to all problems, especially when the fact that society has always been dominated and influenced by men has not changed much.

The question of working-women is quite complex. "The majority of women do not escape from the traditional feminine world; they get from neither society nor their husbands the assistance they would need to become in concrete fact the equals of the men. Only those women who have a political faith, who take militant action in the unions, who have confidence in their future, can give ethical meaning to thankless daily labour." Many women think that by working outside they are doubly burdened. Not only do they have to put in strenuous hours working in a factory or an office but at home also they have to carry out all the activities and household jobs. The benefit of an outside job is only that it makes them economically self sufficient but it does not relieve them of household duties and "house-keeping - burdens". They are not receiving "in exchange for their work the moral and social benefits they might rightfully count on," and as a result they give in to the pressure and restraints.

There happens to be another problem as far as the working women are concerned. It is not very often that a woman manages to get a highly, or even a well-paid job. In order to come up to the expectations of the society and maintain a reasonably good standard of living, the minimal wages are not enough. Thus, she needs the assistance and support of men to climb the ladder. In order to achieve this she has to make some compromises. She is ready or rather forced by circumstances to "surrender" her body, as "she has to please men if she is to succeed in her life as a woman". Perhaps, the motive behind keeping a woman at such low wages that can hardly keep her away from starving to death is to create such circumstances that will force her to make compromises. At times, a woman is ready to make any sacrifice or compromise for her economic independence, while at other time she will choose to remain home, living at the mercy of the other - "She often retains both sources of income - and each serves more or less as an escape from the other; but she is really in double servitude: to job and to protector". Quite ironically, neither the girl nor the married woman is able to achieve her independence wholly by her own efforts. The earnings of a married woman are not enough but are regarded only as "pin money" and the girl, on the other hand, is not able to make enough and "it is the masculine contribution that seems extra."

This all does not mean that absolutely no, or very few, women are able to achieve economic and social independence

through their jobs and professions; in fact they make quite a number. There has been difference of opinion between the feminists and anti-feminists on the subject of independent women. According to the anti-feminists "the emancipated women of today succeed in doing nothing of importance in the world and that furthermore they have difficulty in achieving their own inner equilibrium". On the other hand, the feminist groups disregard the importance of inner balance and focus upon the results achieved by professional women. There are no valid reasons to believe that the professional women have simply gone astray and are on the wrong, yet they are not at ease in this new sphere they have created for themselves. "The woman who is economically emancipated from man is not for all that in a moral, social, and psychological situation identical with that of man. The way she carries on her profession and her devotion to it depend on the context supplied by the total pattern of her life. For when she begins her adult life she does not have behind her the same past as does a boy; she is not viewed by society in the same way; the universe presents itself to her in a different perspective. The fact of being a woman today poses peculiar problems for an independent individual."

Simone de Beauvoir argues that the life of a man as an individual is not in any way related or in contrast to his position or his fate as a male. But, unfortunately the same cannot be said in case of a woman. De Beauvoir says, "Through the identification of phallus and transcendence, it turns out that his social and spiritual success endow him with a virile prestige. He is not divided. Whereas it is required of woman that in order to realize her femininity she must make herself object and prey, which is to say that she must renounce her claims as sovereign subject. It is this conflict that especially marks the situation of the emancipated woman. She refuses to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation; but it would also be a mutilation to repudiate her sex. Man is a human being with sexuality; woman is a complete individual, equal to the male, only if she too is a human being with sexuality. To renounce her femininity is to renounce a part of her humanity". For a woman, a distinction is made - a woman as female and a woman as an individual. Female is a biological occurrence but it is being feminine that is all the time imposed upon a woman. Femininity is a social and a cultural construction. It is based on the myths and ideal of the people and is therefore "artificially shaped by custom and fashion, it is imposed upon each woman from without". Interestingly, the individual woman has no role to play in the shaping of this femininity but has to simply accept these otherwise she degrades herself.

And if a woman does not fit herself within the frame structured by the society and tries to go against conventions, she is considered a rebel. She will be considered "eccentric" and instead of being called mad she would rather conform to the laws and conventions of the society. However, it should be made sure that a revolutionary attitude or a rebellion should bring out positive results. It should help to conserve energy and time should efficiently be utilized rather than wasting whatever is available. Thus, a woman should not give up her expected mannerisms if she does not intend to annoy the people around her or to "devalue" herself. Interestingly, a man has no problems conforming to the conventional set up because it has actually been structured according to his will and his requirements. On the other hand, it becomes essential for a woman "who also is subject, activity, to insinuate herself into a world that has doomed her to passivity." And Simone says it is all the more difficult for a woman because even the routine practices like "dressing and housekeeping" have twined into complex "arts". Unlike woman, man does not have to bother himself much about his clothes, as all he is looking for is "convenience" and comfort and not necessarily to make an impression. But for a woman, the dressing up becomes a part of her personality and she is judged according to her dress and appearance.

As de Beauvoir puts it - "she is judged, respected, desired, by and through her toilette". Not only does she have to keep things in proper order - from blouse to shirt to stockings and shoes - she spends a lot on her make up and hair dressing as well. Apart from this a single woman is expected to maintain a presentable lodging too. However, it is not only for others pleasure that she sustains her "womanliness"; rather it is also for her self satisfaction - "She can regard herself with approval throughout her present and past only in combining the life she has made for herself with the destiny that her mother, her childhood games, and her adolescent fantasies prepared for her."

For independent women there arises an internal struggle between the independent individual that she has become now and the femininity, which has been eroded in the process. She cannot afford to devote much time to beautify herself as an other normal woman would whose foremost objective is to enhance her seductive capabilities. No doubt that with "fame and fortune" she is regarded quite "attractive", she loses the feminine charm; "Feminine charm

demands that transcendence, degraded into immanence, appear no longer as anything more than a subtle quivering of the flesh; it is necessary to be spontaneously offered prey. But the intellectual knows that she is offering herself, she knows that she is a conscious being, a subject...".

The intellectual woman is aware of her reasoning powers and instead of being comforted by it, she is all the more scared of her failure as a woman, thereby implying that she doubts if she can attain the physical pleasures of this world. As a result she makes an extra effort to act and pretends to have all those essentialised characters that are associated with women in general. But very soon she feels uncomfortable in this act of imitating and she is all the more irritated and troubled. This results in a revengeful attitude on the part of the women. A part of them wants to assert and manifest her individual subjectivity at the same time she is aware that men are usually not willing to come to terms with the "equal" woman. If this emancipated intellectual woman is readily accepted, she will not have to be crushed between femininity and intellectuality or lead an insecure life.

Thankfully, the situation of today has changed in the sense that men have begun to accept the "new status" of women and there is an on going effort to attain equilibrium between the two sexes. However, there is still a long way to go for the independent woman before she is able to have a smooth life and at present she has many difficulties. de Beauvoir feels that just like a male, the woman also has some desires that she wants to fulfill. Not only this even she needs some sort of enjoyment and leisure to relax herself and rejuvenate to begin her work again. In this regard, she is once again not as lucky as the man. The society always seems to scrutinize her life and there is greater threat to her reputation than in the case of a man - "The difference depends both on traditional attitudes and on the special nature of feminine eroticism".

Simone de Beauvoir discusses a couple of options available to women. She says that in order to satisfy her passions, if a woman picks up someone from the street and takes him home for a night there are a number of risks involved. Foremost, this man might infect the woman with some sort of venereal disease if he had not taken protections and also there is always a risk of conception in spite of all the protection and caution taken by the woman. In addition to this, there can be danger to life if the man turns out to be a crook or a robber and then there is another option, that of a "permanent lover". It is not rare with men to keep a mistress who is also supported financially by him. The woman can make such an arrangement and simply use him when she feels the need of him.

But it is not as simple as it sounds to be. To be free from complexities and other problems it is important that "they (women) must be old to be able to dissociate sex and sentiment so crudely, since in feminine adolescence the two are most profoundly associated". The distinction between "flesh and spirit" is not very easily accepted by both, men and women. Each would like to get possession of both these things of his/her partner. Then there is always a sense of guilt involved in such an arrangement and women are more sensitive towards such things as compared to men - "Masculine pride conceals the ambiguities of the erotic drama from the male; he lies to himself unconsciously. More easily humiliated, more vulnerable, woman is also clearer sighted; she will succeed in blinding herself only at the cost of entertaining a more calculated bad faith. Even granted the means, woman will never find the purchase of a male a satisfactory solution."

Simone de Beauvoir makes another important observation in case of a relationship where the woman "entraps a man". Here, the woman seems to be under a false deception that she is not only giving herself to the erotic pleasure but also taking something. In reality, according to Simone, neither the man nor the woman takes the other. On the other hand, in normal relationships both man and woman not only want to satisfy their desires but they also wish to maintain their "dignity as human beings". de Beauvoir says: "When a male enjoys a woman, when he gives her enjoyment, he takes the position of sole subject; he is imperious conqueror or lavish donor - sometimes both at once. Woman, for her part, also wishes to make it clear that she subdues her partner to her pleasure and overwhelms him with her gifts. Thus, when she imposed herself on a man, be it through promised benefits, or in staking on his courtesy, or by artfully arousing his desire in its pure generality, she readily persuades herself that she is overwhelming him with her bounty. Thanks to this advantageous conviction, she can make advances without humiliating herself, because she feels she is doing so out of generosity." Most of the men do not appreciate that a woman should make first move. They would rather have a monopoly where giving and conquering is concerned. Thus, a man can only be a taker and

never a giver. She has to always be an object - passive and inert - in order to satisfy her man and make him immensely happy.

On rare occasions even if she manages to succeed in being a generous provider, "the victory is still ambiguous." She is not accepted as anything else but "the prey of desire" - "she is represented, at one time, as pure passivity, available, open, a utensil; she yields gently to the spell of sex feeling, she is fascinated by the male, who picks her like a fruit. At another time she is regarded as if possessed by alien forces: there is a devil raging in her womb..." de Beauvoir feels that it is near to impossible to regard woman as completely a free individual. Taking the case of France, Simone, informs "free woman" and "light woman" are often misunderstood and taken as a replacement for one another. But actually, "the term 'light', implies an absence of resistance and control, a lack, the very negation of liberty". However, efforts, especially through feminine literature, are made to fight such biases.

It is impossible for the women to escape the superiority of men. He demands her submissiveness - "He is eager to take and not to receive, not to exchange but to rob". There happens to be a problem when woman begins to assert herself. The "tension" created adds to the satisfaction of man. But on the other hand when woman gives up her passivity "she breaks the spell that brings on her enjoyment, if she mimics dominance in her postures and movements, she fails to reach the climax of pleasure". And as a result most women become frigid.

However, if both man and woman are ready to recognize one another as human beings, realizing that neither of the two is superior or inferior but "equals" - "if both the man and woman have a little modesty and some generosity, ideas of victory and defeat are abolished: the act of love becomes a free exchange". Strangely enough, it is the woman who finds it hard to regard man as an equal individual. Normally, males are regarded as belonging to a superior class and having a higher status. They are placed higher in the hierarchy of the society and a woman is always aware of this fact. Also, a man finds "it as an easy matter to love a woman". Whenever a woman introduces a man to her own world, he is very keen on exploring it and also, woman being a step down, her ordinary qualities seem commendable accomplishments while her errors and mistakes are overlooked. Simone de Beauvoir insists: "If a woman has false ideas, if she is not very intelligent, clear sighted, or courageous, a man does not hold her responsible: she is the victim, he thinks - and often with reason - of her situation". The man contemplates what could she possibly be like. She can be imagined in any way the man wants to, as she is nothing in particular, she has no specificity and can conveniently be moulded into any form.

And if the woman tries to establish friendship with him she is held back especially when she realizes that it is impossible to have an affectionate relationship when she does not approve of his behaviour and attitudes. The air of superiority around him makes the woman lose interest. Moreover, adjustments are made if the man is quite young but then they would prefer young girls rather than mature women. By any luck the woman is able to get a match that pleases both her heart and body, he might not be ready to take her as an equal. If woman does think of entering into a liaison or marriage there is always this fear that whether she will be allowed to continue with her work or once again she will have to choose to sit at home or be left by her mate. No doubt in the present scenario, man has no problem if his counterpart is working and "living together is an enrichment for two free beings, and each finds security for his or her own independence in the occupation of the mate". But there is still a problem in some cases. Although the husband willingly accepts a professional wife, the wife feels that he should not lose upon all these benefits that a conventional wife would have provided or offered him. Thus she takes on to prove herself as a good cook & housekeeper, wonderful mother and along with all these even look presentable and appealing. de Beauvoir says: "She assumes it (all this) through regard for her partner and out of fidelity to herself also, for she intends, as we have already seen, to be in no way unfaithful to her destiny as woman". She has been brought up in such an environment that it gets engraved into her psyche; into her mind and heart; the men being the superior caste and therefore must be respected but nonetheless, she is unable to claim it openly. Consequently, "between the desire to assert herself and the desire for self-effacement she is torn and divided".

The woman grows up with this idea that she is an inferior being. Thus she is never hopeful of being extra fortunate especially in comparison to a man whose superiority is acknowledged by the heavens too. This proves to be of some advantage to the woman in the sense that at least she is not held responsible for the fate of the man, good or bad. But,

looking at this from a different perspective, the concern and kindness the woman gets is more due to the feelings of sympathy, pity and mercy that the man feels for her. Thus, woman is once again turned into a victim or a "prey". Often independent women get into relationship with men having their own individuality and since they are already accomplished beings, they will not exploit her for some of their own weaknesses. However, it is very rare that a woman is not overpowered by their impulses and reverts to her conventional attitude towards her lover and thus, tying him down to with her love for him and loading him with her demands and expectations. The dreams and hopes that she has nurtured throughout her adolescence cannot be so easily overcome. Thus, she ends up making compromises, although regarding the man as an equal justifying herself is not something that usually happens.

There is another function that is impossible for the woman to perform independently and "it is maternity". First, it is not acceptable by the society that an unwed woman should become a mother. The child in such a case is considered illegitimate and is always looked at with contempt though it is no fault of his or her; while the unmarried mother is simply unwanted as she becomes a threat to the society and the moral values upheld by it. There is an option of artificial insemination but that too is not something that a woman can go for without criticism, as it is not acceptable to the courtesans of the society. Even if professional women become legitimate mothers they have yet another problem to face and that is of child care. She has to depend upon her relatives or kindergartens or has to give up her work: "Thus the independent woman of today is torn between her professional interests and the problems of her sexual life; it is difficult for her to strike a balance between the two; if she does, it is at the price of concessions and sacrifices which require her to be in a constant state of tension".

Simone de Beauvoir observes that it is not as much the physicality of a woman that causes problem but "the discomforts and maladies that overburden women are due to psychic causes". She feels that a woman is not at ease and relaxed because she is committed to too many tasks and roles and moreover, most of them are contradictory to one another. Thus, it is the dilemma, mental conflicts and tensions that weaken the woman and makes her restless and uncomfortable. It is the predicaments and the quandaries in life that retard the progress of women and adversely affects her mental health. It is important, says de Beauvoir, to keep in mind while analyzing the situation of a professional woman: "She undertakes a career in a mentally harassing situation and while still under the personal burdens implied traditionally by her femininity nor are the objective circumstances favourable to her". Thus, women are always pulled back when they are trying to move ahead. Even before a woman has reached at some status or a position she is aware of her inferiority and the same is reiterated throughout the course of her life and wherever she goes—at the time of her studies, apprenticeship, jobs, etc.

In fact, woman is opposed not only by the masculine society, family and men at her office, but she also finds some kind of repulsion while working with other women in her circle. Other women also have to go through the same circumstances and have limited opportunities; so, when one among them happens to be well supported, the other begins to think if she should have also followed the direction taken by this one who is quite comfortable in her situation. As a result, a woman might get doubtful of her own decisions and the choices that she made. An ambitious woman, thus, begins to have second thoughts about her success. She feels guilty and worries that she might be deprived of other pleasures in life as a result of her professional success. She rather feels that her grace, charm and attractiveness should remain intact: "the more she seems to be getting ahead on her own the more her other chances fade; in becoming a blue stocking, a woman of brains, she will make herself unattractive to men in general, or she will humiliate her husband or lover by being too outstanding a success. So she not only applies herself the more to making a show of elegance and frivolity, but also restrains her aspiration". A woman is caught in a dilemma; one she belongs to an inferior class, and when she is independent and working she still has this inferiority complex that men are better workers in almost all the fields. On the other hand if she is trying to enhance her feminine attributes and characters then she hampers her professional advancement.

de Beauvoir further observes that girls, when unable to be victorious in tough competitions, would often not find fault with her training but immediately begins to condemn her femininity for the failures and "by resigning herself to this inequality, she enhances it". As a result of frequent failures and constant reminders of her inferiority, she is unable to aim very high and is easily satisfied by the mediocre success. Moreover, independent women feel that people do not have much confidence in their abilities. de Beauvoir says that it is a common practice that people belonging to a superior class (for example the whites) do not prefer to go to those of inferior caste (for example the blacks). But strangely, there is the

tendency among the inferior ones also that they would rather go to their superiors and have reservations in going to one that belongs to their category. Similarly is the case with women (which is regarded as an inferior class): "Most women, in particular, steeped in adoration for man, eagerly seek him out in person of the doctor, the lawyer, the office manager, and so on. Neither man nor woman likes to be under a woman's orders. Her superiors, even if they esteem her highly, will always be somewhat condescending; to be a woman is not a defect, is at least a peculiarity".

As noticed, it is not very often that you find an element of "adventure" and "experience for its own sake" in a woman's character. There has to be a planned approach to everything and must bring the desired result, which is very rarely related to her work or career. She feels that having a professional career is quite the same as having a married life. Just as one builds her home after marriage and carries out household activities for the single reason that it is her job whether she likes it or no, the work for a professional woman has to be done because she has been placed in that situation. There is a lack of fervor and enthusiasm for her work. The zeal to excel in whatever she does and at the same time the sense of enjoyment is missing in case of the independent women: "...she remains dominated, surrounded by the male universe, she lacks audacity to break through its ceiling, she does not passionately lose herself in her projects. She still regards her life as an immanent enterprise; her aim is not at an objective but, through the objective, at her subjective success". Since women are already doubtful of their success, when it does come, it has an intoxicating effect and thus, women are not able to handle it well and tend to lose their composure, as they were never sure of it. While moving on the path of progress and advancement they are always preoccupied with how far have they come and how much have they made it from their downtrodden condition instead of looking ahead. de Beauvoir feels that this is the reason why women do not reach the pinnacle of their success: "What woman essentially lacks today for doing great things is forgetfulness of herself; but to forget oneself it is first of all necessary to be firmly assured that now and for the future one has found oneself. Newly come into the world of men, poorly seconded by them, woman is still too busily occupied to search for herself".

However, according to de Beauvoir there is one category of women for whom the above comments are not completely true and "these are the women who seek through artistic expression to transcend their given characteristics; they are the actresses, dancers and singers". Their work, instead of negating the fact of femininity, reaffirms and emphasizes it all the more. These women enjoy immense freedom and even though they are most of the time in the company of men, they are not suffocated by the supposed dominating authority and superiority of men and their masculinity: "Their great advantage is that their professional success-like those of men-contribute to their sexual valuation; in their self-realization, their validation of themselves as human beings, they find self fulfillment as women: they are not torn between contradictory aspirations". They do not have to struggle to prove themselves as something that they are not and neither do they have to adapt themselves to anything else than what comes naturally to them. She manages to express herself through the exposition and presentation of what she is and there is no need for her to learn any other language in order to survive, as the one she is gifted with seems quite alright for her. In other words, there is no need for her to change as per the requirements of the phallogocentric society for she has no problem with her femininity-"she will be truly an artist, a creator, who gives meaning to her life by lending meaning to the world".

But even this category is not completely free from its shortcomings-"...instead of integrating her narcissistic self-indulgence and her sexual liberty with her artistic life, the actress very often sinks into self-worship or into gallantry". She forgets about everything else but herself and her presence. She is not very much concerned about the art of which she is the carrier or even about the character that she is trying to portray; she will not go "beyond herself". In the contemporary scenario greater number of creative activities are available to women. More than career options, Simone regards them as escape routes conveniently picked up by women: "Woman's situation inclines her to seek salvation in literature and art". These are the fields that involve her emotions rather than just her intellectual faculties of the brain. Not only her mind but also her heart is engrossed in the art.

Simone de Beauvoir writes: "to prevent an inner life that has no useful purpose from sinking into nothingness, to assert herself against given conditions which she bears rebelliously, to create a world other than that in which she fails to attain her being, she must resort to self-expression". She satisfies herself by writing letters and intimate diaries and may move on to writing her biography in form of a novel or penning down her feelings and emotions in verse. But, if

these activities are taken up only to kill time they are only good enough to be considered as "fancy work". She will not be able to give them the seriousness and perfection and for her own part, she will only be considered an amateur. Women fail to understand that proper and serious training is essential to create anything of a professional level. She carries this misconception that spontaneity is all that is required but overlooks the fact that a piece of art is commendable only if it reflects, rather than presents something. She is also not open to healthy criticism and is not ready to believe that mistakes are the stepping-stones to success. Therefore, Simone feels that among women "who toy with arts and letters, very few persevere; and even those who pass this first obstacle will very often continue to be torn between their narcissism and an inferiority complex".

One cannot overlook the fact that the world of art is once again a masculine world and the woman who decides to enter this world is, consciously or unconsciously, aware of this fact. Being a woman, "to please is her first care" and she thinks that once she becomes a professional writer she will be "displeasing". Thus, she is not ready to experiment and prefers to stick to the conventional ideas. This is not to say that woman lacks in originality. She knows that she needs to be acceptable and in order to put across her mind in a male universe she has to follow the rules laid down by men and cannot dare to do something new and different. Women, indeed, have made lot of improvement but still they have not achieved complete success in dismantling and getting rid of the "sex-limitation that has isolated them in their femininity". Woman usually conceals the fact that she is dependent on others from herself and this, says de Beauvoir, means accepting their dependency. Rather, it is important to 'expose this dependence [which] is in itself a liberation, a clear-sighted cynicism is a defense against humiliations and shame: it is a preliminary sketch of an assumption".

de Beauvoir regards the work of women writers of immense significance as they promote this: "clear-sightedness", yet this is not enough. What is still necessary for the woman is to go beyond what is obvious and try to reach the reality. There is no doubt that reality is only a construction and there is nothing as absolute reality but they need to realize this on their own and unless they start looking for it they will never understand that there is, in fact, no reality: "when they have removed the veils of illusion and deception, they think they have done enough; but this negative audacity leaves us still faced by an enigma, for the truth itself is ambiguity, abyss, mystery: once started it must be thoughtfully reconsidered, recreated. It is all very well not to be duped, but at the point all else begins. Woman exhausts her courage dissipating mirages and she stops in terror at the threshold of reality". Thus women are very good at presenting facts through their writings. They are bound to be great reporters and theoreticians. Their writings might delve into the inner feelings, aspirations and conflicts of women and their language enhances the sensations and the experiences rather than emphasizing the technicalities of it.

Another domain much traversed by women is Nature-"For the young girl, for the woman who has not fully abdicated, nature represents what woman herself represents for man: herself and her negations, a kingdom and a place of exile, the whole in the guise of the other". She reveals her experience and her dreams and other feelings through the metaphors of nature like the moon, flowers, sun, sea, and so on and so forth. But, unfortunately there are not many women writers who take or have taken the risk of dealing with the unknown. They are used to accepting things the way they are, thus, they never wonder or interrogate life or death or the world they exist in-"Women too do not contest the human situation, because they have hardly begun to assume it. This explains why their work for most part lacks metaphysical resonances and also anger; they do not take the world incidentally, they do not ask questions, they do not expose its contradictions: they take it as it is too seriously".

De Beauvoir argues that art, literature and philosophy "are attempts to found the world anew on a human liberty". Thus, it is assumed that the individual who undertakes the task of presenting a new vision of the world should, one, be well acquainted with the universe and experiences of life and second, the being should be a free individual to convey the true sense of liberty. And, both these things are not possible in case of a woman. She, as a result of cultural and social customs and conventional perceptions, she is not a free, liberated individual and because of limitations she has not been introduced to various aspects of life. Thus, it is not possible for her to carry out her role as a writer or a philosopher or a painter with the required conviction and sincerity. It is necessary for a woman, says de Beauvoir, 'to undertake in anguish and pride, her apprenticeship in abandonment and transcend: that is in liberty'. Not only this, but the woman should be allowed and given a chance to assert herself. She should have confidence that she can fend for herself

and fight for her rightful existence. No matter how isolated she might feel in this masculine world, yet she must "stand up before it". De Beauvoir gives the example of Emily Bronte and says that the reason for her "wild and powerful book" is the fact that "in the face of nature, death and destiny, she had no other backing than her own resources".

One can say that the entire argument presented by Simone de Beauvoir can be condensed into this paragraph almost towards the end of the essay: "The men that we call great are those who-in one way or another-have taken the weight of the world upon their shoulders; they have done better or worse, they have succeeded in recreating it or they have gone down; but they have assumed that enormous burden. This is what no woman has ever done, what none has ever been able to do. To regard the universe once's own, to consider oneself to blame for its faults and to glory in its progress, one must belong to the caste of the privileged; it for those alone who are in command to satisfy the universe by changing it, by thinking about it, by revealing it; they alone can recognize themselves in it and endeavour to make their mark upon it. It is in man and not in woman that it has hitherto been possible for Man to be incarnated. For the individual who seem to us most understanding, who are honoured with the name of genius are those who propose to enact the fate of all humanity in their personal existences, and no woman has believed herself authorized to do this." Thus, what de Beauvoir is trying to put across is that unless and until the sexual distinctions and gender biases are done away with and unless the woman is allowed to feel and be regarded as first a human being existing freely, she will not be able to make much contribution to this world: "As long as she still has to struggle to become a human being, she cannot become a creator".

Questions for better understanding of the essays

1. What is "the myth of woman," as de Beauvoir articulates it from?
2. To what use have male-oriented societies and individual males put this myth, especially as regards the alleged mysteriousness of women?
3. Why, according to de Beauvoir is it futile to define "what one is"? In other words, what is misguided about making statements about one's supposed inner essence?
4. What is in fact responsible for one person's seeming mysterious to another person?
5. According to de Beauvoir what should relations between the sexes be like?
6. Does de Beauvoir seem hopeful about our achieving the kind of relations she believes would be best?
7. Also, given that de Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* over half a century ago, would you say that there has been a significant improvement in the way men and women relate to one another?

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Virginia Woolf - Unit III

(I) A Brief Biographical Sketch

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was the younger daughter of famous Sir Leslie Stephen, author, critic, biographer, philosopher, essayist and the friend of scholars and men of letters during the latter half of the 19th century. She was related to the Darwin and Strachey families and was thus born into the intellectual aristocracy. She was one of the six sisters whose beauty was legendary. When Leonard Woolf, Virginia's husband, first met them, at a tea party in their brother Thoby's rooms at Cambridge, in the company of their cousin, the Principal of Newnham, he found them to be 'the most Victorian of Victorian young ladies', whose beauty, "literally took one's breath away." Yet there was a look in their eyes that warned the observer to be cautious, "a look of great intelligence, hyper critical, sarcastic, satirical".

Virginia Woolf's childhood home at Hyde Park Gate attracted such distinguished visitors as James Russell Lowell, Thomas Hardy, George Meredith and Henry James. An atmosphere of freedom permeated their family life. In her memoirs Virginia Woolf fondly recalls how in her father's household everybody had the right "to think one's own thoughts and to follow one's own pursuits and choose one's own profession." Her father allowed his children to "read what you like," and his only advice in the art of reading was to "read what one liked because one liked it, never to pretend to admire what one did not"; and the only lesson in the art of writing was, "to write in the fewest possible words, as clearly as possible, exactly what one meant". The art of writing, as recalled by Virginia Woolf in her *Diary* had been "absorbing ever since I was a little creature scribbling a story in the manner of Hawthorne on the green plush sofa in the drawing room at St. Iver while the grown ups dined."

The social and cultural milieu from which she gathered the experience of life and the material for her novels was composed of a small number of families, most of them intimately connected and deeply aware of their intellectual attainments and moral responsibility. Virginia Woolf, to put it differently, belonged to 'the cultural elite' the twentieth century counterpart of the 'Establishment'. During the years before and after the turn of century, the young men of these families and their friends were studying at Cambridge. Virginia, whose health remained indifferent, was educated at home, but these Cambridge men, through Virginia's brothers became her friends and also the friends of her sisters. After Sir Leslie Stephen's death in 1904, Vanessa and Virginia, Thoby and Adrian, rented a house in Bloomsbury Square, a literary district which later became famous as the locale of the Bloomsbury Group, a 'little-club' founded by Virginia Woolf. Notable among the members of the group were Lytton Strachey, famous for his *Eminent Victorians* and the well-known economist J.M. Keynes. This group was greatly influenced by the philosophy of C.E. Moore and exclusive, strictly non-practical pursuit of 'Sweetness and Light' became the ideal of Moore's followers.

Virginia Woolf's mother died when she was barely thirteen. Since then her father became the dominant influence in her life. The reading of Virginia Woolf, was inspired by the books on her father's shelves. Leslie Stephen has been considered as an 'opinionated Victorian man' and the 'historian of English thought in eighteenth century and utilitarians.' Virginia Woolf radically departs from these views of her father and rejected Victorian ideas of propriety. But in doing so she displayed a form of moral earnestness derived from the Victorians themselves. Her father was a great moralist with regard to sex. Sexual purity is the axis of the stable family according to him. But Virginia Woolf has her own views. In her mature years Virginia Woolf rebelled against this attitude. Her circle of artists and intellectuals believed that a person's sex life is a private 'matter concerning only himself. After the death of her father Virginia Woolf moved from Kensington to Bloomsbury, that is, from middle class domestication to highbrow bohemianism.

Virginia Woolf chose Leonard Woolf as her husband from a group of Thoby's brilliant Cambridge friends. In 1912 they got married and in 1917 they founded the Hogarth Press that published all her novels. Since 1905 Virginia Woolf had been writing book reviews and her first novel was published in 1915, but some of the deepest interests that were to shape her work are clear in retrospect. She was a great admirer of London. She was a Londoner born and bred and London is seldom absent from her works. Both *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves* are London books in ways more than one. The days spent in her childhood in Cornwall left sea memories that haunt her novels, especially *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*. Besides the city and the sea, she was a great lover of books. Virginia haunted libraries as she haunted the streets in London before she came to write of the experience in a magical pattern of thought and imagery.

The age in which Virginia Woolf lived and wrote was seeing a number of changes in the family life. She was born at the height of Victorian reign and died during World War II. The outbreak of war ended an era of security and stability, which people who grew up before 1914, looked back at with nostalgia. Woolf held that peace and prosperity gave a family likeness to the nineteenth century writers despite great individual differences. Virginia Woolf quotes Desmond MacCarthy to say that in Cambridge people were not interested in politics. What they found absorbing was the discussion of those goods which were an end in themselves—the search for truth, the aesthetic emotions and personal relations. “Then suddenly like a chasm in smooth road, the war came.” And the war had a profound effect on the literature that followed it. Virginia Woolf was no exception. The smug conventional security disappeared, instead the devastation, the lurking sense of insecurity and the broken families that war brings in its train haunt post-war literature. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith powerfully manifests the havoc that war has caused on the moral plane. The social pattern was so tremendously transformed in her lifetime that in 1924 she wrote: “All human relations have shifted: those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children.” Consequently there was a tremendous change in the sphere of religion, conduct, politics and literature. Virginia Woolf could not take the family life for granted. Her novels portray not only the behaviour of individuals in society but include an implicit criticism of social forms themselves.

“Virginia Woolf was a lady by birth and upbringing”, says E. M. Forster. “She felt herself to be not only a woman but a lady.” She considered herself a snob also. She had an aversion to hierarchies, says Mardes, and this was the reason which led to a prejudice against her joining associations of any kind. The influence of her father and her own ideas gave rise to great mental conflict in her. Leslie Stephen’s daughter all along struggled with the ghost of her father, that formidable old man. She was destined to vacillate all her life between defiance and a child-like desire for approval. The Bloomsbury group had a very significant place in her life. Whether her novels have been influenced by it or not, is a matter of interpretation. A. D. Mody argues that they have not been influenced by it in the ‘simple sense.’ She does not share the ‘Bloomsbury complacency’ and was above ‘narrowness’. Her perspective had always been larger than that of the Bloomsbury Group. She viewed the world ‘with a poised impersonality’. In fact, she used her own experience of writing in just the way she used her experience of Leslie Stephen or of Bloomsbury; she developed from it a critical comprehension of all form of human activity.

The only form of life Virginia Woolf was fully and effectually committed to was that of the imagination. But this commitment as pitted against a disciplined purposiveness which is the anti-thesis of the aesthetic. She delighted in the lighter pleasures of imagination and she had also, tendency towards its more recessive forms, fantasy or lyricism or dissociated idealism. However, in these tendencies she did not frequently indulge in her novels. but objectified and criticised them. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she examined Clarissa Dalloway with a detachment which shows self-awareness. To Bell, a member of the Bloomsbury Group: Virginia Woolf was the gayest human being he had known. Her talk was scintillating. She indulged in flights of fancy. David Garnett describes her company thus: “Virginia holding a cigarette would lean forward before speaking and clear her throat with a motion like that of a noble bird of prey. Then as she spoke excitement would suddenly come and her voice would crack and in that cracked high note one felt all her humour and delight in life. She had warmth and feelings of fellowship which set people at their ease her voice and glance were filled with affection, mockery, curiosity and comradeship. She saw everyone including herself with detachment and life itself as a vast Shakespearean comedy. She loved telling stories at her own expense. All her personal vanity was forgotten in story telling.

Virginia’s marriage with Leonard did not modify her way of life; nor did it alter the course of her inner development. Love, although it occupies a place of prominence in her first two novels, appears there less as a total upheaval of profound revision of values than as a particular experience in the field of human relations. As an artist Virginia found in Leonard Woolf an ideal companion, who while giving her complete intellectual liberty, knew how to share in her work, not merely with the sympathy and intelligence which she might have got from a good friend, but he gave her that understanding and encouragement which is possible only when the two lives are one. Thus, when Virginia says that she owed all her happiness to her husband, she is only slightly exaggerating things. Their married life was quite happy and still Virginia Woolf found it impossible to continue living in this world.

Despite all her delight in the lighter pleasures of imagination, flights of fancy and sense of humour, Virginia's personality had a dark disquieting side. As Christopher Isherwood says she looked like an unhappy, high born lady in a ballad, a fairy tale princess under a spell, with her wonderful forlorn eyes. In her Diary there are ominous references in January and February 1941 to "a battle against depression". But she was determined not to be engulfed in the trough of despair'. She made plans for her new books and visited a few places. There was a lull in the war in January. But she was subjected to a certain strain, and this strain, whatever interpretations one might place on it, proved too great for her. On March 28, 1941, she disappeared and opened "that door" and sought death in the river near her home, leaving her hat and walking stick on the bank.

On her death T.S. Eliot commented, "Virginia Woolf was the centre not merely of an esoteric group, but of the literary life of London. With the death of Virginia Woolf, a whole pattern of culture is broken : she may be from one point of view only the symbol of it but she should not be the symbol if she had not been more than anyone of them in her time, the mainstay of it".

Virginia Woolf's Work

Fiction: *New Gardens; The Voyage out; Night and Day; Jacob's Room; Mrs. Dalloway; To the Lighthouse; Orlando; The waves; The years; Between the Acts; A Hunted House.*

Biography: *Flush; Roger Fry; A Writer's Diary; Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey; Letters.*

Criticism, etc.: *The Common Reader: First Series; The Common Reader: Second Series; A Room of One's Own; Three Guineas; The Death of the Moth; The Moment; The Captain's Death Bed; Granite and Rainbow; Collected Essays.*

(II) The Intellectual Background

In as much as he breathes the same air as other humans do, votes and pays taxes like them, reads public newspapers and goes to the contemporary theatre, each writer is affected by what happens to him and around him. In the case of a perceptive and sensitive person like Virginia Woolf, who had little formal schooling and who believed that "the world [would] go on providing me with excitement whether I can use it or not," the entire education was to consist in the life around her. In *Orlando* Virginia Woolf says, "the transaction between a writer and the spirit of the age is one of infinite delicacy and upon a nice arrangement between the two the whole fortune of his works depends." For the novelist of the middle of the nineteenth century the arrangement seemed to be happy but it became increasingly difficult as the century drew to a close. There was a great change in the spirit of age. To understand the structure of her values and attitudes, one is obliged to go to the underpinning of her mind-the early formative influences the current contagious opinions and the very spirit of the age.

A. The Heritage

If family is the 'main channel of transmission' of culture for a person of normal circumstances in life, for Virginia Woolf, her unusual family was the whole ocean till she transferred herself to the world of her brother's friends in London. Family was an important influence in her life, and its connections, significant opportunities for her career.

The third child of an eminent Victorian family, Adeline Virginia Stephen was born on January 25, 1881, at Hyde Park Gate, an ancestral mansion in Kensington Gardens, London. Her father, Leslie Stephen, an established scholar, an ex-fellow of Trinity Hall, was, at the time of her birth, the editor of *Cornhill Magazine*. Her mother, "a strikingly beautiful girl, courted and admired by eminent artists. . . [was] chosen by Burne-Jones as the model for his painting of the 'Annunciation'." Among their friends, the Stephens could count Henry James, Thomas Hardy (who contributed to the *Cornhill* and witnessed the deed whereby Leslie Stephen renounced Holy Orders), George Meredith and Morley; and, across the Atlantic, Charles Eliot Norton, Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell (who was God-father to "my Dear Little GodDaughter," Virginia).

It is legitimate to suppose that some of the literary talk that permeated the Stephen household was imparted to the young and sensitive Virginia who, in her words, liked to scribble "a story in the manner of Hawthorne, on the green plush sofa in the drawing room at St. Ives, while the grown ups dined." The family atmosphere was made up of a quaint mixture of Cambridge rationalism, agnosticism, liberalism, and moralistic philosophy, all of which formed Leslie

Stephen's canons of judgement-social and literary. On the one hand, the Stephen children imbibed this atmosphere; on the other, they were free from conventional education. Leslie Stephen and his wife, Julia Duckworth Stephen, had decided to educate their children themselves although there were governesses at home. As Quentin Bell informs us, before Virginia was seven "Julia was trying to teach her Latin, history and French, while Leslie took the children in mathematics," but neither of them was a good teacher. Leslie Stephen could, however, be an interesting storyteller; he could recite poetry and read stories to the children so that the "best lessons were probably given out of school hours. When he was not teaching." One wonders whether Virginia Woolf did not inherit this trait of her father's when she too spun a story around a figure of the remote past or created a person, like Mrs. Brown, from the present, to educate her readers or to mine an abstract problem of aesthetics.

It was taken for granted almost from the very beginning that Virginia would be a writer. When she was nine, Virginia started a family news bulletin, *The Hyde Park Gate News* (1891-1895). The paper contained mostly family news and gossip and also "some first efforts at fiction." From what Virginia Woolf's biographer tells us, we can build up a picture of a close-knit Stephen family. No wonder that she recollects and reproduces that childhood in her novels time and again.

The death of Julia Stephen in 1895 must have wiped her young world of grace, loveliness, fineness, and warmth. Virginia Woolf had inherited "a fine, artistic delicacy and sensitivity" from her mother, who had stimulated her interests and sensitivity. From then onwards she had to depend on her dominating father, or on her own resources. While the brothers were sent to school, Virginia, with her sister Vanessa, continued to study under the tutelage of Sir Stephen. Virginia was a voracious reader, "Gracious child, how you gobble," Leslie Stephen would say to her and mumble to himself: "Ginia [Virginia] is devouring books, almost faster than I like." And yet he went "tramping over the Library with his little girl sitting at H.P.G. [Hyde Park Gate] in his mind." The interest in reading seems to have inspired in this little girl love for writing so strong that she became "enraptured" and "entranced" at the sight of the large yellow page and "used to read it and dream of those obscure adventures and no doubt practised their style in [her] copy book." To one who had been denied formal schooling, the free access to a select library was a great boon.

While Sir Leslie Stephen's library introduced Virginia to a choice reading, his tutelage gave her confidence in her responses. For, as she wrote later, Leslie encouraged children to "read what one liked because- one liked it, never to pretend to admire what one did not." A part of Leslie Stephen's liberal education to his children was to let them think independently. Virginia Woolf candidly noted that if freedom meant the right to think one's own thoughts and to follow one's pursuits, "then no one respected and indeed insisted upon freedom more completely than he did." She advised her common reader "to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions." Her expansive reading and a well-tutored and cultivated habit of free thinking rendered her daring enough to cross swords with the greatest literary minds of the age. Her diary entries of 1922 show how radically she differed with T.S. Eliot over Joyce's *Ulysses*. It was inevitable that, as critic, she should insist that to admit authorities "into our libraries and let them tell us how to read, is to destroy the spirit of freedom which is the breath of those sanctuaries." The fact that in her personal judgement of established reputations she refused to be crowded own by the writer's aura can be traced to the fine example of her father's critical temper. Stephen, as she said had a way of upsetting "established reputations and disregarding conventional values."

In a person of Stephen's integrity, critical independence was but part of the scholar's freedom from conventional religious and political beliefs. As a fellow of Trinity Hall, the man who was to preach muscular Christianity later took Holy Orders. But, like Emerson before him, he began to experience doubts about what he preached as a person. When the Education Act of 1870, which allowed the local school boards to subsidize religious education in Anglican schools, finally passed Parliament, Stephen resigned from the ministry. He sought to bring light to others through his *Essays on Free Thinking and Plain Speaking* (1873) and vindicate his action by his "Agnostic's Apology" (*Fortnightly*, June, 1876). His moral indignation against the Church may explain his daughter's skepticism about the opinions of literary establishment, Politically, brought up on Mill and Comte and inspired by the young radical Disraeli, Stephen belonged to the liberal tradition. His *Social Rights and Duties* (1896) and *The English Utilitarians* (1900) testify equally to his social commitment and human liberalism. Virginia Woolf's reliance on the "Common Reader" as a measure of critical sanity derives its force from a democratic bias, which may well have been grounded in her father's political faith.

Stephen's disregard of conventional values was not, however, carried into his belief about women's social position. Theoretically, he granted women their rights, yet family life was of great importance to him, and for a family to be well-knit and smoothly operative, women had to stay at home. "The highest services of this kind," he believed, "are rendered by persons condemned, or should I say privileged, to live in obscurity." While he inspired the growth of an independent mind in his children, his own domineering nature, whether intended or not, made them stand in awe of him. It was especially so in case of Virginia Woolf, who could never forgive her father for being rude to her. She was consumed, as Quentin Bell tells us, with silent indignations, especially because she thought he reserved those "bellowings and screamings" for his women. Even the fact that her brothers were sent to Cambridge, while she and her sister had to devote their afternoons and evenings to what were considered to be suitable tasks for women, made her feel that "this was an injury inflicted on her by reason of her sex.

Leslie Stephen's dominating presence and rational temperament stood out as a foil to all that her sensitive and submissive mother represented. The dual awareness of the demanding conscience and the cold rationality- of her father and of the fine sensibility and warm sensitivity of her mother inclined Virginia to associate cold logic with men and intuition with women. The recognition of the complementary dependence of one on the other led her to the belief that truth must be apprehended not only by means of ratiocination, but by way of intuition and sensibility. This un-Cambridge, un-Stephen attitude was probably reinforced rather than diminished by their mother's early death (1895) and by the eleven years of their father's widowhood.

She carried this bi-polar approach to truth in her theory of the creative personality. She viewed the writer's mind as being made up of two distinct elements-the male and the female. The entire universe, in fact, appeared to her as torn asunder by warring opposites which had to be fused together to make a single whole.

In view of Stephen's powerful and ascetic personality, one is inclined to agree with Michael Holroyd that the Stephen children did suffer "grievously under the meanness and dogmatic puritanism of his household." How devastating an influence Stephen had on the mind of Virginia Woolf can only be guessed from her diary entries of a quarter of a century after his death. She writes in 1928: "His life would have ended mine." Then she goes on to speculate: "What would have happened? No writing, no books..: -inconceivable." With his death in 1904 Virginia Woolf was freed from the constraints she had been living under ever since her mother's death. And when her brother Thoby returned from Cambridge, he introduced her to his Cambridge friends. Acquaintance with this set not only opened up new horizons for her but also accorded her sanity and her incipient interests in a fresh lease of life.

B. Friends and Fellow-Workers

From the protective but tense world of her father's library, Virginia entered the company of her brother's friends who were then holding their "Thursday Evenings" at 46 Gordon Square. Among these young men, where a chance remark would give rise to a question that would be followed by endless discussion by fewer and fewer people, Virginia found that "she was listening to a kind of conversation that had never come her way before." She began to sense that she had come out of a stifling atmosphere of a dominating presence and definitive opinions into an open environment of intellectual quest and curiosity. Initially, she felt breathless and, not unoften, out of her depth, she admits.

It filled me with wonder to watch those who were finally left in the argument, piling stone upon stone, cautiously, accurately, long after it had completely soared above my sight. . . One had glimpses of something miraculous happening high up in the air.

Clive Bell, referring to Vanessa and Virginia Stephen, wrote that these two young women became "the centre of a circle of which Thoby's Cambridge friends were what perhaps I may call the spokes." These two young women struck them as different from other women in the sense that they could think with "intellectual coolness." The young men were also convinced that both Vanessa and Virginia were in no danger of hearing "those rising strident tones of emotion which must destroy good talk." Thus accepted, the Stephen sisters became, without much effort, insiders to what had been, primarily, a Cambridge group.

Between the years 1907 and 1914, the "Thursday Evenings" took the form of "a society. . . of people which became publicly known as Bloomsbury." The origin of the Bloomsbury circle can be traced to a small group of friends at

Cambridge who had started “some reading societies for reading aloud plays, one of which met at midnight”. The exact date of birth of the Bloomsbury proper seems to vary with the memoirs of its members. The only ground of agreement common to them is that it came into existence sometime between 1904 and 1914 and that it belonged, thus, to the peaceful England of pre World War I days. Its original, the “midnight society” of Cambridge, consisted of Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Thoby Stephen and Saxon Sydney Turner. The Bloomsbury circle included, besides them, Vanessa, Virginia, Adrian Stephen, Maynard Keynes, Duncan Grant, E.M. Forster, Roger Fry, and Desmond and Molly MacCarthy. The group met at 46 Gordon Square, where Virginia and Adrian Stephen lived, and at Fitzroy Square where Clive and Vanessa Bell moved in after their marriage. While the Cambridge group thus transplanted, and transformed itself in London, there came out Cambridge don G.E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (1903), which was to be the Holy Writ for the Bloomsbury circle for some time.

Bloomsbury cannot be called a movement or a cult for it was more of a spirit, a state of mind. Quentin Bell considers it as something “almost impalpable, almost indefinable.” In a derogatory sense, the Bloomsbury group came to convey a highbrow sentiment. As members of this group never tried to seek publicity or “provide a spectacle,” the legends around it continued to grow, making... what had initially been useful as a quick, rough and ready term of classification to the journalists. . . into a very real obstacle of labour of the literary and historical biographer.”

Ultimately, the group came to mean to the outsiders “a meeting of certain influences and adoption of certain attitudes which became almost a cult.” What is safe to assume, on the basis of published evidence, is that the Bloomsbury circle was made up of a group of people who shared certain common artistic and social predilections or purposes.

Their predilections were in part shaped and, in part, nurtured by the current philosophic fad of moral relativism that derived from G.E. Moore’s thinking. “*Principia Ethica*” Leonard Woolf writes, “passed into our unconscious and was now merely a part of our super-ego; we no longer argued about it as a guide to practical life.” Moore tried to define the subject matter of ethics and arrived at the conclusion that “good” was undefinable. A thing “could be considered to be good in itself or it could be causally related to something else which might be good as a means.” Aesthetic appreciation consisted of, he insisted, “not merely a bare cognition of what is beautiful in the object, but also some kind of feeling or emotion.” Armed with Moore’s common sense and a simplistic belief in “good” as an elemental quality, the Bloomsbury people made an effort to escape from a belief in conventional morals, and from the Benthamite concept of “utility” which was thought to be a reliable measure of the goodness (or desirability) of an act or concept. Stressing the difference between “being good” and “doing good”, the Bloomsbury group maintained that nothing mattered except their own and other people’s states of mind, but as Keynes said in his *Two Memoirs*, chiefly their own.

The influence of Moore on the Bloomsbury group as a whole -is, debatable. Quentin Bell assures us that in their conversation there was “a certain high seriousness... despite its gaiety, and there was as much argument as gossip,” and in argument “it was supposed at all events, that the contributors were looking for truth, not victory.”

To Virginia Woolf, who denied having any training in philosophy, whatever knowledge she possessed came, as she wrote to a critic, “simply from listening to people, talking.” In her circle Moore’s ideas were freely bandied about; she herself read Moore’s *Principia Ethica* in 1908 even though following it was almost as if she had “to crawl over the same page a number of times, till I almost see my own tracks.” She confessed to Clive Bell later on how it was almost a physical feeling when she split her head over Moore every night. She could feel ideas travelling to the remotest part of her brain “as though some little coil of brain unvisited by any blood so far, and pale as wax, had got a life in it at last; but had no strength to keep it.” When she finished *Principia Ethica* she told her sister, “I am not so dumbfounded as I was; but the more I understand, the more I admire. He [Moore] is so humane in spite of his desire to know the truth. Rosenbaum argues with some persuasion that Moore, like William James and Bergson; was a philosopher of consciousness and that, as a novelist, Virginia Woolf’s gradual movement from the narration of solid facts to delineation of shifting states of consciousness may really be due to her increasing familiarity with the New Philosophy and its preoccupation with the phenomenon of consciousness. For, as Rosenbaum maintains:

It is the epistemological dualism, with its distinction of fact from knowing, that becomes a basic philosophical presupposition of Virginia Woolf’s criticism of fiction.

Material world constituted one order of reality for her and the human consciousness, another. For the artist, what an event or a phenomenon did to human awareness was equally significant. The awareness of fact was what constituted its spiritual aura for the human mind. It is significant to note that Moore called those people materialists who failed to understand “consciousness” that “which sensation of blue has in common with sensation of green.” Virginia Woolf, similarly, condemned Wells, Galsworthy and Dennett as “materialists” for they could not catch the “luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope . . . this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit.” Parallels between Moore’s philosophy and Virginia Woolf’s thinking can be traced not only in her fiction but her critical statements too. Here it should suffice to say that Virginia Woolf was very much aware of Moore as “a fine flame of arrogance at the end.”

In her association with the Bloomsbury group, her mind found new subjects and directions. This is borne out by one of her notes discovered among the Monk House Papers. She writes that they discussed “copulation with the same excitement and openness that we had discussed the nature of good. It is strange to think how reticent, how reserved we had been and for how long.” For a daughter of Leslie Stephen, to be so frank was a major departure not only from the decorum of reserve but also from what he would have considered the moral code. After her debut in London she became critical of, to use Stephen Spender’s phrase “conventionality masquerading as traditionalism.” In repudiating the writings of Dennett etc., Virginia Woolf was repudiating the literary convention, and in asking for a room of one’s own for every woman, she was rejecting the social convention that denied woman an independent income. The freedom and stimulus of the Bloomsbury group encouraged every artist to create, as Roger Fry vouched, “his own method of expression in his medium.” It was this atmosphere of give-and-take, of unfettered enquiry that gave Virginia Woolf the impetus to free thinking. Later on it emboldened her to assert: “I write what I like writing and there’s an end on it.” This freedom for herself implied freedom for others to make judgement: “I’m to write what I like; and they’re to say what they like.” It was her association with the Bloomsbury circle that saved her, as a critic, from getting into Laurentian rages or from issuing pontifical statements as Pound always, and Eliot sometimes did.

The Bloomsbury atmosphere had a formative influence on her growth as a writer. Yet to think that it imposed upon Virginia Woolf any rigid doctrine or set attitudes would be to misunderstand both the nature of the group and her mind. The Bloomsbury group was no mutual admiration society. By being sharply critical of each other they helped each member in his / her growth as an independent thinker and writer. A sharp biting wind of criticism blew through their habitation. R.F. Harrod tells us how they pulled one another to pieces “not leaving a shred, destroying him utterly, you might wonder what form their criticism would take when directed against an outsider.”

To sum up, the free and sophisticated atmosphere of the Bloomsbury group provided the intensely receptive and sensitive Virginia Woolf “fertile climate of intellectual and artistic life.” The endless discussions must have stimulated her thinking and left an indelible impression on her mind. Her association with this group of intellectuals may explain why her criticism runs sometimes like public argument and sometimes like a piece of personal conversation. Naturally, she was held in great esteem by the group. She was the genius, “the high priestess of Bloomsbury” as T.S. Eliot, an objective outsider said. Without her at the centre of it, the group would have remained formless or marginal and with her death a whole “pattern of culture was broken.”

Whether a symbol of Bloomsbury life or its prop, Virginia Woolf was neither averse to nor exclusive of other groups and personalities of the time. Henry James whose reputation was at its peak during the first decade of the twentieth century, was the doyen of the English novelists of the period. His influence was pervasive because “he could never have been accused by any other writer of being false to his own artistic standards.” At sixteen Virginia Woolf had begun to read his work. She could not have been unaware of his critical opinions even as she grew up, especially since he was a close friend of Leslie Stephen’s and a welcome guest at their household. In 1909 we find her regretting that she did not know him personally: “I’ve seen Henry James twice since I came [to London] and was immensely impressed. I do not mean only seen with the eye. I wish I knew him.” This desire to know him better was, at least partially, the result of the budding novelist’s ambition to understand the secret of the “Master’s” power. Nor was it only at the beginning of her career that James cast his spell upon her. In 1941, when she was fighting off the gathering despondency that was to take her life, she sought to find in James, what more than a hundred years ago Mill had found in Wordsworth, a stay against depression. Twenty days before she drowned herself in the River near her house, she wrote in what is the last published entry in her diary:

No: I intend no introspection. I mark Henry James' sentence: Observe perpetually. Observe the on come of age. Observe greed. Observe my own despondency. By that means it becomes serviceable. Or so I hope.

It is a tribute to Virginia Woolf's perception and a proof of her immersion in James that in two words "observe perpetually"-she summed up the gist of Jamesian ethics and aesthetics. In what Leon Edel considers to be "one of those great pronouncements which seems to offer the last word on the subject [of the novel]," James summarised his thinking on the novelist and the novel. He had "only two little words" for a doctrine: "one is life and the other freedom." But the freedom to range over the whole of life and to closely observe it also entailed on the novelist the obligation not "to be put off with mean and puerile falsities."

In almost Jamesian tones, Virginia Woolf says that to the novelist "nothing-no 'method', no experimentation, even of the wildest-is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence." The conclusion of her essay "Modern Fiction" reads like a summary of James' "The Art of Fiction." The very rhythm and the structure of the sentences have the Jamesian stamp upon them. She says, like him: "The proper stuff of Fiction" does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss."

If Henry James advised novelists to exercise their privilege of unfettered freedom in the choice and treatment of subjects, Virginia Woolf was impatient with the fellow-workers who had, lost their freedom to a literary convention and accepted sentimental falsities as the limits of their domain.

If as a critic, she has all the characteristics of an aesthete, lines of influence can be traced to James too, who, by all informed accounts, was "the greatest of theorists, in the art of novel." James as theorist, for all his devotion to life, was, an aesthete who went to the extent of saying that "with any capability, we recognise betimes that to 'put' things [in a work of art] is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them." For James, to compose was to act, and to select was to exercise a moral judgment. With such a sacrosanct notion of literary art, James, could not permit any trespass from what he called "irresponsible pedagogy." He argued "literature lives essentially in the sacred depths of its being" and that "like other sensitive organisms, it is highly susceptible of demoralization, and that nothing is better calculated than irresponsible pedagogy to make it close its ears and lips. " If Virginia Woolf had a distrust of scientific or "academic" criticism, in an age that considered any other kind of criticism but emotional impressionism, it is partly because of her own orientation in Henry James, and partly because his reputation as a critic was a guarantee of the validity of his critical beliefs. Another ground for their ready acceptance was that James' views on the artist's freedom, on art's autonomy and the critic's reliance on his sensibility merely confirmed what her acquaintance with Moore might already have taught her about the relative validity of aesthetic judgements. It is on such basis that one can explain a wholehearted acceptance of James by her Cambridge friends. Leonard Woolf was surprised to find how close they had been to James without knowing it, "I have just finished *The Golden Bowl* and am astounded," he wrote to Strachey in 1905. "Did he invent us or we him? He uses *all* our words in their most technical sense and we can't have got them all from him." It is not that their neologisms were Jamesian ; they were a generation steeped in James, especially since his views happened to agree with theirs. In Virginia Woolf's care for artistic form, in her critical stance, the influence of the Master is discernible. She had been initiated early in James and later influences failed to dislodge his shadow.

Virginia Woolf found some kinship of spirit with D.H Lawrence, another prominent English novelist. "I have too much in common [with him]," she said, "the same pressure to be ourselves." But she seems to have shared with him something more than a temperamental affinity: the need to be one's sincere self in one's expression. Whether as a result of direct influence or not-she like Lawrence, did want the novel to move from the purely sensuous world to the psychic. A decade before she had made her famous plea for a regeneration of the novel, Lawrence defended the nature of *The Rainbow* then known as *The Wedding Ring*, by maintaining, I don't care about physiology of matter-but somehow that which is . . . non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element-which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent.

If "the ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond," the theme of Lawrence's novel was carbon, the element that goes into the making of the thing that crystallizes as a person. Whether or not she was affected by the Laurentian stand, it is clear, both from her work and her manifesto for the modern novel, that she carried this movement of fiction a step forward, from the "material" (the physical life) and the "elemental" (the psychic life) to

the “atomic” (the life of momentary quantum of thought). Her famous advice to the modern novelist in “Modern Fiction” seems much like a gloss to Lawrence’s explanation of “a bit futuristic” novel.

If Bergson’s and William James’, philosophic ideas convinced Virginia Woolf of the primacy of psychic life, Lawrence’s practice showed her what, in the novel, could be done with it. It is note-worthy that not only does she regard, like Lawrence, the non-physical, subconscious events as of primary significance to the novelist but also relies, like him, upon scientific imagery to describe her intent. If Lawrence, conscious of new possibilities for it proposed a “surgery for the novel,” she urged it to break away from the past into new directions. Lawrence insisted that the novel had “got to present us with new, really new feelings, a whole line of new emotion, which will get us out of the emotional rut.” And she reminded her generation that “the proper stuff of fiction” was a little other than custom would have us believe it. It was about time for it to make a fresh start, for it had already spent “immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring.” In her awareness of the need for change in the course of the novel, Virginia Woolf was not too far from Lawrence’s position.

Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence had many friends in common, therefore, it is not surprising that the two artists who had nothing in common in their social positions had so much in common in their views on art. Lawrence’s friends Lady Ottoline Morrell, E.M. Forster, Middleton Murry and the Garnetts, were close friends of the Woolfs too. Lawrence’s publisher, Duckworth, was none other than Virginia Woolf’s cousin, Gerald Duckworth. For Virginia Woolf, a knowledge of Lawrence’s opinions, who, in her circle thus formed, was the most eminent of the English novelists, would be the most natural thing.

Heavy reliance on personal sensibility, encouraged by Virginia father and fostered by the example of James and Lawrence, would be further reinforced by her friendship with John Middleton Murry, who, for a time, was an ardent admirer of Lawrence. Virginia Woolf said of Murry: “I respect Murry. I wish for his good opinion.” Criticism, for Murry, did not mean an application of principles drawn from outside the work. He wrote that true criticism was in itself “an organic part of the whole activity of art,” for art exercised its own sovereignty and nothing could be imposed from outside. Writing six years after Murry’s essay, Virginia Woolf contended in an almost similar vein, that criticism of a work did not consist in placing it against certain pre-meditated standards but in applying the standards the author offers through the book itself. If, on theoretical grounds, Murry was for interdicting the use of non literary standards in literary evaluation, in his own practice he was an “absolutely emotional critic.” In a letter to Katherine Mansfield, he wrote on November 23, 1919

“My test is extremely simple. If a work awakens a profound response in me, then I sit up and try to find out what it is that is working on me. In other words I am an absolutely emotional critic. What may seem intellectual is only my method of explaining the nature of the emotion.”

Virginia Woolf, who had known Murry since 1915, and who had published his pamphlet *The Critic in Judgement* in 1919, would have been familiar with his critical theory and practice even if he had not been the eminent editor of the prominent journal *The Athenaeum* and, later on, of *The Adelphi*. For her hopes about “the coming man” were so high that “she and Lytton agreed that he [Murry] would probably end as Professor of English Literature at Oxford or Cambridge.” That a person of his academic interests and public office should consider personal response to be the basis of all reasoned criticism could only have strengthened what Virginia Woolf acquired under her father’s tutelage: the habit of trusting her own assessment rather than the findings of a scholarly apparatus. Murry, the author, among other works, of *Countries of the Mind* (1922) and of *Keats and Shakespeare* (1925) may well have confirmed, by his energetic debates on behalf of Romanticism, Virginia Woolf’s own romantic predilections. In a letter to Lytton Strachey in 1922, she admitted:

Of course you put your infallible finger upon the spot romanticism. How do I catch it? Not from my father. I think it must have been my Great Aunts. But some of it, I think, comes from the effort of breaking with complete representation.

Five years later, she confessed to Strachey, again, “I adore soft music at evening. . This you may put down, with other notorious faults, to my unfortunate romanticism-I can’t help it. What’s more I don’t want to help it.” The habitual romantic could only have found solace in Murry’s impassioned defence of Romanticism. In the pages of *The Adelphi*,

Murry, in 1923, stated his views on Romanticism that, of late, had increasingly been under attack. Eliot, in his journal, *The Criterion*, took issue with Murry and then, subsequently, invited him to defend his position in an article in *The Criterion*. In obliging him, Murry went hammer and tongs. To meet Eliot headlong, Murry gave his essay the title that would recall Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" written five years ago. Eliot not only admired Murry's candour but also respected his position. In conducting this Romanticism vs. Classicism controversy to some issue, Murry went beyond literary labels to philosophic concepts. He maintained that literature was. "the expression of the "lesser I AM [the self that can only be] in virtue of the greater I AM [God]," Consequent I" as a reader of critic, "we cannot apprehend a work of literature except as a manifestation of the rhythm of the soul of the man who created it." Personal sensations, in an aesthetic experience, were not only justifiable but also necessary if only to apprehend the uniqueness of a work. Murry, noting the contemporary artist's interest in self-communing and in the phantoms of the mind went on to argue that Romanticism "is a tradition which in the present condition of the European consciousness is of more immediate importance to ourselves." In travailing Eliot's argument for the acceptance of "the mind of Europe" as "much more important than [one's] own private mind," Murry, understandably enough, earned immense public attention for his share in the debate. Romantically biased herself, Virginia Woolf would have found great assurance in Murry's philosophic stand on the issue, of Romanticism and Classicism. A good reception given to Murry's books on criticism, especially his *Problem of Style* (1922), and *Keats and Shakespeare* (1925) would be a strong index of the fact that a critic with a private sensibility still had a function and, what was more, an audience.

The other partisan of this debate, T.S. Eliot, was one of the major contemporaries of Virginia Woolf and neither his works nor his pronouncements could be totally ignored even if they were not always listened to in agreement. Curious is the history of the Woolfs' relations with Eliot, who first came to them as a customer. As Quentin Bell tells us, Eliot "came to Hogarth House on 15 November (1918) bringing with him three or four poems. In 1918 the Hogarth Press printed Eliot's *Poems* which included, among other pieces, "The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock." Leonard Woolf felt justifiably proud of its success for, he found, they had rightly detected in Eliot the lines which sounded a new note in poetry. As they grew to know each other better, Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot became Tom and Virginia to each other and they stayed close friends to the end of her life.

In 1922, four years after his first business visit to Hogarth House, Eliot read *The Wasteland* to the Woolfs. That night Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary: "He sang it and chanted it and rhythmized it. It has great beauty and force of phrase; symmetry; and tensity. What connects it together, I'm not so sure One was left, however, with some strange emotion."

The Hogarth Press published *The Wasteland* in 1923. After the publication of *The Wasteland* English poetry was not to be what it had been for about a century: 'elegant,' 'poetic,' 'personal' and measured. This event could not be ignored even by the most obtuse, and it served as a bold and successful example to those who were eager to experiment in the genre of their choice. The critic who demanded for "modern fiction" freedom from conventions, would have been delighted both by the boldness of the poem and its use of interior monologue.

The Wasteland alone, by its success, would have set up new standards of criticism as it did set off new fashions in poetry. But its author had already collected, and published some of his most radical criticism. In 1922, he founded the critical quarterly, *The Criterion*. From now on, Eliot's basic tenets, forged after his contacts with Pound and Hulme, were going to start off a process of critical reevaluation. New standards of criticism emerged from Eliot's fresh attitude to literary art. Poetry was as much an act of cerebration as of emotional confession. Poetry was not, a "turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." It is not personal; for the poet, as a man, has no place in poems, only the realizable emotion has. The more perfect the artist, Eliot believed, "the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates. " Nor is poetry made up of a single element. It is a complex of multiple impressions and cognitions. Virginia Woolf would have heartily endorsed Eliot's demand for complexity in art were her poll taken on Eliot's statements to the effect. She herself considered fiction that told simple straight-forward tales as naive and jejune. But as to the question of avoidance of personal emotions in the work, she would say that emotion was a part of life too and hence deserved a place in fiction. If, for Eliot, the author's "personality"- was "but a particular medium," for Virginia Woolf it was the principal. In the name of "the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul," Eliot justified an

“impersonal theory of poetry.” In the name of the integrity of the artist, Virginia Woolf called for a personal rendering of the world. She chose, in all deliberateness, to take a stand that was different from the one that was currently popular. Her conversation with Eliot about Joyce’s *Ulysses* is a good example of her fiercely independent judgements.

Following Matthew Arnold, Eliot insisted on detachment and objectivity in a critic, claiming that “honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry.” Criticism so directed was to be, not only a disinterested exercise of intellect, but also an attempt at “the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste.” In her own way, Virginia Woolf was for avoiding questions of the author’s life and personality in the exercise of critical judgement. Indeed, all her critical effort was to teach the common reader to subdue his personal prejudices by a programmed learning of the classics. But she was never impressed by Eliot’s impassioned claim that criticism could be systematised as a scientific activity. So in 1933, when Virginia Woolf expressed her distrust of academic critics, Eliot interested her by saying that he was now no longer so sure that there was a science of criticism; the critics had exaggerated the intellectuality and the erudition of his poetry, he found that they got things very wrong.

Since no conclusions are being attempted yet, it may be enough to suggest here that a profitable way to find a realistic measure of Virginia Woolf as a critic is to stop evaluating her in terms of Eliotic theories. She was not a follower, but a rival of her junior, “Tom” Eliot. She championed a point of view that provides an alternative among perspectives on criticism. As an artist, she looked at the world not through the eyes of the blind Tiresias but through the intuition of the wise Mrs. Ramsay. As a critic, she was interested in the sensibility not of “the women [who] come and go talking of Michaelangelo but of the poor Mrs. Brown who travels in the corner of a railway carriage.

Virginia Woolf’s interest in Mrs. Brown and the common reader has some affiliations with the socialistic thought that, in the realm of letters, had been popularised first by Shaw, then by Wells and the Webbs, Friends of the Webbs, the Woolfs as early as July 1913, were attending the Fabian Society Conference. Subsequently, Virginia Woolf would be travelling to Manchester and Liverpool with Leonard, who, in 1920 would be offered nomination as Labour candidate for the Combined English University Constituency. Though her mounting interest in the politics of the Left did not mean a ready acceptance by her of the Socialist Wells, she did find reasons to admire Shaw’s contribution to “modern” spirit. She found the dash of scepticism, that Shaw had directed against age-old economics and aesthetics, exhilarating. She noted, in an article on the contemporary notion of art that she found narrow:

It is as if the modern mind, wishing always to verify its emotions, had lost the power of accepting anything simply for what it is. Undoubtedly this sceptical testing spirit has led to a great freshening and quickening of the soul.

She would not applaud Shaw’s didactic stance, but she did like the direction Shaw had given to English literature.

Though herself an aesthete, Virginia Woolf could realise and appreciate the advantages of the realistic and commonsense point of view in art as propounded by Shaw. It is part of her freedom of mind that she could see the shortcomings of an extremist point of view to which Pater and Wilde had carried their aesthetic’ fervour. A thorough shaking was very much needed before artists like her could assemble the threads to weave a new work of fiction. Shaw helped balance the design by presenting colours other than those of the decadent aesthetes of the 1890’s. In 1962, Leonard Woolf wrote about Shaw, Wells and, Bennett: “But looking back over the last 45 years I still see them. . .together with sparks flying. “ Virginia Woolf could not approve of some of their artistic modes, but she did not spurn their values of life. She disowned their methods because she had developed her own notion of the nature of art and of the nature of human reality. She was certain that the writer needed to go beyond the “railway line of sentence” and to disregard the “falsity of the past (by which I mean Bennett, Galsworthy and so on.)”

Refuting the ideas of ,Bennett and others Virginia Woolf wrote to Raverat, that the literary artist must realise that “people don’t and never did feel or think or dream for a second in that way; but all over the place, in your way.” Aesthetically, the contribution of these novelists was significant, if only negatively, in that it drove Virginia Woolf to find a new theory of fiction. They provided the norm of fictional writing during the first generation of the twentieth century. Virginia Woolf saw life around her, read their work and drew her own conclusions.

During her career as a critic, Virginia Woolf witnessed the rise of another school of criticism which, though indifferent to all political values, was strongly committed to its own assumptions about the nature of literature and its influence on

the human mind. The same year as she delivered her famous address, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” to the Cambridge Society called Heretics, I. A. Richards, a lecturer in English and Moral Sciences at Cambridge, published his *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924). With its insistence on the psychological theory of value of an aesthetic experience, it marked a change from the old a priori type of aesthetics to the scientific examination of what actually went on in the mind and also in the body under the impact of a piece of literature. Richards’ next work, *Practical Criticism* (1929), which documented the “protocols” of the uninitiated readers’ responses to untitled poems, made a plea for a systematic close reading of the text to ensure a more reasoned, and, thus, a more reliable understanding of the poem. The linguistic structure of a poem, which was unique among verbal constructs, had a great psychological value in harmonizing the inner life of the reader. The critic’s function was to make the readers more consciously aware of the sources and the effects of this therapeutic value of the poem. Though Richards’ work along with his disciple William Empson’s work was to start off a new critical fad in America, the ingenuity of its’ semantic analysis and of systematic interpretation left Virginia Woolf unimpressed.

C. *The Intellectual Ethos*

The conditions that generally affect the nature of literary and critical output, began altering around the turn of the century. First, though the *fin de siècle* was not succeeded by a battery of poetic or novelistic talents, it was, indeed, followed by a glut of new magazines each devoted to a new literary programme or committed to a new critical policy. Summing up the scene of 1891, Henry James was struck by “the deluge of doctrine suspended in the void; the profusion of talk and the contraction of experiment, of what one may call literary conduct”. A quarter of a century later the situation was not much different. The multiplying journals that dealt in literature swelled the deluge of polemical, even doctrinaire criticism, though they did not always act as midwife at the birth of new letters. To name only the prominent few, the first number of Ford’s *English Review* came out in December, 1908. In 1924 Ford was to start another review, *The Trans-Atlantic Review*. A.R. Orage began editing *The New Age* in 1908. It appears as though every writer who had anything to say wanted either to bring out a journal of his own to give the reading public some select directions or to attach himself to an organ agreeable to his thinking. John Middleton Murry began his long editorial career with *The Rhythm* (1911), *The New Freewoman*, later called *The Egoist* (1913), moved from *The Athanaeum* (1919) to *The Adelphi* (1923), and finally to *The Calender of Modern Letters* (1925). It is interesting to note the number of magazines Ezra Pound served either as an editor or as a foreign correspondent. He was associated with *Poetry* (1912-1927), *The New Review* (1931-1932), *The Westminster Magazine* (1935), and his own *Exile* (1927-1928). Some other periodicals that were issuing their own manifestoes and clarion calls were Wyndham Lewis’ (1914), T.S. Eliot’s *The Criterion* (1922-1929) and, finally, F.R. Leavis’ *Scrutiny* (1932).

The use of a good review, as T.S. Eliot wrote to Ford Madox Ford, was “not to force talent, but to create-a favourable atmosphere.” But the deluge of competent magazines did something more than merely provide a favourable atmosphere for better literary growth. It changed the tone and range of criticism of professional reviewers made critics. And in the period when journals initiated and broadcasted critical debates, it was partisans of a theory who stole the uncommitted adversary’s thunder and polemicists who carried the day. It was in the midst of such a scene that, when concerned about the reception of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf wrote: “Journalism, everything, is to give way to it.” Oppressive as one of the mass media, journalism affected the work of even the best of its contributors. Something of journalism-its self-assured tone, its felicity for a telling phrase, its turn for a clever image-still cling to the critical pieces of Eliot, Ford and Pound. Gentle and conscientious critics like Forster, and Virginia Woolf, who not only “made several drafts, sometimes a great many drafts, before she was satisfied with a review,” .but also wanted it to be a work of art in itself, had to give way to readier and more strident voices. The post-script to her diary entry of December 19, 1921, about her encounter with the editor of *The Times Literary Supplement*, reveals her position vis-a-vis the world of magazines pretty fairly. The editor seems to have asked her to tell him in twenty minutes whether she would be willing to drop from her Henry James article a word that he took strong exception to. She “thought it over and came to the required conclusion in twelve minutes and a half.” Yet, though she capitulated for the moment, she debated whether to keep up her relations with the *Supplement* or to break it off “with an explanation, or to pander, or to go on writing against the current.” The latter seemed right to her. The inner debate that she could confide only to her diary settled

her position as that of a spectator on the lines rather than of a performer in the ring. The conditions under which criticism developed as a major *belles lettres* activity during the first three decades of the century did much to determine her contemporary position and reputation as a critic.

It is easy to realise now, in retrospect, why Virginia Woolf failed to set the Thames on fire as a critic. Loving freedom of the mind, an inheritor of a cultured sensibility and the companion of the best of the speculative minds of the age, she refused to be drafted into the regimen of academic criticism. To journals, especially to *The Times Literary Supplement*, she did contribute reviews and critical articles. But, not wishing to be a mocking bird, she kept her personal tone and thus failed to capture the ear of the public brought up on more voluble notes. It is only when the voices have settled and her work has been collected and published in book form that we can begin to wonder how much the history of the trade has been a limiting factor to her reputation as a critic.

If Virginia Woolf's reputation was thus affected, her sense and sensibility were cultivated by what was going on in the fields of philosophy and psychology. Bergson, William James and Sigmund Freud were the most influential figures in the two areas. Whatever the ultimate value of their work, each of them, in his own way, compelled the attention of the thinking men of their generation to the nature and functions of various aspects of the human mind. Their preoccupation was to radically alter the notion of the human personality and, with it, the technique—whether in poetry or fiction—of rendering it. Though Bergson's *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory* had already been translated into English in 1910 and 1911, respectively, Bertrand Russell's comprehensive account of Bergson's thought as *The Philosophy of Bergson* came out in England only in 1914. T.E. Hulme, who, for a few years before his death, was the centre of the intellectual circle of London that included Pound and Virginia's friend Eliot, was influenced by Bergson, whose *Introduction a la Meta physique* he translated in 1914. Emphasizing the importance of intuition in artistic creation, Hulme tried to explain Bergson's philosophy in his essay, "Bergson's Theory of Art," posthumously published, along with other essays, as *Speculations* (1924). To those who were firmly convinced that the mechanistic theory gave the true account of the world, he felt it necessary to show "exactly in what way Bergson thinks that our ordinary methods of explanation distort reality."

Bergson's impact on French and English—can be fully apprehended. But one thing that is already unmistakably clear is that his concept of time and memory was the most significant aspect of his philosophic speculation and had a tremendous impact on the twentieth century literature. Bergson's time, or *la duree* (a succession of qualitative changes), was the pure essence of reality. Bergson believed that successions of qualitative changes "melt into and permeate one another, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalise themselves in relation to one another." Linked with this concept of *la duree* is Bergson's notion of memory. He divides memory into *memoire involontaire* and *memoire volontaire*. It is the former which is more important; for it "stores up the past by the mere necessity of its own nature." The latter is governed by reason and will. It is through *memoire involontaire* or what Bergson calls "*memo ire par excellence*" that the past and the present can be blended together. In *Time and Free Will* Bergson emphasized that any attempt to analyse feelings would divert us from a true representation of inner reality. Because our emotions grow in a duration "whose moments permeate one another," "any attempt to separate these moments from each other by spreading out time in space would spell the life out of emotions. Objective and rational analysis can neither apprehend nor communicate reality which is "our personality in its flowing through time—our self which endures."

Many parallels can be found between Virginia Woolf's theory of reality and Bergson's. Indeed, what forms the staple of her fiction is the portrayal of human awareness, which is a succession of states that constantly melt into each other to form a continuous flux. An hour then can be stretched to a hundred times its clock length, or "may be accurately represented on the time piece of the mind by one second." It was their obliviousness to this aspect of human reality and it was the absence of this component from their depiction of life that earned Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy the pejorative epithet "materialists" from Virginia Woolf. For, as Bergson said, this reality could be apprehended only intuitively; the conventional objective form of the novel, that handled only the obvious aspects of life, was not equipped to deal with it. A new technique had, therefore, to be developed. In any case, the philosophical basis of Virginia Woolf's literary theory is best explained in Bergson's philosophy and it matters little whether she was directly acquainted with Bergson's work or not.

William James represented thought as a continuum. Consciousness, he said, was not a chain; it was not chopped into bits but it flowed like a stream. He felt that words like chain or train did not describe consciousness fully, so “in talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.” In explaining the durational aspect of consciousness William James gave, probably unwittingly, the basis for a new kind of novel that would appropriately be called the stream-of-consciousness novel. Virginia Woolf’s “luminous halo” and James’s “halo”, “penumbra” or “fringe” are these “transitional phases of our mental processes” marking the fusing of the past and present into the picture that alone can represent experience as a continuum.

William James had hardly finished explaining the durational aspect of the conscious mind, when Sigmund Freud followed with his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), where he sought to present the unconscious as the “real psyche.” He described the mental act as going through two phases: the Unconscious and the Conscious. This notice about the presence of the stranger among us, the unconscious mind, and the revelation about its nature at once took the younger generation by storm. Adrian Stephen, Virginia Woolf’s brother, for example, gave up studying medieval law and became a professional psycho-analyst as did James Strachey and his wife. From Freud the writers learnt a new psychological vocabulary. Words like “the Id”, “the Ego”, “the Super Ego,” “repression,” etc., came into common use and the ideas related with them were assimilated by literary imagination. While writers “modeled their studies of character on the therapeutic situation,” the critic’s interest turned from literature to the artist’s mind-to probing the processes that resulted in a particular literary work. The new knowledge about the inner workings of the mind revolutionized all that had been known about them till then.. The Hogarth Press, owned by the Woolfs, published the *Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud* in 1924. It appears, though, that Virginia Woolf had read him even before this. For in her review of *The Imperfect Mother* in 1918 she was “conscious of a division of mind which twenty or even ten years ago could hardly have afflicted our predecessors.”

Virginia Woolf met Freud in 1931 when he struck her as an alert “screwed up shrunk very old man,” and an “old fire now flickering.” In a diary entry of December 1939, she refers to her reading Freud “to enlarge the circumference: to give my brain a wider scope: to make it objective; to get outside.”

Psychoanalysis as a therapy for the psychologically disturbed appeared just before the outbreak of the War. Its literary horoscope was auspicious too. On the one hand, it found eager literary critics who seized upon it as a tool for analysing either the author or his characters (and the journals were not wanting to tout the new method); on the other hand, it joined with the increasing prestige of Dostoevsky, who was a relentless searcher of dark souls. Since popular interest in psychology and its methods had created the taste with which Russian fiction could be best enjoyed, Russian works were greeted with enthusiasm. Turgenev had already been known in England, as also in the United States, when Constance Garnett’s series of translations of Dostoevsky began to come out in 1912. Yet, not till D.S. Mirsky’s *History of Russian Literature* (1924) and *Contemporary Russian Literature* (1926) were published did the structural principles governing the Russian novel become well noted among the English reading public. But Virginia Woolf had read both Dostoevsky and *War and Peace* in 1912. She detected in the Russian writers a sense of inconclusiveness, an interest in the situation and in the flux of life for their own sake. The Russians, as Virginia Woolf wrote in 1918, were “driven to write by their deep sense of human suffering and their unwavering sympathy with it.” It was out of interest in Russian fiction that she collaborated with Kotliansky in translating Dostoevsky and Goldenweiser’s *Conversations with Tolstoy* between 1921 and 1923.¹⁰⁶ The Russian writers were a powerful source of permeative influence for they formed the background for all such ventures which proclaimed the right of the individual to respect his intuitive beliefs as possessing general interest, and suggested the importance of that which lay beyond the grasp of scientific observation.

Dostoevsky influenced Virginia Woolf in her early years; later on she turned to Turgenev. Her diary entry of 1933 mentions the conflicting claims of Dostoevsky and Turgenev: “How do you know what this is? How do we know if the Dostoevsky form is better or worse than the Turgenev?” Virginia Woolf’s admiration for the Russian novelists was a life-long affair. When she read Tolstoy again, in 1940, for example, he had the same effect on her as he had in 1912, like that of “an exposed electric wire.”

Like the Russians, the French writers had a considerable influence on the growth of the new novel. The French took

the art of fiction more seriously than the English, much as did the Russians. Virginia Woolf was conscious of their accomplishment. In "The Art Of Fiction" she wrote: "In France and Russia they take fiction seriously. . . something of their pre-eminence may be due to the pains they take, something to the severity with which they are judged." While Zola and Maupassant had influenced writers like Gissing and George Moore in the treatment of everyday life, Marcel Proust came to be influential in a different manner. Quentin Bell informs us that Proust was introduced to Virginia Woolf and her circle of friends by Roger Fry, who, as we shall see, also introduced them to the French Post-Impressionists. Proust provided in his work "a whole theory of memory and consciousness, although not directly projected in logical terms." His novel *A Remembrance of Things Past* was, as he admitted, not a work of ratiocination. In providing, through his fiction, an illustration of Bergson's philosophy of time and memory, Proust inspired in the younger novelists an awareness of what was already upon them. A diary entry of 1925 clearly indicates the impact of Proust on Virginia Woolf. She writes:

The thing about Proust is his combination of the utmost sensibility with the utmost tenacity. He searches out these butterfly shades to the last grain. He is as tough as catgut and as evanescent as butterfly's bloom. And he will, I suppose, both influence me and make me out of temper with every sentence of my own.

It was to be expected that in the formation of Virginia Woolf's theory of fiction and critical biases, modern novelists-Russian or French should play a significant role. If the Russians revealed the innermost flickerings of the human mind, Proust brought the light of his saturated intelligence to reveal "the infinite range and complexity of human sensibility." The novel that avoided either sector of human experience was the poorer to that extent. Thus, as T.S. Eliot found hope for poetry in French symbolists, Virginia Woolf found hope for the novel in the works of the Russians and in the novels of Flaubert and Proust. Her critical predilections were to be shaped by what she had admired and imbibed.

Another influence that travelled from France to England was that of the Post-Impressionist paintings that were exhibited by Roger Fry and Desmond MacCarthy first in 1910, and then in 1912. The artists whose paintings were then displayed were Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse, Renoir, Degas and Manet. These Post-Impressionists, as Roger Fry wrote, did not try to give "a pale reflex of actual experiences, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality." They tried to create rather than to imitate form. Acclaiming the supremacy of individual expression and intuitive belief, they felt confident that they could express through suggestive indirection even that which scientific observation missed. Cezanne, for instance, tried to capture not the surface but the essence of his subject. One wonders whether in trying to express the richness of an immediate experience and in her emphasis on the "integral expression of the artist's vision," Virginia Woolf was not influenced by the Post-Impressionists' practice in art. Quentin Bell tells us that Virginia Woolf was not much interested in Post-Impressionism but that "with Roger Fry as a constant visitor in Gordon Square she could not ignore the commotion that they caused." The Post-Impressionists not only startled and shocked the London public, but they also influenced the Bloomsbury circle. The doctrines of G.E. Moore no longer seemed important enough when it was Cezanne that was being discussed. Quentin Bell informs us that "the intellectual character of Bloomsbury itself began to change."

During the season of cultural and literary changes, of aesthetic and philosophic upheavals, another movement was reaching its culminating point: the women's suffragette movement. In literature, the new woman had already come into existence with the plays of Ibsen who insisted that a woman could not be herself in a society which was exclusively masculine. The new woman presented by Shaw, Wells and Hardy shocked the English middle class readers. Then the Women's Social Political Union (WSPU) came into existence in 1903. Women marched on Parliament, held meetings, threw stones and thus went on to provoke the police into arresting them. The Women's Suffrage movement reached its peak between 1911 and 1913. Virginia Woolf became a staunch supporter of the rights of women, though not solely for political reasons. Virginia Woolf saw women's life full of confusion. She felt that across "the broad continent of a woman's life falls the shadow of a sword. On one side all is correct, definite, orderly. . . But on the other side all is confusion."

With such knowledge of unsheltered women's fate, there was hardly a chance, in her mind, for any forgiveness. Virginia Woolf refused to stay satisfied with intellectual commitment alone. Nor did she need a public programme to fix her sights. Having been a witness, at her parents', to the thoughtless behaviour of a domineering male and to the

helpless plight of dependent females, Virginia Woolf had enlisted, even before suffragette protest became a movement, as a correspondent to write for the "Women's Supplement" to *The Guardian*. But as the movement spread, she became an active participant in its programme. In January 1910, she volunteered to work for Women's Suffrage and then in November-December she resumed her activity on behalf of Women's Suffrage. It was but natural that feminist thinking should become a component of her sensibility.

In the course of our discussion of Virginia Woolf's novels, we shall see how deep feminism had gone into her thinking. It may be enough to mention here that her concept of the "androgynous mind," central for our understanding of both her creative work and critical theories, seems to derive its metaphorical basis from her notion of man-woman relationship. Her novels celebrate a woman's world, and her criticism enshrines feminine sensibility. For an artist, there is, probably, no better way to commemorate his values than to make them the keystone of his work, Virginia Woolf's attachment to feminism affected both her critical judgement and her tone.

If we find her criticism to be eclectic and her critical approach free of any fixed predilections, it is because it was her fortune to be born in a period that, after English Renaissance, can be said to be the most fruitful in literary products and critical theories. And in that age, she was at the centre of things, in the very thick of the intellectual metropolis of the world, conversing with some of the best minds of the century. The dyer's hands left their print on her critical faculty and her literary values.

(III) Virginia Woolf's Contribution to Modernism

From Fielding, say upto Hardy, or, in other words, from the eighteenth century till the beginning of the modern period, the English novel had a set form. It is a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. Again, the story in most cases is a love story with a hero, a heroine and a villain, who exists mainly to prevent the marriage of the first two till the end of the story. *Tom Jones*, the masterpiece of Fielding, the father of the English novel, is such a story and traces the vicissitudes of the love of Tom and Sophia ending in their marriage. Love ending in marriage forms the conventional plot of the novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are, of course, exceptions Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy* is not a conventional love story. In fact, it has no systematic plot. Thackeray's novel, *Vanity Fair*, is a novel without a hero. Still, in this novel also there is a love story constituted by the love of Dobbin and Amelia, and the novel ends with the ringing of their marriage bells. However, in spite of this love element *Vanity Fair* is an unconventional novel in many respects. Again Meredith's novels are not conventional stories. They have fine comedy, poetry and romance, and have also a conspicuous love element, but these elements are not presented in the conventional form. He is more concerned with the creation of scenes of absorbing interest than in tracing the vicissitudes of love, as the conventional novelist does. His successor Hardy wrote love stories of a rather conventional type. But conventional villains do not exist in his world. The villain's part is played by Destiny in the novels of Hardy.

From Fielding to Dickens, the English novel has hardly any intellectual appeal. It is a story of absorbing interest with digressions and extraneous matter, and it has humour and pathos, mystery and horror. The extraneous matter tends to make its texture loose. From George Eliot onward the form of the English novel begins to undergo a change. For one thing, it becomes more compact. The theme or the underlying idea of the novels of George Eliot gives them a new unity of structure. Her novels are the illustrations of the moral idea that evil inevitably recoils on the wrong-doer, who cannot escape the consequences of his misdeeds. Since her novels are built upon and illustrate this basic idea, they are more compact in form than the novels of her predecessors. Likewise, Hardy's plots are well constructed, compact and imbued with a strong intellectual appeal. Yet, broadly speaking they continue to be old fashioned traditional stories.

The novel is a realistic portrayal of life, and the conventional novel portrays life in the form of a story. In other words, though the conventional novelist takes his material from life, yet with that material he constructs a new world with a form and shape which life does not have. Our lives, strictly speaking, are not stories, but life in the conventional novel exists in the form of a story. Now, one of the basic differences between the conventional novel and the new or the modern novel is that while the former is a story the latter is not. E.M. Forster, who is both a novelist and a critic objects to the novel being a story. In his book *Aspects of the Novel* he says: "That (the story) is the highest factor common to all novels and I wish that it was not so, that it could be something different-melody, or perception of the

truth, not this low atavistic form.” In his novel entitled *Point Counter Point* Aldous Huxley frankly admits that he cannot write a story. Anyone familiar with contemporary fiction would say that the modern novel ceases to be a story. Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* are undoubtedly extreme cases of the absence of any story whatever from the novel. These novels depict only the inner conscience of man, that is the flow of ideas passing through his mind without presenting the drama of human actions and emotions. But even those modern novelists who depict actions and emotions hardly tell a story.

Virginia Woolf, too, believes that the novel should not be a story. But her reasons for so believing are different from those of E.M. Forster and Aldous Huxley. Virginia Woolf believes that the novel is a portrayal of life. But according to her, the conventional novel fails to portray life. That is why there is the necessity of the novel of a new type. For ‘life’, as she thinks, is not the drama of actions and emotions but the impressions received by the human mind. In her essay on “Modern Fiction” included in the volume, the *Common Reader*, she says, “Look within and Life, it seems, is very far from being “Like this”. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions-trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the Life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent forms differently from that of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plots, no comedy, no love interest, or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged: life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding... us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. It is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible.”

Virginia Woolf clearly states the difference between the old and the new concept of fiction. “The proper stuff of fiction”, she says, “is a little other than custom would have us believe it.” According to her “custom the proper stuff of fiction is action and events. Men and women act and events occur, and as action proceeds and events succeed one another, the story moves onward and finally reaches its end. So, the conventional plot is an arrangement of action and event in a particular order and form. But according to Virginia Woolf “the proper stuff of fiction” is not what happens in the external world, but within the mind of man. It is not the outer reality, but inner consciousness, not what men and women do and feel, but the impressions they receive on their mind. Secondly, she wants the impressions to be presented exactly as they occur, and not in a set form. If life is ‘a luminous halo’, a vague, formless something, so should be its presentation in the novel which according to her theory, should be formless and chaotic. Her novels, however, are not chaotic, nor do they want in form. So, in actual practice she deviates from her own theory. Still, the material she uses in her novels and their form both are entirely different from the stuff and shape of the conventional novel. She does not write a connected story of actions and events for the simple reason that such a story in her opinion fails to portray life. It may show the novelist’s admirable craftsmanship, but life is neither craftsmanship nor comment on problems. For Virginia Woolf “life is spiritual” and “not material”, inner and not outer. It is “the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain,” and the novelist’s business is to reveal it with utmost faithfulness. Hermione Lee in the *Novels of Virginia Woolf* states that her contribution to modernism is an important one. The term is most easily defined through examples, as by Frank Kermode in ‘The Modern’ when he says that ‘on the whole, everybody knows what is meant by modern literature, modern art, modern music. The words suggest Joyce, Picasso, Schoenberg, or Stravinsky the experiments of two or more generations back. Elsewhere in the same essay Kermode fixes the ‘peak period’ of the modernist ‘movement’ as somewhere around 1910-1925. A similar kind of definition through example occurs in an article by Richard Watson, who describes the literature we call modern’ as the literature represented in English by Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce, in French by Proust, in German by Hesse. Other names like Lawrence, Kafka, Gide, Musil, Pound, Stein might be invoked. But such descriptions of modernism, though suggestive rather than definitive, do imply that the ‘movement’ has some recognizable common denominators. It is associated with the first three decades of this twentieth century. It applies to different art forms. It is experimental and it is international- one of the marked characteristics of modernism being its crossing of cultural boundaries, for instance in the exodus of writers from America to France and England.

Definitions of literary modernism (particularly when the modern is being contrasted with the avant-garde or the contemporary) very often emphasize the two aspects with which Virginia Woolf herself was most concerned in her comments on modern fiction. First, modernism is usually described as a response to an era whose political and social developments invited nihilism, scepticism and despair; an era thus described in 1929: The structures which are variously known as mythology, religion, and philosophy, and which are alike in that each has as its function the interpretation of experience in terms which have human values, have collapsed under the force of successive attacks and shown themselves utterly incapable of assimilating the new stores of experience which have been dumped upon the world. With increasing completeness science maps out the pattern of nature, but the latter has no relation to the pattern of human needs and feelings.

If modernism has 'a persistent world-view', Kermode writes, 'it is one we should have to call apocalyptic'. Modern literature is, then, an attempt to create in an environment hostile to order and faith and, it seemed after 1914, to life itself. Second, it is often pointed out that there is an intimate relationship between the 'apocalyptic' world view of modernism and the *form* of its repeated efforts to 'make it new'. The experiments of the modernists were very largely (and very minutely) concerned with form, as though, by an intensive ordering process of a kind not before attempted, the chaotic universe might be mastered. Thus Kermode finds 'a kind of formal desperation' in the 'great experimental novels of early modernism'. Through elaborate structuring, through allusion and literary references the fusion of 'tradition and the individual talent' through images and through myths, the modern writer expressed 'a yearning to pierce through the messy phenomenal world to some perfect and necessary form and order'.

(IV) Virginia Woolf as a Novelist

Virginia Woolf is a remarkable, though not a major figure in this 'movement'. None of her novels has the stature or scope of Proust or of Conrad, of Joyce's *Ulysses* or of Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. She is, with Forster, in the second rank of twentieth century novelists. Her imaginative territory is strictly demarcated by her social environment, her intellectual inheritance, her mental instability¹ and her sexual reserve. Yet no other English novelist of the period combined the theoretical analysis of the requirements for the modern novel with a continuing attempt, in every new work, to match her vision of reality with its appropriate form.

That she is aware of herself as being part of a movement is clear from her brilliant statements on the future of the modern novel (found essentially in 'Modern Fiction' (1919), 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1924) and 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' (1927)) which dominate her reputation as an essayist. The most frequently quoted paragraph of her writing is reinvoked not only as an illustration of her own methods but as a central comment on modernism:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed Spirit?

The passage has suffered from being too much quoted. Out of its historical context it does not seem a very convincing definition of what the novel should do; nor is it an entirely accurate summing up of her own achievements and intentions. In spite of the fluid structure of the novels, which creates the movement of intangible consciousnesses rather than of visible appearances or large-scale destinies, there is nevertheless a foundation of 'plot', 'comedy' and 'tragedy' which unites, in her best work, solidity with the 'luminous'. But for all this the message of 'Modern Fiction' was apt and useful in 1919, expressing exactly the Bergsonian feeling of the time, in arts and in letters, that to think in terms of a fixed identity and of a common reality was no longer possible. The images with which she expresses this

idea do double duty. They establish her idea of true reality; but in doing so they also reject, by implication, a whole tradition of literature. The lamps of a horse-drawn carriage and the buttons sewn by the Bond Street tailor suggest the material as well as the methods of the Victorian and Edwardian novel. The images that replace those figures of realism are cunningly chosen so as to have an air of scientific modernity, and, also, so as to seem intangible: the atoms, the luminous halo and the semitransparent envelope are visual references which have, however, a vague and shapeless quality. The antithesis in 'Modern Fiction' between representational scenes and amorphous shapes bears a marked resemblance to Roger Fry's theories of art. His preference for post-impressionist painters over a realist such as Sargent is analogous to Virginia Woolf's rejection of Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells in favour of the 'Georgians' Forster, Lawrence, Joyce, Strachey, Eliot, Dorothy Richardson. In her biography of Roger Fry (1940) she quotes his description of Sargent's portrait of the Duke of Portland, which anticipates the distinction she makes in *Between the Acts* between portraits and pictures:

'First the collie dog which the Duke caresses has one lock of very white hair; secondly the Duke's boots are so polished that they glitter; thirdly the Duke's collar is very large and very stiffly starched; fourthly the Duke was when he stood for his portrait sunburnt. After that we might come to the Duke himself.' But by the time he came to the Duke himself [he] is so 'deadened by the fizz and crackle of Mr Sargent's brush work that (he) can see nothing'.

The grounds for dislike are exactly the same as in Virginia Woolf's criticism of how Mr Bennett would treat Mrs Brown:

Mr Bennett, alone of the Edwardians, would keep his eyes in the carriage. He, indeed, would observe every detail with immense care. He would notice the advertisements; the pictures of Swanage and Portsmouth; the way in which the cushion bulged between the buttons; how Mrs Brown wore a brooch which had cost three-and-ten at Whitworth's bazaar; and had mended both gloves - indeed the thumb of the left-hand glove had been replaced.

What is to be set against this engrossment in 'childish problems of photographic representation'? (The phrase is Fry's.) Fry and Virginia Woolf have the same answer: not illusion, but another reality; not imitation, but equivalence. The work of art must create, through form, its own terms for truth. Roger Fry tries to explain this in his introduction to the catalogue of the second Post Impressionist Exhibition of 1912 (which contained works by Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso, Lhote, Braque, and the English artists Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, Spencer Gore, Eric Gill and Wyndham Lewis):

These artists do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form, not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life. By that I mean that they wish to make images which by the clearness of their logical structure, and by their closely-knit unity of texture, shall appeal to our disinterested and contemplative imagination with something of the same vividness as the things of actual life appeal to our practical activities. In fact they aim not at illusion but at reality.

He expands the argument in a letter written in 1913 to P. J. Atkins, a Leicester water-colourist:

The reality of a picture is immensely greater if the spectator is not referred back by illusion to a possible exterior reality (which is stronger and more real) but is held within the reality of the artistic creation by its sheer necessity and intensity of unity.

It is no accident, then, that Virginia Woolf dated the change in 'human character' which called for a new kind of literature as taking place in December 1910 - the date of Roger Fry's first Post-Impressionist Exhibition - nor that in her thoughts on literature she frequently employs analogies with painting. But Virginia Woolf goes further than Roger Fry when she relates modernism in the arts to the emotional, social and intellectual climate of the 1910s. The need for the creation of a new reality, not through 'photographic representation' but through 'necessitated form', is a need created by the conditions of existence. When she talks of a change taking place in December 1910 she is talking about a change in life rather than in art, as she makes humorously clear:

In life one can see the change, if I may use a homely illustration, in the character of one's cook. The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; the Georgian

cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing-room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat.

This may seem too bland and cosy to be taken seriously. But it presents the light-hearted side of the difficult and unsettling nature of twentieth-century life, which must be taken seriously, and for which the artist has a public duty to find some fitting expression:

The mind is full of monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable emotions. That the age of the earth is 3,000,000,000 years; that human life lasts but a second; that the capacity of the human mind is nevertheless boundless; that life is infinitely beautiful yet repulsive; that one's fellow creatures are adorable but disgusting; that science and religion have between them destroyed belief; that all bonds of union seem broken, yet somehow control must exist - it is in this atmosphere of doubt and conflict that writers have now to create.

The old confidence in a general, recognizable perspective on life and character has vanished. There is indeed some envy and wistfulness in the tone in which Virginia Woolf looks back on the literature of an empiricist universe:

In both (Scott and Jane Austen) there is the same natural conviction that life is of a certain quality. They have their judgment of conduct. They know the relations of human beings towards each other and towards the universe. Certainty of that kind is the condition which makes it possible to write. To believe that your impressions hold good for others is to be released from the cramp and confinement of personality.

But there should be no pretending that that comfortable perspective remains. The idea of life and character presented in the Edwardian novel is, according to Virginia Woolf, a fraudulent attempt to sustain a fixed idea of reality under inappropriate conditions. Paradoxical though it may seem to call her a more realistic novelist than H. G. Wells that is the response she demands. Her idea of modernism was that it must pursue the expression of a reality more true to post-war sensibilities. A settled point of view, chronological continuity, and the idea that one can say of anyone that they were this or were that' will no longer do. 'Georgian' writers have already learned from Sterne, from Meredith, from the Russian novelists and above all from Proust that the soul is 'streaked, variegated, all of a mixture and that if it is to be accurately 'translated' into literature, we must learn to 'tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure'. The word 'translated' is used here because it is the word which Proust uses in the antithesis drawn in *Time Regained* between photographic realism and true reality.

If reality were indeed a sort of waste product of experience, more or less identical for each one of us, since when we speak of bad weather, a war, a taxi ride, a brightly lit restaurant, a garden full of flowers, everybody knows what we mean, if reality were no more than this, no doubt a sort of cinematograph film of these things would be sufficient and the 'style', the 'literature' that departed from the simple data that they provide would be superfluous and artificial. But was it true that reality was no more than this? If I tried to understand what actually happens at the moment when a thing makes some particular impression upon me - on the day, for instance, when as I crossed the bridge over the Vivonne the shadow of a cloud upon the water had made me cry: 'Damn!' and jump for joy; or the occasion when, hearing a phrase of Bergotte's, all that I had disengaged from my impression was the not specially relevant remark: 'How splendid!'; or the words I had once heard Bloch use in exasperation at some piece of bad behaviour, words quite inappropriate to a very commonplace incident, 'I must say that that sort of conduct seems to me absolutely fantastic!'; or that evening when, flattered at the politeness which the Guermantes had shown to me as their guest and also a little intoxicated by the wines which I had drunk in their house, I could not help saying to myself half aloud as I came away alone: 'They really are delightful people and I 'should be happy to see them every day of my life' - I realised that the words in each case were a long way removed from the impressions that I or Bloch had in fact received. So that the essential, the only true book, though in the ordinary sense of the word it does not have to be 'invented' by a great writer - for it exists already in each one of us - has to be translated by him. The function and the task of a writer are those of a translator!

Though it is complex, humorous and analytical of social experience in a manner foreign to Virginia Woolf, the passage can nevertheless be compared to the flimsier, more abstract statement of a similar idea in 'Street Haunting':

But what could be more absurd? It is, in fact, on the stroke of six; it is a winter's evening; we are walking to the Strand to buy a pencil. How, then, are we also on a balcony, wearing pearls in June? What could be more absurd? Yet it is nature's folly, not ours. When she set about her chief masterpiece, the making of man, she should have thought of one thing only. Instead, turning her head, looking over her shoulder, into each one of us she let creep instincts and desires which are utterly at variance with his main being, so that we are streaked, variegated, all of a mixture; the colours have run. Is the true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June.?

Virginia Woolf is describing the coexistence of different states of mind inhabiting an apparently fixed personality; Proust is describing the imbalance between response and actuality. But both imply that reality is not fixed; it is not the same to each person, nor does each person partake of that sameness and fixedness. Though Virginia Woolf (however much in debt to Proust) may not have been directly influenced by that passage from *Time Regained*, it does, however, become clear from the comparison that she was, and felt herself to be, part of a movement. Two excellent critics, one writing on Virginia Woolf and one on Proust, have useful comments here:

A shift in emphasis followed... This shift in emphasis expresses something that we might call a transfer of confidence: the great exterior turning points and blows of fate are granted less importance; they are credited with less power of yielding decisive information concerning the subject; on the other hand there is confidence that in any random fragment plucked from the course of a life at any time the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed.

As the novel form has developed beyond the description of a deterministic environment towards the inner reality of the human mind necessarily shifted its techniques of presentation. The fetish of point of view in fiction corresponds to an awareness of the self as the source of meaning, of significance in experience. The style of writing known as stream of consciousness consists in pure point of view, no other order than that of the self struggling to reach the core of feeling (or to escape from it) in each successive moment.

The comparison with Proust, and these two general statements about the modern novel, show that Virginia Woolf was not working alone. Even Lawrence, who was not at all in sympathy with anything that came out of Bloomsbury, shared some of Virginia Woolf's ideas about life and the novel:

The universe is like Father Ocean; a stream of all things slowly moving. We move, and the rock of ages moves. And since we move and move for ever, in no discernible direction, there is no centre to the movement, to us. To us, the centre shifts at every moment. . . Alas! there is no road before us!

There is nothing to do but to maintain a true relationship to the things we move with and amongst and against. The novel, he feels, must change to accommodate this Bergsonian sense of flux.

'You can put anything you like in a novel. So why do people *always* go on putting the same thing? Why is the *vol au vent* always chicken!' So wrote Lawrence in 1925... 'Tell Arnold Bennett,' he once wrote to his literary agent, 'that all rules of construction hold good only for the novels that are copies of other novels.'

These statements illuminate Virginia Woolf's otherwise rather surprising feeling about Lawrence, that 'he and I have too much in common'. Nevertheless she found his novels hard to read. In fact she was not entirely in sympathy with the 'crashing and destruction' being carried out by any of the other 'Georgian' modernists. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917) and the early chapters of *Ulysses* had a very powerful influence on Virginia Woolf, and their appearance coincided with the major change in her style between 1919 and 1922. She felt that Joyce's concern 'at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain has marked an extremely important development in fiction. But, in spite of her belief that 'any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers', Joyce made her uneasy. She found him distasteful she was 'irritated and disillusioned by a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples' and she felt that his narrative method was too self-regarding. It 'never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond', leaving one inside the 'damned egotistical self'! Again, in considering Dorothy Richardson's gargantuan stream of consciousness novel, *Pilgrimage*, she is disappointed, because, when we are given up to the consciousness of Miriam Henderson, 'we should perceive in the helter-skelter of flying fragments some unity, significance, or design' but instead 'Things look much the same as ever.'

By the 1930 Virginia Woolf was faced with a different sort of difficulty. Her experimentation seemed to have outlasted the period with which it had most in common. The 'Georgian' movement had petered out, and, as Bell remarks, the adversaries and the collaborators she had cited in 1924 had (with the exception of H. G. Wells) either stopped living or stopped writing: The English novelists of roughly her own generation were Compton Mackenzie, Aldous Huxley, J. B. Priestley, Hugh Walpole, David Garnett and Rose Macaulay; and none of them seemed to be carrying forward the revolution which, in 1924, she had believed to be imminent. Having lost both her adversaries and her collaborators she stood very much alone.

But her sense of isolation did not prevent Virginia Woolf from continuing to carry out what she felt to be the task of the modern novelist. Though her novels move from the treatment of youth to middle age, and then from individuals to society, and though they experiment with a wide variety of techniques - *The Waves* being as different from *To the Lighthouse* as *Between the Acts* is from *Night and Day* - they perpetually make an attempt to formulate and express a true reality. In every novel we find a consistent and energetic presentation of perception and experience, which invites analogies between the conditions under which her characters feel and live, and their creator's idea of the nature of fiction. But the mirror which allows manner to reflect matter, form to reflect content, does not frame an aesthetic paradise. Her continual, self-conscious struggle for an accurate rendering of life as she perceived it is a struggle for mastery over the intractable and the chaotic, both inside and outside the mind. These forces are never excluded: the characters, like the narrator, are always dealing with them. Both are engaged in 'an exacting form of intercourse. Virginia Woolf is often praised for sensitivity and lyricism and criticized for ineffectuality and preciousness. There is truth on both sides, but such praise and blame sidestep equally the determined pursuit of control and authenticity which invigorates even the slightest of her work, and makes her major achievements solid with integrity and rich with inventiveness.

Another interesting aspect of Virginia Woolf as a novelist is that she inherits something of the Romantic idea of the potency of the imagination, working at a depth below the conscious mind. And there is a further echo of Wordsworth in her idea of a creative relationship between the imagination and the natural world, though she is not interested in the moral effect of nature on man, nor does she actually write *about* nature. But she can find no other way to express the truth of life and character than through natural images and physical perceptions. In 'The Searchlight', as in *To the Lighthouse*, the dominant figure of a beam of light draws the story together. But what the light picks out are also visual images, and emotion is engendered in both the great grandfather and Mrs Ivimey, through the physical reaction to those images. The essay on 'The Moment', quoted above, continues its definition of 'the present situation' thus: 'To begin with: it is largely composed of visual and of sense impressions.'

'The Searchlight' corroborates this statement, and so, on a larger scale, do all Virginia Woolf's novels. Objects, colours and physical sensations express the life of the mind. But were this all, the accusation levelled against Virginia Woolf by Muriel Bradbrook (among others) would be a damning one: 'Emotions are reduced to a description of their physical accompaniment. . . Mrs Woolf never. . . attempts to reproduce the process of thinking.' But the translation of mental states into physical images is not reductive. The process is the natural expression of her concept of existence, not a superficial, decorative technique. Virginia Woolf not only felt that the expression of the life of the mind through physical images was the most accurate equivalent that art can make for reality; she also believed in the relationship between people and non-human objects as being life-enhancing. The Wordsworthian idea of the consolatory and educative function of nature is too joyful for her; her novels are melancholy and uncertain. But they do express a secular faith in the value of the seen and felt a faith more usually expressed in the twentieth century poetry. These two examples, one from the twenties and one from the sixties, express in different ways the belief, shared by Virginia Woolf, the objects of the mortal world are the most significant metaphors of, and vehicles for, our spiritual life.

In Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* Terenie Hewet confides ,to Rachel Vmrece ; "I want to write a novel about Silence, the things people don't say." "The things people do not say" were the things Virginia Woolf and her contemporaries, James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence wanted to say. They shared an interest in making silence speak, in giving a tongue to the complex inner world of feeling and memory and in establishing the validity of that world's claim of the term "reality". Literary historians invariably make a trio of Joyce, Woolf and Lawrence, agreeing that they shared the dominant metaphysical bias of a whole generation and wrote unconventional novels.

(V) The Psychological Novel

It will not be out of place here to say a word about the modern psychological novel. The modern novelist shows a great deal of interest in human psychology, or working of the human mind. It does not mean however, that psychology is absent from the novels of the past. Novelists have always been interested in the exploration of motives, and to that extent they have been interested in psychology. Besides, they frequently describe what passes within the mind of their characters, their joy or sorrow, sense of relief or sense of boredom. In almost all the conventional novels there is exploration and analysis of motives and descriptions of moods and feelings. By such analysis and descriptions the novelist helps us to understand his characters. Again, there are conventional novels where plots are rooted in human psychology, for instance the plots of Jane Austen. The very title *Pride and Prejudice* suggests her deep interest in human psychology.

The modern psychological novelist, however, reveals a different type of interest in the human mind. His interest is not confined to the exploration of motives or the depiction of feelings. He is wholly preoccupied with human consciousness or with what passes within the mind of his characters. The conventional novelist is primarily concerned with action, and if he examines psychology it is only because action springs from psychology. For the modern novelist though, whether coherent or incoherent, this is more important for him than a definite line of action. If he describes action at all, it is casual and disconnected. He does not present a pattern in which one action leads to another, as the conventional novelist does.

Three names deserve special mention in connection with the modern psychological novel. They are Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson. Marcel Proust was a Frenchman, James Joyce an Irishman and Dorothy Richardson an English woman. These writers wrote novels which were entirely different from the conventional novels. They are interested in what passes within the mind of their characters, or in other words, what their characters think and not what they do. They are novelists of inner consciousness and not of its manifestation in action. The first two volumes of the eight part work of Marcel Proust are known as *Remembrance of Things Past*. Their title suggests their theme, which is memory recalling past events and sensations. Memory functions according to its own law of association so that when a character dips a biscuit in a cup of tea, he is suddenly reminded of a number of past events. In the novels of Proust the mind frequently travels in the past and it is the past which is frequently conjured up in the present. Obviously Proust is interested in the mental operation of his characters than in their actions.

James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson both take us inside the mind of their characters. In his novel *Ulysses* James Joyce depicts the stream of consciousness of Leopold Bloom, his wife and Stephen Dedalus. Dorothy Richardson takes us inside the mind of the principal character, Miriam Henderson, and we are made to view the world through her eyes. In the volumes of her novel *Pilgrimage* she portrays the mind or constantly flowing consciousness of Miriam Henderson. "*Pilgrimage* ", says Walter Allen, "satisfies Virginia Woolf's requirements in that it contains in the accepted sense no plot, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe; there is only Miriam Henderson, living from day to day, experiencing, feeling, reacting to the stimuli of the outside world of people and things: Life for Miriam is precisely' an incessant shower of innumerable atoms', and reading, we live within her in an eternal present.

The term "stream of consciousness" is applied to the novels of Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce. Virginia Woolf as a follower of Miss Richardson and Joyce makes frequent use of the "stream of consciousness" method, especially in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. The term "stream-of-consciousness" was first used by an American psychologist, William James, who compared the human mind to a constantly flowing river. Thoughts are constantly passing through our mind. But they are not necessarily a chain of connected ideas. Unless we think deliberately on a topic, our thoughts constantly arising in our mind are not systematic and coherent. Any idea may arise at any time. A student sitting in a class may suddenly and without any apparent cause be reminded of a match he witnessed a month ago. There is no connection, whatever between the lecture he is hearing and the match he witnessed, and yet he is suddenly reminded of the match. A river flows only in one direction. But our mind moves arbitrarily both in the past and in the present. So, mind has a two-way traffic. Our mind is a welter of ideas and disconnected thoughts arise and subside in it. The "stream-of consciousness" technique strives to present a picture of the incoherence of our mind. The "Stream-of Consciousness" type narrative, says J. W. Beach in his *The Twentieth Century Novel*, is a new and radical development from the subjectivism of 'the well made novel. Its defining feature is exploitation of the element of incoherence in our conscious process. This incoherence characterises both our normal and abnormal states of

mind. The natural association of ideas is extremely freakish. Our psyche is such an imperfectly integrated bundle of memories, sensations, and impulses, that unless sternly controlled by some dominating motive it is likely to be at the mercy of every stray wind of suggestion. It is our deliberate attention, called into play by the will to action, that brings order into this chaos. Consciously or unconsciously, we choose to ignore, to forget ninety-nine percent of all that is actually going on within us. This applies to those of us who are strong and simple, who have determination and the steadiness of will to bring all our energies to bear upon a definite line of action. But the moment we relax, the moment we let go control of our will and our attention, we fall back into the welter, the chaos of our complicated selves.”

It has been argued above that the novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, too, are interested in human psychology. They, too, depict human thoughts and feelings. But it is a systematic, coherent and well ordered picture of the mind they offer in their works. If they describe a character's thoughts, he is shown as systematically thinking about something. His thinking forms a chain of thought in which one idea is essentially connected with the other. To the novelist of the past the human mind is more rational than it is to the modern psychological novelist. The reason is that modern psychology has revealed to us that man after all is not so rational an animal as he has hitherto been supposed to be, and that the human mind in its passive state is a confused welter rather than a systematic process. The novelists in the past were interested in men and their actions. The modern psychological novelist is interested in the passive state of the human mind, the state undirected by what Arnold terms, “Our sense of conduct”. It is this passive state of the mind which novelists like Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce portray in their novels. Virginia Woolf attempts to do the same in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, though her picture of mind is different from that of Miss Richardson's or of Joyce's.

The expression “Internal monologue” is frequently used in connection with “stream of consciousness”. Often one expression is used interchangeably with the other. The word “monologue”, may, perhaps, give a wrong idea of the expression “internal monologue”. In its original Greek sense it means “speaking alone”. But it is a speech presenting logical and seasoned thought. As Leon Edel, points out in his book, *The Psychological Novel*, “The word ‘monologue’ because of its association with the theatre, has distinct literary and dramatic connotations that do not convey the idea of flux. In the traditional monologue the character gives the audience logical and reasoned thoughts. These are selective even while they represent casual reflection or reverse and are rendered without relation to external stimuli. Hamlet's “to be or not to be,” read by itself, out of the context of the play, gives us no feeling of his surroundings or the sensory experiences he may be having at the time of utterance. His monologue, or soliloquy, reflects and expresses his inner tension, the conflicts of his troubled spirit, his measured thoughts have been distilled from the fluid stream of consciousness to which, in this case, we have no access, since all the impurities have been filtered out. So, Hamlet's soliloquy presents only a chain of reasoning; but does not offer to our view a complete picture of his mind while he is considering the question of “to be or not to be.” But suppose the soliloquy is mixed up with the other thoughts that arise in his mind at that time. Suppose he is conscious of a strong smell coming from somewhere, and he introduces this idea in his soliloquy. Or there enters his mind an idea of guilt and punishment, and this thought, too is introduced in the soliloquy. The soliloquy then will be mixed up with several irrelevant ideas and will cease to be a pure chain of reasoning as it is in the play. The “internal monologue” in the sense of “stream of consciousness” is such a welter of disconnected thoughts and it presents a picture of the mind in its impassive state.

(VI) Consciousness and Group Consciousness in Virginia Woolf

Allen McLaurin while putting Virginia Woolf's novels in a historical perspective talks about the depiction of consciousness and group consciousness in her writings. He intends to explore an idea which links Virginia Woolf clearly to a current of thinking, which was of great importance in her lifetime, but which, has since been somewhat neglected, or obscured, or treated in only a fragmentary way. Many of her contemporaries, her first reviewers, noticed this in web of interrelated ideas which she presents, not as lumpy doctrine, but as a network of images and suggestions, is the notion of a group mind. And because Virginia Woolf's imagination progressed characteristically by contraries one needs to consider a drama of opposites in her treatment of the theme, which often presents itself as a doubt or a question rather

than a statement or a belief. Typically, as with Clarissa Dalloway, the idea is fuelled by an overwhelming need to understand the meaning of death: Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter—even trees, or barns. It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death.

Critics have discussed extensively the treatment of individual consciousness in Virginia Woolf's work, and have naturally emphasised the idea of the 'stream of consciousness'. These discussions are often helpful and interesting, but we need to consider why analyses of the individual streams in most discussion of Virginia Woolf's work have been given a disproportionate emphasis. One of the reasons for the imbalance in past discussions possibly stems from the belief that one can make an easy step from stream of consciousness as a subject to stream of consciousness as a method or technique. This, according to McLaurin, is a mistaken assumption. He argues that the failure to understand the relevance of group feeling in Virginia Woolf's work stems in part from confusion about the depiction of the stream of consciousness in literature.

In its relation to literature the term 'stream of consciousness' has been used in two basic ways. First of all, to describe the phenomenon itself, and naturally reference is made here to William James, and to the chapter in *The Principles of Psychology* in which the idea was first discussed:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' is the metaphor by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought of consciousness, or of subjective life.

The depiction of this stream in literature, that is to say the stream of consciousness as subject matter in fiction, is simply an extension of this basic meaning. But there has developed a second and confusing usage of the term; to designate a method or technique, and as this. confusion may have played its part in obscuring Virginia Woolf's portrayal of group consciousness. One can avoid the confusion caused by the two uses of the term 'stream of consciousness' by refraining from using it to refer to a method or technique.

Of those who would speak of the stream of consciousness *method*, one might ask whether they are referring to a variety of methods which writers have developed to indicate the flow of inner speech or consciousness. If so, surely these methods can be identified and separately named, and in fact some very fine work has been done in this area of formal analysis, avoiding the use of the 'stream of consciousness' label. The alternative to this blanket use of the term would be to use 'stream of consciousness method or technique' to designate a specific mode of writing, and the usual choice here has been either direct or indirect interior monologue. Restriction of the term to cover direct interior monologue, with its characteristic dislocation of grammar and syntax would mean that we would have to limit the stream of consciousness to cover very few passages in very few novels, and be forced into the contradiction of saying that Virginia Woolf is a stream of consciousness writer who does not use the stream of consciousness technique. Using the phrase 'stream of consciousness method' to refer to indirect interior monologue leads to an even greater absurdity. Indirect interior monologue, though a favourite device of stream of consciousness writers, is also used, not only by those who are not particularly interested in the stream of consciousness but also, and characteristically, by Lawrence, a writer who was explicitly opposed to the stream of consciousness idea. For Lawrence it was his own words 'the stream of hell which undermined my adolescence'. To call indirect interior monologue the 'stream of consciousness method' would therefore put one in the position of saying that a writer who hated and detested the stream of consciousness idea used a stream of consciousness technique. One can avoid this confusion quite simply by reserving the term 'stream of consciousness' to refer to the phenomenon itself or for its appearance as the subject matter of certain works of literature. One can then proceed to examine with greater clarity—the relationship between the portrayal of individual consciousness and the way it is related to group consciousness in Virginia Woolf's work.

A natural beginning for such an investigation is the original source of the stream metaphor, and a reading of William

James. James describes the way in which inner life contains ‘sensations of our bodies and of the objects around us, memories of past experiences and thoughts of distant things, feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, desires and aversions, and other emotional conditions, together with determinations of the will, in every variety of permutation and combination. All these aspects, he argues, are simultaneously present, but the focus and margin of attention are constantly changing. The depiction of that changing focus of attention is central to Virginia Woolf’s art. Her characters are surrounded by a halo of consciousness and their acts of attention emphasise now this amalgam of present feelings and memories now another. In addition, Virginia Woolf stimulates those little shocks described in *The Principles of Psychology* which change the focus of attention without ever interrupting the continuity of the stream of consciousness. Both Virginia Woolf and Joyce present a phenomenon common to everyone’s experience; the feeling of having something on the tip of the tongue but not quite being able to bring it to mind.

These detailed similarities are of course less important than the general conception which Joyce and Virginia share about the nature and importance of the stream of consciousness. But it is precisely this overall agreement, which has obscured a crucial difference between the two. If one is to trace the idea of group consciousness in Virginia Woolf’s work one must look closely at a major divergence from James, which comes at the point in his discussion where he considers the possibility of contact between the streams which constitute the inner lives of individuals:

Neither contemporaneity, nor proximity in space, nor similarity of quality and content are able to fuse thoughts together which are sundered by this barrier of belonging to different personal minds. The breaches between such thoughts are the most absolute breaches in nature.

For William James this partition between consciousnesses is a self evident assumption; common sense tells him it is the case, and he is emotionally neutral about the matter. But for the stream of consciousness writers this isolation presents itself as an intellectual and emotional problem.

James’s assumption about the privacy of each individual’s inner life has had its influence on critics of consciousness writing. Surely, their argument runs, by emphasising unduly these inherently private states of mind, streams which, by James’s definition, cannot be shared, are not these writers stressing an aspect of human experience which cuts off one human being from another, making each of us, to adapt a phrase of one of the most notable of these critics, Wyndham Lewis, ‘hermits in our own head’? For the stream of consciousness writers of the early twentieth century, including Virginia Woolf, the isolation of the individual consciousness is not simply a given, a matter of fact, as it is for James. The sundering of mind from mind, which he asserts, is questioned; it raises conflicting emotions and therefore becomes part of the drama of the work rather than a given fact. In Virginia Woolf’s work there is a tension between the idea of privacy and the notion of a group feeling or consciousness, and it is this aspect of her works which is worth exploring.

It would not be true to say that the depiction of group feeling has been completely neglected in discussions of Virginia Woolf’s work. One critic states that ‘her books are full of scenes where whole groups of people share thoughts and become like a single organism, and another speaks of ‘collective images drawn from a larger community of mind’, and relates a passage in *Jacob’s Room* to what he calls the “then-current notions of a collective mental being.” But apart from a passing reference to Hardy’s *Dynasts* these notions remain unspecified. In other words, in comparison with the enormous amount of discussion of stream of consciousness ideas, there has been little systematic exploration of the idea of the group mind in Virginia Woolf’s work. Why are there so many scattered references and so few extended discussions? One of the reasons for the imbalance might well stem from the idea that one can make an easy step from stream of consciousness as subject to stream of consciousness as a mistaken one. Another explanation for the ascendancy of the stream of consciousness idea is that it is relatively easy to key the literary expression of the individual consciousness into the powerful tradition of speculation which has that most persuasive of writers, William James, as one of its leading lights. The importance of the ‘group’ in Virginia Woolf’s work too belongs to a current of speculation which was of considerable importance during Virginia Woolf’s lifetime and of which she was very much aware. By relating her work to this tradition. McLaurin indicates that the depiction of group feeling which we find in her work is not simply an idiosyncrasy or an eccentric flourish added to the fundamental business of stimulating individual streams of consciousness. In other words, what he suggests is that there was a current of speculation, which paralleled, and in some respects ran counter to, the stream of consciousness ideas expounded by William James. By concentrating on the idea of group consciousness naturally some details of Virginia Woolf’s works get illuminated.

Ideas about a 'group mind', about 'crowds' - in other words, notions about group psychology-were very much in vogue at the time when Virginia Woolf began her writing career, and continued through the early decades of the twentieth century. Members of the Bloomsbury Group, including Virginia Woolf, were very conscious of this current of thought. Perhaps the most accessible part of this speculation, for those of us interested in literary work of the Unanimist writer Jules Romains because he embodied some of these ideas about the group mind in literary form. Virginia Woolf herself summarised Romains' ideas in a review written in 1913:

What really interests him is the feelings of persons, not as individual characters, but as members of groups; what he delights and excels in doing is to trace the mysterious growth, where two or three are gathered together, of a kind of consciousness of the group in addition to that of each individual of the group.

It is at this point that a glance at contemporary reviews of Virginia Woolf's novels can be revealing. For her contemporaries, the comparison between Virginia Woolf's work and that of the Unanimists seemed a natural and obvious one. E. M. Forster commented, in a review of her very first novel, that he found in the *Voyage Out* an atmosphere unknown in English literature, the atmosphere of Jules Romains' *Mort de Quelq'un*. It is significant that Romains' novel, first published in 1911, was translated by Virginia Woolf's friends, Sydney Waterloo and Desmond MacCarthy, who published their translation in 1914 with the title *The Death of a Nobody*. It is interesting to note that MacCarthy was to become the model for Bernard, the spokesman for the collective consciousness portrayed in *The Waves*. Forster's comment" was perceptive, and the similarity he notes is further confirmed by the early drafts of *The Voyage Out*. But it was also prophetic because the similarities between Romains and Virginia Woolf are very much clearer in her later work. *The Death of a Nobody*, with its powerful evocation of a group feeling which is triggered by the death of the central character, continues to echo in Virginia Woolf's mind long afterwards. A couple of brief quotations be enough to establish the similarity in image and feeling between the translation of Romains' work and *Mrs Dalloway*, for example;

When the news of the death of the central character of Romains' novel reaches his home village, the houses which have previously been like separate lumps, become 'linked together by a mesh of fine elastic nerve that throbbed beneath the strokes of the midday chimes'. Here, the way in which the chimes of the clock spatialise the mesh of nerves is of course very close to the whole conception of space and group feeling which we experience in *Mrs Dalloway*. Towards the end of Romains' novel, the last person to remember the dead man has his memory stirred by the passing of a vehicle, from which, to quote the MacCarthy translation, 'he caught. . . a little vibration which brushed the surface of his mind, and a deeper, less conscious disturbance'. inevitably reminding of the passing car in Virginia Woolf's novel: 'For the surface agitation of the passing car, as it sunk grazed something very profound'

This idea about the affinity between Virginia Woolf's notion of a group mind and the Unanimist ideas of Romains has recently been given some corroboration by the discovery of that review by Virginia Woolf from which is quoted earlier. A note found in Virginia Woolf's papers from Romains himself thanking the anonymous reviewer, through the editor of *The Times Literary Supplement*, for the understanding review. In her article, Virginia Woolf suggested that Romains' work belonged to a type of writing of which there was scarcely the equivalent in England, the novel in which there are 'no characters, no humour, no plot. . .'. That comment is bound to bring to our minds, as readers of Virginia Woolf, her comment in the famous essay entitled 'Modern Fiction': 'if a writer were a free man and not a slave', she writes, 'if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style. . . 'Modern Fiction' has of course become a standard reference point for many discussions, not only of Virginia Woolf but also more generally of the stream of consciousness novel. It is surely of some considerable significance that one of its leading ideas (even down to the phrasing) is prefigured in an article which deals, not with the stream of consciousness, but with group consciousness.

There are innumerable instances in Virginia Woolf which can be seen in this context of an exploration of group feeling. *The Waves* is obviously relevant to our discussion, being a novel that clearly attempts to express the idea of a group mind. The early drafts show in a very interesting way how Virginia Woolf searched around for a way to express what she calls in her review of Romains the 'mysterious growth' of a 'kind of consciousness

of the group'. But speculation about the group was not confined to Unanimist writers, nor to literary explorations of the idea. Virginia Woolf was aware of other works on group psychology and crowd theory which were written in the first decades of the century, and which were discussed with great interest by members of the Bloomsbury Group. In a review written in January 1916 Leonard Woolf's poke of the huge upsurge of interest which had taken place in the study of group psychology, an interest which had become, he said, much more pronounced, for obvious reasons, since the outbreak of the War.

The *Catalogue of Books from the Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf* reveals that the Woolfs owned a copy of a book by Wilfred Trotter called *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*, published in 1916. From an article published by Woolf in July 1916, we can gather that Trotter had achieved the almost impossible task of dispelling the scepticism about group psychology. Leonard obviously found the book convincing, and it is clear that it altered the direction of his thinking, for he began to see the crowd in terms of its non-rational or instinctive motivation. From her biography of Roger Fry we can see that Virginia Woolf was involved in discussions about Trotter's theory in the early twenties. But as her diaries reveal she was aware of his herd theory much earlier. She was at first sceptical about Trotter's analysis of the herd-like quality of human collective behaviour, but she began to see group behaviour from Trotter's point of view. It should be pointed out that she and other members of the Bloomsbury Group interpreted the herd theory in a much more pessimistic sense than Trotter intended. Writing in her Diary in November 1917 she recorded a relevant conversation with Roger Fry:

Old Roger takes a gloomy view, not of our life, but of the world's future; but I think I detected the influence of Trotter and the herd, and so I distrusted him. Still, stepping out into Charlotte Street, where the Bloomsbury murder took place a week or two ago, and seeing a crowd swarming in the road and hearing women abuse each other at the noise others come running with delight-all this sordidity made me think him rather likely to be right.

Years later we find Virginia Woolf still using images and ideas arising from these discussions of Trotter's work. We can see then, when we consider Virginia Woolf's close knowledge of Trotter and of the Unanimist Romans, that she could draw on a powerful body of thought which explored the nature of group consciousness. It is significant, though, that in terms of *feeling* these ideas pulled in opposite directions; the Unanimists being patently optimistic, whereas Trotter was understood by Virginia Woolf as conveying a pessimistic message (whether this was a true understanding is of course another matter). In the pull of these contraries Virginia Woolf could find a pattern, which was very familiar in her own emotional life, of elation and depression, of expansiveness and withdrawal.

This interest in-group consciousness remained with Virginia Woolf throughout her writing career. As Leonard Woolf says, the advent of the First World War greatly stimulated interest in explorations of the group idea, and Virginia Woolf's own observations of 'herd behaviour', as Trotter called it, were especially active in the War, and in the peace celebrations which followed. It is quite natural then, that with the threat of another war, in the late thirties, her thoughts should turn in that direction again, and in this perspective her final novel, *Between the Acts*, can be seen as the culmination of Virginia Woolf's exploration of group consciousness. The background which McLeaurin has been sketching in helps to explain why she should have been so fascinated by Freud's 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' whilst writing *Between the Acts*. The influence of Freud's essay on Virginia Woolf has been noted, but never in this larger context which McLeaurin has tried to establish. That context can help to explain Miss La Trobe's relief when a herd of cattle joins in her pageant, and why they are visited by Eros, but these local matters of explication are much less important for the purpose in this argument than the recovery of an important and powerful stream of speculation of which Virginia Woolf is a part. Virginia Woolf was certainly an idiosyncratic writer; but according to McLeaurin that her interest in the group mind is not one of her idiosyncrasies.

William James chose the stream metaphor from amongst a number of possibilities, as we can see in his general description of the stream of consciousness in the book called *Talks to Teachers*. There is a stream, says James, a succession of states, or waves, or fields or (whatever you please to call them), of knowledge, of feeling, of desire, deliberation etc., that constantly pass and repass, and that constitute our inner life. The existence of this stream is the primal fact, the nature and origin of it form the essential problem, of our science. James's favoured metaphor, the stream, has been taken up by subsequent generations. For the artist, and perhaps ultimately for the scientist as well,

the choice of metaphor is not such a matter of indifference as James seems to suggest. The incidence of wave and sea imagery in Virginia Woolf's work is an obvious feature which has been extensively documented. What does this imagery tell one when one looks at it, not as a kind of abstract pattern, or part of her personal 'handwriting', as it were, but to ask what its implications are for one's perception of consciousness as it is conveyed in Virginia Woolf's novels?

Certainly the ebb and flow of waves is a better image for the texture of Virginia Woolf's portrayal of moments of reverie than 'stream' would be, but much more important for my immediate argument is the continuity which is established in Virginia Woolf's sea imagery between the individual and the group. McLaurine is suggesting that the wave and sea metaphors are easier to elaborate in the direction of group consciousness than the image of a stream. What one can safely say is that Virginia Woolf certainly did use the sea metaphor to create continuity between individual and group consciousness, as we can see explicitly in her *Diary*. Writing in 1925 she commented, 'I sometimes think humanity is a vast wave, undulating: the same, I mean: the same emotions'. And of course *The Waves* is her most thoroughgoing attempt to establish continuity between the individual and group consciousness through the elaboration of the image of the title. As one critic has succinctly put it, the sea in Virginia Woolf is never completely estranging.

(VII) The Androgynous Mind and Artistic Creation

Vijay L Sharma in his *Virginia Woolf As a Literary Critic A Revaluation* examines in detail Virginia Woolf's concept of an androgynic mind and its implications for her literary and critical theories. He states that though a close friend of some of the major English figures of the twentieth century and a sensitive witness to radical alterations in some of the basic assumptions about the human mind, and art and the world, Virginia Woolf was never completely converted by any group or theory. But, if she managed to hold her own, it was because she was able to forge her own set of beliefs about the nature of literature, the function of criticism and of the creative processes. Central to her view of art, literature and criticism is her peculiar notion of the human mind and its role in perception and artistic creation. Indeed, her literary theory and critical criteria can be said to be derivatives of her theory of the creative mind.

Virginia Woolf's view of the world is anything but simplistic. She considers life to have a myriad forms and each form to have, potentially, multiple facets. If in her novels, she juxtaposes life and death, sanity and insanity, love and hatred, the comic and the tragic, and the physical and the psychological, it is because she believes that no one episode, or experience, no single tone or stance ever exhausts the whole range of human existence. Life has a rich density, layer upon layer and, as such, mere scratching at the surface cannot be treated as cross-sections of reality. Quite early in life she grew aware of the multiple aspects of reality. But if a work of art had to capture both the form and the essence of multifaceted reality, the artist's mind had to abandon its preoccupation with one plane of existence alone. Even before she attempted her first novel, in commenting on a fresco by Perugino she wrote, in 1908: "I attain a different kind of beauty, 'achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords, showing all the traces of the mind's passage through the world; achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments; to me this seems the natural process.'"

The continuous flux of life is made up of "shivering fragments." Virginia Woolf's effort in her writings is, consequently, to find the still point where the variegated flux comes to a temporary pause, where all the disparities merge into a complete whole without losing their identity. Several conclusions have been drawn about the quality of her values and vision from her practice of pulling in various contexts together. So far critics have tried to explain the presence of the contrary elements in Virginia Woolf's works in terms, either of her personality or her aesthetics but seldom in terms of her theory of the mind and its ideal relation to the world of experience. It is intelligent criticism that they have offered, for they have grasped the symptoms of Virginia Woolf's fictitious world fairly accurately. It is, however, not easy to see if they have diagnosed the cause of the pervasive ambivalence equally sagaciously. Indeed, none of these critics except, probably, Freedman, has tried to find a logical basis for the presence of these disparate elements. Nor have they tried to find a correlation between her concept of the percipient mind and the perceived world. Yet as one reads her critical essays and her diary closely, the conviction grows that the ambient quality of her universe is not the result of mere rhetoric on the part of the author; it is an inevitable posture of the mind so that she cannot cast it away even in her letters and her diary.

That is why she likes to flash and dash from side to side, goaded on by what she calls reality. And in such a state of mind

she feels: "If I never felt these extraordinary pervasive strains of unrest or happiness or rest or discomfort—I should float down into acquiescence." That she does not fall into acquiescence of the drab surface of things can be seen in any of the poetic passages that abound alike in her fiction and in her expository writings. The beauty of the world becomes double-edged to her. Speaking to the Arts Society at Newnham, she said, about her feelings of an autumn evening, that the beauty of the world which is so soon to perish "has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder." Virginia Woolf's characters, like their creator, are aware of what she regards as the perpetual interplay between thought and action, between the life of solitude and the life of society, "this astonishing precipice on one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other side of which it was contemplative and dark as night."

This awareness of the interplay between light and darkness sharpens her perceptions so that she feels enchanted by life like a "child with a globe"; yet there is death to reckon with, death with its "scrunching and scrambling." Often wondering, "why is life so tragic: so like a strip of pavement over an abyss," she recognises too that it is always "life that matters, nothing but life, the process of discovering the everlasting and perpetual process" that matters. No definitive statement can be made about life, which is a perpetual motion, except to assert that all arrangements and patterns are true but for a psychological moment. No one form or statement can exhaust the possibilities of life. So the relentless searcher in Virginia Woolf tries to lay hands on some discovery and say "this is it" This 'it' that she wants to catch eludes her because it exists, as she wrote in 1929, in "a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun." It keeps taking various shapes but "whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent." This protean phenomenon life, or reality, derives its changeful quality from permutations and combinations of the two dissimilar elements that compose it: the material and the spiritual. She calls them the "outer" and the "inner". This reality is made up of scraps of paper as well as of the light of the remote stars. It is curious that her notion of reality comes remarkably close to Lao Tzu's, who, like her, failing to find a more descriptive word, had called it "It". He also found it composed of contrary elements and dualism!

During the second and third decades of the century, interest in Chinese literature was fairly serious. Pound, attracted by Ernest Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, translated a group of Chinese poems as *Cathay* (1915). Bertrand Russell, known to the Bloomsbury group through their common friends G.E. Moore, Forster and Lady Ottoline Morrell, visited China in 1920 and published his account of it as *The Problem of China* (1922). Richards taught in China and, subsequently, published *Mencius and the Mind* (1932). Finally, Virginia Woolf's own nephew, Julian Bell, made a trip to China in 1935. While he was there, she was in constant correspondence with him. Virginia Woolf's metaphors for the mind are parallel to the Chinese concept of reality, popularly known as "Yin- Yang". It is almost a truism that she is more interested in the personality of her characters than in the events that shape them. For her, personality is not a function of matter—the latter by her called "truth." So she thinks of truth "as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow like intangibility." This dual awareness of the solid aspect of a thing and the elusive, as between the truth about a person's body and his personality, lies at the basis of all her thinking. Every situation, she feels, can be said to have two sides:

One full in the light so that it can be described as accurately and examined as minutely as possible; the other half in shadow so that it can be described only in a moment of faith and vision by the use of metaphor.

The side facing light can be analysed; for it is available to reason and perception; the dark side eludes grasp because it can only be guessed at and figured out by imagination. It is worth noting here that it is this consciousness in her of the dualism of matter and spirit that separates her from, and explains her critical reaction to, naturalists like Bennett. As the use of symbols is a proof of the symbolists' apathy to naturalism so is the presence of lyrical elements in Virginia Woolf's fiction of her reaction to naturalistic philosophy. She criticizes Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy because they concern themselves only with one component of life—its surface aspects. They are materialists in as much as they neglect the inner, the spiritual content of the physical situations they describe. Unable to pierce the veil of the appearance of Mrs Brown, they fail to capture the secret of her life. The writer's business, for Virginia Woolf, is to absorb impressions, trivial as well as fantastic, to divine the moods, evanescent as well as habitual, to read from manner the essence of the person, and then to synthesize this complexity to conjure up the full flavour of an existence. If a writer would enter the 'heart of an event, or assimilate the full value of an experience, he must respond to it with the

whole of his mind. But to get a complete hold of the human mind is not an ordinary feat; for it is an “odd thing, so capricious, faithless, infinitely shying ail shadows. Besides being capricious, the mind is “a very mysterious organ, about which nothing whatever is known though we depend upon it so completely.” Yet even when conceding the mind a mystery of its own, Virginia Woolf, reasoning from its activities, goes on to infer that it is a composite of the “dark side that comes uppermost in solitude,” and “the light side that shows in company.” It is this belief in the dual aspects of the mind, each geared to a peculiar kind of activity, that lies at the heart of her theory of the “androgynous” nature of the artist’s mind.

A truly creative mind, Virginia Woolf believes, is possessed of the characteristics of both the sexes. (The term “androgyny” is a derivation of two Greek words *andro* and *gyn* meaning male and female respectively). The concept collates, as Carolyn Heilbrun argues in her study, “a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned.”

The artist’s mind, for Virginia Woolf, is made up of the male as well as the female qualities. Not that there are two lobes to the mind; but that it has two dominant faculties—each capable of a particular kind of function: man predominating over woman in man’s brain and woman predominating over man in woman’s brain. “The normal and comfortable state of being,” she believes “is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating.” By maleness of the mind Virginia Woolf means that faculty which deals with hard, physical facts, with the life of newspapers and coffee stands; by femaleness of the mind she means the human faculty that burrows deep for spiritual significance of physical acts and events. The male part of the mind, as a conscious entity, is active at the rational level; the female part, as its unconscious ally, passively awaits to make allies but now and then. So, if only one faculty is operational what we get is a lopsided view of reality. In an ideal state both the sides fuse together. This is the state of mind for which, according to Virginia Woolf, every writer should ideally aspire. She thinks that Coleridge, in calling a great mind androgynous, meant that it combined both the feminine and the masculine sides of the mind: “If one is a man,” she writes, “still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her.”

Both these elements combine in the androgynous mind, which is “resonant and porous”; it “transmits emotion without impediment; it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided.” But, generally, authors work at partial facts with partial minds and so, like Galsworthy and Kipling, they fail to have the spark of the woman in them. They enforce male values and describe the world of men; they deal in what Forster would call “the life of telegrams and anger.” A woman-writer may err, similarly, by trading exclusively in misty and rosy sentiments. It is worth noticing here that Virginia Woolf would not allow even her feminist predilections to interfere with her aesthetics. She does not attach any undue importance to the female side of the mind; for the masculine and the feminine part of the mind have to collaborate “before the art of creation can be accomplished.” In their union, the mind is fully fertilized. But when a writer works with only one half of the mind, as the Edwardians did, the work fails to acquire the “secret of perpetual life.” Virginia Woolf considers Shakespeare’s mind androgynous, the composite mind that enabled him to see life whole. She recommends, therefore, that “some marriage of the opposites had to be consummated for healthy art is the offspring of such a marriage. If the mind is not androgynous like Shakespeare’s, or Coleridge’s, the work produced would remain but a pale shadow of the palpating reality. The vision would alter and fail to become whole and entire if the writer’s mind fails to reach that concentrated state where the opposites coalesce. It cannot give the impression of either the wholeness or richness of life’s experience both of which Virginia Woolf demands in a good work of art.

Whether it is between the real and the imaginary, the permanent and the transitory, the material and the spiritual, the interplay between contrary elements—corresponding to the dual aspects of the mind—is eternal. The male always faces light and the surface and the female ever turned towards the dark and the deep. Virginia Woolf’s aesthetic theory rests on the belief that these opposites can be reconciled at some level. She wants the artist, like Lily Briscoe in *To the Light House* to be on a level with the ordinary experience “and yet at the same time, feel It’s a miracle, it’s an ecstasy.” In the confusion of the inner chaos, our lives are spent in trying to give “this globe a shape, round, whole and entire.” Out of this chaos, as Virginia Woolf explains in *Jacob’s Room*, the mind discovers a shape “whether by argument or not, the spiritual shape, hard yet ephemeral, as of glass compared with the dark stone of the Chapel.” The androgynous mind possesses the range and resilience to perceive with finesse and equanimity all the components of a fact or a situation. It has, too, the synthetic power to organize the obviously irreconcilable elements into a single perspective. Its activity, balanced and comprehensive, is ideally suited to literary creativity.

Since the source of art lies in the creative mind, Virginia Woolf is fascinated by the workings of this mind. As early as 1917, she was referring to the “uncharted territories of the mind.” This is the region where dwell dreams and visions that cannot be logically accounted for. In another review, written in 1920, Virginia Woolf speaks of the two sides of the mind as the scientific and the artistic. Is the novelist, she believes, has to concern himself primarily with the artistic, for the scientific engages itself merely in noting and scanning what is out there. The artistic sensibility, on the other hand, carries out the functions of the female that of brooding over what the scientific faculty has brought in ‘as grist to its mill.’ Of the two polarities of the mind, it is the uncharted territory, the artistic side, that interests her more. The creative process is carried on in the labyrinthine depths, in, what she metaphorically calls the room, the crucible-the “under mind.” The upper mind performs the primary function of absorbing the impressions “in the order in which they fall. . . however disconnected and incoherent in appearance.” The mind receives “a myriad impressions-trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel.” These impressions come from all sides like ‘an ‘ incessant shower of innumerable atoms,’ wherein, as yet, no design is ‘discernible. The observing mind is too busy noting the details to find their “inscape.” At this stage the writer’s attention is claimed as much by the sawdust-trampled street as by a gesture or a word. He is like a fish in mid-ocean-which cannot “cease to let the water rush through his gills.” It sweeps in its glance from Mrs. Brown’s dress, through the railway carriage to the view outside. The upper mind looks at the symmetrical straight corridors or rows of doors and windows, or avenues of houses. Gliding over surfaces, it basks in the warmth of colour and beauty, the brilliant omnibuses, the yellow flanks and purple steaks in the butcher’s shop or the red and blue blobs of flowers blazing in the florist’s window. The eye that perceives this “is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure.” It does not slip into depths nor does it compose the “trophies in such a way as to bring out the more obscure angles and relationships.” The upper mind is but another name for the masculine, the scientific or the rational part of the mind.

(VIII) Form and Pattern in *Mrs Dalloway*

Virginia Woolf, in her essay on Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown in 1924, affirmed that the Edwardian novelist had “made tools and established conventions which do their business: and that business our business. For us those conventions are ruined and those tools death.” Virginia Woolf thus has radical views on form and pattern of a novel. According to her, in a novel there should be “no plot, no comedy, no tragedy no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style”. For the novelist’s business is to portray life. And life is not a series of “gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end”. Life is an endless series of impressions we receive on our mind. But if the novelist presents those impressions exactly as he receives them, the result will be chaotic, however true it may be to life. A welter of disconnected impressions will not be art, and fiction is a form of art. Life in itself may be formless, but when the artist portrays it, he gives it a form and shape. Art follows a process of selection and combination, and form emerges out of this selection and combination. Life provides raw material to the novelist, who re-arranges it according to his own sense of beauty and concept of life. According to Joyce Cary, a celebrated modern novelist, if a novelist wishes to convey to his readers his sense of life, he “has to organize a scheme of things to make us feel life as he wishes us to feel it”. Thus, in his opinion “books like *Ulysses* or *Finnegan’s wake* have a perfect form and are as closely organised as a Beethoven symphony. *Ulysses* is a novel which portrays stream of consciousness, that is disconnected ideas as they arise and subside at random in our “passive mind”. Now, the picture of such a “Stream of consciousness” with its casual and random ideas and stray reactions to external stimuli ought to be chaotic, but it is not so in art. For, as Joyce Cary says, “*Ulysses* has a perfect form, and is as closely organised as a Beethoven Symphony”. Again *Finnegan’s wake* has “a perfect form” as Cary says. Art can never be formless and chaotic, for the, moment it becomes so it ceases to be art. There is a school of novelists who believe that the novel should be just a “raw slice of life”, without being reorganised and reshaped. But even in the novels of these writers we discover highly original forms.

It has been argued that in spite of her theory that the novel should present life as a “luminous halo” and not “a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged”, Virginia Woolf’s novels are not chaotic. For, as Lord David Cecil points out, she has an innate aesthetic sense because of which she picks out for emphasis only those features of her subject which strike her as peculiarly significant. Hence the chaos in her novels is reduced to a pattern. Her characters are

absorbed in thought. But their thoughts are not nebulous and chaotic. Their mind does not move at random from idea to idea or from present to past and vice versa. *Mrs. Dalloway*, for instance, is frequently reminded of her life at Bourton, particularly of her relation with Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway and Selly Seton. Through her memory the picture of her past life at Bourton is brought to our view. But it is not a blurred and chaotic picture, but one in which events and characters are well arranged and clearly outlined. In fact, her memory gives us a systematic and interesting story of her past life in which events are well-connected and characters are systematically analysed. There is nothing vague or incoherent about the *story*, which contains not only the narration of events, but also character analysis. Likewise, the thoughts of Peter Walsh are systematic and well-arranged. He, too, thinks of Bourton and his love for Clarissa and of his subsequent love affairs in India. All the time there is present in his mind the idea that this has made a mess of his life, that his talent and powers have all gone waste. There is a method even in the madness of Septimus Warren Smith. He receives messages from the dead that there is a fundamental unity in the apparent diversity, that trees have the same life as men, and therefore should not be cut. This is his supreme realisation of truth, which he insists on telling the Prime Minister and the entire cabinet. He is conscious of supreme beauty in the universe compared to which our life is nauseatingly ugly. Hence his conclusion is that we all should kill ourselves. He is, of course, mad or very near to madness, and his ideas and conclusions are based on the baseless visions that float before his eyes and the strange sounds he hears. But the point is that his thinking is not absolutely incoherent and meaningless. Some meaning can be assigned to it and some logic seen in it. Hence, the thoughts of the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* form a pattern, a design. And it is this basic pattern which contributes a good deal to the form of the novel.

Unity and coherence, system and organization are essential characteristics of art. The life presented in *Mrs. Dalloway* is not diffuse and formless like a "luminous halo," but has design and pattern. The book has the same order or system, the same unity, that a picture or a symphony has. The subject of the novel is something like this: what life seems like on a fine day in London, or broadly speaking, the sensation of being alive. In order to present her subject artistically Virginia Woolf proceeds, from a centre, and she has chosen for that a cultivated middle aged woman of fashion planning to give a party. Clarissa Dalloway belongs to the rich, upper class inhabiting the West End of London. Her husband is a member of Parliament and there is a possibility of his entering the cabinet. He is a successful diplomat, and is already a member on several important committees. He has a large income, and, his family lives very comfortably in a beautiful house. In the novel we are given glimpses of the inside of the Dalloway house decorated with silk, satin and silver.

But the Dalloways do not constitute the complete picture of life presented in the novel. The author realises how narrow a range of experience is implied in Clarissa Dalloway, her family and friends. Hence she needs the Septimus Smiths to bring in the tragic note. The Dalloways and the Septimus Smiths are in no way connected with each other. Their conditions, too, are entirely different. The Dalloways are rich, while the Septimus Smiths are poor. The former lead a happy and carefree life, while the latter are sad victims of war. Septimus Warren Smith is an extreme case of neurosis as a result of repeated shocks received from shell bursts. He fought bravely in the War and achieved distinctions, but by the time it ends his nerves are completely shattered. He begins to imagine that the dead appeared before him to give him secret messages. Mrs Warren Smith is much worried on her husband's account, and takes him to Sir William Bradshaw-the specialist in neurotic diseases, for consultation and treatment. So, there is nothing in common between the Dalloways and Septimus Smith. And yet they fit in admirably in the picture of life, which the novel offers to our view. In fact the two pictures of life which appear so different from each other are complementary. The two combined give us a full view of life. For life is composed of happiness and misery, darkness and shadow, tragedy and comedy. The one detached from the other will present only a half truth, and give an incomplete view of life. The Septimus Warren Smiths are an extension of misery in the bright, gay and beautiful West End of London where affluent and happy persons like the Dalloways live. So, in the picture of life which Virginia Woolf presents in *Mrs. Dalloway* happiness and misery, darkness and shadow, tragedy and comedy, all co-exist. But in order to understand this fact, fully, it is essential to regard the novel not as a story, but as a picture composed of light and shadow or a symphony composed of various tunes. 'The novel has not the design of a story, the structure of a conventional plot. But it has the pattern of a picture and the orderliness of a symphony. It has a design and a pattern, though its form and pattern are different from those of the conventional novel.'

There are a number of characters in the novel who like the Warren Smiths are in no way connected with the principal persons on whom our attention is mostly focussed. But they are essentially needed to complete the picture of life which the novel offers to our view. For, as J.W. Beach points out, "Virginia Woolf needs something like the blandering Rocks episode of *Ulysses*' to fill the background of her stage with supernumerary figures, quite unconnected with her foreground characters, but still necessary to suggest that lot many undistinguished people, each with his own trouble, faiths, pre-occupations, make up the mass of British humanity. And so, like Joyce, she brings a special section-set off as it is, with breaks in the text-starting with the royal 'cavalcade', carried over into the ingenious intervention of the airplane, and passing on smoothly from one person to another, as in an old-fashioned square dance. Most of these characters never show their faces again. But they have served their purpose of giving to this slice of life breadth-wise extension in the present moment."

The "breadth wise extension in the present moment" is an important feature of *Mrs. Dalloway*. For the novel presents a slice of life depth wise and breadth wise. It gives a latitudinal and not longitudinal view of life. In the conventional novel the story moves onwards in time. It records the progress of events from day to day, week to week, month to month and year to year. In a novel like *David Copperfield* the narrative unfolds events which occur in succession for about thirty years. So in the conventional novel time and the events occurring in it are gradually unfolded until the story reaches its end. Sometimes the story begins to move backward in time. But the total impression it gives is that of the progress of events in a certain period of time. *Mrs Dalloway*, on the other hand, presents life only during a few hours on a warm June day in London. At about 10 in the morning *Mrs. Dalloway* starts from her house to purchase flowers for her party, and the novel ends with a picture of her party which is over before mid-night. There is hardly any progress of events in the real sense. Practically speaking nothing happens in the novel except the suicide of Septimus Warren Smith and the gathering of Clarissa's friends at her party. But as time passes a succession of pictures are brought before our eyes. The streets of West End, London, the Regent's Park, the Harley Street, the inside of Clarissa's house, the residential quarters of the Warren Smiths and so on.

Several pictures, purposes and movements co-exist in time. While Clarissa is purchasing flowers for her party, the Septimus Smiths are proceeding toward the Regents' Park, an aeroplane droning overhead is making words with smoke and the royal car is moving in the direction of the Buckingham Palace. When Peter Walsh visits Clarissa, the Warren Smiths rest in the Regents' Park, and when he goes to his lawyer they go to Sir William Bradshaw. When the Warren Smiths return from Bradshaw's Clinic, Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread arrive at the residence of Lady Brutton. The pictures co-existing in time are brought before our eyes in succession. For instance, the picture of Mr. Dalloway in the beautiful West End Street is succeeded by that of the Warren Smiths moving towards Regents Park. Both, however, occur at the same time. It is in this way that *Mrs. Dalloway* gives us the impression of life and its varied activities occurring simultaneously.

The chimes and strokes of the Big Ben announce the passage of time. It stands as symbol of unity suggesting the simultaneous occurrence of several things and giving a breadth-wise view of life. When the clock strikes eleven a crowd collects at the portals of Buckingham Palace, an aeroplane appears in the sky, Mrs. Dalloway comes out of the florist's shop and the Warren Smiths move towards the Regent's Park. At 11:30 Peter Walsh leaves Clarissa's house and the Warren Smiths arrive at the Regent's Park. At 12 noon Peter Walsh goes to his solicitors and the Warren Smiths to Dr. Bradshaw. As the clock strikes the passage of time new pictures appear before our eyes. At 11 AM it is the picture of Mrs. Dalloway near the Florist's shop; at 12 noon there appears a different picture, that of a person sitting in the Regent's Park, and at 2 PM. a third picture that of a lunch in progress at Lady Brutton's house succeeds the first two. The background, too, affords an artistic unity to the novel. The picture of life is presented against the background of West End London with its streets and shops, park and palace, and beautiful houses. It is in this part of London that characters move about to execute their several ends; pictures of happiness and misery are offered to our view; the tragic incident of the suicide of Septimus Warren Smith occurs; and Clarissa gives a gay party to her friends. So even the apparently disconnected incidents, scenes and situations appear to be united when viewed against the background. For all belong to the same place and the same duration of time.

(IX) Characterisation in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Character portrayal is the most important feature of a novel. In her article "Character in Fiction", better known under the title "Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown" Virginia Woolf states "that all novels deal with character, and that it is to express character not to preach doctrine, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved." Winfred Holtby, who usually offers interesting interpretations of the novel asserts that Mrs. Woolf holds that in novel writing "Character Creation is the all important quality." Yet critics have unanimously reproached Virginia Woolf with a certain inability to create characters. None of her heroes or heroines, not even Clarissa Dalloway or Mrs. Ramsay, impress the reader's imagination with that precision, richness and vitality which ensure an independent and convincing existence for characters in fiction. E.M. Forster writes of Virginia Woolf, "She could seldom so portay a character that it was remembered afterwards on its own account, as Emma is remembered, for instance, Dorothea, Casauban, or Sophia and Constance."

It can be safely argued that a novelist's real merit is to be judged from his character creation. The greater the novelist the more original will be his characters. Perhaps the most original character creation in fiction is Don Quixote by the Spanish novelist, Cervantes. But the great English novelists, too, have created highly original characters. Mrs. Collins, Mr. Micawber, Becky Sharp all are original character creations. Perhaps the characters of Dickens are superb in this respect. Dickens looks at life from an entirely original point of view. Hence he is able to create highly interesting and original characters. They are not always life-like, but they are replete with vitality, Perhaps it is not essential for a novelist to produce exact copies of men and women in real life. He has the liberty to create persons who, though basically resembling ourselves, are in certain respects different from us. It is only the lesser novelists who give us an exact copy of life. Great novelists are artists gifted with powerful imagination, and as such, they recreate life rather than copy it. But whether life-like or not the characters of a great novelist deeply absorb our interest, so that it is impossible to forget them.

There are several methods of character portrayal. The commonest is the author's own description of a character. Since he has created a character, he is expected to know everything about him. So, he describes to us his external appearance and his psychology. Dickens for instance, is such a novelist. Hardy on the other hand, mostly neglects external appearance because he is interested in the inner man. The descriptive method of character portrayal is very common. But equally common is another method known as the "dramatic" method of characterization. The novelist employing this method does not describe his characters, nor does he attempt an analysis of their nature. He lets them reveal themselves through their speech and action.

From the very beginning Virginia Woolf was conscious of the fact that the traditional method of characterisation could not portray her own vision of human beings. She was impelled by her own vision of life to emphasize the fluidity of human personality rather than its fixity. She perceived the variety of impressions made by one person upon the people around him and his ever changing consciousness of the surrounding world. Consequently in stead of defining an identity or epitomizing it in a particular intellect, she invites us to discuss it by living with whom they come into contact.

Virginia Woolf's method of character presentation is dramatic, though it is different from the method of novelists like Jane Austen and Conrad. She presents a character through the stream of consciousness of other characters. In Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Marlowe describes the hero and analyses his nature. But the characters of Virginia Woolf, particularly in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Jacob s Room* and *To the Lighthouse*, do not describe and analyse. As Lord David Cecil aptly points out, they are solitary, self-absorbed persons. Even in company they seem to be absorbed in private unspoken thoughts. They are not talking and acting but thinking beings. So they do not talk about one another, nor do they analyse one another's nature in the manner in which Marlowe analyses the nature of Lord Jim. But they think a good deal about one another, and as one character thinks about another his nature is revealed to us, In this way we come to know a good deal about a character even before he actually appears on the scene. Virginia Woolf employs a new method of character presentation that of presenting one character through the thoughts of another. The mind of one character becomes a sort of mirror in which another character is reflected and our knowledge of a character is limited to his reflection in another character's consciousness.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, prior to a character's actual appearance before us we hear a lot about him from the thoughts of other characters. In the opening scene of the novel Mrs. Dalloway while going to the florist's shop, is thinking about Peter Walsh, who actually appears before us a few hours after, "How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning, like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and ye (for a girl of eighteen as she then was solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen, looking until Peter Walsh said 'Musing among the vegetables?' - was that it 'prefer men to cauliflowers' - was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out of the terrace-Peter Walsh.) He would be back from India one of these days. June or July, She forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull. It was his sayings one remembered; his eyes; his pocket knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, when millions of things have utterly vanished-how strange it was! a few sayings like this about cabbages."

Clarissa Dalloway continues to think about Peter Walsh, and as she does so we know more and more about him, though we have not yet actually met him.

For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter: she never wrote a letter and his were dry sticks; but suddenly it would come over her, if he were with me now what would he say? Some days, some sights bringing him back, to her calmly, without the old bitterness; which perhaps was the reward of having cared for the people. But Peter-however beautiful the day might be, and the trees and the grass, and the little girl in pink-Peter never saw a thing of all that. He would put on his spectacles, if she told him to; he would look. It was the state of the world that interested him: Wagner is music. Pope's poetry, people's character eternally, and the defects of her own soul. How he scolded her! How they argued! She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of a perfect hostess he said. So she would still find herself arguing in St. James' Park. still making out that she had been right-and she had too-not to marry him. For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in and day out in the same house, which Richard gave her, and she him (Where was he this morning, for instance? Some committee, she never asked what). But with Peter everything had to be shared, everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced; though she had borne about her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish; and then the horror of the moment when someone told her at a concert that he had married a woman he met on the boat going to India! Never should she forget all that. Cold, heartless, a prude he called her. Never could he understand how she cared.

Thus Peter Walsh exists in the thoughts of Clarissa Dalloway, and from what she thinks we learn several things about Peter's nature and character. Unlike Clarissa he was more interested in man than nature. He never cared to notice beauty around him even on an exceptionally beautiful day. It was the state of the world that interested him. He liked Wagner's music and Pope's poetry, and was in the habit of discussing people's character and pointing out to Clarissa her several defects. He thought that she was a snob. Clarissa did not marry him, for he was not the sort of man to allow her "a little licence, a little independence". Richard, her husband, gave her that independence. Clarissa was pained to learn that he had married a woman he met on the boat sailing for India. He could not execute the plan he made for his life, and, as such, his whole life was a failure. Lastly Clarissa is reminded of a peculiar habit of Peter Walsh that of playing with a pocket knife while talking to others.

All these things about Peter Walsh we learn from the thoughts of Clarissa. Virginia Woolf does not describe his character. Nor does she let him reveal himself through speech and action; for, there are only bits of dialogue and practically no action in *Mrs. Dalloway*. She reveals Peter's character through Clarissa's stream of consciousness.

Virginia Woolf employs the same technique in presenting the character of Sally Selton, a friend of Clarissa. It is only at Clarissa's party that Sally makes her first appearance. We meet her slightly before the novel ends, but we already know a good deal about her character from the streams of consciousness of Clarissa and Peter Walsh. When Sally actually appears before us at Clarissa's party she is hardly more than a shadowy character. All that she says at the

party is that she is the mother of five “enormous boys”. This information does not reveal her character in any way. There are lots of mothers who have five “enormous boys”. But Sally is a highly complex character, and it is only in the thoughts of Clarissa and Peter Walsh that her many sided nature is revealed.

There are two characters in the novel whose past life is not revealed through the stream of consciousness of other characters. They are Clarissa and Septimus Warren Smith. The characters of Peter Walsh and Sally Seton are revealed to us before they make their appearance in the novel. But this process is reversed in the case of Clarissa and Septimus Warren Smith. Their appearance in the novel is not “preceded by information about their character through the consciousness of other characters. Virginia Woolf first puts them on the stage, and they are made to think, speak and act for some time. After that, their past life is brought before us through the consciousness of other characters. When the novel begins, Clarissa is shown going to the florist’s shop to purchase flowers for her party. That work done she returns home and receives Peter Walsh in her drawing room. After that Clarissa’s past life is revived in the thoughts of Peter Walsh. He is reminded of the days when Clarissa was a young woman living at Bourton. He wanted to marry her, but Clarissa chose to marry Richard Dalloway, and in disappointment he went to India. It is in this way that we are informed of Clarissa’s past life. Likewise the past life of Septimus Warren Smith is revealed through the thoughts of his wife Lucrezia. When we meet him in the novel he is on the verge of madness. He hears voices coming from the dead, and sees his dead friend. Evans approaches him to reveal the greatest secret of life. But we learn from the thoughts of his wife that he fought bravely in the war and won honour and promotion. Before the war ended, his friend Evans, a fellow officer, died, and that perhaps, was the principal cause of his mental derangement, when alone, he was seized with an indescribable fear. He married an Italian girl, Lucrezia, thinking that marriage would give him happiness and remove his baseless fears. But marriage fails to achieve the desired end and his condition grew from bad to worse. All these things about the past life of Warren Smith we learn from his wife’s stream of consciousness.

Virginia Woolf’s characters grow and change in her novels, at least her principal characters. They are not the same at the end of the novel as they are at its beginning. They are, therefore, round and not flat characters. For flat characters remain uniformly the same while round characters grow, develop and change. The character which changes most in *Mrs. Dalloway* is Sally Seton. In her youth she was a radical idealist and ridiculed conservatism wherever she found it. She loved Plato and Shelley, and disliked convention, rules and authority. She smoked cigars and once ran down the passage with her bath sponge without a strip of cloth on her body. But years after when we meet Sally at Clarissa’s party she is altogether a different woman. She is now a middle aged woman, the wife of a bald headed millionaire, and the mother of five sons. There is no sign about her now of her former idealism. She has accepted the conventions of the class to which she now belongs and like other women of her class loves wealth and worldly success.

The other characters, who undergo tremendous transformation are Peter Walsh and Clarissa. When young, Peter Walsh had hope of achieving something in life, and it was with that hope in his heart that he went to India. But years after he returns to England a disappointed man with a painful consciousness that his entire life has been a failure. He has lost his youthful hope and enthusiasm, has grown weak-willed, and does not know how to spend the rest of his life. He counts on the help of his friends.

A change has come over Clarissa also. In her early youth she had an intellectual inclination. She read books and discussed poetry and politics with Peter Walsh and others. But now she hardly reads a book except a few memoirs. She likes social gatherings and loves hosting, giving and attending parties. She seems to have lost her former interest in poetry and politics. Miss Kilman, the woman employed by her husband to teach her daughter, is a fine scholar of history; but it never occurs to Clarissa to discuss history with her. In fact, she is not on good terms with her.

Let us briefly enumerate the main features of Virginia Woolf’s technique of characterization, with reference to *Mrs. Dalloway*:

1. Her range of characterization is narrow and limited. In *Mrs Dalloway* as in other novels she portrays the life of the rich, cultured upper middle class and the aristocracy, the people who inhabit the West End part of London. The Septimus Smiths do not belong to this class. But they are not poor in the literal sense of the word. They can afford to consult an expensive doctor like Sir William Bradshaw. In fact, poverty and ugliness both are eliminated from the world of Virginia Woolf. She presents life which is free from want and care and in a surrounding which is beautiful.

2. Against a background of mass humanity, she presents a few dominant characters and concentrates on them. Her picture of life is as crowded as the streets of London. A crowd assembles around the royal car so that traffic is blocked. Another crowd collects before the gates of Buckingham Palace. In Regent's Park a large number of persons bask in the sun. Buses, trams and taxies full of passengers are constantly running up and down the streets of London. When an aeroplane drones in the sky hundreds of heads are turned up towards it. But the crowded parks and pavements and streets of London form only the background of her picture of life. Against that background she presents only a few characters, for instance Clarissa, Peter Walsh, Sally Seton and the Septimus Smiths in *Mrs. Dalloway*. It is these characters alone who are painted full length in the novel, and it is in them that our interest is centralized.
3. Virginia Woolf presents her characters in the moment of contemplation, not action. As pointed out, they are self-absorbed persons. Even in company they seem to be absorbed in private thoughts of their own. Peter and Clarissa meet after years of separation. When long separated lovers meet, it is natural for them to display some emotion. But no such thing happens at the meeting of Clarissa and Peter Walsh who sheds tears, because his life has been a failure and not because he meets after a long time the woman he once loved. There is some conversation between the two. But after a brief question and answer session each lapses into his or her own private thoughts. "And how are you?" said Peter Walsh, positively trembling, taking both her hands, kissing both her hands. She's grown older, he thought, sitting down. "I shan't tell her anything about it." he thought, for she has grown older. "She's looking at me.," he thought, a sudden embarrassment coming over him though he had kissed her hands. Putting his hand into his pocket, he took out a large pocket-knife and half opened the blade. "Exactly the same, thought Clarissa; the same queer look; the same check suit: a little out of the straight his face is, a little thinner, dryer, perhaps, but he looks awfully well, and just the same." Thus at the meeting of Clarissa and Peter Walsh there is more of contemplation than conversation.

It has already been pointed out that Virginia Woolf's characters change with the passage of time. They not only change themselves, but are conscious of change in others. When Peter Walsh meets Sally Seton at Clarissa's party he thinks that she has changed considerably, "Lord, lord, what a change had come over her! The softness of her hand, its egotism too." And Sally thought that "he was rather shrivelled-looking but kinder."

5. Virginia Woolf is not concerned with the moral quality of her characters. They are not labelled as good and bad in her novels. There are no saints or sinners in her world, only men and women who stand in certain relationships to one another. Neither the conventional villain nor the good man more sinned against than sinning, has any place in her world. Still there are a few characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* of whom some sort of moral judgement is passed. They are Hugh Whitbread, Sir William Bradshaw and Doris Kilman.

Hugh Whitbread is presented as glutton and prig. At Clarissa's party he awaits an opportunity of bowing to the Prime Minister. When Sally asks Peter Walsh about Hugh's, occupation, the latter replies. "He blacked the king's boots or counted bottles at Windsor". Miss Brush Lady Brutton's hand-maid, regards him an underbred fellow". At that lady's lunch party, he still continues to eat while the rest have finished, He has, "The most extraordinary, the most natural, the most sublime respect for the British aristocracy". Sally regards him as a man who has read nothing and thought nothing, one who represents "all that is most detestable in British middle class life". And yet the man is not altogether bad. He is kind and helpful.

Sir William Bradshaw is the leading physician of London and a specialist in neurotic disease. "He had . worked very hard; he had won his position by sheer ability (being the son of a shopkeeper); loved his profession; made a fine figurehead at ceremonies and spoke well". But there is something indescribably unpleasant about him on account of which his patients fail to like him Rezia Warren Smith cried, walking down Harley street, "that she did not like that man." And Clarissa, too, is not really pleased to see him at her party: And Sir William, who looked very distinguished with his grey hair and blue eyes, said yes; they had not been able to resist the temptation. He was talking to Richard about that Bill probably, which they wanted, to get through the Commons. Why did the sight of "him, talking to Richard, curl her up?"

Doris Kilman is the tutoress of Clarissa's daughter 'Elizabeth. She -is poor, but. is an able teacher and has profound knowledge of modern history. Still Clarissa does not like her, partly because of her religiosity, and partly because of her absolute sway over her daughter. It is a sort of possessiveness, and Clarissa hates possessiveness. She did not marry Peter Walsh, for the thought that he would possess her absolutely and would not allow her independence.

I close this discussion with a quotation from Jean Guignet's famous article "Character and Human Relationships", "The primary quality of all these characters, the one which ensures for them a convincing presence in the novels .and the power of surviving in our memories, is their very limitedness. They have a history, professions, a passion or a mania, a gesture, an attitude a turn of phrase that defines them; and their fidelity to themselves is unflinching: thus they are, and thus they remain. In fact these figures have no reality, no existence of their own; they make a momentary appearance in the field of vision of the chief protagonists, and it is the two dimensional image which they leave as they pass, in the latter's accumulated experience, that the novelist reproduces. Enclosed within their security, their certitude, they are immune to questioning from without or within. They are clockwork figures, wound up once and for all, functioning in season and out of season with equal blindness and self-confidence. They are never taken by surprise and can never surprise anyone else. They have the solidity and permanence of material objects. It is owing to this, no doubt, that they leave a vivid and enduring impression in the reader's mind."

(X) The Impact of War on Human Sensibility

World War I was not a mere political explosion of unprecedented magnitude. It also represented a violent eruption of the deep-seated social, economic, intellectual and spiritual forces that had for long been seething beneath the placid veneer of the pre-war society. Man's view of reality had changed so radically as to become wholly incompatible with the existing state of things. The war itself, with its horror and monstrosity, came as a surprise and shock to many. Yet it was not so much the spectacle of death and destruction that caused the shock. The more regrettable phenomenon was a total disintegration of the values of life men had cherished and held dear for centuries.

As an emotional experience the war of 1914-1918 seems to have penetrated deeper into the human consciousness than any other of the later ones. For various reasons the First World War produced literature almost unmatched in quality and quantity. The authors of the period sought indefatigably to uncover the reasons for the world-shaking event. Parallel to this, there was also a sustained effort towards heart-searching. The shambles to which the war-ravaged world was reduced, had their replica in the cracks in human personality. Crisis of life was just another name for the painful crisis in man's psyche. A whole generation of anguished souls looked back at the past, just as they looked into themselves. They sought through honest analysis to expose the laws that had proved responsible for the collapse of a whole civilization. The repeated query was: what had gone wrong with the society and the human values of the pre-War world, because of which the war had come and destroyed everything root and branch? Could they, they further asked, isolate and identify the root causes of the malaise and arraign those responsible for not setting things right before the volcanic war-heat had erupted in a destructive fury? Could it be possible for man to feel sure of his ground in a world in which nothing appeared to be stable enough to sustain his emotional kinship with the rest of his fellow beings? These were some of the questions which vexed the minds of those who survived the slaughter and atrocities of the war. A new literature thus grew up; full of anguish and pain, characterised by the spirit of intense self-examination and daring social criticism.

The two World Wars proved a tremendous impact on Virginia Woolf. With her sensitive awareness of the horrors and devastation of these global conflicts she could not certainly have squeezed life into the convention of comedy without an outrageous falsification of the contemporary social reality. Jane Austen and Scott had managed to do so earlier because the Napoleonic Wars did not affect them and their country directly. Their vision of life remained undisturbed by the events in France. Writing about them in her essay "The Leaning Tower," Virginia Woolf says, "Scott never saw the sailors drowning at Trafalgar, Jane Austen never heard the cannon roar at Waterloo. Neither of them heard Napoleon's voice as we hear Hitler's voice as we sit at home in the evening."

Virginia Woolf's novels are a mirror of the twentieth century sensibility. She saw life in the raw. She had an acute awareness of the indescribable horror and suffering of war. Man, it appeared, had achieved a remarkable degree of

efficiency in genocide and devastation. The novels written during the period between the two wars have a clear note of anxiety and crisis even though superficially they might look as comedies of manners.

Jacob's Room, Virginia Woolf's first novel of idea, was written against the distressing background of the First World War. She was painfully conscious of the trail of brutality of horror left by the war. With her extremely sensitive nature, she could not keep aloof from the current events. She was one of those writers whose view of life was conditioned by the forces of their age. Looking around her she saw writers like Leonard Woolf in *After the Deluge* and G. L. Dickinson in *The European Anarchy* reacting sharply against the War and trying to pinpoint its causes and effects. Virginia Woolf also was concerned seriously with the horrors of war. This inevitably gave a tragic bent to her vision of life. In *Jacob's Room*, Jacob is a movingly tragic character because his death in the war is completely inexplicable. And he is absolutely unlike Rachel in *The Voyage Out*, who before her sudden death has had a glimpse of the beauty and happiness of life. Mrs. Woolf's treatment of Jacob's character shows how her mind was unhinged by the brutal and inhuman killings of the war. Her sense of horror finds poignant expression even in her short story "A Society" where one of the characters on hearing the cries of war is seized with nightmarish fear of this man-made calamity. Her Diary also bears testimony to the tragic impact the war had on her sensibility. She writes on October 25, 1920: "Why is life so tragic; so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss. I look down; I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end."

Virginia Woolf felt acutely the devastating effect of War. She saw the future of humanity in a war-torn world as hopelessly bleak. War dehumanised the entire society. In *Jacob's Room* she tried to depict the life of young men of the post-war generation. Jacob, a typical young man of the period, is one of the meaningless sacrifices to others' war. We find on his shelves in his Cambridge room the classics and the Elizabethans, but no Wells or Shaw or six-penny weeklies written by pale men in muddy boots. Jacob's sudden and premature death in the war is thus symbolical. It is the death of the intellectual and thinker with an inspiring vision and untapped resources of dash and energy who might, in all probability, have helped resolve the crisis of modern civilization. Viewed this way, his death acquires a sense of deep tragedy.

Mrs Dalloway has a close thematic link with *Jacob's Room*. Virginia Woolf was concerned with more vital questions of humanity. As she herself recorded in Diary, she was going to be something more than merely "tinselley" in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her aim was not just another successful novel. She was trying rather to reach the central thing, that is to say, the things which were of tremendous human significance. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Septimus Warren Smith represents the generation, which has survived the devastating effects of war. A shell-shocked soldier, Septimus becomes a universal character representing a generation of young men driven by the harrowing experience of war to seek release from mental torture in suicide. Septimus, a promising, romantic and idealistic young man, goes to London for intellectual and emotional sustenance. He reads Shakespeare, Dante and Shaw and falls in love with Isabel Pole who lectures on Shakespeare. As a clerk in an estate agent's office, he impressed his employer by his ability and efficiency. But, then, as he attends the evening classes, the war-drums begin to beat. Septimus is one of the first to volunteer. He proves a remarkably brave soldier and serves the army with great distinction. He goes to France with thoughts of saving an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Isabel Pole. In the course of his career as a soldier he learns to value friendship. Just as his relationship with Isabel Pole has been one of love as an idealised experience, his friendship with Evans proves to be a source of perfect emotional fulfilment. But Evans gets killed in the war leaving Septimus distressingly alone. As the war ends and the dead are buried, Septimus has a queer experience. He becomes aware of a great change in respect of his emotional responses. He could not feel. As he opened the door of the room where the Italian girls sat making hats, he could see them; could hear them; they were rubbing wires among coloured beads in saucers; they were turning buckram shapes this way and that; the table was all strewn with feathers, spangles, silks, ribbons; scissors were rapping on the table; but something failed him; he could not feel.

Even taste had no relish to him. He put down his cup on the little marble table. He looked at people outside; happy they seemed, collecting in the middle of the street, shouting, laughing, squabbling over nothing. But he could not taste, he could not feel. In the tea-shop among the tables and the chattering waiters the appalling fear came over him—he could not feel. He could reason; he could read, Dante for example, quite easily, he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then—that he could not feel.

Neither love nor friendship is a thrilling experience to Septimus now. His relationship with Lucrezia, his wife, is totally devoid of the emotional warmth he had experienced with Isabel Pole. Even while sitting close to each other, they have a sense of yawning gap. Both have a feeling of alienation and loneliness.

The death of Evans also means nothing emotionally. They had been good friends. It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug; one worrying a paper screw, snarling, snapping, giving a pinch, now and then, at the old dog's ear; the other lying somnolent, blinking at the fire, raising a paw, turning and growling good-temperedly. They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other. But when Evans was killed just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably.

The War, however, had taught Septimus to take shell explosions and consequent death, with indifference. Love and friendship had lost all, the warmth and thrill. Septimus who had found Shakespeare projecting a majestic view of man and life, reads the great dramatist afresh and discovers, to his great surprise, that war had brought about a drastic change in his view of the Elizabethan colossus. He opened Shakespeare once more. That boy's business of the intoxication of language—*Antony and Cleopatra*—had shrivelled utterly. How Shakespeare loathed humanity—the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sodality of the mouth and the belly! This was now revealed to Septimus—the message hidden in the beauty of words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair. Dante the same. Aeschylus the same.

Love between man and woman was repulsive to Shakespeare. The business of copulation was filth to him before the end. One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but 'only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that. Septimus realises with shock that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen. They are plastered over with grimaces.

Virginia Woolf wanted *Mrs. Dalloway* to be "a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and insane side by side—something like that." Septimus Warren Smith is not an insane person in the sense the modern psychologists think. The novelist shares the classical view of Plato that there is also a madness, which is divine gift. He is a visionary who utters profound truth when he is thought to be insane. He is deeply wise and a master of himself when the doctors have declared him to be a maniac. The moments of vision, these intuitive flashes, come to him intermittently when the world has given him up as lost. These moments of vision, to use Virginia Woolf's own term, left Septimus to the crest of a wave from which everything looks clear. He is able now to see through the facade of civilization and accept without hesitation or hypocrisy the painful reality of man's essential savagery. But, then, this knowledge will cost him too dear. For condemning 'human nature as savage and brutish he would be inviting upon himself the verdict of death. One can avoid despair only by pretending that everything is well with life. Clarissa and the group of sprightly men and women with whom she associates have been living cheerfully because of their stubborn refusal to take cognisance of the sordid and painful nature of life. Sanity lies in a life of self-deception. Septimus is mad because he would not accept the world as different from what he actually finds it.

That Virginia Woolf did not consider Septimus's view of life altogether wrong and meriting contemptuous rejection becomes increasingly clear as the novel moves to a close. Clarissa's first reaction to the news of Septimus's suicide is one of anger that death should have been mentioned at her party. But howsoever hard she may try to ignore the painful fact of death by keeping herself engaged in laughter and idle gossip, the reality of it is inescapable. Septimus's death proves in a sense a moment of vision for Mrs. Dalloway. It gives rise to a chain of thoughts which lead Clarissa to the view that she too may justifiably do with her life what Septimus has done with his:

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate,

people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

But this young man who had killed himself—had he plunged holding his treasure? ‘If it were now to die, ‘twere now to be most happy,’ she had said to herself once, coming down, in white or there were the poets and thinkers. Suppose he had had that passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil, with sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it—if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?

Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one’s parents giving it into one’s hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the *Times*, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. She had escaped. But that young man had killed himself

Septimus Warren Smith represents those who suffer because of their lonely pursuit of visions. The ex-soldier, thus, becomes a tragic figure who even after having survived the war has no chance of honourable living. One of the motives that cause war is the motive to dominate. Holmes and Bradshaw represent the spirit of tyranny, forcing people to live in a manner they consider right. Septimus rebels against their tyranny. “He would not submit to their idea of normality and proportion. With a pretence of solicitude for his health they would invoke proportion; order rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months’ rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve.” But he would not let them violate the integrity of his spirit. If escape from tyranny becomes altogether impossible, he has no alternative but to embrace death.

The tragic effect of Septimus Warren Smith’s life and death is heightened when Rezia, the frustrated Italian wife, is unable to know the cause of his suffering. Rezia is fascinated by London and its horses. She has married Septimus in order to lead a better life. She had a beautiful home in Milan where things had been pretty happy. Hat-making kept her busy and gave her a calling. Her marriage with Septimus, however, gives her no sense of meaningful companionship. Her agony finds expression in silent gazes, gestures of despair and stifled verbal articulation. “Everyone gives up something when they marry. She had given up her home.” She wishes to have children. Even after four or five years of married life she has not become a mother. Septimus refuses to have children. One cannot perpetuate suffering or increase the breed of the lustful animals that men are. Rezia thus suffers silently and all alone. Neither her husband nor the larger world has any idea of what she has been going through.

There are moments when she feels that it is quite possible for them to get restored to the bliss of their early married life. A trifling joke reminiscent of the earlier times makes her perfectly happy. She would not let anybody separate them. The world, however, must go its own tyrannical way. Though she bars the passage for Holmes saying that she would not allow him to see her husband, the doctor pushes his way up. The result is Septimus’s jump to death. Rezia runs to the window, she sees and understands what has happened. What is really tragic about her is not her husband’s suicide so much as the unfriendly manner in which the world treats them. Rezia provides a deep insight into Virginia Woolf’s view of the essential nature of human tragedy.

In *The Years* (1937) also Virginia Woolf sticks to her vision of 1920’s when the world seemed to ride forward almost without control to its second deadly catastrophe. She had a sensitive awareness of the ominous developments on the international plane and felt seriously apprehensive about the impending war. The writing on the wall was clear indeed. The situation was irretrievably drifting towards the deafening boom of guns and the hooting of the air-raid sirens. That the horror of another catastrophe unhinged the mind of Virginia Woolf is evident from the record in her Diary under the date 13 March : “Hitler has his army on the Rhine But it’s odd how near the guns have got to our private life again. I can quite distinctly see them and hear a roar, even though I go on, like a doomed mouse, nibbling at my daily page.” The human race, was threatened it appeared, with total annihilation. The painful memories of the first World War were still fresh in her mind and the apprehension of another left her cold. Section “1917” of *The Years* is marked by an unmistakable sense of fear and horror.

The modern war is no longer an exclusively soldier's affair. It proves a nerve-racking impact on the civilians also howsoever far they may be from the scene of actual fighting. Even domestic life cannot run its natural course. Virginia Woolf brings this idea effectively home to us in her presentation of Maggie's domestic life against the background of war.

(XI) Death

As a close but sympathetic observer of human life Virginia Woolf repeatedly poses to herself the profound questions: What is life? What is death? In almost all her novels we find her trying to find an answer to these questions. Right from her childhood Virginia Woolf had the misfortune of witnessing a series of deaths in her family. The death of her mother, father and brother affected her so much that she often suffered from mental breakdown of which we find frequent mention in her Diary. She was also a witness to the holocaust of the First World War and the first phase of the Second World War both of which gave her a rude shaking. The echoes of death and destruction constantly rang in her ears, and deeply affected her heart and mind. Obviously, there were reason for her being obsessed with the idea of death. It is not surprising therefore that she should be so profoundly concerned with the meaning of death in her novels.

In her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, death comes as something more than the mere end of life. The title *The Voyage Out*, itself suggests not only Rachel's spirit of adventure but also her voyage out of life. The awakening of Rachel to passion forms the central theme of the novel, and this theme, it is worth noting, never engaged the attention of Virginia Woolf in her later novels. Rachel's voyage from London to Santa Marina helps her gain an understanding of life and also a rich store of experience. The second voyage takes place when Rachel is engaged to Terence Hewet shortly before her tragic death. Rachel wants to have a view of the hotel and accompanies Helen for a walk there from her villa. They look into one window after another. In the largest room are Terence Hewet and his friend, St. John Hirst. After some time Rachel looks up the bedrooms in the hotel. She meets the inhabitants of the hotel at a dance where she provides the music for the dancers. When she is about to leave the hotel she sees a group of people sitting around a tea-table. Mrs. Flushing, one of the members of the group, extends Rachel an invitation for a trip along the Amazon. Rachel accepts the invitation and her final voyage begins with love between her and Terence Hewet as they move down the river. She is completely lost in herself and Terence. The two words—love and marriage—are repeatedly on her lips as the trip continues. They are perfectly happy. Rachel has an awareness of a new feeling in her while talking to Terence Hewet.: 'This is happiness, I suppose' and aloud to Terence she spoke, 'This is happiness.'

Almost simultaneously with her he also says, "This is happiness." They realise at once that the feeling had sprung in both of them the same time. Rachel has no foreknowledge of the disaster in store for her. Soon she falls victim to a malignant fever and dies. In her delirium she fails to recognise her lover. The illness of Rachel comes as a revelation to Terence Hewet:

He had never realised before that underneath every action, underneath the life of every day, pain lies, quiescent, but ready to devour, he seemed to be able to see suffering, as if it were a fire, curling up over the edges of all action, eating away the lives of men and women. He thought for the first time' with understanding of words which had before seemed to him empty: the struggle of life the hardness of life. Now he knew for himself that life is hard and full of suffering. He looked at the scattered lights in the town beneath, and thought of Arthur and Susan, or Evelyn and Perrott venturing out over wittingly, and by their happiness laying themselves open to suffering such as this. How did they dare to love each other, he wondered how had he himself dared to live as he had lived, rapidly and carelessly, passing from one thing to another, loving Rachel as he had loved her? Never again would he feel secure_ he would never believe in the stability of life, or forget what depths of pain lie beneath small happiness and feelings of content and safety. It seemed to him as he looked back that their happiness had never been so great as his pain was now. There had always been something imperfect in their happiness, something they had wanted and had not been able to get. It had been fragmentary and incomplete, because they were so young and had not known what they were doing.

The ecstatic moment of self-realization in love is of an extremely brief duration. It is one of those moments that come but rarely in a man's life. Dorothy Brewster remarks rightly: Virginia Woolf suggests through the multiple voyages out in the novel that the stream of life flows on despite the void created by death. Writing to Lytton Strachey she said that her intention in introducing death in the novel was "to give the feeling of vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, Which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again and the whole was to have a sort of pattern, and be somehow controlled." The death of Rachel brings life to a standstill for a while. Despite their

sorrow for Rachel's untimely death, the people of the hotel go about their business as usual. After the storm recedes, the inhabitants of the hotel sit together in the lounge and start knitting, reading, talking and playing chess. *The Voyage Out* takes on tragic significance: the literal voyage out to South America, the voyaging out of Rachel's adventuring personality and the voyage out of life altogether.

As the storm drew away, the people in the hall of the hotel sat down_ and with a comfortable sense of relief, began to tell each other stories about great storms, and produced in many cases their occupations for the evening, The chess board was brought out, and Mr, Elliot, who wore a stock instead of a collar as a sign of convalescence, but was otherwise much as usual, challenged Mr. Pepper to a final contest. Round them gathered a group of ladies with pieces of needlework, or in default of needlework, with novels, to superintend the game, much as if they were in charge of two small boys playing marbles. Every now and then they looked at the board and made some encouraging remark to the gentlemen.

Mrs. Paley just round the corner had her cards arranged in long ladders before her, with Susan sitting near to sympathise but not to correct, and the merchants and the miscellaneous people who had never been discovered to possess names were stretched in their arm-chairs with their newspapers on their knees. The conversation in these circumstances was very gentle, fragmentary, and intermittent, but the room was full of the indescribable stir of life. So Rachel's death means no interruption in the normal course of life in the hotel. Having walked from the villa through the storm, John Hirst too who had been a lover of Rachel thinks himself secure when he looks at the people in the hall where the conversation is going on:

All these voices sounded gratefully in St. John's ears as he lay half-asleep, and yet vividly conscious of everything around him. Across his eyes passed a procession of objects, black and indistinct, the figures of people picking up their books, their cards, their balls of wool, their work-baskets, and passing him one after another on their way to bed.

All this is highly significant in this early novel by Virginia Woolf People do not stop their work and resume their normal routine, which helps one overcome and forget the shock and helps life's flow to continue. This is what Virginia Woolf means by death. Life is cut short for a moment by death, howsoever tragic it may be, and goes on again. It does not cease after death. John Bennet observes aptly:

There is a profound truth in Virginia Woolf's vision of the experience of the deepest of all sorrows, the death of those we love. What she shows is the continuation of life, the healing tyranny of habit and of the small, unavoidable demands made by living. She does not minimize the pain, but she shows it as it is, continuous, and yet frequently submerged.

The fact, however, that the life of the community goes on uninterrupted in spite of the death of an individual does not mean that Virginia Woolf intended death to be accepted as a normal phenomenon of life. Most of the people dying in her novels are young men and women on the threshold of life. Each one of them holds promise of richly fruitful career. But death suddenly puts an abrupt end to a life that would have been highly creative and meaningful. It is no less significant that character in the novels of Virginia Woolf die unexpectedly, causing a great shock to those with whom they had been associated. The shock is not only of loss but also of the unexplainable manner in which a young person makes a sudden exit from the scene of life. Death thus acquires a sense of mystery for which there is no explanation. Though life runs its normal course without suffering any serious jolt from death, there are characters for whom the phenomenon of sudden and unexpected death means a sort of spiritual illumination. They become aware almost in a flash of the trivial "nature of their ambitions and material pursuits."

Naturally, therefore, the death of Jacob is an event with an impact on other characters in the novel. His sudden disappearance robs them all of something which had become a part of their own being. The death of someone dear to us means that was the death of a part of our own selves. Just as we live in each other, we die also in each other. Death invariably means a sense of emptiness. As the title of the novel suggests, the room of Jacob is as important as Jacob himself, and this room represents symbolically the larger world of ideas in which Jacob lives. Jacob's death renders the room empty. The last character of the novel offers nothing other than a view of the room as Bonamy finds it after the death of the occupant. Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtains; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker armchair creaks, though no one sits there.

Bonamy's cry, "Jacob! Jacob" at the close of the novel is a subtle repetition of Archer's cry in its beginning bringing the story full circle to the point from where it started. When Archer shouted for his brother, the latter was holding fascinated a skull in his arms. This act was symbolic of Jacob's embrace of death some years later. Bonamy's cry springs from a sense of loss caused by the sudden exit of the young man from the world of the living. Jacob, it appears, had been born with the destiny to die. Significantly enough, the eighteenth century house, empty now because of the death of its occupant, is described in the last chapter as having over its doorways a rose or a ram's skull carved in the wood. Just as Bonamy's cry at the end of the novel is reminiscent of the shout of Archer in its beginning, the skull carved in wood over the doorway reminds of the skull picked up by child Jacob as an object of play in the first chapter. Virginia Woolf underlines the sense of tragedy more through such images and artistic devices than through plain narrative.

In *To the Lighthouse* also death figures prominently in life. As in *Jacob's Room*, here too we find it striking those who are young. Andrew Ramsay is a brilliant young man with an aptitude for the most coherent of sciences, mathematics. But his sudden death in the prime of youth makes a mockery of all coherence

A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully was instantaneous. The sweet young Prue Ramsay also has an abrupt end. She is beautiful and Mrs. Ramsay has all the maternal solicitude for her. She thinks that Prue should be happier than Minta because she is her daughter. But her happiness does not last long and she dies. Here again a flower is cruelly cut in its early bloom. Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more

It is worth noting that these two deaths should find no more than a casual mention in the novel. The persons dying are both young. Each death is sudden and unexpected. One follows close on the heels of the other. And yet, in the actual description of death which is mere three lines, Virginia Woolf appears to be deliberately playing down the tragic sense of the event. The death of Prue was indeed a tragedy because *people said so*. They also said that no body deserved happiness more. It is certainly not the proper way of treating death if the novelist intended really to evoke tragic emotions. In *Jacob's Room* also the death of Jacob had been suggested in an extremely casual manner as if Virginia Woolf sought purposely to divest the event of all sense of tragedy. And yet, as already explained earlier, the death of Jacob acquires tragic intensity when viewed in the total context of the novel. The skull image and the shout, "Jacob! Jacob!" in the first and the last chapters of the novel make us painfully aware of death having been conceived by Virginia Woolf as a part of Jacob's tragic destiny, notwithstanding its casual mention in the novel.

The deaths of Prue and Andrew also strike us as tragic events because of the broader context of life encompassing them. The cryptic announcement of Prue's death is preceded by so vivid a description of nature that it not only comes alive but also has profoundly meaningful suggestions regarding the nature of the world in which we live and human destiny:

As summer neared, as the evenings lengthened, there came to the wakeful, the hopeful, walking the beach, stirring the pool, imaginations of the strangest kind—of flesh turned to atoms which drove before the wind, of stars flashing in their hearts, of cliff, sea, cloud, and sky brought purposely together to assemble outwardly the scattered parts of the vision within. In those mirrors, the minds of men, in those pools of uneasy water, in which clouds for ever turn and shadows form, dreams persisted, and it was impossible to resist the strange intimation which every gull, flower, tree, man and woman and the white earth itself seemed to declare that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules; or to resist the extraordinary stimulus to range hither and thither in search of some absolute good, some crystal of intensity, remote from the known pleasures and familiar virtues, something alien to the processes of domestic life, single, hard, bright, like a diamond in the sand, which would render the possessor secure. Moreover, softened and acquiescent, the spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and among passing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind.

The cliff, sea, cloud and sky achieve a sense of unique harmony so that in their balanced relationship they reflect a unified vision. The scattered parts of the vision within are brought together to become a coherent whole. With nature suggesting such a sense of harmony and coherence, it is only natural to feel that good triumphs, happiness prevails and order rules. But even while the different aspects of nature point to the existence of some absolute good, the spring

appears to suggest that man's life on this earth is essentially sorrowful and tragic. It is after having projected such a vision of nature that Virginia Woolf announces in a brief sentence of no tragic intensity the death of Prue. The paragraph following this announcement of Prue's death describes a house with empty rooms where flies weave a web and weeds growing close to the glass tap methodically in the night at the window-pane. Here also, as in *Jacob's Room*, there is a tragic suggestion of death having created a serious void. This emptiness, we feel, is not an individual experience but a universal one. Death, particularly of the young; robs the world as a whole of animation and vitality. Even the language used by the novelist is suggestive of languor and dullness:

Flies wove a web in the sunny rooms; weeds that had grown close to the glass in the night tapped methodically at the window-pane. When darkness fell, the stroke of the Lighthouse, which had laid itself with such authority upon the carpet in the darkness, tracing its pattern, came now in the softer light of spring mixed with moonlight gliding gently as if it laid its caress and lingered stealthily and looked and came lovingly again. But in the very lull of this loving caress, as the long stroke leant upon the bed, the rock was rent asunder; another fold of the shawl loosened; there it hung, and swayed. Through the short summer nights and the long summer days, when the empty rooms seemed to murmur with the echoes of the field and the hum of flies, the long streamer waved gently, swayed aimlessly.

The death of Andrew is a violent one. He dies in war as a result of a shell explosion. Quite appropriately, therefore, the announcement of his death is preceded by a paragraph suggesting noisy strokes and sharp clang of metal: But slumber and sleep though it might there came later in the summer ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt, which with their repeated shocks still further loosened the shawl and cracked the tea-cups. Now and again some glass tinkled in the cupboard as if a giant voice had shrieked so loud in its agony that tumblers stood inside a cupboard vibrated too. Then again silence fell; and then, night after night, and sometimes in plain day when the roses were bright and light turned on the wall its shape clearly there seemed to drop into this silence this indifference" this integrity, the thud of something falling which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? Impatient, despairing yet loth to go (for beauty offers her lures, has her consolations), to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken.

The paragraph following the announcement of Andrews Ramsay's death again suggests a serious disturbance of cosmic harmony:

At that season those who had gone down to pace the beach and ask of the sea and sky what message they reported or what vision they affirmed had to consider among the usual tokens of divine bounty — the sunset on the sea, the pallor of dawn, the moon rising, fishing-boats against the moon, and children pelting each other with handfuls of grass, something out of harmony with this jocundity, this serenity. There was the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath. This intrusion into a scene calculated to stir the most sublime reflections and lead to the most comfortable conclusions stayed their pacing. It was difficult blandly to overlook them, to abolish their significance in the landscape; to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within.

The chapter considered above offers a general view of the misery and sorrow of human life. Virginia Woolf treats the subject of pain and suffering as a universal phenomenon. It is the only chapter in the novel without any of the human characters in the foreground. The novelist makes brief mention of two young ones, but obviously she was trying to stress the idea of death in general rather than to describe individual deaths. The sense of tragedy in *To the Lighthouse*, thus, is of an all pervasive nature. It is not limited by particularities.

There is yet another aspect of Virginia Woolf's treatment of death which deserves attention. We find occasional suggestions in her novels regarding the continuing spiritual influence of people even after they have disappeared from the scene of life. Death, she seems to suggest, is not an end. People continue to remain a potent influence on the living even after their death. In *To the Lighthouse* Mrs. Ramsay's influence on others even after she is dead is too obvious to go unnoticed. She is the central character of the novel and is more concerned with intuition rather than with the intellect. She has developed a sort of passion to gather people together. She finds pleasure in arranging marriages.

She wants to promote human relations. But her influence does not end with her death. As though to die is simply to enter a new phase of flux, Mrs. Ramsay is vividly alive in the mind of Lily Briscoe. Her spirit is the controlling factor in the last section of the novel. Lily thinks of Mrs. Ramsay more and more as she proceeds with her painting.

Lily has a vivid impression of Mrs. Ramsay's impact on the relationships between one individual and another. Though she seemed to be playing no active role, her very presence made people rise above anger, irritation and meanness and experience a unique type of serenity.

Lily Briscoe while painting does not simply remember Mrs. Ramsay as we usually remember the dead who had been near and dear to us. The memory of Mrs. . Ramsay brings to her a new awareness of the truth of life. It is in the nature of a spiritual revelation:

What is the meaning of life? That was all — a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that, and the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying 'Life stand still here'; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (She looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck in to stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' she repeated. She owed this revelation to her

Lily, we feel, proves capable of a vision only because she remains susceptible to the spiritual influence of the dead Mrs. Ramsay:

Suddenly the window at which she was looking was whitened by some light stuff behind it. At last then somebody had come into the drawing-room; somebody was sitting in the chair. For heaven's sake, she prayed, let them sit still there and not come floundering out to talk to her. Mercifully, whoever it was stayed still inside; had settled by some stroke of luck so as to throw an odd shaped triangular shadow over the step. It altered the composition of the picture a little. It was interesting. It might be useful. Her mood was coming back to her. One must keep on looking without for a second relaxing the intensity of emotion, the determination not to be put off, not to be bamboozled. One must hold the scene — so — in a vice and let nothing come in and spoil it. One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair that's a table, and yet at the same time. It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. The problem might be solved after all. Ah but what had happened? Some wave of white went over the window-pane. The air must have stirred some flounce in the room. Her heart leapt at her and seized her and tortured her.

'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' she cried, feeling the old horror come back to want and want and not to have. Could she inflict that still? And then, quietly, as if she refrained, that too became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table. Ramsay it was part of her perfect goodness to Lily sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish brown stockings, cast her shadow on the step.

It would be a mistake to think that Lily's awareness of Mrs. Ramsay's vivid presence even though she is/long dead, is merely a consequence of her highly imaginative temperament. Mrs. Ramsay, while living had hoped to fix herself in the memories of those who would remain alive after her. This hope is fulfilled in Lily Briscoe's life as an artist. Mrs. Ramsay thus achieves a type of -immortality and her continued existence in Lily's mind is as much of a reality as that of any chair or table. In suggesting the spiritual influence of Mrs. Ramsay even after her death Virginia Woolf comes very close to E M. Forster. Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India* continues to influence the thoughts and conduct of people who have met and known her even after she disappears from the scene of life. Both Forster and Virginia Woolf invest their elderly ladies with spiritual significance. Death in relation to them has no tragic poignancy that we find it having in relation to the young.

In *The Waves*, Percival, a man of great promise, gets thrown from his horse and is killed. His sudden death casts a gloom on all other characters in the novel. Virginia Woolf in portraying the character of Percival emphasizes the frailty and uncertainty of human life and the perplexing haphazardness of events. As Bernard in the novel remarks: What is startling, what is unexpected, what we cannot account for, what turns symmetry to nonsense — that comes suddenly to my mind, thinking of him.” The death of Percival suggests that life has no meaningful pattern. It is futile seeking for a sense of order in the chaos of human existence. What logical explanation can there be for a sudden, untimely death?

By Percival’s death a continuity is broken, and the abrupt end of his life creates a vacuum in the lives of those with whom he was involved. The regions where those lives were enriched by him get frozen into listlessness and immobility. Percival never appears on the scene again but his presence is felt by all the characters. He continues to live in the memory of others. After his death Bernard remembers him occupying a central position in the group. Louis thinks that others have become nocturnal, rapt. Their eyes like moth’s wings moving so quickly that they do not seem to move at all.

Bernard gets the news of Percival’s death the very day a son is born to him. He finds it an incomprehensible combination of sorrow and Joy. The complexity of emotions is of such an enigmatic nature. The death of Percival however is a more powerful impact on Bernard than the birth of his son. He thinks he needs silence so that when he is alone, he may consider what death has done to his world. Bernard finds the world going as usual. The butcher delivers meat next door. Two old men stumble along the pavement. Sparrows alight. The machine works and he notes the rhythm, the throb. But in none of these things Bernard feels like having a part since Percival can see them no longer. Percival had been at the centre of all activities and experiences Bernard had known. Now that he is dead, there is a sense of emptiness everywhere. Bernard feels that in the death of Percival the world has lost something that would have been very valuable to it. Men and women have lost a leader whom they would have followed.

The Waves ends on a note of fierce defiance against death. This enemy which renders life desolate and meaningless must not be accepted lying down:

In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph. and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she, loved; Life; London.

I [Bernard] am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man’s, like Percival’s, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!

Clarissa, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, obviously, thirsts for noise and excitement which she has always considered to be the essence of life.

In marrying Richard, however, she made an irrevocable choice of a life of stiff formality. Entertaining guests and playing the role of a meticulous hostess is all that life means to her now. It has really been a life of unrelieved triviality. The announcement of Septimus’ s suicide proves to Clarissa a sudden spiritual illumination. She, at once, grows aware of the utter meaninglessness of life she has been living. Is there any point, she asks herself, in clinging tenaciously to life as it has been to her? Young Septimus has perhaps acted wisely in throwing his life away. Clarissa wishes that she too could do it:

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* has an unmistakable suggestion that the dissolution of the body is not the only form of death. People may continue to drag on with their physical existence though the spirit in them may have long ceased to be an animating force. We find her thus stressing the idea of death in life. Clarissa Dalloway presents the picture of a spiritually benumbed life. That the spirit has ceased to animate her being any more is indicated by the glittering triviality in the midst of which she lives. Clarissa’s love of parties and her absorption in life around her give her no real satisfaction. She has a disturbing consciousness of the loss of fire and vitality which she remembers having possessed in her young days when she loved riding and dancing and reading Shelley and Morris with Sally Seton. As she goes along the busy London street, the rush.

She thought of life as a gift from parents, to be lived to the end; and there arose in the depths of her heart an awful fear. She has a sudden realisation that she has been able to endure this life of triviality and boredom only because of a sense of communication with her brothers. But for the companionship of Richard she must have perished. She had escaped. But that young man (Septimus) had killed himself. The thought of survival and escape, however, fills Clarissa with a sense of disgrace. She takes it as her punishment to see a man here, a woman there, sinking and disappearing in this profound darkness of life while she has managed with all the cunning of which she is capable to hold on. Clarissa is stricken with a sense of guilt. She had schemed, she had pilfered, she was never wholly admirable. Clarissa, therefore, feels that the young man who killed himself is not an object of pity. She felt somehow very like him the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living.

Virginia Woolf's idea about death-in-life is further illustrated in *The Years*. She suggests the idea that by changing man dies, and by not changing also he meets the same inexorable fate. North and Peggy who were so close in their childhood find only hostility and distance in their adulthood. The children they were, have not flowered in to the adults they are; those childish figures died as quite different adults were born from the old selves. After having reverted to childhood memories. Peggy and North stand silent, unable to carry the old selves into the present. It is now a source of amazement to North to remember that he used to read to her his poetry. This deathlike state brought about by change is painful when realized emotionally; the death that results from an inability to change is much commoner and more deplorable. Nicholas again appears in the 'Present Day' part, i. e. the final part of the novel, still talking of "dictators; Napoleon; the psychology of great men." It appears that his mind has remained atrophied since some point in 1917. Rose and Martin reveal a similar stagnation as they banter each other for the hundredth time about their childhood experiences. Their repetitions lead Peggy to think. Each person had a certain line laid down in their minds, She thought, and along it came the same old sayings. One's mind must be criss-crossed like the palm of one's hand, she thought, looking at the palm of her hand."

This substitution of another kind of death for the literal one in the first portion of the novel reflects Virginia Woolf's overall intention. She speaks of *The Years* as composed of two parts: the first portion of the book is the open narrative; the second is the submerged side of the narrative. Thus the literal fact of personal death carries the submerged implication of a more symbolic, more general death.

The Years as a novel may not rise to the artistic height of *Mrs. Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*. But it is really a very incisive piece of commentary on Virginia Woolf's attitude to death. The years covered by the novel were those when some of her most near and dear ones died. Those giants of English fiction whom she had pilloried in her essays John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett etc. also died in the thirties. In her Diary she records how she felt her own process of thinking suddenly stricken by drought, rendered sterile by the expiry of so many whom she knew and who kindled her literary flame in various ways. These deaths created a sense of impoverishment in her mind and cast a deep shadow upon *The Years*. The depredations of death are frightfully frequent. We cannot overlook the chain of deaths in the novel. In 1880, Mrs. Pargiter dies. In 1891, Parnell is dead. Eugenie and Digby die almost at the same time. The King dies in 1910. Abel Pargiter's end comes in 1911. In 1913, Crosby's faithful dog dies. The years that follow 1913 see mass killing and carnage on an unprecedented scale in the First World War. After the War the whole world looks staggeringly different. The political structure of the world, its values and standards, are all changed almost beyond recognition. This change is symbolical of the death of the old world. It may be said that a chapter of history has closed and the past has been blotted out of existence. '

We find, thus, that Virginia Woolf's treatment of death has a tinge of sadness not only in relation to the passing away of individuals, but also in relation to the decay and death of the traditional institutions and the values they embodied.

(XII) Sensation in Language and Art in *Mrs Dalloway*

Language and art do not copy our physical sensations. Cassirer asks simply 'What would be accomplished by a mere copy of something already present?' and he goes on to point out that the value of language lies precisely in its difference from sensation:

If, for example, we regarded it as the true and essential function of language to express once again, but merely in a

different medium, the very same reality that lies ready-made before_ us in particular sensations and intuitions - we should be struck at once by the vast inadequacy of all languages. Measured by the limitless richness and diversity of intuitive reality, all linguistic symbols would inevitably seem empty; measured by its individual concretion, they would inevitably seem abstract and vague.

This difference is the 'little rift' which Butler speaks of, the fact that 'association does not stick to the letter of its bond' Art, however, often claims to be more concrete than ordinary language, to be connected in some particularly close way to sensation. It is often felt to be in some way nearer to the sensational world than, say, science or mathematics. Wimsatt, following Cassirer, says that the fully concrete use of language, in poetry, can only draw attention to the difference between itself and the reality which it symbolises:

What may seem stranger is that the verbal symbol in calling attention to itself must also call attention to the difference between itself and reality which it resembles and symbolises. As one of the fathers of 'symbolic form' has expressed it: 'Even the most primitive verbal utterance requires a transmutation of a certain cognitive or emotive experience into sound, i.e., a medium that is foreign to the experience, and even quite disparate.' In most discourse we look right through this disparity. There is a one-way transparent intellectual reference. But poetry by thickening the medium increases the disparity between itself and its referents.

In Butler's terms, the relationship between sensation and language is a juncture which always has within it an element of dissociation, a characteristic which he ascribes to all 'connections'. In the discussion of Butler's *Note-Books* one sees how his idea of 'shock' was transmuted into fiction in *Mrs Dalloway*. The novel is, in one of its aspects, an expansion of Butler's idea for an essay on 'The Sense of Touch'. Also relevant here is an interesting discussion by Roger Fry in *A Sampler if Castile*, which Leonard and Virginia Woolf published in 1923, two years before *Mrs Dalloway*. Fry asks 'How can I suppose that I can hand over to you, through language, the faintest image of a single moment's physical sensation?' Clearly, this is not possible, but there remains the desire to .make language and art come as close as possible to sensation, or at least not to lose sight of the physical world altogether. Fry goes on to praise the Spanish words 'echar' and 'sacar' (that which you let go from you, and that which you pull towards you). He feels that they are better than their English equivalents 'let' and 'get' because they retain a 'kinaesthetic quality'. He feels that the muscular effort in pronouncing the Spanish words somehow keeps them in touch with the physical actions out of which the more abstract ideas 'let' and 'get' have developed.

An attempt is made here to convey Butler's sense of shock and Fry's observation that kinaesthesia is an important element in *Mrs Dalloway*. In Virginia Woolf's circle there was a considerable interest in linguistics and she would probably have come across some of these ideas in her reading of Butler. Leonard Woolf reviewed Jespersen's *The Philosophy of Grammar* along with *Four Words* by Logan Pearsall Smith, who was, indeed, a friend of the Woolfs. Leonard Woolf entitles his review *Words* and points out that it is '... a curious thing with regard to writers that most of them seem to take no interest in the material in which they have to work. I call those material words. This background interest in language should be emphasised, McLauwin thinks, in opposite to a view generally held, that *Mrs Dalloway* is a Bloomsbury version of *Ulysses*. The value of stressing this more general linguistic background can be seen, perhaps, if we look at Owen Barfield's interesting study *Poetic Diction*. Barfield traces the growth of linguistic research over the previous few years, and his remarks on the word 'cut' are helpful in analysing Virginia Woolf's novel. He criticises Jespersen by saying that although Jespersen finds language becoming more figurative as we look into the past, he sees it as *beginning* from monosyllables with *general* meanings. Barfield goes on to say: "a meaning may be 'perceptual' (that is to say, the word's whole reference may be to some sensible object or process) and at the same time, general' or 'abstract'- It is just those meanings which attempt to be most exclusively material ('sensuel'), which are also the most generalised and abstract - i.e. remote from reality." Let us take the simple English word *cut*. Its reference is perfectly material; yet its meaning is at the same time more general and less particular, more abstract and less concrete, than some single word which should comprise in itself let us say - all that we have to express to-day by the sentence: 'I cut this flesh with joy at this moment'. If it is impossible to cut a pound of flesh without spilling blood, it is even more impossible' to cut '.

Barfield draws on anthropology to illustrate the difference between concrete and abstract meanings: 'in some crude

tongues, although you can express twenty different kinds of cutting, you cannot say 'cut' . . . This insight, together with Butler's antithesis of cutting and joining is a good introduction to one of the themes of *Mrs Dalloway*.

There are a great variety of divisive activities covered by the word 'cut', and many of these appear in the novel. Clarissa at the beginning of the novel goes to buy cut flowers for her party. Like her party, and for that matter, Clarissa herself, they will last only a short while, but they will be fresh and colourful during their brief life, not grey and 'cut and dried' like Holmes and Bradshaw (for whose sake Lady Bradshaw has 'pared and pruned' herself). Clarissa goes herself for the flowers because Lucy has her work 'cut out' for her. She feels that her portion of life has been 'sliced' when Lady Bruton cuts her (does not invite her to the luncheon, party); Clarissa is 'cut', (hurt). She is poised between exclusion and inclusion in life and hesitates to have any clear-cut opinion of her 'character' or that of her friends:

She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone. . . and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.

She feels inclined to criticise Peter because he constantly plays with his pocket knife; she is glad she did not marry him, for his egoism would have cut her off from her private life, her own separate existence, which her marriage to Richard allows. She does not spare his lady friend from the knife: 'She flattered him; she fooled him, thought Clarissa; shaping the woman, the wife of the Major in the Indian Army, with three strokes of a knife.' Septimus, her double, believes that the world will cut him (deal him a blow with a whip), for he has become alienated from his fellow creatures by his madness:

Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too. The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?

These different meanings of 'cut' are its objective, abstract aspect. They are related in the novel to its concrete, subjective significance to the *sensation* of cutting or being cut. In an attempt to give the immediate perception of life, to give that feeling which precedes the division into the 'cut' and the 'uncut', Virginia Woolf uses words and images of touch and movement. It is an attempt to give the very process of the world impinging upon our senses. Roger Fry's Spanish words are less neutral than the images of Virginia Woolf, for there is a self which pulls and pushes in his examples, whereas the combination of sensation and movement which I am speaking of here is much less sharply differentiated. The 'scraping' and 'grazing' which continues throughout the novel is an attempt to capture that interaction between the self and world before the two have been separated. These images also move in that area between absolute connection and absolute separation, between inclusion and exclusion, which lie at the centre of the novel. In this way, images of scraping establish the affinity between the 'doubles' Clarissa and Septimus, who are themselves connected yet separate. Clarissa is convalescing and puts her irritation at her own ungenerosity quite naturally in terms of that physical pain which is its cause:

It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful, rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love! this hatred!

The scraping images do convey the slightly oblique view of the 'world which Clarissa and Septimus share, but the physical sensation which is evoked does not simply 'mean' this point of view. There is a network of interconnected images which cannot, without a disturbing 'cutting' be abstracted from the context of the novel. The images graze against an obscure layer of existence where intuition and sensation and meaning are not quite separate. In this way Clarissa and Septimus are linked in some obscure way to the official car: 'For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk

grazed something very profound.' Later, the shock of Lady Bruton 'cutting' her causes similar vibrations in Clarissa: 'for the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she had stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of a passing car and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered'. But the scraping does not mean simply a sense of exclusion; it is a feeling, a sensation that the reader is meant to share by means of this related imagery. In this passage the scraping is connected not with apartness from life, but inclusion and social interchange:

For this is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable; suddenly she shoots to the surface and sports on the wind-wrinkled waves; that is, has a positive need to brush, scrape, kindle herself, gossiping.

This wealth of cuttings and scrapings in the novel is an attempt to capture in language the richness and diversity of our intuitive and sensational life. Virginia Woolf constructs a keyboard on which there is a scale running from smooth cutting to rough scraping, from inclusion to exclusion, from sensation to abstract symbolism.

And yet there is a problem here, for art clearly deals in some way with sensations, with the way in which the 'outer' world interacts with the 'inner' world of our consciousness. The artist cannot copy a pre-existing reality, and yet there is a constant struggle, which we can see in *Mrs Dalloway* to look behind the mirror of art and grasp the inmost form of the world. But the madness of Septimus Smith, and by association, of Clarissa, indicates that Virginia Woolf was well aware that, in Cassirer's words 'the thoroughly individual, singular perception which sensationalism and with it the skeptical critique of language sets up as a supreme norm, an ideal of knowledge, is essentially nothing more than a pathological phenomenon. . . ' Indeed, Virginia Woolf faced this difficulty in her own life. Complete subjectivity is insanity, but objectivity gives too little of the 'truth' as seen by the individual. Cassirer states the problem in this way:

Always there remains an evident and distressing opposition: 'outer' and 'inner' never completely correspond. But these restrictions, which the artist must acknowledge, do not stop his efforts. He continues to create for he knows that it is only by doing so that he can discover and gain possession of his own self. His world and his true self can be had only in the shape which he gives to them. This belief that the artist does not describe a given, objective reality lies behind Fry's attack on the 'illusionists' and Virginia Woolf's on the 'materialists'. The art of Sargent and Bennett is untruthful because it claims to be what it cannot possibly be, namely, a faithful copy of the 'real world'. According to Fry, what the artist can give us, and what we respond to, is a relation:

Our emotional reactions are not about sensations. This may at first sight appear paradoxical, because the arts seem to be peculiarly preoccupied with agreeable sensations, with relatively pure colours and pure sounds. But it is not difficult to see that, however valuable a predisposing and accompanying condition of aesthetic apprehension such agreeably pure sensations may be, they are not essential, nor have we any difficulty in distinguishing between our response to sensations and our response to works of art. Those responses to sensation may be very rich and complex and tinged with emotion, but they are distinct.

In responding to the images of *Mrs Dalloway* we certainly find this to be true, for our reaction is to the *relation* between different images of 'cutting' and 'scraping' and so on. Anything else would be merely a trick, such as providing sandpaper in the margin on which the reader could really scrape himself.

(XIII) Use of Symbolism in *Mrs. Dalloway*

A. N. Whitehead in *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effects* writes that the human mind is said to function symbolically "when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages respecting other components of its experience". The former set of components becomes symbols and the latter the meaning of it. He further adds that there must be "some community between the natures of symbol and its meaning." S. K. Langer and W. M. Urban, also, insist that there should be some sort of similarity or "some common logical form between the symbol and the thing symbolized, otherwise, being unrelated it would not be a symbol but "empty imagining". A. N. Whitehead further points out that the "the object of symbolism is the enhancement of the importance of what it symbolizes". Virginia Woolf stresses these two points in her essay "On Not Knowing Greek" which she had written

in 1925 Comparing Aeschylus and Sophocles she feels that Aeschylus has “in some mysterious way a general force, a symbolic power’. Explaining his method of achieving this power, she says:

By the bold and running use of metaphor he will amplify and give us, not the thing itself, but the reverberation and reflection which taken into his mind, the thing has made; close enough to the original to illustrate it, remote enough to heighten, enlarges, and make splendid.

Thus she points out that the symbol should have some similarity to the thing symbolized, which it should make splendid. Virginia Woolf also believes that the intuitive realization that a symbol imparts to us should be instant, because we start doubting the real and symbolical if we do not apprehend symbol and meaning simultaneously.

Like W. M. Urban who in *Language and Reality* says that the object of a symbol “is suggestion or insight rather than direct or literal representation” she explains how repeated images, working on our senses by suggesting emotions and ideas, become symbolic. Character atmosphere, and action, too, she feels, have symbolic value.

Virginia Woolf not only has stated the nature and scope of the symbol, but also has explained why we need it. She seems to believe with E. Cassirer that man is not “animal rationale” but is “animal symbolicum”. Like A. N. Whitehead, who says that “Mankind has to find a symbol to express himself”, she writes:

We grasp what is beyond their surface meaning, gather instinctively this, that, and the other a sound, a colour, here a stress, there a pause which the poet, knowing words to be meager in comparison with ideas, has strewn about his page to evoke, when collected a state of mind which neither words can express nor the reason explain.

That we need symbols because words are meagre in comparison with ideas, she has stressed in another essay also. In *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* she explains how the untamed ferocity which is perpetually at war with the accepted order of things makes the Brontes “desire to create instantly rather than to observe patiently”. They, therefore, she adds, “feel the need of some powerful symbol of the vast and slumbering passions in human nature than words or actions can convey”.

Virginia Woolf, it can now be deduced, is of the view that when a writer desires to express some genuinely new ideas or states of mind which he cannot adequately convey through the stiff and conventional medium of language in its literal capacity, he uses character, action, atmosphere, images to “evoke” and suggest them: and that these images, acquiring added significance, become symbols.

Virginia Woolf started writing *Mrs. Dalloway* in June 1922, and completed it by October 1924, when the after effects of war the maimed and the shell shocked the starving and the sick were still affecting sensitive hearts. These were “the years of considerable human suffering”, as Leonard Woolf remarks in *After the Deluge*. The cause of this human suffering Virginia Woolf seems to feel, is the exploitation of man by man, be it political, economic, religious, or social, whether “in the heat and sands of India”, in “the mud and swamp of Africa”, or in “the purlieu of London”. The exploitation is the outcome of the despicableness of society, which Virginia Woolf tries to portray in this novel. Writing about it in her Diary, she says: “I want to criticise the social system and to show it at work, at its most intense.” Through *Mrs. Dalloway*, therefore, Virginia Woolf delivers her diatribe against a superficial society that lacks depth in human relationships.

To portray different aspects of society Virginia Woolf uses certain characters symbolically. Hugh Whitbread represents, as Sally Seton thinks, that which is “most detestable in English middle class life”. He is a man who has “read nothing, thought nothing”. He has the manners and breeding of an English gentleman. He is a perfect specimen of “the public-school man”, a great “snob”, who has married “the Honourable Evelyn” and found a little job at court.

He looked always as if he were on duty, thought Peter, a privileged but secretive being, hoarding secrets which he would die to defend, though it was only some little piece of title – tattle dropped by a court footman which would be in all the papers tomorrow. . . . Look at him now, on tiptoe, dancing, forward bowing and scraping, as the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton emerged, intimating for the entire world to see that he was privileged to say something, something private, to Lady Bruton as she passed. She stopped. She wagged her fine old head. She was thanking him presumably for some piece of servility. She had her toadies, minor officials in Government offices who ran about putting through little jobs on her behalf, in return for which she gave them luncheon.

This “admirable Hugh” who loves “dressing up in gold lace and doing homage”, and snuffing round the precincts of the great”, besides representing a worldly careerist, becomes symbolic of mental servility to plumed authority and of unnatural loyalties, qualities which Virginia Woolf elaborates in *Three Guineas*.

The effect that all feel when “greatness” passes by them also signifies the addiction of society to unnatural loyalties, rumours were at once in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street on one side, to Atkinson’s scent shop on the other falling indeed with something of a cloud’s sudden sobriety and stillness upon faces which a second before had been seen alertly discretely. But now mystery had brushed them with her wings. But no body knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales’s, the Queen’s the Prime Minister’s?

The same “dark breath of veneration” whether for queen, Prince, or Prime Minister – the enduring symbol of the state that ripples through glove shops and hat shops on both sides of Bond Street, ripples through everyone, and is felt “to the marrow of their bones” when the Prime Minister – “this symbol of what they all stood for, English Society” – passes by them at Clarissa’s party. This worship of greatness for which the people are prepared to go “to the cannon’s mouth, as their ancestors had gone before them”, and are ready to open a bazaar like Lady Bexborough “with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed “, becomes symbolic of the distortion of values which leads to unnatural loyalties, one of the causes of war and its inhuman destruction.

Miss Kilman represents possessive love and corrupt religiosity.

Bitter and burning, Miss Kilman had turned into a church two years three months ago. She had heard the Rev. Edward Whittaker preach: the boys sing; had seen the solemn lights descend, and whether it was the music, or the voices the hot and turbulent feelings which boiled and surged in her had been assuaged as she sat there, and she had wept copiously. So now, whenever the hot and painful feelings boiled in her, this hatred of Mrs. Dalloway, this grudge against the world, she thought of God. She thought of Mr. Whittaker. Rage was succeeded by calm. A sweet savour filled her veins, her lips parted, and, standing formidable upon the landing in her mackintosh, she looked with steady and sinister serenity at Mrs. Dalloway, who came out with her daughter.

Miss Kilman is religious not because she had some vision or is poor in spirit and pure in heart, but because religion, like alcohol, serves as a means of escape from her gnawing anger and hatred. Her going to church, therefore, does not make her humble and tender. It makes her rather formidable and sinisterly serene. She wants to have mastery over others, to subdue them.

And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, you are right.

In her misplaced religious fervour Miss Kilman not only wants to humiliate and ruin Mrs. Dalloway, but also wants to possess and dominate Elizabeth. When Elizabeth prepares to leave after having finished her tea. Miss Kilman tries to prevent her. Prolonging her tea as much as possible she says, “I’ve not quite finished yet.” And when she had finally “swallowed down the last inches of the chocolate éclair, her agony was so terrific. If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted.

Virginia Woolf, like Rabindranath Tagore, appears to have felt the sting of the domination of possessive love. That she loathed domination of any type, especially of religiosity, is shown by her entry in her diary: I meant to write about the Barnetts and the peculiar repulsiveness of those who dabble their fingers self approvingly in the stuff of others’ souls I come to loathe any dominion of one over another; any leadership, any imposition of the will.”

These remarks provoked by her reading of *Rev. Canon S. A. Barnett: His life, Work and Friends*, reflecting the integrity of her free unexploiting mind throw light on her diatribe in *Mrs. Dalloway* against possessive love and dominating religion.

love and religion! Thought Clarissa, going back into the drawing room, tingling all over. How detestable, how detestable they are! For now that the body of Miss Kilman was not before her, it overwhelms her-the idea. The cruellest things in the world, she thought, seeing them clumsy hot domineering, hypocritical, exasperating, jealousy, infinity, cruel and unscrupulous dressed in a mackintosh coat, on the landing, love and religion.

Miss Kilman, whose love is not unselfish, and whose religion is not pure, becomes a symbol of such impure sentiments as domineering', 'infinitely cruel', and 'unscrupulous' love and religion. As these are ugly and unpleasant things, Miss Kilman who symbolizes them, is 'ugly clumsy' and shabbily dressed 'in a green mackintosh coat'. Her mackintosh, therefore, as W. Y. Tindall rightly points out, 'inimical to waters, symbolizes her condition'. It portrays, perhaps, the closed condition of her mind that does not allow any rain of grace to reach her parched heart.

An individual, as modern psycho-analytical research has shown, resorts to obsessional handwashing if there is a sense of guilt in his unconscious mind. Two examples of this are Pontius Pilate from history, and Lady Macbeth from literature, though Pilate was making a consciously symbolic act and Lady Macbeth an unconscious one. Similarly societies, at times, lay undue stress on outer neatness because of inner untidiness, on outer sense of proportion because of inner disorderliness, on outward show of strength because of inner weakness. Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw are symbols of such compensatory neatness, proportion, and order. They stand for the aspect of human nature which Septimus thought was going to catch him, and to escape which he committed suicide. He felt that:

human beings have neither kindness nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen. They are plastered over with grimaces.

Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumb screw are applied. Human nature is remorseless.

Sir William, the impress of whose will was received by the "Naked, defenceless, the exhausted the friendless", who swooped and devoured, and who shut people up to appease the goddesses "Sense Proportion and "Conversion" and Dr. Holmes are more powerful and overbearing, hence more harmful, than Miss Kilman with her possessive love and domineering religion.

Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William's goddess, was acquired by Sir William walking hospitals, catching salmon, begetting one son in Harley Street by Lady Bradshaw so that not only did his colleagues respect him, his subordinate fear him, but the friends and relations of his patients felt for him the keenest, gratitude for insisting that these prophetic Christ and Christesses, who prophesied the end of the world, or the advent of God, should drink milk in bed, as Sir William ordered; Sir William with his thirty years' experience of these kind of cases, and his infallible instinct, this is madness, this sense; his sense of proportion.

But Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged in the heat and sands on India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieu of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which her own is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace... offers help, but desires power... concealed as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self-sacrifice.

Sir William, therefore, shutting people up in his home till they are converted to his point of view, becomes symbolic of egotistical sense of proportion and its forceful imposition.

The low, powerful, grey car of Sir William Bradshaw- the grey haired doctor- with its furs and silver grey rugs, and his grey room, are also symbolical. There greyness, reflecting the lack of warmth and colour of feeling, becomes symbolic of his insensitivity to human suffering. It also evokes a sense of dread, as does the dove grey upholstery of

“The Prime Minister’s car’ seen in Bond Street. Whereas Miss Kilman is thought to be detestable only by Clarissa, Sir William is felt to be odious by Rezia, Richard, Clarissa, and Peter. Rezia has cried that “she did not like that man”. The Dalloways ‘didn’t like his taste, didn’t like his smell’. And Peter, seeing the Bradshaws at Clarissa’s party, said, “That they are damnable humbugs’.

Similarly Peter Walsh, Sally Seton, and Septimus Smith are used symbolically to suggest the adventurous, the unconventional society of London, one goes away to India, another lives in the country, and the third commits suicide. Thus they seek to escape being Londoners who, according to E. M. Forster, are the only countrymen ‘on the road to sterility’. Both Peter and Sally, who are always friendly to each other, are unconventional and adventurous. It is through them that Virginia Woolf conveys her criticism of society, its hypocrisy and insincerity. In contradistinction to Hugh Whitbread and Sir William they are interested in reading. Peter was interested, as Clarissa recalls, ‘in Wagner, Pope’s poetry, people’s characters eternally, and the defects of her soul’. Sally used to read Morris, Plato, and Shelley. They, along with Septimus who used to read Shakespeare and Dante, represent that class of educated men and women who made Sir William feel uncomfortable. For there was in Sir William ‘a grudge, deeply buried, against cultivated people who came into his room and intimated that doctors, whose profession is a constant strain upon all the highest faculties, are not educated men’. Cultivated and with critical faculties wide awake. Peter and Sally are able to see through people. Peter was able to see through Clarissa’s worldliness and pronounce that she had the making of what he called, a ‘perfect hostess’. He was also able to judge correctly the faults and failings of Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread. Sally, too, tried to ‘get hold of things by the right end’. She saw through ‘the admirable Hugh when Clarissa and the rest were at his feet’. These two with their critical minds symbolize that minority of intelligentsia who are aware of the shortcomings of modern society.

Sally Seton had ‘a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything, does anything’; she could walk in ‘quite unexpectedly without a penny in her pocket, one night after dinner; she would run along the passage without a stitch of clothing, having forgotten her sponge, unmindful of gentlemen seeing her; she would smoke cigars, would paint, would write. Thus she becomes a symbol of freedom loving rebels who break the rigid senseless conventionalities.

Peter and Sally, being ordinary creatures with human failings, are ignored by the society as of no consequence. But the brilliant and the visionary, because they do not follow the proportion of the herd, are pronounced mad. They are manacled, secured behind bars, or put in homes. If they still persist in their visions, they are crucified, poisoned, or forced to commit suicide. Septimus symbolizes those few who have been martyred because of their visions. Septimus was a promising young man who was ‘anxious to improve himself’. His employer, Mr. Brewer thought very highly of Smith’s abilities’. As the European war broke out, he was among the first to volunteer. He served with great distinction and was promoted. This bright young man is obsessed with a sense of moral turpitude that he had not cared when his friend Evans was killed, and that ‘he married his wife without loving her’. He is also aware of sins of society, the brutality blaring out on the placards, men trapped in mines, and women burnt alive, sights that would turn a sensitive mind mad.

Virginia Woolf, as she says in her Diary, wanted *Mrs. Dalloway* to be a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side—something like that. She has been successful to such an extent that the case of Septimus Smith can surely bear comparison with the cases of the insane described in scientific treatises on insanity. Septimus, like the insane mentioned by Bernard Hart in *The Psychology of Insanity*, exhibits undue excitement, then apathy, has hallucinations, and hears voices, Bernard Hart also points out that in many patients ‘the reasoning powers seem to be in excellent order so long as they are applied to matters not immediately connected with the delusional system’. Septimus Warren Smith in the same manner could read, Dante for example, quite easily (Septimus, do put down your book,’ said Rezia, gently shutting the *Inferno*), he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect.

Yet whereas the modern psychologists are prone to think that the visions and trances manifested by ‘the ascetics and ecstatic’ being of ‘frequent occurrence in the mentally disordered patients of today’, are hallucinatory, Virginia Woolf, on the other hand appears to share the classical viewpoint of Plato that ‘there is also a madness which is divine gift. She feels that the so called insane, who do not conform to the worldly proportion of the herd, sometimes have a better conception of reality, and have something useful to say. Septimus Smith therefore, like Gerard de Nerval who,

according to Arthur Symonds, 'was only wise, passionate, collected, really master of himself, when he was insane, and like Villiers de L'Isle-Adam who was 'an amusing kind of mad man', utters his profoundest sayings when he is thought to be insane. In a way Septimus seems to resemble Virginia Woolf herself. She had severe nervous breakdowns and her mental stability was threatened for years by her brother's death. When Septimus had to utter his profound truths he muttered gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out of those profound truths, which needed so deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out.

Similarly Virginia Woolf used to feel very excited, especially when she was writing her novels of ideas. 'I get excited writing', she says at one place. When she was writing what at that time she called *Two Guineas*, she reported, "I must very clearly verge on insanity I think, I get so deep in this book I do not know what I am doing. Find myself walking along the Strand talking aloud." Similarly when she completed *The Waves*, she wrote, "I wrote the words O Death fifteen minutes ago, having reeled across the last ten pages with some moments of such intensity and intoxication that I seemed only to stumble after my own voice, or almost, after some sort of speaker (as when I was mad) I was almost afraid remembering the voices that used to fly ahead."

So Septimus Smith, getting excited, talking aloud, seeing the dead, and hearing voices, utters such truths as Virginia Woolf pondered over throughout her life, and was to elaborate in her novels. 'There is a God... there is no death' ... that trees are alive... and universal love', and time are some of the ideas in the mind of Septimus that Virginia Woolf later considered in *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, *Orlando*, and *The Years*. Septimus Smith uttering these messages of universal love becomes a symbol of a visionary, and because he is not willing to conform to the sense of proportion, and refuses to be converted to the ideas of Holmes and Bradshaw, is a rebel against society. His flinging himself 'vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings' is not a sign of his being 'coward', as Dr. Holmes thought it to be. Like the 'self homicide' of the young man mentioned by De Quincey, it is a symbolic act of defiance, of refusal to be dominated and exploited. He commits suicide to show that Bradshaw had no right to say 'must' to him, that Bradshaw had no power over him to order rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest, rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months' rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve.

He did not want to be flattened like Dr. Holmes who, if he ever found himself even half a pound below eleven stone six, asked his wife for another plate of porridge at breakfast, 'the large outline' of whose body Rezia saw against the window. He did not want to have a large outline, symbolic of brute force, of well-fed bodies and starved souls. Believing it seems, in the saying of Christ: 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul', he thus, as Mrs. Dalloway feels, preserves his soul 'A thing that mattered'. Thus he is able to indict also, what Peter sarcastically calls, 'the triumphs of civilization'. On another level this suicide of the shell shocked brilliant young man, Septimus, becomes an indictment of inhuman war.

Besides employing characters to give us an insight into the various aspects of society, Virginia Woolf uses then to symbolize certain conditions and states of mind as well. The old woman who lives opposite the Dalloways and is free to do as she liked, to climb upstairs, stop, or gain her bedroom, and living alone by herself, safe from the domination of Kilman, becomes, for Clarissa Dalloway, who herself, in order to enjoy that privacy, had refused to marry Peter, a symbol of the privacy of the soul. She sees the old woman once again after she has heard about the suicide of Septimus. "She was going to bed. It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window. It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed alone." The old lady quite quietly going to bed alone, unconcerned with the social gatherings with the Holmes and Bradshaws making life intolerable, and the Smiths killing themselves evokes in Clarissa once again the sense of the privacy of the soul that she wanted to preserve.

Just as in *The Voyage Out* Rachel's girlhood is symbolized by mist and cold of London, the state of Clarissa's girlhood is externalized by the early morning air at Bourton, fresh, calm, and still, 'like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn. The time of the day and the surroundings, too, are symbolic. The early morning is suggestive of her youth the morning of life and the flowers and trees with the smoke winging off them, the rooks rising, falling, which she watches as she stands there with Peter, represent her feelings

and aspirations about a rosy budding life. The rising and falling emotions that she was feeling in the presence of Peter who loved her and for whom she had tender feelings.

Like Clarissa, who thinks of the garden at Bourten when she thinks about her girlhood, Rezia, too thinks about the Milan Gardens when she thinks of her maidenhood and happiness. Once again she thinks of the garden and the country side when she is given 'the sweet stuff' to drink to make her go to sleep. The quiet and peace, that descend on her as she drops off to sleep after those highly strung moments of her life, are aptly externalised by the garden, the cornfields and the hills near the sea, and by the 'rain failing, whispering, stirrings among dry corn, the caress of the sea', that she dreams about.

Similarly the tender feelings of Richard Dalloway, and the freedom and delight of Elizabeth, are high-lighted by the mention of appropriate nature symbols. When Richard Dalloway, along with Hugh Whitbread, walks through the streets of London after having lunched with Millicent Bruton, he becomes conscious of the sham and strenuous life of London. 'For the worthlessness of life did strike Richard pretty forcibly' he desires rest and peace. He thinks about Norfolk, where "A soft warm wind blew back the petals; confused the waters; ruffled the flowering grasses. Haymakers, who had pitched beneath hedges to sleep away the morning toil, parted curtains of green blades; moved trembling globes of cow parsley to see the sky; the blue, the steadfast, the blazing summer sky." This restful landscape of Norfolk becomes symbolic of the feelings of rest and quiet which Richard Dalloway desired at that movement.

His daughter, Elizabeth, too, who had felt stuffy inside the Army and Navy Stores in the company of Miss Kilman, thinks about the country and dogs. She wants to be out in the open air away from the oppressing presence of Miss Kilman. Therefore, when 'She was delighted to be free'. The fresh air, symbolically, 'was so delicious'

The country, nature, and flowers are used as appropriate symbols for the tender, peaceful, and quiet feelings of Peter, Sally, and Clarissa, also. Whenever Peter thought tenderly about Clarissa, and he thought about her quite often 'on board ship; in the Himalayas; suggested by the oddest things', he always was reminded of 'some field or English harvest', and he 'saw her most often in the country, not in London' And just as Sally 'despairing of human relationships' goes into her garden and gets "from her flowers a peace which men and women never gave her'. Clarissa gets her peace from the flowers in Miss Pym's shop.

There were flowers: delphiniums sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses, there were irises Ah yes so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smile as she stood turning her head from side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. And then, opening her eyes, how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays, the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale as if it were the evening and girls in muslim frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower roses, carnations, irises, lilac glows; white, violet red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses!

And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she felt flow over her and surmount that hatred that monster surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when oh! A pistol shot in the street outside!

Miss Pym's shop with its deliciously scented exquisitely fresh flowers burning by themselves, softly and purely, pleasurably exciting the senses of smell, touch, and sight, with its neatness and innocence heightened by the mention of the fresh 'frilled linen from a laundry', and the girls in Muslim frocks', and with its visions of unruffled calmness evoked by the 'almost blue black sky', becomes symbolic of a heaven where peace and purity, seeping into 'the monster' - the leaf encumbered forest. Virginia Woolf's symbol for the soul uplift a person and help him to surmount the hatred and harshness of life which are symbolized by the street outside with its harsh metallic sounds of pistol shots. In contrast to London, which is a symbolic setting for *Mrs. Dalloway* in which Virginia Woolf wants to portray

'the despicableness of people', and 'the detestable social system', as Richard Dalloway calls it, the flowers, gardens, countryside, and nature mentioned in this novel at different places, represent sanctuaries of peace. Septimus Smith's message: 'do not cut down trees', therefore evoking these ideas, becomes symbolic.

Some of the actions, too, in *Mrs. Dalloway* are of symbolical nature. Peter Walsh's different actions with his old 'horn handled knife, which Clarissa could swear he had these thirty years', are symbolic of his various emotions and attitudes of mind. His extraordinary habit of always playing with his knife, that Clarissa had noted in him, stands for 'his silly unconventionality, his weakness; his lack of the ghost of a notion that having a conservative husband was bad for some women is represented by his shutting 'the knife with a snap'. Similarly while he thinks about the life he had led full of 'journeys; rides; quarrels; adventures; bridge parties; love affairs; work. Work, work!' as compared to the 'smugness' of Clarissa's life, he clenches his fist on his knife. This clenching the fist on the knife like a Red Indian, evokes the most adventurous side of his life and personality. In the same manner his paring of his nails with his pocket knife, and running his finger along its blade, suggest his mental attitude of being sharp enough yet to trim his life to his liking. He, as he told Clarissa, was going to his 'lawyers and solicitors, Messrs. Hooper and Grareley of Lincoln's Inn' to ask them to arrange a divorce for Daisy 'the wife of a Major in the Indian Army' with whom he was in love. Again on leaving Clarissa, as he followed the 'young; quite young' women wearing a red carnation, his straightening himself and 'stealthily fingering his pocket knife' is symbolic of his need to reassure himself that he is still young and free. Likewise his holding the knife at arm's length, viewing, and then replacing it in his pocket, is an action symbolic of his thoughts at that particular moment.

Could it be that he was in love with her, then, remembering the misery, the torture, the extraordinary passion of those days?... But then those astonishing accesses of emotion bursting into tears this morning, what was all that about?... It was jealousy... which survives every other passion of mankind, Peter Walsh thought, holding his pocketknife at arms length. She had been meeting Major Order, Daisy said in her last letter; said it on purpose he knew, said it to make him jealous;... he was furious! All this bother of coming to England and seeing lawyers was not to marry her, but to prevent her from marrying anybody else. That was what tortured him... when he saw Clarissa so calm, so cold... realizing what she might have spared him, what she had reduced him to a whimpering, snivelling old ass. But women, he thought, shutting his pocket-knife, don't know what passion is. They don't know the meaning of it to men. Clarissa was as cold as an icicle.

This introspection about his own self, how he suffered when he loved Clarissa, how he feels about Daisy's love and about his own personality is aptly symbolized by the way he views his pocket knife, holding before him at arms length. Thinking that women such as Clarissa being as cold as an icicle, can neither know the sharpness of passion, nor understand it, he feels that he should not have made a 'snivelling old ass' of himself by showing his emotion to her. This feeling he externalises by shutting the blade of his pocket-knife, and it seems, replacing it in his pocket.

In the evening when he goes to attend Clarissa's party, on 'entering the house, the lighted house where the door stood open, where the motor cars were standing, and bright women descending', Peter feels that 'the soul must brave itself to endure'. At the moment he opens 'the big blade of his pocket knife' the type of party that he dislikes and to face the humbugs he hates. This horn handled knife, therefore, reflecting his thoughts, feelings and attitudes, becomes a symbol not merely of his 'sex and intellect', but of his personality as a whole.

Like the pocket knife which symbolizes the personality of Peter Walsh, 'the green dress' becomes a symbol of Mrs. Dalloway's personality.

That was herself -pointed; dark; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together never.. showing a sign of all the other sides of her faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions, like this of Lady Bruton not asking her to lunch... Now, where was her dress? Her evening dresses hung in the cupboard. Clarissa.. gently detached the green dress and carried it to the window. She had torn it... But in artificial light the green shone, but lost its colour in the sun. She would mend it. Where was the tear?... Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly, to the belt.

Clarissa's mending the dress, collecting the folds together, suggests her drawing her parts together and not showing the other side of her faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicious the tear in her personality. Therefore, as she brings the pleats of her personality together by forgetting the baseness of lady Bruton in not asking her to lunch by overcoming her hatred for Miss Kilman, and by saying thank you, thank you to Lucy who was 'helping her to be like this. To be what she wanted, gentle, generous hearted', quiet and calm descended on her. In this very effort of not showing a sign of the other side of her personality and of appearing to be gentle and generous, there is something artificial, something tinselly. The green dress, therefore, that shines in artificial light but loses colour in the sun, and becomes a suggestive symbol of 'the perfect hostess'. Some of the ordinary things and happenings of everyday life, also, acquire added significance of a symbolic kind. The fountain where Peter and Clarissa meet.

Was in the middle of a little shrubbery, far from the house, with shrubs and trees all around it. There she came, even before the time.. the spout (it was broken) dribbling water incessantly... She did not move. 'Tell me the truth, tell me the truth,' he kept on saying. She seemed contracted, petrified... She was like iron, like flint, rigid up the backbone. And when she said, 'It's no use. It's no use. This is the ends' ...it was as if she had hit him in the face.

The fountain with its broken spout and a dribble only, like the dry fountain in *The Voyage Out*, symbolizes the contracted and rigid feelings that Clarissa had at that moment for Peter.

Besides portraying the despicableness of society, and sanity and insanity, Virginia Woolf is interested in probing into the nature of life and death. Like Clarissa, she finds life.

In people's eye's in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motorcars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplanes overhead....

a beating, stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it... the bouncing ponies... the whirling Young man, , and laughing girls in their transparent muslins who, even, after dancing all night, were taking there absurd wooly dogs for a run discreet old dowagers.. and the shopkeepers....

all giving her a sense of the divine vitality, become symbols of pulsating life. Similarly when Peter watches the beauty of Bedford Place leading to Russell Square, he sees that.

It was straightness and emptiness of course; the symmetry of a corridor, but it was also windows lit up. A piano, a gramophone sounding; a sense of pleasure making hidden, but now and again emerging when, through the uncurtained window, the window left open, one saw parties sitting over tables, young people slowly circling, conversations between men and women, maids idly looking out... stockings drying on top ledges, a parrot, a few ordinary plants.

Those ordinary things through their 'beauty pure and simple' giving him a sense of 'absorbing, mysterious', and infinitely rich life, attain symbolic value.

Clarissa Dalloway is concerned with the physical show of life that she sees in the swing tramp, and trudge, in the bouncing ponies, in the whirling young men, and in the laughing girls in their transparent muslins. Not being interested, like Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, and Eleanor Pargiter in *The Years*, in the 'inner' or the 'other' life. She remains, in spite of her occasional perfunctory musings about the soul and death, as Lytton Strachey felt, shallow and tinselly. Consequently her ideas about death do not attain the meaning and depth of Bernard's in *The Waves* 'Fear no ,ore the heat o' the sun', a line from *Cymbeline* which Clarissa often repeats symbolizes her yconception of death. It is not something to be dreaded. If anything, it saves from the stresses of life. There is an 'embrace' in it, therefore one should not cling to life at the cost of one's integrity and personal dignity 'the thing that mattered', and which as Clarissa thought, lay 'wreathed about with chatter, defaced obscured in her life', and which she, like most social people, lets 'drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter.'

(XIV) Moral and Values in Virginia Woolf's Fiction

“When philosophy is not consumed in a novel, when we can underline this phrase with a pencil, and cut out that exhortation with a pair of scissors and paste the whole into a system, it is safe to say that there is something wrong with the philosophy or with the novel or with both.” so writes Virginia Woolf, upon the novels of George Meredith. In her own novels the ‘philosophy’ is “consumed” to an exceptional degree. There are two obvious reasons why it must be so. First, because her whole endeavour is towards understanding rather than judgement, and it is from the judgements, pronounced or implied by authors, that we usually extract their own views upon ethical or philosophical questions; and secondly because, in accordance with her own artistic purposes, she disappears from her books with growing completeness. We attend to the thought and the speech of her persons, but never to her own. Yet this clearly does not mean that her novels do not contain any moral and metaphysical ideas.

It is not then for moral precepts nor for a system of metaphysics that her reader will look—if he does so, he will look in vain. But no one can write about human beings without revealing their own sense of values. Much can be discovered from Virginia Woolf's novels about the way she saw things; about what things seemed to her important; about what she valued and what she disliked. One notices that certain themes recur and must therefore have held an important place in her thoughts, and her handling of those themes reveals certain predilections and sometimes a peculiar conflict or tension of the mind, as of one poised between two opposed beliefs. Such a tension exists, for instance, in her feeling about life itself. Over and over again the people she creates experience the sense that life is chaotic, fragmentary, disillusioning. And as often they experience the intense joy of living. This tension in her feeling about life is already apparent in *The Voyage Out*. The novel moves between the poles of life and death, Rachel questions and seeks for life's meaning, for an order and beauty in life comparable to what she finds in music. When she plays the listener to find everything “Very still, as if they saw a building with spaces and columns succeeding each other rising in the empty space. They began to see themselves and their lives, and the whole of human life advancing very nobly under the direction of the music. They felt themselves ennobled, and when Rachel stopped playing they desired nothing but sleep.”

But for Mrs. Dalloway, in *The Voyage Out*, mere human living in its disorder and its ugliness is more valuable than the beauty of poetry and the peace of death. It is life as men and women experience it that Virginia Woolf presents in her books; that, she believes, is all we can know, and within it lie both extremes, the sense of life's magnificence, and the sense of life's ugliness and chaos. In *Jacob's Room* she says, “Indeed, Piccadilly and Holborn, and the empty sitting-room with fifty people in it are liable at any moment to blow music into the air. Women perhaps are more excitable than men. It is seldom that any one says anything about it, and to see the hordes crossing Waterloo Bridge to catch the non-stop to Surbiton one might think what reason impelled them. No, no. It is the drums and trumpets. Only, should you turn aside into one of those little bays on the Waterloo Bridge to think the matter over, it will probably seem to you all a muddle—all a mystery.”

And for Mrs. Ramsay, in *To the Lighthouse*, the muddle and the mystery predominate, although she is one of those women, of whom there are several in these novels, who can create shape and order and harmony out of human relationships. Mrs. Ramsay “took a look at life, for she had clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband. A sort of transaction went on between them, in which she was on one side, and life was on another, and she was always trying to get the better of it, as it was for her; and sometimes they parleyed (when she sat alone); there were, she remembered, great reconciliation scenes; but for the most part, oddly enough, she must admit that she felt this thing that she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if one gave it a chance. There were the eternal problems; suffering; death; the poor.”

The personality of Clarissa Dalloway, sketched a little statistically in Mrs. Dalloway is developed with full sympathy in the book that goes by her name. She, like Mrs. Ramsay, is one who loves to create order by uniting human beings. Peter Walsh is critical of her love of social functions and she questions herself, recognizing in this love the centre of her life:

... in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this things she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-So in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she fleet quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only

they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering, to combine, to create; but to whom?

“An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddle Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense: and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know.

“All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; she the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whit-breed; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that how unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all; how every instant....”

And the exquisite joy of life is not merely talked about but re-created, “proved upon our pulses” in the book. But side by side with it stalks the horror and the chaos; Septimus is overwhelmed by it and courts death. Of his death the wife of Sir William Bradshaw, nerve specialist, speaks at Clarissa’s party: Lady Bradshaw (poor goose—one didn’t dislike her) murmured how, just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr. Dalloway) had killed himself. He had been in the army.’ Oh thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here’s death, she thought.”

The conflict between an intense an intense love of life and an equally intense perception of its terror is closely linked, for Virginia Woolf, as for Keats, on the one hand with “an exquisite sense” of the luxurious” and on the other with a perception of “the miseries of the world” “here where men sit and hear each other groan”. It is pity for human suffering that causes Mrs. Ramsay’s antagonism to life: “With her mind she had always seized the fact that there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit; she knew that.”

And Virginia Woolf knew that. So she creates Septimus Warren Smith for whom “The world has raised its whip, where will it descend?” In retrospect she shows us Septimus the romantic, idealistic young man, who loved the poets, who came to London, was a clerk, but attended evening classes and when war broke out volunteered to fight for an England which “consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays” and of the women who “lectured at the Waterloo Road upon Shakespeare”. He was good soldier, he was promoted, he saw his friend killed, but he survived, only:

“Now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder claps of fear. He could not feel. . . .

It might be possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window, as they left Newhaven; it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning.

The two forms of human misery that most haunt the books are poverty and war. War that swallows up Jacob, that destroys Septimus, that tortures the mind of Maggie’s husband Renny in *The Years*; after an air raid in 1917:

“They listened. The guns were still firing, but far away in the distance. There was a sound like the breaking of waves on a shore far away.

They’re only killing other people’, said Renny savagely. He kicked the wooden box.

Similarly to the tension in the novels between the love and the hatred of life, is the tension between doing and contemplating. It is the nature of the artist to contemplate and re-create the human scene, not to endeavour to change it. He is endowed with what Keats calls “negative capability”; he is ‘capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. . . with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration’. Virginia Woolf is among those poets whom Keats admires, who have “no palpable design upon out”. Yet the poet is not less, but more conscious of the world about him than the average man; therefore to him.

... ‘the miseries of the world are misery, and will not let him rest.’

Like Keats, Virginia Woolf feels sometimes that “there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world,—some do it with their society—some with their wit—some with their benevolence—some with a sort of power of conferring good humour on all they meet and in a thousand ways all equally dutiful to the command of Great Nature.”

And because, herself a contemplative, she yet feels this lure and this worth in the life of action she communicates the tension between the two through the minds of the people she creates.

Mrs. Dalloway admires her husband's active concern for the welfare of mankind; it is because he is capable of "doing some good for the world. . . with his benevolence" that she admires his' adorable, his divine simplicity which no one had to the same extent; which made him go and do a thing while she and Peter frittered their time away bickering."

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* For the preparation of this study material, I have heavily borrowed from the above mentioned books.

Assignments

1. Consider *Mrs. Dalloway* as a stream of consciousness novel. Illustrate your answer.
2. Comment on Clarissa Dalloway's split personality in *Mrs. Dalloway*.
3. Write an extended note on the stream of consciousness technique with special reference to *Mrs. Dalloway*.
4. Virginia Woolfs characters are highly articulate and quite abnormally self-aware watching their thoughts and feelings the whole time. Discuss with reference to *Mrs. Dalloway*.
5. Write a detailed note on the manipulation of Time-scheme in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. What purpose does it serve in the novel?
6. Which positive values are celebrated by Virginia Woolf in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*? Discuss.
7. Symbolism is one of the significant features of Virginia Woolf's Art. Discuss with reference to *Mrs. Dalloway*.
8. Comment on Virginia Woolf's art of characterisation with special reference to *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Alice Walker - Unit IV

Writer and Her Age

Alice Melsinior Walker was born on Feb., 9, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia to Willie Lee and Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker, a family of poor sharecroppers but wealthy of spirit and love. Her grand father, Henry Clay Walker, as Walker herself puts it was “a man who charmed, even mesmerized me, when I was a child.” As the eighth child, she had experienced the stings of poverty in, her early life. Their large family had to live crowded in a small and ugly house, allowing her no privacy or comforts. On top of it she was conscious of the fact that her mother never wanted, her eighth child which filled her with a sense of loneliness. Walker’s mother who “seemed a large soft, loving eyed” woman, was creative, usually patient with her family and outside. She was a hard working woman who laboured beside her husband in the fields. She nurtured a great love for mother earth and cherished it as “one way of creativity by adorning with flowers whatever house” the Walker family was forced to live in. Walker does obeisance to this quality in her mother when she says “Whatever rocky soil, she landed on, she turned into a garden.” (In Search of My Mother’s Garden.)

Walker’s mother had suffered intensely both as a woman and a black woman in the racist world. However she valued education and was inspired to send Alice to school at the age of four. Alice was ‘basically a tomboy who unlike girls of her age, went out and played in the outfields.

In the summer of 1952 while playing, “Cowboys and Indian” with her brothers, Walker was blinded in her right eye by a BB gun pullet. This left her deformed and ugly: and the agony of being ugly dogged her, till one day her daughter Rebecca exclaimed in wonder, “Mommy, there’s a world in your eye.” The trauma of the deformed eye was so deep that she began to have “day dreams” not of “fairy tales” but of “falling swords” and putting gun to ‘her heart and head. For a long time she felt “shy and timid” and often reacted to slights and insults that were not intended. (John O’Brien, “Alice Walker: An Interview to Alice Walker Critical Perspectives Past & Present ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah (New York. Amistad Press 1993), p. 327)

Walker’s early experiences of life initiated her into the knowledge of discrimination against women being practiced in her community. She often resented how in her own family the boys went “unfettered” and the girls were tied to “domestic duty” (Charles Walker, “Alice Walker: Color Purple, Author Confronts her critics and Talks About Her New Book.”)

She also remembers the way her brother used to intimidate her and bully girls like her. Walker’s consciousness of the enslavement of woman to duties, and responsibilities resulting in her self-denial deepened further when she first experienced pregnancy during the summer of her senior school. It seemed to threaten her body, her whole self. She thought of killing herself and even slept with a razor blade under her pillow for several weeks. With the help of her friend she ultimately managed to terminate her pregnancy.

In 1961 after graduating high school she was able to cast off this shell of loneliness. However, the emotional trauma – pain anxiety, depression of this ordeal found expression in her poetry *Once*. Muriel Rukeyser, her teacher helped her in helped her in bringing out this book of poetry (1968).

She was her school’s valedictorian and voted as the most popular student in high school. In 1961, at the age of seventeen, Walker was awarded a rehabilitation scholarship from the State of Georgia, which enabled her to attend Spelman College, an institution dedicated to the education of black women. Three gifts from her mother carried symbolic significance for her – a suitcase with which to travel to a world beyond her poor, rural surroundings, a typewriter, for creativity and a sewing machine for self sufficiency.

While at Spelman College, Walker’s rebelliousness and activism showed up. She participated in civil rights demonstrations. She was invited to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s home in 1962 at the end of her freshman year in recognition of her invitation to attend the Youth World Peace festival in Helsinki, Finland. After attending the conference, Alice travelled Europe for the summer. Walker’s love for writing enabled her to overcome her painful personal experiences of her deformity. Walker says “I firmly believe I would never have survived to be writer—I know I would not have survived at all.”

In August 1963 Alice travelled to Washington DC to take part in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Perched in a tree limb to try to get a view, Alice could not see much of the podium, but was able to hear Dr. King's "I Have A Dream" address.

After graduating from Sarah Lawrence, in 1965 Alice Walker returned to Georgia where she participated in the Civil Rights Movement. By doing door to door voter's registration in the African American community, gave her chance to have first hand experience of the ghastly impact of the poverty which undermined the relationship between black men and women. In 1966, she was awarded her first writing grant. She met Mervyn Leventhal, a white civil rights attorney. They were married in 1967. Walker's experience of marriage strengthened her conviction that the 'woman' who was 'alone' because of her 'body' had to fight all those institutions and customs which sought to fetter her body, mind and soul. She worked as a teacher at Jackson State' college and Tougaloo college. She won an award of \$300 for the essay "The Civil Rights Movement: Was It Good?"

In the Late sixties Martin Luther King was assassinated. Vietnam war had begun and there was a virtual chaos in the U.S.A. Walker, at this time had been busy writing her first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), which portrays the stings of poverty, and the impact of racism. With the publication of her first novel she won recognition as a writer. The New Yorker declared her next novel *Meridian* (1976) as "beautifully presented and utterly convincing." *The Color Purple* (1982) placed "Walker in the company of Faulkner."

This was followed by *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) "mesmerizing tapestry of human experience and emotion... readers will cheer..." declared San Francisco Examiner Chronicle....

And *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) is a powerful condemnation of the practices of female circumcision. This was followed by *The Light of My Father's Smile* which explores what happens – to an entire "family – "when a daughter cannot forgive her father for a single, hypocritical, soul-crushing act. It explores the dangerous bonds of fidelity between sisters, lovers, memories..... Walker's language is sensual and at the same time delightfully precise ... Political, immodest, astonishing by turns, [this novel] once again demonstrates Walker's gigantic talent."

Besides these Walker wrote a series of essays with a wealth of self-revelation entitled

In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose (1983). *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult* (1995), *Living by the Word* 1988 reveals Walker's involvement with global issues. *Anything We Love Can Be Saved* (1997) is a book of essays dealing with female circumcision, Cuban Communism, Warden trial of Winnie Mandela, tributes to poet Audre Lord. *The Way Forward is With a Broken Heart* (Oct. 2000) is Walker's latest work.

Apart from these literary novels, essays Walker has penned down two collections of short stories: *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973) a book of short stories in Barbra Smith's words, "sets put consciously to explore with honesty the textures and terrors of black women's lives." This was followed by *You Can Not Keep Good Women Down* (1981). In contrast to the first collection this work celebrates the indomitable courage of women to fight back. These are empowered women who are capable of choosing their own path of life.

In addition to these she has penned down five volumes of poetry. Walker now lives in northern California.

In 1968, Walker made her mark with the publication of her first book of poetry and throughout the 1970s & 1980s. The Afro American poets such as June Jordan, Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez and Audre Lord have engendered a distinctly female work while empowering a distinctly African American vision of life. Several of these women writers are multi talented, working in poetry & fiction. For example, Sherley, Anne Williams has created; the, Peacock Poems and Dessa Rose, a feminist historical novel, and Rita Dove has produced award-winning poetry and short fiction. The best known of those who have moved easily between literary genres and creative poems is Alice Walker, the premiere Afro American and Southern author of her generation and who may be placed, in the tradition of Virginia Woolf and Zora Neale Hurston.

Almost all Afro American writing is rooted in the historical circumstances of slavery. Whether born in slavery or

not, major writers of African American literature before World War-I launched their literary careers using slave narrative as their canvas. The horrors & the sufferings of slavery system find vivid articulations in these narratives. In fact, Afro American literature can be termed as documentation of the multi-faceted nature of oppression & dispossession of blacks. There are two kinds of portraits of black man/woman, one that belongs to pre-civil war period and the other to the anti civil war. The commonly accepted image of the Old Negro that appeared in the sub human literature of this time is that of a “Canaans”. The servant of servants who has no history, “No value and culture”. He is adjudged as innately inferior and therefore altogether unfit to associate with the white races. In contrast to this image of the black of pre-civil south, the image that appears in the anti civil war is that of the restoration of individual dignity and personal self-worth of the blacks.

The first novel, *Clotel* (1853) of an African American writing was authored by William Wells Brown. Harriet-Wilson's *Our Nig: or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black in a Two Storey White House, North* (1859). Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* written by Hersely (1861); published under the name of Linder Brent, the first African American female slave to author her own narrative are a few writers who made their mark in the field of literature.

The 1863, Emancipation Proclamation supposed to bring some relief for the black & give some status to them in the society remained more of a blue print than a reality. The black writer was forced to conform to social conventions & European literary, models that proclaimed white society as just and humane. But there were many writers who not only deviated from the stipulated literary tradition but also set out to fight gender and racial oppression. They had the courage and audacity to decry the horrifying assaults in the form of rapes and lynching. Black women did not lag behind and actively involved themselves. In the movement for equal rights for women and for civil rights for all African Americans. Their activism resulted in the formation of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1896. Unfortunately most of the literature of this period went unnoticed & has been reclaimed & resurrected only in the recent times.

The turn of the century rolled out eminent writers like Waddell Chesnutt (*The House Behind the Cedars*, 1900) James Weldon Johnson (*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, 1912) & W.E.B. DUBOIS (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903). *Dubois in the African Roots of War* gives a vivid record of the prevailing conditions of pre-slavery. “Thus the world began to invest in color prejudice. The “Color Line” began to pay dividends. For indeed, while the exploration of the valley of Congo was the occasion of the Scramble for Africa, the cause lay deeper (England, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Turkey, among others, all spent the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries in a “Scramble” for Africa. . .” DUBOIS saw in the capitalist infiltration of Africa the origins of world racism against blacks, “Color” became in the world's thought synonymous with inferiority, Negro lost its capitalization and Africa was another name for bestiality and barbarism. Lynching of upcoming blacks was termed as racial justice for whites. DUBOIS organized the Pan American Movement to counter the European exploitation of Africa's plentiful resources and create a ‘people’ that would fight for its rights to a national self determination for the democratization of capital and for the eradication of the racist representatives that have masked the capitalist pilfering of Pan-African resources.

The thrust of these writers, by and large, is on the frustrations, inner chaos and sense of “doubleness” of a newly emancipated people, even as they celebrate their resistance, hard work and ingenuity.

The ground work though was laid by the first generation of writers, the Afro-American literature still lacked a clearly definable group of creative writers whose writings would reflect a broad range of Afro American life. In the early 1920s and 30s, the blacks witnessed Harlem Renaissance—the burgeoning of writing about race and identity and the Afro Americans place in the cultural, social and artistic life in America.

Harlem (Newyork) captured the imagination of the writers of these people as the place was a contrast to the South. It gave a status to the black community, opened up large vistas of social opportunities for them promising employment and decent living. It also became a centre for NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People), the Urban League, Marcus Garvey's Nationalist Universal Negro Improvement Association.

In 1925 Alain Locke wrote "*The New Negro*" and the book became the Harlem Renaissance's founding document. It emphasized on the elevation of black elite of artists, intellectuals & literate; and urged that the cultural achievements of the Afro-Americans be seen as on par with those of the white dominant culture, Locke saw in the *New Negro* movement the "spiritual emancipation." In the *New Negro* he finds the man who has "American wants American ideas" and a recognition by white culture is what is required. He too has to be brought into the main stream of American life, the writer insists.

The New Negro's movement from South to North is not an act of escapism but an effort to embrace new freedom that awaits him in the North. He becomes symbolic of an awakened racial pride fostered both by his American heritage & African roots in a race of warriors & emperors.

1929 onwards was a period of great depression. There was misery and deprivation all over America. The hurt of social alienation already prevailed & to add fuel to the fire economic deprivation engendered further bitterness in the blacks. They were the worst hit by the depression. Racism in its concealed form once again seemed to surface and threatened the very existence of the blacks. Rolph Ellison (*Invisible Man* 1952), Richmond Right (*Native Son* 1940), James Baldwin (*Go Tell it on the Mountain*, 1953), are the novelists who deal with themes like social alienation, loss of identity & the impact of nagging poverty.

1960—saw the dawning of Civil Rights Movement. It overturned the color bar & brought into being legislations promising equality. Women who had lived marginalized lives, became active and were all out to demolish the male dominated social structure. To start with, they found opposition from white men & women and the sexism of black men. The movement which in fact was many movements put together like Black Nationalism, the Black Panthers and the Civil Right Movement, sponsored the liberation of black race, in fact aimed at the liberation of black male only. An utter disregard for the humanity & equality of women spoke of the strong gender bias against black women.

In 1970s, the women's liberation movements came up but these primarily served the cause of white women. The black women did not trust these movements and read them as movements for the self advancement of white women. The year 1973 opened up gates of hope for black women when the Nationalist Black Feminist organization was launched with the objective to help restore voice and identity to black woman. 1977 a year later saw the emergence of the Combahee River Collective which launched its manifesto: "A Black Feminist Statement—with the agenda, "We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression" as Black women. These women see black feminism as the logical, political movement to combat the manifold & simultaneous oppression that all women of Color face." (Old Maria Lauret, liberating literature: Feminist Fiction in America). Barba Smith in her essay "The Truth Never Hurts: Black lesbians in fiction" in the 1980s states that "Black feminist writing provides an incisive critical perspective on sexual politics that affect Black women." Lesbianism finds open discussion with such writers. Another positive aspect of the new writers is faith in their roots & commitment to Afro-American heritage.

1970s unfolded another renaissance in black women's writing. Various aspects relate with women find articulation. Issues like gender, sexism, black womanhood, domestic violence, community, culture women camaraderie are generally addressed to by the writers of this period. The writers are fully aware of their "whole" self which is grounded in cultural, communal & ancestral truths. Poets like Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez & novelists like Toni Morrison (the first Afro-American to receive Nobel Prize in 1993). Toni Cade Barbara, Alice Walker & Gloria Naylor are a few who found recognition for their works. In Walker's words, these have enabled, "black women, especially those most marginalised by race, caste & class to have their voices heard and their histories read."

The struggling efforts of these women initially found strong opposition not only from white writers but also from their own people – the black male writers. It was a world where men ruled on all fronts, literature being the last field they would allow women to trespass and so women's writings came under heavy criticism. Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1992) which won her the Pulitzer Prize placed Walker in the company of Faulkner.

However, Alice Walker came under a barrage of criticism. Bradley assails Walker's attitude towards black men,

particularly the portrayal of the black, patriarch. He basically sees it as characterized by high “level of enmity” (David Bradley, New York Times Magazine). He located the roots of male hatred in writer’s childhood hatred for her father resulting from her feeling that he was responsible for the family’s poverty. Bradley it seems in his enthusiasm to trace Walker’s castigation of the failures of black man to some of her life experience, has conveniently ignored Walker’s later and maturer observations about her own father with whom she had come to develop and sympathetic understanding as “a poor man exploited by the rural middle class rich, like millions of peasants the world over.” (In search of My Mother’s Garden.) This criticism hurt her the most “as from infancy I have relied on the fiercely sweet spirits of black men nor did these sprits fail me as I sought to stay on my path to health, wholeness, truth & creativity. (TSRT).

Philip Royster reads *The Color Purple* as a direct product of the author’s “Childhood trauma” (In search of Our Father’s Arms: Alice Walker’s Persona of the Alienate Darling p. 347). Though Royster’s attempt to explain *The Color Purple* in terms of the writer’s life, personality provided some useful insights into the life and works of Walker, an obsessive concern with the biography obscures from his view the depth & width of Walker’s themes and attitudes in her fiction. Walker renders in her fiction the truth of life as she perceives it. Walker is also criticised for diluting the cause of racism by exposing the weaknesses & failures of black men and women which they term as “betrayal of her race.” She is branded as ‘a “traitor” of her race for undermining the “gains of 1960s Black Power Movement” (Calvin Hernton, Who is Afraid of Alice Walker. *The Color Purple* as Slave Narrative).

The tendency of Walker’s critics, only reflects the limitations of their perspective on her works. They, it seems are trying to judge Walker’s art only on the criterion laid down by them. Any deviation from that fixed formula seems to be unacceptable to them which is tantamount to their failure to recognise the writer’s own point of view, the range & complexity of her concerns and her vision of life.

From Alice Walker’s life and, her contemporary world we now move to her works. The works of Walker, fiction or non-fiction focus on certain themes which find apt articulation mainly through her protagonist. Being “a womanist” the cause of women’s suffering is close to her heart, and almost all her novels and stories portray women’s oppression and suppression, their journey from slavery to self empowerment. Racism which continued to dog the lives of the black particularly women, even after emancipation also comes under focus in her works. Besides these the theme of love, activism and pantheism also find place in her works. So we take up the two themes of her works; black woman’s self-empowerment, her sexist racial victimization.

JOURNEY FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM

Walker’s fiction like that of any great artist is characterised by a great deal of diversity and complexity. It seems to deal with almost every facet and dimension of life. Her attempts to explore all the various aspects of the life’ of the black without any sign to conceal or gloss over any of it aspects makes her fiction different from that of most of the other writers particularly those who have remained preoccupied only with the theme of the oppression of the black by the white. She, in fact, has held blacks to a rigorous critical scrutiny and, in the process, has focused her readers’ attention on all of those attitudes, customs and structures which, along with the racist oppression, have entrapped them in a cycle of misery and degradation.

Walker in her endeavour to examine thoroughly and objectively the weaknesses and strengths of the black has found a very fertile ground for her fiction in the predicament of black woman those story is a veritable account of her encounters with pains and sufferings denials and dispossession. In her novels & short stories she has, depicted powerfully the journey of a black woman’s life from birth to death characterised by her subjugation to physical and psychological violence, sexual exploitation and oppression and a denial of freedom to live a life of wholeness on her own terms. Her experiences as a daughter, wife and mother only tell the story of how her, own family dominated by male authority has tended to deprive her of the opportunities to develop her sense of self-worth and has thus prepared her only for the role of a slave in her life to serve, this time black master. Walker has turned her critical attention to the customs and traditions of black community which have, been so devised as to keep woman

subservient to man by denying her the right of control even over her own body and mind. Various strategies employed by men of her community to keep woman away from power have been exposed ruthlessly by Walker in her works. The subjugation of woman to oppression and exploitation, denial and dispossession at the hands of man in her family, community and in the larger racist world is only a part of the complex story of the black woman's sufferings as well as her heroic struggles to break or transcend the shackles of her bondage and to move towards liberation, expansion and regeneration of her self.

The complex and difficult course of a black woman's journey from a state of bondage to freedom, from denial of self to a sense of 'self-worth' has been delineated by Walker in all of its different facets and dimensions.

Walker's fiction depicts the struggles of black woman to liberate her body from the chains of mere biological function imposed on her by man. She moves from being a mere object of possession towards a state of control over her body, trying to become sexually liberated and self possessed. This struggle of black woman to re-appropriate her body has been presented by Walker along with her endeavours to achieve a social status of parity with man. She strives hard to improve her standing in the male dominated society through her work, her attempts to get education and by questioning and even challenging the validity of some of the customs and traditions of her community which seek to perpetuate her subjugation to man. This change in her social status, Walker suggests, is closely related to the expansion of her economic role and her abilities to achieve economic self-reliance. Besides this, Walker has also dramatised in her fiction the awakening of black woman to her political rights. She no longer is prepared to accept her traditional role and place only within the four walls of her house but struggles for her civil rights and her share in structures of power.

This first step that a black woman takes in her journey from a passive sufferer or a weak victim under the domination of man to a state of self-possessed, independent and strong woman, has been depicted by the writer mainly through the protagonists of her novels and short-stories. The first step that these protagonists take towards the journey of liberation is through resistance. These characters who had suffered all oppressions silently & uncomplainingly refuse to do so any longer. These helpless, unresisting victims actively take up cudgels with all those forces which seek to "marginalise" their existence. Such characters evince a sensitivity enabling them to empathise and sympathise with others and at the same time, feel the pains of injustice actively, impelling them to resist its perpetrators with all their strength and abilities. This human sensitivity, however, needs to be guided by intellectual ability. Walker's women, who journey towards liberation, tend to develop an awareness of the situation they are trapped in, a consciousness, of the causes responsible for their predicament and a knowledge of ways and means of ameliorating their lot. They exhibit a remarkable quality of dynamism and own ability to think and act in rational manner. These qualities of head and heart, which her protagonists possess, enable them to achieve their freedom and dignity, only when these women display self-confidence, a heroic courage of physical, intellectual and moral nature. All of these dimensions and facets of the struggles of Walker's Women to shake off their bondage as well as the physical and moral qualities required to achieve the goal of liberation have been depicted by her in great depth and detail in her works.

The first move that the black woman of Walker's literary world makes in her attempts to achieve an affirmation of self is the "re-appropriation of her body, the most exploited target of male aggression."³ This is characterised by her struggles to liberate her body from a mere object of sexual possession by man to a state wherein she learns to "love herself."⁴ and value her body in her own right. Walker's woman, who had "learned to fear and hate" her body now comes to celebrate its beauty and power. She outgrows the stage of her biological vulnerability which had been exploited by man to disempower her and thus to keep her under his control.

Celie and Fanny Nzingha in the novels *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar* respectively serve memorable examples of this journey of black woman. Celie for example shows a remarkable ability to grow out of a stage of passive submission to male authority and oppression to a state of rejoicing in the trace beauty and womanliness of her body. This becomes evident when the readers see the change in her attitudes towards herself and her responses towards her male exploiters at different stages of her life.

Celie, to begin with, seems to have no control at all over her body and no choices in matters of her relations with men who impose themselves on her with an utter disregard to her wishes. Alphonso and Albert both dispossess her of her right to her body and treat her as a mere object of sexual gratification. She becomes alienated from her body so much that she has to desensitize it and face onslaughts of physical and sexual aggressions passively and silently like a “dead wood”. In the early part of the novel she appears as a woman with only a negative image of her self. That is why she does not revolt and suffers only meekly like a dumb dog when thrashed by Albert mercilessly with a belt. But then begins the story of her transformation into a strong, self-respecting and an independent woman, no longer prepared to put up with the indignities upon her body. The process of Celie’s self-growth and development starts with the arrival of Shug Avery, her husband’s beloved.

Shug Avery, suffering from a horrible “womanly disease”, comes to live with Albert, Celie’s husband. Celie’s careful and loving nursing of Shug wins the latter’s heart. Shug provides to Celie the example of reciprocity, and a bond of warmth and friendship is created between the two. It is during their intimate conversations that Shug learns of Celie’s predicament at Albert’s hands and Celie’s own naivety about the mysteries of her own body. In fact, it is Shug who “initiates a desire for selfhood”⁵ in Celie and an awareness of her own beauty and worth. Celie who had so far hated her body and considered it to be responsible for oppression learns to love and value it. She becomes aware of how sexual violence upon her body had robbed her of the awareness of beauty and mystery of her womanly creativity. It is when Shug tells her about the mysteries of her body and asks her to go and see her sex organ in the mirror which she does that she becomes aware of her beauty and rejoices ecstatically in this discovery of her self-worth. She no longer regards herself as a mere piece of property owned by her man and experiences a sense of belonging to her own self: “It’s mine, I say.”

This sense of belonging to body creates in Celie a confidence with which she comes to gain control over herself. It is significant that Celie, who remained tight lipped over her brutal oppression, now comes to throw back angry words at her voluble oppressor, Albert. In the past, Celie had tolerated with silence and a sense of shame all kinds of indignities and humiliations from Alphonso, her stepfather who had told her that, “she was evil an always up to no good”. She had meekly accepted the verdict of Albert’s verbal abuse: “You ugly, you skinny, your shape funny. You too scared to open your mouth... You black, you pore... you a woman, Goddam... You nothing at all” (CP 186-87): But the meek victim stands transformed. She no longer would put up with such invectives and vehemently affirms her existence against her husband’s alleged “nothing” and asserts her new found freedom, “I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook... But I’m here.”

The discovery of her beauty by Celie initiates her into some of the most valuable human experiences which the abuse of her body by Alphonso and Albert had deprived her of. The utter selfishness she had seen in both of these male figures had rendered the experiences of genuine human warmth and tenderness alien to her. Her contact with Shug generates not only her love of her own body and beauty but also kindles in her a sense of human warmth and sympathy. They become like lovers and when they make love for the first time, their pleasure is purely oral. “They kiss and kiss until (they) can’t hardly kiss no more” (CP. 109). Celie for whom life was nothing but misery now comes to discover how it can be full of sweetness and joy. Earlier the oppression of her body had turned life for her into a kind of wasteland not only physical but also emotional and spiritual. Awakening of her love for herself releases her from this life of sterility and marks the beginning of her journey into a life-of freedom, fulfillment, human contact and creativity.

A deliverance from a state of utter sexual subservience to the lust of man further offers to Celie possibilities of self expansion. This aspect of Celie’s journey towards liberation from sexual bondage to a state of freedom begins with the re appropriation of her body and leads her to a stage where her body and its natural urges and energies become a means of hope, self-expansion, regeneration and an affirmation of her self as a woman.

The fact that Walker regards freedom of a woman’s body as a pre-requisite for all other kinds of freedom and happiness becomes all the more clear through the example of Shug Avery in *The Color purple*. Shug is a blues

singer. She moves nearly all over the country to give concerts. Her music is not just a means of earning for herself but more importantly to find a fulfillment and a realization of her potentials. She seems to be in tune with the inner rhythms of her life and it is this inner harmony that flows out into her songs that make her a great artist. The harmony of her life and music appears to be inextricably related to her sexual life and to her attitude, toward her own body. It is important to note that she is living a life of freedom from subjugation to any particular man. She has been in love with Albert and even others three children to him, but never allows him to dictate, dominate or degrade her body in any way as he does in the case of Celie. It is she who even teaches Celie to stand up bravely to his assaults, to challenge him and to learn to love and respect her own self and thus to preserve its sanctity. She, then, falls in love with other man even with a boy of nineteen and thus uses her body as a means to achieve her fulfillment and freedom. Her creativity as an artist, a sign of her inner harmony and happiness as an individual, in this way, seems to be rooted in the freedom of her body which she loves and celebrates uninhibitedly. Walker, thus, clearly suggests that a woman can find voice and express herself in a speech or any creative art only if her body also finds its own language, its expression through a free play and realization of its natural self.

This view of freedom of body exposes women like Shug to a very hostile condemnation and denigration from all those who are conditioned to the conventional morality which is another hurdle in this journey towards liberation. It is designed mainly to keep woman, in subservience to man. Condemnation of Shug by the priest as “Sult, hussy, heifer and street cleaner” (CP. 46), is an example of how woman’s attempts towards her freedom of body are vehemently opposed. They have to face a social Censure and are treated with derision. But it takes a lot of courage on her part to defy all of these subtle attempts of man to keep her from moving towards the liberation of her body. Walker, in this ‘way, seems to treat conventional morality antithetical to the rights of woman to her own body and her efforts to use her innate strengths of her sex for her own growth and fulfillment.

The view of conventional mortality undermining the woman’s right to her body finds a more detailed and in-depth treatment in her novel, *The Temple of My Familiar*. Surprisingly enough even a critic like J.M. Coetze fails to appreciate the insights Walker provides to her readers into how a blackman feels oppressed by conventional institutions and she struggles for freedom from the conventional morality when he discusses the novel as “untethered fantasies” born out of “dreamy woods”,⁶ The novel focuses mainly in three couples Fanny and Suwelo, Arveyda and Carlotta, Hal and Lissie. Their stories serve to reveal how institutions like marriage tend to work as instruments of hegemony. It casts husband wife relationship into a kind of master –slave bond, wherein it is enjoined upon the wife to obey her husband and to please him a he wants. It allows man a right to her body and thereby to “prove his superiority through his sexuality”⁷ he thus, turns her into a kind of mere object for his sexual urges. The novel suggests that marriage only legitimises the domination and exploitation of woman by man. It, therefore, can not lead woman to a state of peace, happiness, growth and fulfillment of her ownself as an independent human identity. The relationship in marriage based, essentially on inequalities between man and woman is presented by Walker as unjust and inconducive to the growth of healthy, mutually satisfying and fruitful relationship based on respect and recognition of each other’s identities. The novel, infact, is a scathing criticism of all those institutions and attitudes that seek to enthrall woman by invoking the sanctity of conventional patterns of man-woman relationship. It even goes on to suggest that a really healthy, meaningful and sacred relationship cab be achieved only when a woman regains a full control over her body and mind and becomes an active participant on the basis of parity in her bodily relations with mall. Fanny, the heroine of the novel represents that class of Walker’s women who refuses to suffer endlessly the constricting and deforming effects of the institution of marriage, Suwelo and Fanny love passionately, kissing each other for “hours Hours” They kissed like the “very essence of her soul’s vitality)” (THF. 284). But she finds this bond of love being stifled by the institution of marriage which seeks to deprive woman of her autonomy and dignity. Moreover, Fanny believes strongly that love, which is an expression of her life force, is only choked to death when imprisoned in the trap of marriage. Marriage for her, thus, works not as a means of achieving self expansion and a mystic merger with the cosmic life but only as an institution that withers the very flower of love and life. She, therefore, like other heroines of Walker, moves courageously towards regaining her freedom and integrity she had lost by entering into relationship of marriage with Suwelo.

The journey of Fanny towards freedom begins when she responds sensitively and decisively to a feeling of dispossession resulting from the stance of male superiority her husband displays towards her in almost every area

of their relationship. Fanny realizes that her marriage bond allows her husband a right to impose himself on her and that his mainly sexual interests in her tend to degrade and undermine the sanctity of her body' and mind. She runs out of patience with his proclivities to use women for his own sexual purposes and to treat them with scant respect for their individual self. She breaks down in tears when she can no longer control her pain and anger at the discovery that Suwelo has been in bed with another woman Carlotta, the wife of Arveyda. It is not only his relationship with another woman that hurts Fanny, but what hurts her more as a woman is the utter superficiality and smugness with which he has treated Carlotta. It is when he tells her that Carlotta "meant nothing whatever" to him that "she had no substance" that Fanny hates him most "as a man". She pleads with Suwelo that "men must have mercy on women and they must "feel woman' s bodies as a masseuse feels them" not just to caress them superficially and use them as if they are calender pin-up, centre-folds or paperdolls" (TMP. 321). Weary of man's failure to understand and respect the individuality and dignity of a woman's body and mind, Fanny resolves to dissolve her marriage and to construct her own independent life.

Suwelo knew that he had a perverted sexuality which was "colonised by the movies he saw and the books he, read. The magazines he thumbed through on street corners" (TMF. 386). She, therefore, never allows herself to be carried away even when he cries and begs for her love because she feels so much degraded by his obsessive sexuality that she can never experience "orgasm" and self fulfillment with him as his wife. It is only when she feels liberated from Suwelo and feels free as a woman to quest for her fulfillment that her body experiences the first ecstasy of orgasm.

This development of the life of Fanny speaks clearly of her sensitivity, dynamism and courage. This is also an evidence of the great value Walker attaches to one's freedom from cramping and constricting patterns of stereotyped relationships characterised often by "hypocrisy" selfishness and a desire to "colonise" the others. Fanny, in fact, appears to be a representative of the principle of universal harmony which can be achieved only when there is no oppressor and the oppressed. She appears as an active agent of this principle and her journey towards her own freedom is also marked by her simultaneous journey towards becoming a kind of *messiah* for others as well.

Fanny's qualities as a kind of a messiah become evident to the reader when she reveals her remarkable abilities to enter into a bond of empathy with all those who come to her for massage. She displays a kind of intuitive understanding of the pain of others 'and thus acts as a kind of physical as well as a spiritual healer. Fanny's influence upon Carlotta is not confined only to the latter's body but also percolates deep down into her soul. The company and sympathetic hearing she gives to Carlotta purge the years and pains which have hitherto been possessing her psyche like an evil spirit, for years. This enables Carlotta to achieve an enhanced and heightened awareness of herself as well as of others surrounding her. This releases her from the choking grip of anger against Arveyda and she is able to develop a more positive and affirmative outlook on life as a whole.

The pattern of growth in the personality and attitudes of Fanny and Carlotta, thus provide fine examples of the capacities and abilities of Walker's women to struggle and achieve their freedom and thereby affirm the dignity and value of human life. Their perspective on life widens and their capacity to realize its fullness deepens as they encounter forces and tendencies which seek to enthrall woman in constricting and rigidly conformist patterns of life. They ultimately are, thus, able to develop a cosmic view of life and construct a life of harmony based on trust, tolerance, a sympathetic understanding and respect for each other as individuals.

Another impediment that Walker's woman has to overcome in her struggle for liberation is the regimented societies. This struggle of her women against authoritarian male chauvinism embodies in the form of customs and traditions of society is epitomised by Tashi, the heroine of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. She not only suffers pains and mutilation but also displays a tremendous growth in personality and outlook leading her to a stage where she challenges all those practices which seek to cripple and subjugate her body and mind.

Tashi, the protagonist in the novel, *The Temple of My Familiar* suffers physical and psychological circumcision as a result of her blind allegiance to the culture of her community. But the price she has to pay in terms of the mutilation of body, mind and soul awakens her to the real nature and purpose of customs like genital circumcision and she

begins to react sensitively and strongly to all those forces that seek to destroy a woman's wholeness. She no longer remains naively mesmerized by slogans of Olinkan glory and begins to understand the sexual politics behind these customs of her society. She becomes aware of what men in collaboration with women do to their own daughters. This knowledge imparts to her a new strength and she succeeds in overcoming her trauma to a large extent. She no longer gropes in the dark and can now see the purpose of her existence. She comes to realize that to live a life of one's own is the legitimate right of every individual. For purpose of living an authentic life of wholeness, one has to stand up and face courageously all those forces and institutions which seek to keep woman in subservience to man.

This infuses Tashi with a sense of self confidence, self-worth and a hope that she can still try to live as life of meaningful dignity as a woman. In the beginning this resurgence of the spirit to live takes a form of anger against *tsunga*, the genital circumciser and the symbol of the system that has mutilated millions of women like Tashi. She harbours in her soul a desire to take revenge on her mutilator by killing the one who, many years ago killed her. She even manages to meet *tsunga* and thus to steal an opportunity to take her revenge. But in the flash of a new awakening, she learns that *tsunga* too has only been an instrument in the hands of the larger system designed by man to keep control over women. She feels that *tsunga's* predicament was in essence not much different from that of her own.

This new found understanding purges her of her anger and hatred against *tsunga* and strengthens her will and resolution to fight against the system which had victimised Tashis and *tsungas* for ages. It is with this expanded understanding and vision that Tashi confronts her accusers in her trial for allegedly murdering *tsunga*.

The trial scene shows Tashi, ranged against a system controlled by man and designed to perpetuate male hegemony. She is pitted against a system created and generated by man. It is an undemocratic, regimented and male chauvinistic society in which it is man who holds the reins of political power as well as those of the machinery of justice. Tashi is tried by this male controlled system of power for the death of *tsunga*. The machinery of justice operated by man moves on, mindless of how Tashi herself had been "killed" (PSJ. 272) years ago by *tsunga*. Tashi's pain, the loss of her self caused by her genital circumcision means nothing to the system of justice created and controlled by man. The way she has been deprived of her "autonomy" as woman does not even touch in any way the mechanical process of this justice. Men in seats of justice pass their judgment and she is executed by the firing squad. But the way she meets her end, in fact, signifies the victory of her spirit over the system that executes her. Tashi faces her death with calm and serene fortitude. She is even happy in the idea that it will deliver her from the constant torture resulting from her genital circumcision, at the hands of *tsunga*. More importantly her victory over her oppressors is also signified by the way women come to watch her execution defying male authority of the state trying to scare them away. Mbat, who has been attending on *tsunga* too undergoes a radical transformation under Tashi's influence when she learns from Tashi how women like *tsunga* were merely, "an extension... male, dominating power" (p. 275), cleverly used to dispossess woman of her own powers of body and soul. She also realizes like Tashi that women will have to stand up for freedom and justice as these will never come to them as gifts from men. Mbat even unfurls a banner in front of Tashi just at the moment when the latter is going to be executed by the soldiers. All of them, Adam, Olivia, Fenny, Pierre, Raye, Mbat hold the banner firmly and stretch it wide. It says in huge block letters: 'RESISTANCE' IS THE SECRET OF JOY!' (PSJ. 279). Thus Tashi infuses in all of them a spirit to resist oppression, and overcome cowardice in order to preserve the autonomy of their soul. Her whole, story, in this way, is a story of oppression, suffering and spiritual triumph. She grows from a state of ignorance about the meaning and purpose of genital circumcision to a stage where she is able to see everything in proper perspective and learns to value her "autonomy" and "wholeness" as a woman and becomes a source of strength to others.

The novel *Meridian* deals with this theme incisively by offering a contrast between two characters representing two different attitudes towards church. There is Mrs. Hills on the one hand, who stands for a conventional attitude towards Christianity and tends to submit herself to its dictates. Mrs. Hill's daughter, Meridian, stands on the opposite pole and represents the attitude of a modern educated woman who rejects completely the tendencies of Christianity to deny woman freedom and equality with man thereby undermining her dignity as a woman. This

sharp contrast between these two characters, belonging to two different generations and holding strikingly contrasting views about religion help to reveal the intellectual and moral growth of Walker's women. This underlines the capacity of Walker's woman to grow from a state of subservience and conformity to the traditional religion to a stage wherein she asserts her autonomy, equality with men and tries to fulfil her humanity with freedom and dignity. In the novel *Meridian*, Mrs. Hills, is a kind of a woman who has been since her childhood conditioned to accept and practise the old religion without ever questioning or challenging its authority. Meridian, her daughter, presents a sharp contrast to the set of theological beliefs held by her own mother. She is aware how her mother's cowering to the menacing force of religion allowed no growth whatsoever to her though she was a woman "capable of thought growth and action (but only if unfettered by the needs of dependents, requirements of a husband)". So Meridian is firmly resolved to discard and reject all those theological precepts and philosophies which try to impede her growth as well as her access to autonomy and self-empowerment. Meridian, therefore sets on a journey which entails the demolition and reconstruction of the religion of the past as well as reconstituting of the existing fragments in a new context of the "artifacts of her own heritage."⁸ Her first step towards the attainment of this freedom of the spirit is to reject her mother's religion which demands that woman act only as "obedient daughter", "devoted wife" and "adoring mother".⁹ The rigidity with such Christianity enjoins upon woman to play such roles stirs in Meridian a feeling of revolt against this religion. She does not even accept for herself the role of a traditionally devoted wife. She looks at her relation with her husband in a very critical manner and finds that Teddie her husband wanted her only to act as instrument of his sexual gratification. He expected that his "pleasure should please her" (m. 67-68).

Meridian finds this as degrading and, therefore, unacceptable to her sense of dignity as a woman. This makes her all the more conscious of the value of her freedom and identity. She tries to preserve the autonomy of herself from Teddy's superior role as a husband. She resents deeply the privileges Eddie claims as a man. She, can not bring herself round to the idea that as a devoted wife she ought to be always at his command. She questions: "Why did his pants and shirts have to be starched and ironed after every second wearing?" Whereas she herself had "learned to wear her clothes longer than two day without changing them. Moreover, she does not even accept him as her intellectual superior only because he is a man. She complains that he, like most of the boys of his age will never grow even to become the "president of the local bank." (M. 70). But she feels deeply disturbed when she finds that Eddie still goes to school only because he is a boy, though he knows nothing about books or about the world," (M.71) while she because of marriage and pregnancy is deprived of it all. This resentment against and rejection of discrimination against herself alienates her from Teddy leading to the termination of her marriage in divorce, an act which her mother conditioned by religion could never have thought of.

Meridian takes another step in the direction of her freedom as a woman when she refuses to play the role of an "adopting mother", ordained by the Christian religion. Meridian is so firm in her resolution that even her mother's emotional appeals fail to persuade her to carry the burden of rearing her child. She also, unlike a traditional mother aborts Truman's child and refuses to be the mother of his babies.

The necessity to cultivate the 'spirit to struggle for the preservation of the sanctity of one's own life here and now appears to be the message of Walker's *The Color Purple*, as well. This theme has been developed in the novel around the characters of Celie, the protagonist, and Shug, the blue singer. Celie's story, in fact, is a story of her freedom from the pains and sufferings of slavery, paralleled by her liberation from the oppressive hold of christian God on her whole being. We find that Celie in the early part of the novel turns to God for succour in the hour of her grief. She is a woman who has been trained to see God as one who is "big and old and tall and graybearded and white" who wears "white robes and goes barefooted" and has "bluish grey eyes". Such a God, she believes partakes all of her sorrows and pains. This image of God, in fact has been Walker suggests projected on to the Bible through the Church. Blindly believing in such a God, Celie tries to share all the secret burdens of her life with Him naively trusting in His justice. Her faith in this God, however, fails to mitigate any of her sufferings in her life. Her prayer to God does not save her from the lust of Alphonso. She has to lose even her children. In spite of all

these sufferings, she keeps believing in Him. But her pains and degradations at the hands of Albert, her husband are in no way ,alleviated by prayer to this Christian God of Justice.

Celie's deliverance importantly begins only when she stops turning to God for His Justice and Help and begins to steer the course of her life herself with the help of women of flesh and blood like Shug Avery. Shug teaches her that "God is not someone apart from anything else including yourself" and "god is every thing..... every thing that ever was or ever will be." Moreover, God is not separate from human beings and they too are a part of Him. This new concept of God dwelling within human beings and they themselves as an integral part of his creation brings about a radical change in Celie. With this changed concept of God, Celie loses all faith in the image of Christian God as just, merciful and loving and she begins to see him as "acting alike all the other mens she knows."

Celie's awareness of God as someone present in everything—humans, birds, animals, trees, stars, oceans, hills—fills her mind with a profound feeling of joy. Her feeling of alienation disappears and she begins to participate in, the fullness of life. God for her, thus, is not someone that can be confined to any institution like church but is a force that pulsates through the whole creation. The God that she discovers within herself and all around her is the one that gives her a sense of dignity and joy instead of degrading her by demanding prayers, begging for His mercy. Instead of striking fears in her own natural self and God enables her to love and value her own being as well as all the things around her. This marks her deliverance not only from fears but also from her sense of worthlessness as a black woman. This signifies the fact that the process of growth in the life of Walker's woman and her march towards freedom is inextricably linked to her abilities to achieve the freedom of her mind from the constricting concepts and assumptions embodied in old customs and institutions like church.

The liberation of Walker's woman from the claptrap of theology enables her to develop a greater consciousness of the complexities of issues confronting her in her every Clay life. This leads her to take a more active interest and become deeply involved in all those things which determine the quality and contents of her real existence on earth. She stops looking to other persons or powers outside herself and begins to claim and struggle for her rightful place in the socio-economic set up.

Poverty Walker's novels suggest is the greatest impediment in the way of black woman liberation. She shows, time and again, in her novels that it is poverty that mainly throws woman into endless chains of degradation, oppression and exploitation. The concentration of economic power in man tends to deny her any independent identity of her own in her society. In the absence of economic strength, Walker suggests, the very concept of freedom is a mere illusion—signifying nothing in reality. This idea emerges very clearly when we perceive her protagonists moving towards acquiring economic strength and freedom. The story of Mem, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* provides a striking example of a black woman's struggle to provide a sense of security and opportunities of better life to her children, a place of dignity for herself and to achieve a responsible status in her life by moving away from her dependence upon Brownfield, her husband, towards a state of economic self reliance.

Mem as an enlightened woman does not want her family to merely subsist but she desires to provide them a life of quality and respect. She succeeds in finding a job "in the town" at twelve dollars a week. It releases her to some extent from her fears and worries and infuses a new spirit of confidence and hope in her life. The house she gets on lease gives her a feeling of pride in her achievements and she fixes her signatures on the lease papers.

This signifies the fact that Memo is no longer dependent upon her husband in matter of money and property and has even started to take a, leading role in her family, previously reserved only for Brownfield, her husband. But this is violently resented by Brownfield who, man as he is, fails to bear this assertion of freedom and supremacy by Mem. But in the teeth of all his hostilities Mem moves forward and shifts her family to a new house. In this new house she has most of the basic amenities like noiseless gas-heater, refrigerator. The children get a conducive environment for their social status. Brownfield's own life becomes that of a "gentleman" or as he invariably thought of it, "like a white man" (TLGC. 145). In-short there is a feeling of "progress" about the house even though it provokes jealousy in Brownfield as the achievement speaks of Mem's economic power and not his own. Therefore he

comes to demolish it by emaciating Mem's a body through fresh pregnancies imposed upon her. Mem may become physically emaciated but her willpower, we find, growing stronger and brighter with every move in Brownfield's power to frustrate and thwart her. And it is she who of all the characters in the novel emerges as a heroic figure even though she loses her life in the process.

The way Walker has delineated Mem's struggle shows the great value that she attaches to economic independence of a woman. She seems to suggest emphatically that no freedom of any kind is even conceivable without the economic freedom of a woman. She reveals through the character of Mem that it is only on the economic self-reliance that the edifice of freedom of body and mind can be erected.

Walker's confidence in the capacities and abilities of black woman to achieve economic freedom is further discernible in her delineation of her characters like Celie and Shug in *The color Purple*. Shug, a blues singer goes freely from place to place, offering music programmes to her audience. Her shows bring her a lot of acclaim mainly from her male audience but more importantly they fetch her a lot of money as mainly from gives her economic strength and enables her to move at liberty and live the way she likes. Even her relations' with Albert are deeply influenced by her economic power and freedom.

It is important to note that both Celie and Shug are women Albert turns to both of them for his personal needs of body. But the difference one notices in his attitudes towards, Celie and Shug seems to be rooted in the economic status of these women. Celie, before her freedom from Albert, is no better than a mere piece of property for Albert; she lives in his house and is utterly dependent on him for her bare survival. But Shug, on the other hand, is economically strong and therefore continues to be even more attractive and sexually satisfying to Albert. Moreover, it is this' economic freedom of Shug that gives her the courage and strength to defy Albert and to show him his place even when he has been the father of three of her children. If Celie is dominated by Albert it is Shug who dominates Albert in their relationship. The way Shug turns to other men for her own fulfillment is another evidence of the freedom she enjoys because of her economic self reliance.

The freedom Shug enjoys becomes a source of inspiration and strength even for other women, around her. The transformation in Celie's life; for example, is the result of the mesmerising effects of Shug's personality and freedom. It is under her influence that Celie revolts against "die tenets of female subordination",¹⁰ against Albert, leaves his house and moves to Memphis to build a life of her own.

This journey to Memphis is symbolic of Celie's movement from a life of slavery to freedom, from abject dependence on Albert for her survival to a state of economic strength and self reliance. In Memphis, Celie grows into a successful seamstress earning her freedom with the money she makes in the business. Folks pants Unlimited, the name by which her pants are known is an evidence of the new identity she is able to acquire with her economic freedom as a liberated as well as a liberating woman.

It is noticeable that Celie's economic freedom gives her anew confidence and a new sense of joy in life. She is more at ease with herself, feels dignified in her community and is in tune with the process of life around her. She exudes grace, hope and strength, as result of her economic self reliance. It is significant to note that in the later part of the novel it is Albert, who depends on Celie, takes instructions from her and respects her identity as a woman and even as his superior.

Walker's concept of freedom, however, is very complex and comprehensive. She treats the freedom of body and mind as inextricably linked to each other. Similarly, she does not view the social, economic and even intellectual freedom of an individual in isolation of his or her political freedom. Her novels reveal that the black in America remained deprived of political rights right from the day they first landed in that country.

Even after the abolition of shivery they continued to suffer discrimination as they were not given equal political rights with the white. They continued to be labelled "Nigger" and be "victims of unspeakable crime"¹¹ though their struggle for all the, civil and political rights acquired new dimensions and vigour in the fifties and sixties with the advent of leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. on the political scene. Her novels highlight prominently the role played by black woman in this fight of her race for the democratic rights of equality and liberty in every area of America life.

Walker's women characters, such as Ruth, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and Meridian in the novel, "*Meridian* reveal the growing awareness of the black woman about her civil rights and her determination to fight for them shoulder to shoulder with her male counterparts. The last chapters of Walker's first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* enable the reader to gain insight into how black woman gradually becomes conscious of the necessity to fight for her civil and political rights. She describes the movement launched by black leaders and civil rights activities to educate the black masses about the importance of their participation in the political process of their country. Ruth, the daughter of strong willed and self-respecting woman, Mem, feels stirred when she views on the television scenes depicting the activities of the workers of civil rights movement. When she sees some activities black and white working together for equal civil and political rights for the black, she feels both surprised and herself drawn towards the movement. But her awakening has been shown to be at the nascent stage and we find its full growth in Walker's next novel *Meridian*.

The story of the novel, *Meridian*, is mainly set in Virginia, one of the Southern States which still suffered from the legacy of the days of slavery. The practice of segregation was sanctioned even by the Supreme Court of America when it accepted the principle of separate but equal opportunities to the black. This, however, meant in reality "separate and unequal"¹² for the black. This allowed blacks an access to such facilities as education and health on the basis of equality with the white but they could avail themselves of these facilities in hospitals and educational institutions set up for them separately. This was tantamount to segregation and discrimination which was no longer acceptable to the black leaders. It was realized that the black can not have equal rights and exercise them freely without their legitimate share in the political governance of America. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. Medgar Evers, John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X had, while emphasizing the need of educating the black about the significance of their participation at different levels in the political structure of the country laid their lives. It was the example of these leaders which created wide spread awakening among the black and *Meridian*, the protagonist of the novel, is deeply influenced and motivated by these heroes of the black community.

Meridian's political education seems to begin when *Meridian* learns about the brutal oppression of civil rights workers by their opponents armed with bombs and guns. One day when she switches on the T.V., she is shocked to see the scene of a house bombed and destroyed by the opponents of those black political workers who were carrying out a drive for the registration of blacks as voters. The house she sees on the scene of the T.V. was the same she had seen the previous day in her neighbourhood. She learnt from the T.V. that it was not just a single house but an "entire cluster of houses on that street"(m. 72), that had been blown up, killing and injuring many blacks. "And so it was that one day in the middle of April in 1960, *Meridian* Hill became aware of the past and present of the larger, world." (M. 73) She becomes acutely conscious of the inescapable necessity to fight for the civil and political rights of the blacks even if it means injury or death. This consciousness ultimately grows into a determination to act, and *Meridian* becomes involved in this political struggle for the rights of the black. She offers her services to the office of the Civil Rights Movement and serves it as a typist. She starts going around to motivate the black in the ghettos and the country side to participate in the struggle for their civil and political rights. Thus, *Meridian* takes an important step in her journey towards the attainment of democratic rights of freedom and equality for her people. This also indicates *Meridian*'s ability and strength to assert her personal freedom as a woman to renounce the constraining roles imprisoning woman within the walls of her house as well as to participate actively in a public movement for her legitimate rights.

Meridian's quest for freedom is so strong that she soon grows into a leader of the movement and confronts all kinds of dangers to her life. Her encounters to violence perpetrated by the opponents of the black only strengthen her will and determination to fight on. She leads a procession of civil rights marchers demanding equal hospital facilities and an end to the 'policy of segregation. The marchers are met with brutal state force. They are beaten mercilessly by the police. She sees some of the civil right activists previously jailed coming out of the prison with faces "misshapen from swellings and discolored from bruises" (M. 84). But none of them can deter or discourage *Meridian* and her comrades. She herself was "grabbed" (M. 84) by her hair and was "punched" and "Kicked" (M. 84) from the

back. Her exposure to this brutal violence strains her nerves; but even under the shadows of death, she holds her ground and continues her struggle.

But Meridian's commitment to the values of democracy and genuine human love is too deep to let any feeling of hatred or revenge take roots in heart and mind and against the enemies of the black. That is why when Anne Marion advocates the use of violence and tries to convince Meridian, too, of the absolute necessity of using force against the white oppressors, Meridian for whom the movement envisions a "fitter life for all individuals"¹³ can not contemplate killing anybody.

Though she realizes that the use of violence may sometime be necessary to achieve the end but she knows that her role will be "to walk behind the real revolutionaries.

The study of Walker's fiction reveals how her female protagonists hold and cherish the humanistic principles of life. They free themselves of the strangulating hold of regimented and undemocratic society and move into the "widersocial sphere, to new hope and strength"¹⁴ in order to seek the realization of full humanity, a state wherein they can live as women as well as with dignity. In their struggle for such a society here is liberty and equality for them, they move onward in the journey of life and develop a cosmic view of life. With this view they construct a life of harmony based on trust, tolerance and respect for each other as individuals. Her female protagonists, thus, become representative of those different aspects of the society which when put together help to construct a world of democracy, love and justice.

THE TRAGEDY OF RACISM

Racism broadly came to mean the assertion of superiority of one race over another on the basis of colour. The European races, who mainly developed and used this doctrine, claimed physical, intellectual and moral superiority over other races like the Asians and Africans. These races used the concept that the order of whole universe was structured on the principle of hierarchy and that the superior species or race had the inherent right to rule over the inferior ones. This theory was exploited to justify colonialism in all its shapes and dimensions - political, economic, social and cultural. The white races further invoked christianity to justify their claim to superiority over black races asserting that "white is the color of God and black is the color of sin."¹⁵ On these grounds the colonial races sought to expand their rule, tame blacks as slaves and keep them in bondage claiming it to be their holy duty to rule over and civilize the black, these descendants of "canaans"¹⁶ the servant of servants, with whom the blacks, were compared. To achieve their ends, these races used every conceivable method in their armoury. They often employed brutal and coercive ways to distinguish these races and then to keep them in servility. They also employed subtle strategies of imbuing minds with "illusions of superiority" of whites by impressing upon them incessantly that they had no history, "no value and culture".¹⁷ The white, in this way gave "the unkindest cut"¹⁸ of all to blacks by making them believe themselves as inferior.

The concept of racism came to America with the advent of European races who, considering themselves to be superior, used their power to vanquish and defeat the Indians, the native inhabitants of the continent. It assumed new depths and dimensions when the slave traders began to import slaves from Africa to carry all the burden of work at home and in plantations. These slaves were adjudged "Innately inferior."¹⁹ and altogether unfit to associate with the white races. Though all blacks, both men and women, were subjected to the extreme forms of inhuman treatment, the condition of women, in this system, was far more miserable. The racist whip hit all blacks but its lacerations were deeper, sharper and more painful on women who were made to suffer all possible kinds of brutalities and ignominies on their bodies, minds and souls. With bodies in chains driving slavery, they were used as "chattel"²⁰ Physical and sexual abuses of the cruelest kind destroyed their bodies sending them into psychological traumas ripping them of all human dignity. The crudest forms of inhumanity of the white races came to, be, discernable in their ruthless use of girls and women for their, economic strength denying them the fundamental right of access to their bodies, "the power to procreate in. the image of oneself and not that of alien master."²¹ Not only this, the burden of their own man's emasculated ego at the hands of this "superior race, fell upon these black women who

came to serve as “ the repository of the Black man’s rage²² and frustrations. Even emancipation brought little change in the predicament of black women as shadows of slavery still continued to loom larger threatening their life at every step. Justice, as usual, continued to mean monopoly of whites and the psyche of most of the white continued to be governed by their sense of superiority.

All of these aspects which sought to deny black woman every possibility of living a life of wholeness as a woman, and a human being, keeping her in chains of sufferings and denials have been treated extensively and incisively by Walker in her fiction.

To ensure their supremacy over blacks and to keep them under endless subjugation was foremost on the whites mind. The white acted under a well calculated strategy to achieve their end, the continuance of racism. To assert itself as a superior race the whites, beat subjugation in to the blackman, denied him every kind of freedom. That he would accept him as a superior race, the black man was assigned and treated in the image of wild beast. This was the beginning of the dehumanising process he was put in chains. For this the blackmen and women were captured by slave traders and then sold off like commodities damning them for ever to bondage of body. The destruction of body started with capture but it was with the arrival of white that it assumed institutional forms, a kind of commerce conducted by the white traders for their advantage. They often employed agents to capture them from whom then they brought them and used them in their plantations and then shipped them to America. In fact, this was the beginning of the dehumanising of the black who were brutally beaten into chains of slavery. Examples revealing this inhuman process of turning men into slaves abounds in the novels of Walker. In the novel, *The Temple of My Familiar*, Lissie, the protagonist throws light on this dehumanising aspect of slavery-which comprised all kinds of possible violence, brutality and oppression upon human body and soul. Recalling one of her past lives in which she was a black woman she relates the story of her capture—the dispossession of her freedom.

Lissie’s narration of the whole incident of her capture shows how she falls from freedom and happiness of a carefree girlhood into the frying pan of endless misery and indignities associated with slavery. When “thirteen”, Lissie, sent by her mother to get “Okras” from the “Ok rafield”, and she humming along, enjoying freedom to the full neared the field. Here much to her horror, she spotted the “four huge men.” Instinctively smelling evil in these men who “looked and smelled evil” her instant response was to “run back home.” But the small girl’s still smaller effort failed. She was caught and “tossed over” by one of them, on his back like a “sack of grain” (TMF. 61-62) and along’ with her mother and two brothers captured. Her Mohametan uncle whose property they were, after their own father’s death sold them to the captors much against the mercy appeals of the mother. The mother, in chains, dragged and bruised went prostrate on the ground to secure the life of her children.

But the glitter of gold promised in this bargain, which in turn would buy his wife whiteman’s “trinkets” was dazzling and the deal too tempting to tilt the balance in mother’s favour. Dealing cruel blow to human ties, the uncle sells, them and as a token of parting condescence bestows on each of them the smallest coin. This was, however, only a beginning which awaited a long and agonising process of destruction of the self-physical, psychological and spiritual. The slave traders before selling them further completed the process of dispossession of their identity when they divested them of their coloured clothes woven by their mother, in the “definitive style of their tribe.” A number of writers have documented how the blacks were captured and inhumanly treated by the slave traders. Blassingame has given a gruesome picture of such men in bondage:

After the capture, the Africans were tied together by a rope and then marched hundreds of miles while suffering from thirst, hunger and exhaustion. Consequently many either died along the way or were reduced to a very weak and emaciated condition by the time, they reached the sea-coast. On the coast, the Africans were made to jump up and down, had fingers poked into their mouths and their genital organs handled by a doctor. Those chosen by the Europeans were then branded.²³

This historical fact has been used as one of the thematic trends in Walker’s novel giving a vivid and comprehensive picture of the slaves. In *The Temple of My Familiar Lissie*, an old woman, who remembers all that had gone

behind recalls another incident of her own capture in one of her lives in the past and tells how she and some other slaves after their capture were forced to jog without “stopping” and finally brought to a “big stone fort of the coast,” where for the first time they saw the white man, There, they were subjected to indignities stripping them of all their sense of honour and dignity. The bodies of the captives were thus shamelessly inspected and handled by the white man as if they were commodities and not human beings.

It was only one among the first few episodes in the long and un-relieved drama of tragedy of their life. Lissie and her family were finally purchased by the white master and from then they were at the mercy of the white and were treated by them as they liked. They were, at this stage exposed to the brutal realities of their existence, as slaves, awaiting them. It was a kind of preparation a schooling for the impending doom of slavery in the rest of their life. As a bitter schooling they were dumped into the holding-pen, a cellar underneath the forte. The cellar itself was no short of a cage which imprisoned, frightened and tormented black man and women. Many of these “captives belonged to the ancient African religion of “motherworshippers”(TMF. 64)”

These “motherworshippers” attached a sort of divine sanctity to motherhood and treated womanhood with reverence. On the other hand the culture of Mohametans, practising slave trade in collaboration with white races accorded a very low status to women. It was a common practice for Mohametans “to own many women” as they “owned many cattle or hunting dogs” (p. 64).

The Mohametans, practising the slave trade, thus committed atrocities not only against human dignity but even destroyed a way of life, a religion in the code of which woman enjoyed a place of respect and honour.

Once his captive, the white master very systematically destroyed all vestiges of human dignity—he destroyed the slaves physically, broke their spirits and beat them into a state of complete subjugation. The very notion of freedom, human identity and dignity ceased to exist for them. Fed literally on water, these human beasts were let to survive and survive with the grace of chance. These hair-raising descriptions of what man can do to man are not mere phantoms of the artist’s imagination, pages of history dealing with the slave trade bear ample proof. Blassingame cites how: “The foul and poisonous air of the hold, extreme heat, men lying for hours in their own defecation, with blood and mucus covering the floor, caused a great deal of sickness.”²⁴

These very experiences, documented in the book of history find artistic echoes in the memory of Lissie. She, relates how like one of the other slaves she chanced to survive the agony and unhealthy’ living condition in the holding-pen. She, already a patient of constipation, suffered from fear and anxiety which kept her further “locked tight”, Dysentery claimed many lives. But the same had already been taken into account by the slave traders who, therefore, as she tells had “captured more of us than they were likely to need” (TMF.64).

The whites very systematically structured the living conditions of these slaves in a way so as to convince them of their subhuman condition. Violence was used to extend the chains of slavery from physical bondage to mental and psychological captivity. This was designed by the slave masters to perpetuate slavery by rigorously conditioning their mind and soul to this predicament. Those who found it too much, their human hearts withered away to freedom in death. For example, Lissie’s mother was a woman with a sense of dignity, but she was forced in the cellar to lie in her own filth. Unable to bear all this, her inner-self revolted at the filth on and about her person and by the seventh day, she unprotestingly dies.

Such brutalization and destruction of human beings done with the aim to fill their minds with fear is further revealed in the manner the women were chained and stripped off the barest covering over their private parts. Walker’s treatment of this aspect of women’s suffering in racist bondage reminds the readers of historical facts which tends authenticity to her writing. Manni and Cowley record about the journey of slaves: “Taken on boardship, the naked Africans were shackled together on bare wooden boards in the hold and packed so tightly that they could not sit upright... The first few weeks of the trip was the most traumatic insane and many became so despondent that they gave up the will to live. However, all did not yield. There was a case here and there who fought against this inhuman

treatment.”²⁵ This is made evident from the historical record of Donald D Wax when he observes: “Africans were not, however, totally immobilized by shock. Often they committed suicide... by drowning, or refusing food or medicine, rather than accept enslavement.”²⁶

Lissie relates a similar experience of their being shipped by white traders for onward journey. With feet bound, back turned to the wall and “heads” in “each others lap”, the captives presented a sight of chained helpless animals (TMF. 68-69).

This inhuman suffering so horrified and traumatised Lissie that “she went into mental regression of thumb-sucking stage” of babyhood (TMF. 68). As if this was not enough the young girls were brutally raped, in chains. Lissie was thrice raped and the second time, “I was violated, they chained me so that my arms and legs were spread out and my thumb was beyond my reach” (TMF. 68). Thus Walker presents the utter helplessness of a black woman, the “slave of a slave”²⁷ as one of the several examples in her novels of how women were seen as mere objects for white man’s lust and ego.

Walker’s treatment of this incident is characterised by a subtle undercurrent of irony. The oppressor, the white man is shown by her as the victim of his own violence and brutality. If on the one hand, he imposes himself on the helpless female victim of the black race, he is in the process losing his own humanity, becoming, in fact, a slave himself by contributing to the race of slaves in America. This becomes clear when Lissie remarks with bitterness and anger that “the slavers entered into American slavery with us, long before they actually issued from our bodies” (TMF. 70)

The sexual exploitation of the helpless black women by the white and mighty slaver, unfolds another ugly vital aspect of slavery, namely the slave economy based on the practice of using a black woman only as a slave breeder. A black woman was crucial for the economy of the white as a worker who toiled for day in and day out in his plantations. She contributed to their economy in two important ways. She as a black slave, was made to work tirelessly on the fields and was fed cheaply without involving expenditure. She also was the source of capital in the form of multiplying slaves. Her children were a bonus to the white master and her value was determined by her capacities to produce the slave capital for her owner. The slavers surprisingly had no stirrings of fatherhood even when their sons and daughters were delivered by the black women. The slavers, however, did not care as “color made their own seed disappear to them; the color of gold was all they saw. But not if gold was the color of a child. We were left with this bitter seed, and unfair to the children - burdened with our hated of the fruit” (TMF.70). Thus, blackwomen, were used as a means of economic exploitation. They were used as breeding machines by the white to serve as a repository of white masters’ seed.

The plantation system, thus, became a battle field where slaves fought masters for physical and psychological survival and this fight which invariably ended in asserting the white as a master race filled the lives of the black with bitterness. The black men’s unfulfilled lives, their shattered dreams engendered in them a sense of emasculation of their manhood. It is a natural law that the “superordinate” threatens and punishes the “subordinate” to ensure behavioral conformity to curb or repress his anger, who in his turn may become “excessively submissive or he may focus his hostile feelings on a scapegoat.”²⁸ Whipped at the hands of white men in the fight, he perpetually fought masters for physical and psychological survival, the black man tended to assume the superordinate role and make his women, wives and children the scapegoat of his wrath against the white. Walker probes into this aspect of psyche of the blackman and the resultant oppression on his women incisively in her novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Grange, the protagonist represents the blackman’s battered ego finding its release in preying upon his wife, Margaret. Slaving and sweating in the plantation fields from sunrise to sunset he finds that he can hardly make two meals for his family. The culture of poverty to which he finds himself exposed has rendered him completely helpless—a helplessness conveyed through Grange’s physical description and behavioural pattern of life. Grange’s impotency against the white racist world is related through Brownfield’s eyes who finds his father reduced to a “stone” or a “robot”; (TLGC. 9) and giving answers in “shrugs”—“the shrug being the end of a dream” (p. 107). Under poverty, both Grange and Margaret succumb to “endless rounds of hard-work.” The week-ends which

followed the exhausting day's work brought no relief to them, particularly to Margaret. Grange, being a man could still have the opportunities to escape a while from the soul killing toil. Again, it is woman Margaret, who pays in the form of ceaseless work, sexual betrayals and even beating for Grange's failure to fight against the racist world and his resultant moral deterioration resulting in his slip into alcohol or love of Jossie. Despite all these ignominies and oppressions, Margaret's love for Grange could be seen from the "deference" in her eyes. But the compelling pressure of poverty and Grange's helplessness in supporting and protecting her force her much against her conscience to trade her body to the white.

This tragedy of a black woman in the racist system was not a fate of only stray individuals; it was rather very pervasive and even more poignant in the case of those who dreamed of and struggled to improve their lot in this system of racist oppression. This is evident from the way Walker has treated the story of Mem, another representative of black woman caught up in bondages of suffering in the racist world. Brownfield, — Grange's son began his married life with Mem on a note of dream to have h's. own happy, decent and independent house for his wife and children with chauffeur driven car. He began his life with Mem proud of her education, soft words and warmth exuding from her person. It was his plan to give-up sharecropping to move North to Philadelphia and thus enjoy a life of freedom and prosperity with his beloved wife. Mem, with her own vision of a better future, turned his desire into a kind of resolution which they both strove to realise with the best of their strengths and abilities but the racist economic structure again proved too rigid and exploitative of the black like Brownfield and Mem to let them wriggle out of the clutches of poverty. Even after three years of sweating labour in the farmfield Brownfield found himself "struckdown"(TLGC. 71). Even after shoving his wife and little daughter Daphne into the plantation, he found himself deep in poverty. Poverty coupled with failure corroded his mind and crushed his spirit. This shattered his confidence in his own ability and worth and in his failure of life he saw his failure to keep his promises of giving decent life to his wife and a failure of his manhood. His hurt ego and pride preyed upon his mind consuming all that was positive and creative and filling in him a feeling of self-reproach and guilt. His ,warped heart and mind saw in his wife and children a constant reminder of his failure as a man. It filled him with gnawing rage and in this way: "His rage and his anger and his frustration ruled." All that his diseased psyche could do was to "blame everything, on her"(TLGC.79). Walker describes with powerful irony, how the best of a woman's intentions, abilities and toil become pretext of her victimisation in the sexist and racist world.

The situation turns bad to worse when the loving and sympathetic Mem, to placate Brownfield's inflated ego took up the responsibility of the family in her own hands. Mem took up the job of a teacher again and her hard work coupled with her resolute will started showing results. The Copeland family under her umbrella moved to a leased house where the dream of a happy life once again seemed a realizable possibility. But success by contrast reflected all the more badly on Brownfield. But unable to stomach any longer a woman's success and authority in the house, he hit her viciously seeking to destroy her.

So his rage was replaced by a "greater design" which would help him destroy Mem's authority" (TLGC. 144) and what Brownfield could not achieve through terror he tried to achieve through a vicious strategy the exploitation of his woman's vulnerability to conception, by forcing pregnancies upon her which often resulted in miscarriages and still-births. And ultimately he tried to assert his "upper hand" as a man by shooting Mem dead and thus destroying the whole family. Walker's treatment of the story of Mem and Brownfield is a powerful rendering of the tragedy of black woman who is shown by her not as a victim of sexist ethos only but also and more importantly of sinister workings of racist system. She has dramatised her tale of struggles and sorrows against the backdrop of racist oppression and exploitation of the black. She, in this way, enables the reader to place the dispossession of black woman in a proper perspective and thus to understand the causes of distorted psyche of the much maligned blackman. Though, she does not seem to spare as is evident from the story of Mem and Brownfield the black man of his failures and irresponsibilities she presents him not as a "monster" but as human being, who plays in the hands of his destiny determined by his gods, men of the white race.

If the story of Mem reveals how a black woman becomes a victim of her own man oppressed by whites, the

novelist also shows how a feeling of revenge against the whites can express itself in different ways of violence directed particularly against the white woman, Violation of the: white woman by a blackman is depicted by the novelist not only as a simple act of sexual assault, she rather suggests that this is often a kind of vacarious victory, an assertion of self over his oppressor. By violating the woman of the whiteman, he settles scores within him for exploiting and abusing his black woman.

The story of Tommy Odds & Lynne, in the novel *Meridian* effectively illustrates this aspect of the consequences of racialism Tommy Odds, a companion of Truman in the Civil Rights Movement had only one arm—the other arm had been shot off by whites, He had seen and suffered relentless repression of the black man & woman. Unable to vent it, on his oppressor, he internalised it and the bottled up anger and humiliation had filled him with a sense of revenge which found expression as soon as an opportunity to hit and humiliate arose by sexually assaulting Lynne, the white woman. Tommy Odds instigated the gang of black boys to come and avenge themselves on Lynne, the woman of the class of their oppressors. He exhorts “You guys are afraid. of her. That’s all. Shit. Crackers been raping your mammas and sisters for generations and here’s your chance to get off on a piece of their good” (M.161).

Though the boys do not partake in assault on Lynne, but grins on their faces suggest the contempt they had for whites, who had been indulging in such acts of violence against the black woman. Tommy’s own attempt to accomplish the rape of Lynne which failed and left him stuck with a feeling of impotence the moment he “presses her down to fuck her”, indicates a conflict in his psyche. On the one hand he is motivated by his sense of revenge to commit the assault on Lynne, but on the other hand, his conscience does not seem to permit him to commit a crime of which his own race had been a victim for centuries.

Walker through the stories of Margaret and Mem, of Lynne underlines the fact that, ‘even after emancipation shadows of slavery continued to dog the life of the black particularly cutting deeper more sharply and more painfully into the life of black woman. If the stories of Margaret and Mem illustrate how abolition of slavery did not in reality release them from the chains of poverty, the story of Lynne focuses on how women become victims of violence, unleashed by the racial distrust and incessant political warfare which went on even in the 60s and 70s of this century. Walker, in her fiction clearly suggests that racism is so deep rooted in the psyche of the white America that it continues to break out in different ways even decades after emancipation. Even the system of justice established by the white seems to fail in giving a fair deal to the underdogs.

Walker through the story of Celie in the novel *The Color Purple* unravels another significant aspect of racism. The prosperity of blacks earned by dint of hard labour posed a constant threat to the white economy, & to nip the evil in bud the whites evolved their own system of justice, the “vigilante white”. This aspect of the failure of justice in racist America is shown movingly through the story of Celie and Nettie’s mother whose husband had become a thorn in the white’s flesh because of his economic success achieved through hard work.

Her husband was successfully running a goods-store, had established a smithies and accumulated some property. This fruit of his labour, the decent and happy life he was leading with his wife and daughters invited the merciless wrath of whites who perceived in his success a threat, a challenge to their economic supremacy. There was nothing to prevent these whites from enforcing the “vigilante white.”²⁹ justice against these blacks wherein the vulnerability of the white woman to blackman was used as a pretext to let loose the hunting dogs of justice on them. The result was that Celie’s father along with his two brothers was “liquidated.”

Thus Walker’s treatment of racism in her works clearly indicates that her art is geared to the purpose of assailing all those factors in life which run counter to the values of human love, sympathy, equality and justice, necessary conditions for an individual to live a life of freedom and human fulfillment.

WOMANIST/FEMINIST FICTION

Now that the readers are acquainted with the major themes and works of Alice Walker, the next step is to place the Miter in her literary tradition and to bring out her contribution in this context.

As already pointed out, the most prominent theme that the novel *The Color Purple* suggests is estrangement and violence that mark the relationship between Walker’s men and women. Although the subject has been raised in the

works of earlier American writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and in comic caricatures of Frankie and Johnnie variety, it was largely ignored by most of the black writers until the 1960s; at that point the strongly felt need for a more open scrutiny of life led writers to challenge long standing black middle class proscriptions against dramatising and thereby exposing anything that might reinforce damaging racial stereotypes. Notable among them are James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962), Calene Hatcher Polite's acidulous *The Flaggelents* (1967), More recently Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara and the most recent to join this tradition of writers is Alice Walker. She belongs to the nascent renaissance of black women writing. Infact some scholars date the birth of this movement to the publication in 1970 of Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. It was through the success of the fictional prose that Walker had established the authority to canonize Zora Neale Hurston, By doing so Walker contributed enormously to the construction of the idea of black woman's "tradition" out of which she and a host of others could write, could ground and revise their fiction. These women writes in their works take up the cause of the oppressed women for which they are labelled as "feminists." The question that arises now is—Who is a feminist or What does feminism denote? The term feminist as used in black African American Literature denotes, by and large, an awareness among black women that they have been exploited in life, that this exploitation of them is rooted in patriarchal hegemony and racial discrimination, that they have been misrepresented in literature simply because they are black, female and poor. Feminism had its origin in the belief that white feminism had taken care of the interests of white women only and failed to address itself to the black woman's experience of racism, sexism and classism. In male white American society white women have also suffered at the hands of their men but the plight of black women has been worse. The white women have suffered for being female and black men for being black but black women have had to bear the "double jeopardy" of racism and sexism. Toni Morrison very succinctly puts it, "She [the black women] has nothing to fall on, not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything."³⁰

Walker preferred to use the term "Womanism" to African American "feminism or the feminism of women of Color." She explains "I just like to have words that describe things correctly. Now to me "black feminist" does not do that. I need a word that is organic, that really comes out of the culture.I don't use it because it is "better" than feminism.I choose it because I prefer the sound, the feel, the tit of it because I cherish the spirit. of the women (like Sojourner) the word calls "to mind."

(Among the writers and theologians who have expanded upon and explicated what it is to be a womanist have been Katie G. Cannon, with *Black Womanist Ethics*, and Emillie M. Townes, in her *In a Blaze of Glory*) Perhaps the simplest way to summarise, what a woman is, from an ethical and spiritual perspective, is to borrow from Gretchen E. Ziegenhals; who says that a womanist is one "who speaks out, speaks up, speaks against or in defence of something important—a woman who loves herself, her culture, and who is committed to survival." She is also, by definition and by common usage a woman of color, a woman who inevitably has viewed life and society from the underside. As a black womanist novelist Walker is after the whole truth of African American life. However, her major concern is the black women themselves. She has made it very much clear in an interview with John O' Brien when she said: "I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival of whole of my people. But beyond that I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanity, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women" (In Search of My Mother's Garden 250-51). Therefore, Walker's fiction deals with the life of African Americans with special emphasis on the black women's life.

The body of work of these black writers was devoted to the retrieval of African American culture, a culture rooted in their traditions - the language, folk lore, dance, woodoo & conjure and all the practices such as quilt making, baking, gardening that have shaped the daily lives of black people. Initially black feminist writing' used the form of autobiography to explore the evils of patriarchal, slave bonding society in which even white women, subjugated, are still as oppressive as white men. After Emancipation, these writings articulate the sufferings of African American women and the entire African American community in the sexist classist society. Later, black feminism exhibits itself in the tradition of Coloured Women's Clubs that developed as a psychological and social response to the evils of the larger society.

Though both white women & black women coexisted, the experience of black woman in the racist society is different from the white woman, For a black woman the struggle is harder as compared to the white woman as she had more fronts to counter than the white women. White patriarchy, white women's racism sexism were the prominent fronts that these writers had to battle and these gave them peculiar experiences, altogether different in nature from the experiences of white women. The life of black women, these women realized was worse than that of the slaves, as their fight was not only against the white races but also their own people, the blacks. Already forced to live marginalized lives at the hands of the whites, these black women were further pushed into a quagmire of suffering which ripped them of their humanity and their black female self. Natural enough the responsibility of restoring these women their right to live a life of dignity, humanity and "wholeness," fell upon the shoulders of the women writers who were sensitive to the predicament of black women. The most painful part of the story is the male counterparts of these writers not only chose to close their eyes to the reality around but tried to defeat their purpose by leveling negative criticism on their works. Instead of any appreciation for their dynamism and boldness, these writers were dubbed as "anti-race", "anti-black", "anti-men."

But it goes to the credit of these women writers that amidst all sound & fury, they did not lose their track and continued to pursue their commitment to their women folk a commitment to the survival and wholeness of men & women.

In order to express their understanding and to make their voice audible these writers, depended upon some literary devices like narrating strategies and the creative resources peculiar to them. The impression these writers bring to bear upon their subjects are basically rooted in their consciousness – consciousness which is black & feminist and which goaded by the reality around compels them to critically expose the two pronged monster of American society - sexism & racism. These writers are united in their belief that the unequal and inferior status accorded to women in the set up of 'Sexist & classist society is unjust and therefore needs change. They are convinced that their enemy. is none other, than racism and gender based social order and they are all out to call its knell.

Deeply conscious of the suffering, pain and the anguish of black women, Walker states, "I knew the women, I write about and while growing up in Georgia I had smelt the burnt of their pain". "For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world."³¹

It is this burnt of their pain, which finds full expression in her literary works. Walker's novels such as *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. {1992) and collection of short stories *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Woman* (1973), *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981) deal with the life of African, Americans with special emphasis on women's lives.

In Alice Walker's first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, it is the women. who are used and abused both by their own men folk and by the whites as well. At the core of the novel is the man woman relationship portrayed against Grange Copeland, the protagonist. Apparently the focus may be on Grange but as the story unfolds itself, the sufferings, oppressions, pains and hardships of black woman get crystallized. Margaret, Grange's wife, Mem, Grange's daughter-in-law & Brownfield's wife Josie, the beloved of Grange and Brownfield all suffer. The married life of Grange and Margaret, Brownfield and Mem, is absence of healthy man woman relationship tends to be a scene of mutual clashes and family brawls, The racist society with white masters at the helm of affairs, exploits the blacks, which fills the latter with wrath & frustration who in turn direct their bitterness on their women folk.

The unfulfilled lives of the black, their shattered dreams engendered in them a sense of emasculation of their manhood, which found a scapegoat in their own women folk. Margaret is abandoned by Grange, Mem is shot dead by Brownfield and Josie victimized by her own father, who stood for religion, ends up in running a brothel, where she is used & exploited both by Grange and Brownfield. Thus, just as the white man becomes a symbol of black man's oppression, the black man becomes a symbol of black woman's oppression, But it is not only a gloomy story of oppression on women. It has its positive side to present as it embodies the growth of women from illiterate & docile Margaret, to Mem the literate and ambitious to, Josie a bold and enterprising woman who comes

to establish her own economic kingdom. It is also about Ruth, the grand daughter of Grange, who hopefully will grow into a healthy, sane and self-empowered woman:- a woman created after Walker's heart.

Meridian again is the story of a woman who as a girl child due to naivety about sex became a victim of repeated rape at the hands of Dexter, the owner of the funeral home. Her early exposure to physical abuse develops in her a hatred for her body and alienates her from the pleasures and contentment of motherhood. The subordinate status that she is given as a wife at the hands of her husband, filled her with bitterness and repugnance for the system. As a black educated woman belonging to the sixties, she discards the traditional role of motherhood cast by the society & disentangles herself from the subordinate role of a wife serving to the gratification of physical & sexual demand of her husband. She takes a leap and - brings herself to fight for the sexual, legal & political rights of black women. She becomes flag bearer in black woman's onward journey to allround development and growth.

In *The Color Purple* womanism permeates through the novel. Though initially it unfolds a saga of dispossession and oppression of women like Celie and her mother at the hands of men like Alphonso and Mr _____ and to some extent Harpo who slips into his father's shoes and becomes a legitimate heir to patriarchal hierarchy and like his father starts believing in subjugating women but Walker through female bonding, sexual and emotional, between Celie & Shug and emotional bonding in the hour of crisis between Mary Agnes and Sofia and later on amongst Shug, Celie, Mary Agnes and Sofia shows how the pattern of women comradeship helps women in overcoming hardships and salvage themselves.

As an essential part of her womanist strategy, Walker puts this womanist proclivity in the context of sexism and racism where it serves as a defence against the various types of oppressions women are exposed to. The shared sense of exploitation draws and binds them emotionally, thereby making them strong enough to counter the tyranny of patriarchy, Both Kate and Nettie in *The Color Purple* tell Celie to fight against her ill-treatment by Albert and his children. It is empathy for Sofia which impels Mary Agnes to the point of accepting rape by the warden of the prison to get Sofia out of it. Womanism here exhibits itself in the sense of sisterhood, affection and solidarity which may be termed as women camaraderie and which Harpo calls "pall-bearers", "who ever heard of women pall-bearers", he wails on the death of Sofia's mother. Sofia and her sisters join together to carry their mother's coffin – a custom considered a prerogative of men only in patriarchal society.

The sexual face of womanism reflected through the bonding of Celie & Shug Avery. Celie's attraction to and relationship with Shug are overtly sexual, to other women she is drawn by emotion. Her bonding with Shug Avery takes away the deadness from her body & surprisingly it is with Shug Avery that Celie experiences, "orgasm" for the first time in her life. The women bonding against suppression & oppression in the male dominated society also helps them rise above their narrow interests and work for their common cause. The magic fully works, the women, like Celie, united in thick and thin successfully counter all male aggression on their body & mind & succeed in retrieving their voice, identity and their self.

Possessing the Secret of Joy is a womanist' novel as it lays bare the horrendous customs like genital mutilation—a trade mark of Olinkan glory. To keep women subservient throughout their life, the black community has been practicing the custom of circumcision of female organ at tender aged girls of four or five and catching them "unaware", causing unimaginable physical pain and suffering.³²

The custom prevalent among Africans is probably as old as Africa and Walker shows how it continues to persist even in this age of reason & democracy. The novel graphically brings out its painful & gagging effect on girls like Tashe, the protagonist of the novel, who with her bodily circumcision ends up in psychological, spiritual circumcision of life time. The loss of self- possession ruins her life. The secret of joy she finds lies in "resistance" and not passive acceptance of oppression of any kind.

Walker finds customs and practices like genital circumcision as anti-life, anti-human and inimical to women as well as their rights to live a natural human life and quite naturally she denounces such customs which are responsible for the death of "100 million of women."

Walker's novels, which tantamount to 'womanist' works, have been criticised for blackening the character of black male. She has been accused of, suffering from "a sexist bias" against black men. But this is not a fair assessment of Walker's fiction. The study of her novels & short stories reveals that Walker as a womanist attacks only those forces which seek to undermine a woman's freedom, equality and dignity and which run counter to the principles of rationality and justice. The women who suffer from these weaknesses are severely dealt with in her works. An examination of how Walker's women respond to the situation of self-denial & subservience imposed upon them by men both white & black serves to highlight that Walker, inspite of her deep sympathies with suffering womankind, has upheld the principles of artistic objectivity. Her integrity in delineation of women like Margaret in the novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and the mother of Celie in the novel *The Color Purple*, who are neither conscious of the causes of their predicament nor are equipped with intellectual and moral strength to cope up gracefully with the oppression & injustice they have to confront in their life. Though Walker has portrayed them in a way that evokes our pity & sympathy for them yet these characters remain on the periphery of fictional world and never emerge as admirable & central figure. This is suggestive of Walker's disapproval of the attitude of women who are passive and spineless in their suffering. The attitude of conformism displayed by women like Mrs. Hill, in the novel *Meridian* & M'Lissa in the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* has also been treated by Walker with penetrating irony. The blind adherence of Mrs. Hill to be precepts of Christianity and that of M'Lissa to the customs like genital mutilation of her community has been shown by Walker as one of the factors responsible for the perpetuation of male hegemony. Walker's critical rendering of these women characters in her novels is evidence of the fact that she as a 'womanist' working for the cause of women, is not carried away by any sentimental loyalty to her sex. If women like Mrs. Hill, Margaret and M'Lissa find disapproval because they are responsible for contributing to the degradation & slavery of woman kind, she lauds women like Men, Celie, Shug, Sofia, Meridian and Fanny N'Zingha who represent the qualities and values which Walker seems to prize the most and which she considers worth celebration in her work. On the other hand if men like Grange, Brownfield, Alphonso, Albert and Alphonso's Pa are portrayed in negative colours for their weaknesses, men like Adam Samuel, Rafe and Hal emerge as examples of fine human beings whose attitudes towards women are free from jealousy & possessiveness. It is such men characterised by elements of human understanding, sympathy & tolerance who create space for their women folk and allow them to grow, develop and blossom into the colour purple the colour of Joy & royalty.

Detailed Critical Summary of the Color Purple

The Color Purple is foremost the story of Celie – a poor, barely literate, fourteen years old Southern black rural girl living in Georgia who struggles to escape the brutality and degradation of her at the hands of her men. The tale is told primarily through her own letters, which out of isolation & despair, she initially addresses to God.

Witness the opening passage of *The Color Purple* "Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. May be you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me." Celie graphically tells God about her sexual abuse and, domination by "Fonso", the man she believes to be her father. The horrifying account of Celie's sexual abuse in fact, is a sad commentary on the andro centric culture which condemns women to subordinate state, defenceless and threatened, You better not never tell anybody but God. It'd kill your mammy." Celie is barred from sharing the trauma with other members of the family.

The pregnancy earns Celie her mother's wrath as it restricts her movement & obstructs her in discharging of her domestic duties. In response to her mother's query about the child's father, all Celie can manage to say is "God's. I do not know no other man or what else to say." Celie's mother becomes seriously ill and dies.

Alphonso, Celie's stepfather seems to be a sex maniac. His callousness to Celie's mother, who has recently delivered a child, comes as a shock to the reader. He keeps hovering round her bed "fussing" pulling on her arm. Celie's mother in poor health has to tell him that "it too soon" particularly when she is "already half dead" with all these children and repeated births. Failing to find his sexual gratification in Celie's mother, he turns to Celie, his, step daughter and demands, "You gonna do what your mammy would not." It is he; infact, who with his mania for

sex kills his wife. His sexual passions are made dear. Celie's mother dies, and he wastes no time in marrying and bringing home another girl, of Celie's age. He is so mad for sex that "he be on her all the time." Walker's treatment of men like Alphonso clearly brings out her strong criticism of these men who seek to prove their manhood & their authority as husbands and tend to stifle life out of their wives. She even exposes how these men use the vile craft at their disposal just to satisfy their obsessive hunger for sex. Alphonso clearly plays the game of cheating with Daisy, his new wife that he loved her. Walker is unsparing in her criticism of the naivety of women like Daisy who are too silly to see the mechanizations of men like Alphonso. How she is used by Alphonso, she does not know but Celie knows it well when she observes "I think she thought she love him But he got so many of us. All needing something". Walker's into his hands, is an evidence of not only her denunciation of the dehumanizing roles of men as husbands but also a criticism of women who allow themselves to be fooled & exploited. Celie and her bright, pretty, younger sister, Nettie learn that a man known as Mr. _____ wants to marry Nettie. Alphonso refuses to let Mr. _____ marry Nettie & instead offers him the "ugly" Celie as bride. Celie's marriage deal, transacted in slave like fashion, reveals her worthlessness in the eyes of man. The qualities for which she is valued are the ones found mostly in beasts. While disposing her off like disposing off a beast, Alphonso emphasizes to Albert, her capacity to work: "She can work like a man." Another wonderful quality is her servility: "You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed or clothe it." In this way, marriage itself for Celie turns out to be another version of slavery condemning her to a life of drudgery and degradation, denial and dispossession. Celie becomes a picture of domestic servility, representing the class of women, "mules of life" as Zora Neale Hurston called them. She sweats herself, cooks, fetches water from the well, and takes care of the four rotten children of Albert. Both Nettie and Kate (Albert's sister) exhort Celie to "stand up" and fight against her inhuman conditions but Celie fails to put up any resistance and "stays" where she is told. Long & continued suffering gets internalized in her psyche and she makes herself "A dead wood." She seeks consolation from the fact that she is "alive." Helplessly she exclaims "You a tree. That's how know trees fear man" Mr. - still desires Nettie & when he advances on her. Celie bravely packs her off to the only person she thinks would be able to help Nettie, the wife of the minister, whom she had met once in the town with a baby girl. Instinctively she knew, "She mine! My heart say she mine. But I don't know she mine. If she mine, her name Olivia." Thus Celie is separated from her beloved sister Nettie who is taken in by Samuel, the minister, and his wife Corrine, to look after their adopted children Olivia & Adam, who are in fact Celie's children by her step father Alphonso.

After Nettie's departure Celie's life continues to be miserable, she is beaten, abused and humiliated. She somehow comes to befriend Harpo... Mr. _____'s eldest son; who loves Sofia Butler, a strong minded and independent, girl, Unlike Harpo, who is too afraid to talk to his father like a man, Sofia, who is pregnant with Harpo's child, can think and act fearlessly. They get married despite opposition from Mr. _____ and a dramatic transformation is visible in Harpo, who whistles as a cheerful man and starts working hard. It is here that Walker sharply brings out the weight of tradition on the lives" of men & women. The portrayal of patriarchy is sharply brought out as she focuses on the weight of tradition and passing down of the "natural order of things" typified in the relations between Alberto's father Old mister, Mr. _____, Albert and his son Harpo. There is Mr. _____'s father the old patriarch advisor. He had objected to Mr. _____'s relationship with Shug exactly because Shug in his eyes was a bad woman who had not" stayed in her place." And after Celie has left, he advises Mr. _____ to simply get another wife (slave) and start all over again. Harpo fitting into the shoes of his father is also expected to assume the patriarchal mantle. He loves Sofia because of her strength and assuredness. But all around he finds the weight 'of tradition pulling him, -telling him that his wife should serve him and be kept under his thumb. So he starts to assert his male superiority over Sofia by making her "mind." And nothing can do it "better than sound beating." Celie, too, piqued by Sofia's pitying attitude towards her submissiveness advises Harpo to "beat" her. Ironically Harpo's attempt to beat Sofia ends up in his getting battered & bruised, and giving way to Sofia's wishes.

Celie realizes her folly and when Sofia confronts her, she confesses that it was out of jealousy that she advised Harpo to beat her. The Confession cements the two together and forges in them a bond of sisterhood, they

become the “pall bearers.” Sofia tries to inject some of her spirit into Celie and in reply to Celie’s defeatist attitude of banking upon God for her succour she reacts, “you ought to bash Mr..... Head open,..... think about heaven latter.”

Celie’s life takes a new turn under powerful influence of Shug Avery, the blues singer, Mr.____’s mistress. Shug is down with a “womanly disease” and Mr.____ brings her home to recuperate Celie is simply mesmerized by Shug’s “style”, her “class”. Surprisingly it is for the first time that she gets conscious of her dirty appearance. “Notty head” and dusty headrug, my old everyday shoes and the way I smell”. Initially Shug seems to endorse Mr.____’s version of Celie when she observes “you sure is ugly” but Celie’s loving nursing of Shug restores health to her. Celie becomes indispensable for Shug, Celie’s image of Albert also undergoes a change. Shug’s dismissive attitude of Albert fills Celie with reverential awe for Shug.

For the first time, Celie sees Mr.____ not as a tyrant, an oppressor but fallible like other human beings. In this way Shug’s freedom & courage become a source of inspiration & strength for Celie. Meanwhile Sofia fed up with Harpo’s attempt to beat servility in her, leaves with her children to stay with her sister. It is Celie’s first acquaintance with the assertion of a woman’s self. With Sofia away Harpo and his friend Swain build a juke joint and get Shug there to sing. Much against Mr.____’s annoyance & opposition, Shug takes Celie with her and dedicates a song to, her. Celie unburdens herself to Shug “He beats me when you not here, I say.....For being me and not you”. Shug takes upon her the responsibility that Albert does not beat her any longer.

Shug listens in amazement to the loveless sex relationship of Celie with Mr.____ and therefore considers Celie still a “virgin.” She becomes Celie’s teacher and teaches Celie to love her body and by doing so she will love herself and others. Throughout the process of practical instruction Shug’s empathy for Celie is outstanding. Shug guards the door while Celie explores and discovers a new dimension of her sexuality. The “mirror scene” in fact, is the awakening process. Celie discovers her body, accepts it with pride, begins to think differently, starts loving herself and then embarks on finding “an identity through a network of female relationships with Shug, Nettie, Sofia & Mary Agnes.” This friendship between Celie and Shug Avery takes the form of a lesbian relationship, as Celie for the first time in her life experiences orgasm with Shug; “then I feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth. Way after while I act like a little lost baby too.” This is Celie’s new consciousness of womanhood and motherhood.

Prodded by Shug Avery, Celie comes to love herself and establish her own identity. Sofia returns home to find Harpo with a new girl friend, Mary Agnes, called Squeak because of her high pitched voice. The two women get into fight over Harpo and end up with Sofia knocking out two of Squeak’s teeth. But this quality of resistance boomerangs on Sofia when one day in the market she encounters Millie. Millie, the mayor’s wife expresses “appreciation for Sofia’s children so clean” and shows magnanimity by inviting to work as “maid” in her house, an offer which is resolutely turned down by Sofia, an “amazon” and a natural fighter. The Mayor’s super ego refuses to pocket this impudence and asks again but hears the same “Hell no.” This is unacceptable to Mayor, a lineage of white race. His super ego as a man of superior race is hurt, spurring him to exerting the old coercive method of repression. The reign of terror is let loose and merciless beating leaves Sofia ‘blind in one eyes’, ‘Swole from head to fot’ tongue ‘tween her teef like a ruber’. For her audacity she is put in the jail and made to wash “dirty convict uniforms, nasty sheets and blankets piled over her head” from five in the morning to eight in the evening. The nerve racking and soul draining work leaves her deformed with “face yellow and sickly” and fingers “fatty sau sages.”

Once Sofia is put in Jail, the whole family rallies round in the hour of crisis. Squeak takes care of Sofia’s children. She even at her own risk meets the jail warden, her distance relative, for Sofia’s release. Though her attempt fizzles out and she gets raped by the warden, the suffering instills in her a new awakening about herself. She learns to assert her identity and demands that she be addressed by her own name, Mary Agnes. She starts to sing also.

Sofia is paroled for good conduct and shifted from jail to Mayor’s house. Her deep bitterness against the racist system, of which she is a victim, surfaces in her rough behaviour with two white children under her care. Walker through another incident involving interaction of whites and blacks shows how whites’ concern for blacks is

hypocritical, & only skin deep. Ms. Millie one day in a fit of magnanimity offers to drive Sofia to her place to meet her children in five years. But this condescending attitude of Ms. Millie lasts for fifteen minutes as her car engine develops problems and she refuses to ride back in van with Sofia's brother-in-law. Sofia is forced to accompany her and later on accused for "months bout how ungrateful I is". Walker makes Sofia rightly comment; "White folks is a miracle of affliction".

Celie's story takes a turn when Celie comes to know from Shug the interception of Nettie's letter by Albert. Mr. ___ has been hiding Nettie's letters to Celie from Africa. Infuriated Celie thinks of killing Albert. Shug soothes & comforts her. She channelises her anger into creative art. She introduces the idea of sewing pants. A positive enterprise of women bonding is established. Shug's powerful influence on Celie reorients her mind & she learns to see the world differently. The concept of God and traditional religion also undergoes change. To begin with Celie's anger is directed at God, too. The God who gave her "a lynched daddy, a crazy mamma, a lowdown dog of a step pa & a sister probably I won't ever see again". "The God I had been praying and writing to is man. And act just like all the others men I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown." but under Shug's careful handling the image of the white God, living in church is replaced by God who "is everything that is or was or will be, God is inside from and inside everybody, else, you come into the world with God". And 'site goes on to elaborate, "God love admiration...Not vain, just wanting to share a God thing. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."

The letters that Shug and Celie steal from Albert's indicate that Nettie has befriended a missionary couple, Samuel & Corrine and travelled 'with them to Africa, New York, England, Dakar Liberia & finally the country of the Olinka tribe. This widens the novel's scope and shows that oppression of women by men, of blacks by whites and even of blacks by blacks is universal. The African patriarchal practices in which Celie & Nettie grew up find echo in the male female relationships of the Olinka people. Nettie observes: there is a way that men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They listen long enough to issue instructions. They don't even look at women when women are speaking....The women also do not "look in a man's face" as they say to look in a man's face is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our own behaviour around Pa." The Olinkans practise another crude method of disempowering women. Tashi, the Olinkan girl is not allowed to go to school because "a girl's nothing to herself, only to her husband can she become something." Walker here using her art as criticism of life explores the horrendous ritual of "circumcision"—the genital mutilation and tattooing of faces which is forced on them as a Way of carving their identity. Nettie's letters also narrate the exploitation of the indigenous African people at the hands of English engineers who destroyed the trees and in the process axed "their culture then art, & substituting the hut coverings of roof leaf" with corrugated tin. Walker through Nettie's letters conveys the once "better civilization" of Africans but destroyed by slavery system when "millions and millions of African people were captured and sold into slavery — you and me, Celie! And whole cities destroyed by slavery catching wars. Today the people of Africa — having murdered or sold into slavery their strongest folks - are riddled by disease and sunk in spiritual and physical confusion."

Nettie is also sore over the fact that their work for the "uplift of black people" is seen in the same light as European Colonials. Samuel suggests to Nettie (whom he marries after Corrine's death) to return to Africa and join the m'bels, "the forest people" who live in the jungles refusing to work for the whites or to be ruled by them.

Celie's life changes when she comes to know from Nettie's letter the truth about her parents, and that Pa was not her real father. This takes away the guilt of incest from Celie's mind. Celie learns that her real father by dint of his toil and skill had succeeded in establishing a goods store. The fruit of his labour, the decent and happy life that he was leading invited the whites wraith who perceived in his success a challenge to their economic supremacy. There was nothing to prevent these whites from using their whip and enforcing the "Vigilante White" justice against the blacks. Celie's father & his brother were liquidated and the mother was mentally deranged by the shock. Celie thus comes to see that her own oppression within the family is linked to the larger issue of racial enmity.

Celie reclaims herself, her voice and self esteem to defy Mr. ____ She asserts her selfhood and she falls into the natural rhythm of life. "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can not cook... But I'm here."

When Alphonso dies, Celie inherits his house and land which has passed from her lynched father to her mother and then to her. For the first time, Celie is happy. She "sleeps in a room painted "purple" - the color. of radiance & majesty for Walker and rightly the title of the book. She has love, her own house, many friends and her identity. It is here that Walker focuses on another vital aspect of black women's lives, the spirit of bonding, comraderie, to counter the suppression and oppression of their life. Women need to have self sufficiency, those who already have it have to extend it to their "have nots" friends and thereby establish a community "of women pallbearers." Earlier on it was the bonding Sofia and Mary, now Shug and Celie, Mary Agnes the Singer & her daughter Suzie and now all become one family.

Celie returns to Georgia for a visit and finds that Mr ____ has reformed his ways. He cooks, washes & keeps house neat. She befriends him and from the role of a male tyrant he changes to the traditionally female roles of a house keeper and a semstress and we find him towards the end keeping company to Celie and the "two sitting together like two old fools". Celie explains to him the African version of the Adam & Eve story where in "the only way to stop making somebody the servant is for everybody to accept everybody else as a child of God." Or One mother's children, no matter. what they look like or how they act. When Celie is just floating on the waves of happiness, she gets the shattering news of the ship carrying Nettie & her family sunk .off near the coast of Gibraltar.

Walker's womanish stance however, leads her to bring the racism of women; Sofiaa refuses to conform to the black "mammy" figure and tells Jane Eleanor when the latter hands over her child to her "I love Children" but "all the colored women that say they love yours is lying." But Jane Eleanor prefers Sofia to her own family and much to the horror of her own family decrying her act, "who ever heard of a white woman working for niggers" she tells them, "whoever heard of somebody like Sofia working for trash." Out of love she conceals "yams" in icecream for Henrietta and thus becomes a part of the black family.

Mary Agnes leaves Grady-Shug's ex-love, moves in with her sister and mother who will look after her daughter Suzie while she continues with her career as a Singer. Shug also returns back to Celie after having fling at her 19 years old beau, Germaine whom she comes to consider as her son. Celie is reunited with Nettie Adam & her daughter Olivia & Son.

Thus being voiceless and oppressed for so many years, Celie the protagonist is finally content, fulfilled & self sufficient. When Nettie, Olivia, & Adam return to Georgia from Africa, Celie's circle of friends & family is fully reunited. Though Celie has endured many years of hardship, she says "Don't think us feels old at all. Matter of fact; think thus the youngest us ever felt. Her celebration of the reunion with family & friends, is associated with the day of Americans' independence from the Britishers.

Thus, the title "The Color Purple" finds justification as the novel portrays Celie's journey from oppression to liberation, from dispossession to reclamation of self. The journey ultimately leads her to the world of creation where there is reverence for "trees, the Color purple, humanity" where inexorable force of nature manifest in a blade of corn, little wild flowers, a field blooming purple."

The Color Purple as the Epistolary Novel

As theme, as revised trope, as a double voiced strategy, the representation of characters and texts finding a voice has functioned as a sign both of the formal unity of the Afro American literary tradition and of the integrity of the black subjects depicted in this literature. The use of epistolary as a medium of expression is not new. So before we go into it lets find what epistolary means?

Epistolary may be defined as, "Novel told through letters written by one or more of the characters." The advantage is that it presents an intimate view of the character's thoughts without interference from the author and that it conveys the shape of events to come with dramatic immediacy. The epistolary as a literary form had its boom in the

1700s. *Clarissa* (1748), *Fanny Burney's Evelina* (1778), and *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) are a few examples. Elizabeth Campbell recommends the epistolary form as one which not only gives an opportunity "to the writer to use it as subversive and freeing agent from the values of the dominant culture but also to produce revolutionary texts."

For over 200 years, the concern to depict the quest of the black speaking subject to find his or her voice has been a repeated topos the black tradition, and the central one. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* use a highly accomplished strategy that depends for its effect on the bivocality of free indirect discourse.³⁴ When Walker dedicates the book *The Color Purple* "To the Spirit", in fact it is the "unfolding of the gift of the spirit within, an unspeakable medium of reading and writing through which Walker expresses, dynamic development of her protagonist's consciousness within the "unspeakable medium" of epistolary novel comprised of letters written but never said indeed written but never read as Celie's only reader is God." Trapped in a gridlock of racist, sex, sexist and heterosexual oppressions, Celie struggles toward linguistic self definition. She is an invisible woman, a character traditionally silenced and effaced in fiction and by centring on her Walker replots her heroine's text.

Walker's rendition of epistolary form as narration strategy, in fact displaced standard English. Aware that the "master's tools can never dismantle the master's house."³⁵ Alice Walker has confronted the challenge of constructing an alternative language. The letters are all written by two sisters, Celie and Nettie. Celie addresses her letters, first to God & then to Nettie, while Nettie, off in the wilds of Africa as a missionary, writes her letters to Celie—letters intercepted by Celie's husband, stashed away in a trunk, and finally read by Celie and Shug Avery, her friend companion and lover. Nettie's unreceived letters to Celie appear, suddenly almost at the centre of the text and continue in what we might think of as text's middle passage with interruptions of only three letters which are addressed to God (twice) and to the stars, trees, the sky, to "peoples" and to "Everything". Then Celie addresses Nettie until she writes her final letter.

The letters are in fact, Celie's voice, which is her vehicle for self expression and self-revelation. The reader may say that Celie is her own author. The text's motivation for the writing of letters appears to be: Nettie writes to Celie because she is far away in Africa. Celie writes to God for reasons that Nettie recapitulates in one of her letters.

I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will go on writing them; which is guidance enough for me. Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do "when I pray, locked up in myself and choking on my heart. I am so lonely, Celie." Nettie and Celie are thus together no matter how far they are in the distance.

The italicised command that opens the novel – "you better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy", which the readers assume has been uttered by Celie's stepfather, is responded to literally by Celie. Celie writes to God for the same reason that Nettie writes to Celie so that each may read the text of her life, almost exactly or simultaneously as events unfold. This may be the text justification of its own representation of writing. So far Walker's motivations behind the use of this term are concerned Celie writes herself into being as a 'text, a text we are privileged to read over her shoulder. Celie writes her own story, and writes everyone else's tale in the text except Nettie's. Henry Louis Gates junior rightly observes "Celie writes her text, and is a text, standing in discrete and episodic letters which we like voyeurs, hurriedly read before the addresses (God & Nettie) interrupt their stolen pleasure."³⁶ Celie speaks — or writes—for Celie and, of course to survive for Nettie, the for Shug and finally for Celie.

Ironically, one of the well known effects of the epistolary narrating, as Tarry Eagleton comments "is to underscore the illusion of the real, but also of the spontaneous"³⁷. The best part is that the epistolary form allows for a maximum of identification with a character, precisely because of devices of empathy & distance, standard in third person narration no longer obtain. There is no apparent proprietary consciousness in the epistle so readers supply any coherence of interpretation of the text themselves.

Celie recounts the events, seemingly as, they unfold; her readers decide their meaning. It is the readers who piece together a text from the fragmented letters which Celie never mails and which Celie almost all at once, receives. The writing style of Celie is of such innocence that it compels the most hardened reader to initially sympathise and eventually empathise with her. Walker presents Celie as an utterly dynamic character, who comes to know her world and also to trust her readings of her world, thus enabling Celie to extract from the readers the compassion for the brutalities she is made to suffer at the hands of Albert and Alphonso, followed by Celie's victorious assertion "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't look.....but I'm here." Walker skillfully manipulates the reader's responses to Celie without once even revealing a voice in the text that Celie or Nettie does not narrate or repeat.

Celie emerges as a force, as a presence by writing letters. Her language is indeed so compelling that the readers actually begin to think as Miss Celie — like Shug the readers have her song scratched out of their heads—because by participating in her linguistic processes, they collaborate in her struggle to construct a self. The letters stitched together, become both the text of *The Color Purple* and the autobiographical text of Celie's life and times, her subjugation and liberation. Celie charts her growth of consciousness day to day or letter to letter —by the end of the novel, the readers find themselves, by writing her text herself and by holding text of herself in their hands. Celie unlike Zora Neale Hurston's protagonist Jennie does not re-capitulate her growth; only her readers have the leisure to reread Celie's text of development, the text of her becoming. Celie exists in her letters; the readers garner all the fragments of her 'experience and feeling that she has selected to write and record in her letters and give it a necessary coherence.

The Color Purple abounds in free indirect discourse. Celie is the narrator and author of her letters. The narrator's voice is the voice of the protagonist whose life time is split into two parts; Celie the character whose past action we see represented in her letters which reveal her as a laborious, barely literate adolescent victim of unwholesome patriarchal culture and the other Celie who — despite her use of written dialect, is amazingly a thoughtful and sensitive narrator of her own tale. The first stage of life is one wherein Celie is a character and the second stage is where she emerge out as the author, both as subject and object of narration. The subject object reconciliation appears as the central rhetorical device by which Celie's self-consciousness is represented in her own capacity to write a progressively better structured story of herself.

Celie is equipped with dynamism which Walker represents in her ability to control her own narrative voice as well as her wonderful ability to control all other voices spoken to Celie. Celie represents these voices, through the rhetorical device of free indirect discourse and the apparently impoverished and inarticulate language of the illiterate turns out to be deceptively resonant and dazzlingly rich. It is Celie's voice that is always a presence whenever anyone in her world is represented as having spoken. Through her mode of apparently reporting speech, underscored dramatically by her written dialect voice of narration, the readers assume that they are being shown discourse when all along they never actually are. Celie simply tells what people have said to her. Her written dialect voice identical in diction and idiom to the supposedly spoken' words that pepper her letters and the readers come to believe that they are hearing people speak, just as Celie did when the words were in fact uttered. Celie's voice and a character merge into one and this innovation is probably Walker's most brilliant stroke. Celie's free indirect discourse reveals as Kate Nickerson points out how "sophisticated an editor Celie becomes, precisely as she grows in self-awareness."

For example Celie is introducing, one of Nettie's letter, in a narrative present:

It's hot here, Celie she write: Hotter than July, Hotter than August and July. Hot like cooking dinner on a big stove in a little kitchen in August and July Hot. Who said or wrote these words — Celie or Nettie or both.

Celie's words merged with Nettie's, in a written imitation of the merged voices of free indirect discourse, is an exceptionally rare form.

Another example can be cited in this context. The moving scene takes place when Celie and Shug are beginning to forge their bond, a bond which speaks of a sisterly and later a sexual bonding:

Shug saying Celie. Miss Celie. And I look up where she at.

She say my name again. She say this song I'm bout to sing is call Miss Celie's song. Cause she scratched it out of my head when I was sick. . . . First time somebody made something and name it after me.

Celie's voice & Shug's are merged together into one, one the readers believe is shug's but which can only be — Celie's — and — Shug's simultaneous bonded & inseparable.

Nettie's letters on the other hand are written in standard English, which contrast her character as an educated, well informed one against Celie's barely literate and naïve one. Even this narrative of Nettie, Celie controls by ordering this reading as well as by introducing them within her letters, with her own commentary. Nettie's letter written in standard English take the form a lecture or an oration on the social, political and historical conditions of the black tantamount to somehow stilted verbosity as against Celie's suggestiveness.

Thus Walker by using the epistolary form in presenting true to life people proved how the black English vernacular and its idiom as a literary device is fully capable of being used as a literary language.

By employing this form Walker has not only endowed new flavour to an old technique but has done something exceptional by transforming this form which has always been "considered a female tradition (and therefore inferior) from the category of 'non-art' to 'art'." ³⁸

Major Characters

Celie

The *Color Purple* is foremost the story of Celie, a poor barely literate southern black woman who struggles to escape the brutality and degradation of her by men. The tale is told primarily through letters.

In the interview published just after *The Color Purple* was released, Alice Walker is reported to have said that the character of Celie was conceived after her own grand mother, who was raped by her slave master when she was only twelve. Walker wanted to record the triumphs in the lives of such women by inverting the inevitability of history. She asserts that Celie's character is self-liberational. She says, "I liberated her from her own history, I wanted her to be happy [so that] people can hear Celie's voice; There are so many people like Celie, who make it, who come out of nothing, people who are triumphed." ³⁹

Celie's entry made in the novel through her letters shows her as a weak, timid, helpless girl. She writes to God and unfolds her predicament which is unsavoury and a confirmation of her suffering under patriarchal rule. When the novel opens Celie is already pregnant and suffering from an overpowering sense of incest which she is too ashamed to talk and she writes to God, the only man she knows: "I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. May be you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me." The letter unfolds the woeful tale of a young, innocent teenager, rendered mute and powerless by the secret of incest at the hands of none other than a man whom she thinks her father. The opening of the novel reveals Celie as a 'helpless, suffering daughter, too innocent and too young to understand the magnitude of her tragedy. In utter helplessness, she makes a timid appeal to God "to give sign" to lead her from darkness to light & let help her know "what is happening to me." The entire letter sounds like the cry of a weakling dwarfed by forces beyond her control. Celie's adolescence starts with two pregnancies from Alphonso whom she considers her father, she faces the added agony of tearing away of her children from her, who she fears stand killed by, Alphonso. Poverty nags her. We find that she wears old, used patched clothes of her dead mother, which repel even a brute like Alphonso who on seeing her "dripping breasts" asks her to "put on something", "but what I'm sposed to put on? I don't have nothing" is her cry. Patriarchy whips her up further when Alphonso warns her, "better not never tell nobody but God" The locked up grief finds outlet in writing to God. Celie is docile & puts up no resistance as a daughter. She silently & helplessly suffers the bitterness of her mother also, "as big with child", unable to "move fast" Celie fails to discharge her household duties properly. Her utter helplessness is heartrending when in response to her mother's questioning about baby's father, all she can manage to say is "God's".

Celie is a victim of patriarchal structure where woman is equated with a beast. She is crippled by a sense of “inferiorization, non entity and guilt.”⁴⁰

The Patriarchal culture prevalent in the black families granted to fathers a special status and father as head of the family becomes a figure of absolute authority to be obeyed and followed servilely. Celie has in Alphonso such a father, who instead of showing love and affection represses and oppresses her. Celie like a docile, obedient daughter silently obeys him.

Celie’s infertility, consequent upon two babies from Alphonso is ironically a patriarchal gift to her. She observes how a woman in the church says “you gift big if you bleed every month. I don’t bleed no more”. As a wife she is pushed deeper into the cycle of suffering and oppression when Alphonso fed up with, as she is no longer of any use to him, decides to get rid of her and what better way there can be than to marry her off. Ironically her marriage deal is a revival of master-slave deal. The qualities she is valued for are valued in a beast “She ain’t no stranger to hard work...you can do everything rest like you want to and she ain’t gonna make you feed or clothe it” and “she can work like a man. Her status in her father’s house is that of a slave, a chattel. Celie is married off to Mr.—a down trodden farmer. Marriage, for Celie, is another version of slavery condemning her to a life of drudgery and degradation, denial and dispossession. She is a living picture of servility resembling the class of women, “the mules of life”, as Zora Neale Hurston called them. She is hard working and a good house keeper, cooks, fetches water from the well and takes care of Albert’s four “rotten kids” from previous marriage and this meticulousness in managing the house is appreciated by Carrie, Kate- Albert’s sisters. She is overworked, beaten and reduced to “virtual bondage”. Celie becomes a silent sufferer – the silent suffering serves as a defence mechanism to counter the brutalities of Albert. The warning from Nettie, her sister and Kate, (Albert’s sister) to “stand up” and “fight” against her suffering goes unattended; As she finds herself too weak to offer any resistance she comes to accept her fate, for a time, stoically: “He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie git the belt. She is belted and humbled in the presence of children “peeking through the cracks.” She suffers all this like a dumb dog and she does not cry even “I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie you are a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear a man.” The silent and patient suffering coupled with pangs of poverty reduces her into an automation. Celie consequently loses all interest in life, her finer feelings atrophied, she retreats into an emotional numbness a dead piece of wood – alive in body only.

Celie has never experienced love – the motivating and fulfilling force. This leaves her emotionally starved and consequently the husband wife relationship, supposed to be a warm and life giving force becomes a dry and mechanical exercise. This dry & loveless sex becomes a violence to her body, mind and soul and reduces her to the status of a “pariah”⁴¹. How sex becomes a compulsory, obligatory exercise for Celie is well illustrated when she tells Shug, “Mr.... clam on top of me, do his business, in ten minutes us both sleep.”

Celie, who was taken out of school by Alphonso on the pretext she was “big with child”, is no favourite in appearance. In Albert’s words she is “ugly,...pore...nothing at all”, a view, endorsed by Shug Avery, Albert’s beloved, who after looking her over from “head to foot” cackles, “you sure is ugly.” However Celie is not without brains. Infact her circumstances have dwarfed & maimed her mind and eclipsed the beauty of her “spirit”. We learn from Nettie how given a chance she could have become educated like Nettie. The flashes of witty responses to some situations in the novel reveal that she is daring and has her own way to express a gloomy situation. She can joke about bitterness as well. When Albert’s father visits his house, he is critical of Shug Avery whom however Celie has come to like. When he spits out his salvo against Shug, She reacts. I Twirl the spit round with my finger. I think bout ground glass, wonder how you grand it.” And when Pa tries to tame Albert by asserting his patriarchal authority, “Well this my house. This my land. Your boy Harpo in one of my houses, on my lands.” She reacts “Next time he come I put a little Shug Avery pee in his glass. See how he like that.”

Her description of Pa’s brother Tobia reflects her sense of humour, “He real fat and tall look like a big yellow bear.” Again the way she comments on Harpo’s gluttony reveals her sharp sense of humour “No matter what happening now.... No matter what they say or do, Harpo eat though it. Food on his mind morning, noon and night. His belly

grow and grow, but the rest of him don't. He begin to look like he big. When it due? us ast." This shows how Celie is curiously & satirically daring and has the seeds of resistance which however lie dormant in her. She is jealous of Sofia's this very quality of resistance. It is only after bonding with Shug that this quality surfaces in Celie too. Under Sofia's impact she is able to shed her timidity. Sofia herself a living ,example of fight & resistance, tens Celie how she had been fighting through out her life against people within her family and outside.

Walker believed in growth. She says, "Unless we have hope, unless we can grow together and really feel that we can endure, survive and overcome what is there".⁴² Celie becomes representative of this hope of Walker. From a timid, docile, domestic servant, she grows into a confident, self reliant and liberated woman. Her growth, however, comes in steps. The first step in this journey of hers is taken under the stewardship of Sofia and the seeds of resistance take full circle in Celie in the company of Shug Avery, a blues, singer of legendary beauty. Shug demonlishes Celie's faith in God and tells her to "bash Mr. ____ head open, she say. Think bout heaven latter." To start with Celie is nervous, jittery and even scared of Shug the sophisticated beloved of her husband. However, she finds, in her, a role model. She is amazed at her style, her clothes, her everything which creates a bond of friendship between the two. Shug's company brings a catalytic change in her. Slowly and gradually, with her care & loving nursing of Shug Celie's in overcoming Shug's initial dislike for her. Under Celie's care Shug begins to recuperate and with Shug's proximity, Celie's nervousness starts to disappear. Shug's love for Celie works wonders as she admits to Shug, that no body ever loved her. She is awakened to the beauty of her body and the sanctity of her individual self in the company of Shug. Celie who had so far, hated her body as she believed it to because of her oppression comes to re-appropriate it. With the re-appropriation of her body Celie's journey to self empowerment begins.

Once Celie re-appropriates her pattered body she comes to recognise its beauty Guided by Shug, she takes the mirror, while Shug guards the door for Celie who lies "back on the bed and haul up my dress. Yank down my bloomers. Stick the looking' glass tween my legs...inside like a wet rose" She feels the button of her vagina and "little shiver" goes through her. Celie comes to own her body and is ecstatic that "it mine." The desensitized body, 'a dead piece of wood' starts responding to the fineries of life. It is here that for the first time Celie becomes alive and unconsciously gets jealous of Shug Avery sleeping with Albert, she tells Shug "I don't care if you sleep with him, I say and she takes me at my word. I take me at my word too. But when I hear them together all I can do is pull the quilt over my head & finger my little button and titties and cry." No longer alienated from her body Celie finds a new confidence. She gradually gains the ability to synthesize her thoughts and feelings into a voice that is fully her own. Celie's process of finding her own voice culminates with her outraged explosion at Mr. . . . in which she curses him for his years of abuse and abasement.

Further development ensues and Celie's stoicism gives way to protest and aggression. She had silently tolerated rapes, and all kinds of ignominies hurled over her by Albert: "You ugly, you skinny; you shape funny. You too scared to open your mouth... You black, you pore...: You a woman, Goddam. . . .you nothing at all". But now the confident and aggressive Celie refuses to have this kind of nonsense anymore. Shug declares: Celie is coming to Memphis with me and the conversation that follows is illustrative of her new found courage to defy the man whom she feared to death:

Over my dead body, Mr. _____ say: You satisfied that what you want, Shug say, Cool as clabber.

Mr. . . .start up from his seat look at Shug, plop back down again. He look over at me. I thought you was finally happy, "he say What wrong now?"

You low down dog is what's wrong, I say, It's time to leave you and enter into creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need.

Say What? He ast. Shock.

All round the table folks mouth be dropping open.

You took my sister Nettie away from me, I say and she was the only person love me in the world.

Mr. _____ start to sputter, But But But But But.

Sound like some kind of motor.

But Nettie and my children coming home soon,...When she do, all us together gon whup your ass. “And she goes on with her salvo of bitterness directed at Albert” you was all rotten children I say. You made my life a hell on earth. And your daddy, I here ain’t dead horse’s shit.”

Mr.____ reach over to slap me. “I jab my case knife in his hand”

Her parting words pour out then defiance and assuredness of a woman of what she wants. The parting curse that Celie puts on Mr.____ when she says “Unless you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble... U n t i l you do right by me.... Everything you even dream will fail... will suffer twice, I say”, is a promise that she will not allow Mr.____to abuse her and affirms her identity “I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook....but I’m here”

Shug’s maternal prodding helps spur Celie’s development and a bond of sisterhood between the two is created. This bonding works as it defense mechanism against, violence. Celie’s unabatable fury at interception of Nettie’s letters could have rung. Albert’s knell but Shug saves Celie from stooping low and gives a positive turn to Celie’s passion for killing. Shug lovingly persuades Celie to desist from “killing” and diverts her to “read Nettie’s letters and sew” and Celie finds herself holding “a needle ,and not a razor in my hand.” Thus Shug draws out Celie’s inbuilt creative talent. The anger is sublimated: in the, art of writing and sewing, the art which emphasizes woman’s “transformational power”⁴³ The image of white man as God is also demolished. Celie becomes conscious of the transformational process in her life and experiences “my eyes opening” and mental horizon widening. It is here that she becomes conscious how a vital part of her life that had remained alien to her. Obsessed with thoughts of him (God) “I never truly notice nothing God Make. Not a blade of Corn (how it do that?) not the color purple (where it come from) Not the little wild flowers; Nothing.” Shug chucks out from her mind the overpowering image of patriarchy, synonymous with white ‘.-God. When she informs Celie, “Man corrupt everything....he on your box of grits, in’ your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere you think he God But. he’ ain’t.” And there is re-conceptualization of Celie’s God who is non-traditional & non-patriarchal.

Roving we gather honey’ goes the saying. Celie moves to Memphis — Shug’s place which becomes symbolic of new freedom, freedom of a fully empowered woman man’s equal. Her “Spirit” is in full play here giving a razor’s edge to Celie’s imaginative sensibility. “I dream & dream over Jack’s pants.” Her creativity and imagination find a free and full expression in the art of sewing pants for Shug, Odessa and Jack with individual requirements in minds. Jack’s pants have big pockets so that he can keep a lot of children’s things, marbles and string and pennies & rocks. She makes pants for Sofia with “One leg be purple, one leg be red.” and Celie, the seamstress turns into a successful entrepreneur. Orders start pouring in and she is happy , “I am so happy, I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time.” Thus Celie with access to economic power moves upon the higher step of class hierarchy.

Thus Celie in the end is a fully empowered woman who is finally content, fulfilled and self sufficient. Celie is no longer perceived as a voice, as a chattel or domestic slave but as a “whole woman”, wise, resourceful, caring, sensitive and sensual. Her creative self becomes symbolic of the color purple which helps her move from “fragmented self” to a self which is “whole.” When Nettie and Olivia return to Georgia from Africa Celie’s circle of friends and family is finally completed. Celie has no doubt endured ,many years of hardship & suffering but her present state of joy is unbeatable, when she says, “I don’t think us feel old at all. Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt.”

Pitted against Shug, Celie may look to be crude, ugly and unsophisticated but once equipped with confidence & creativity she comes to acquire the grace and dignity of Shug. She exudes the same confidence and dignity which Shug has.

Albert

From Celie we come to Celie’s husband Mr.____ who remains anonymous till Shug Avery one day addresses him as Albert and thus he springs out of the world of anonymity. Albert is a small (physically & mentally) bitter weak man at first, though married twice, with one legitimate lover Shug Avery and two “sets” of children, (he has fathered three babies of Shug) he knows almost nothing about children or women; He has never really looked at either. Be is

the kind of person who really thinks women are a separate species whose feelings are negligible as those of animals. Albert is more of a brute than a man. His entire conduct the reader finds is below human level. Only towards the end of the novel he shows some signs of growth Albert has; an eye on Nettie and he approaches Alphonso with marriage proposal for her which somehow is rejected.

Rejected in his proposal to wed Nettie, Alphonso waits for sometime. However compelled by the domestic pressures “the woman he had helping him quit and his “mammy” refusing to co-operate any longer he approaches Alphonso again and while settling for Celie his shrewd mind succeeds in extracting a cow along with Celie as a part of marriage deal.

Marriage has little meaning in Albert’s eye. He wants a servant to, attend to his domestic chores, his children and have his sexual gratification, His passivity in a vital matter like marriage is apparent when he rapes his bride child even though her head is bandaged. Devoid of fine sentiments of sensitivity, he treats his wife more like a servant than his companion and though poor Celie spends her wedding day in running away from Harpo, the eldest son who sore over his father’s remarriage, hits her with a rock ripping open Celie’s head. The only response it provokes from Albert is “Don’t do that”. Such is his concern for his wife.

Albert may not be a sex maniac like Alphonso but he is brutal in flesh. His wife from whom he had four children is dead and he brings Celie. as his new wife and tries every possible method to seduce Nettie. Marriage seems to signify nothing beyond a legitimate source of sexual gratification for him. Possessed by the frenzy of lust he uses his position as a husband to turn the sexual experience of his wife into a virtual punishment. He becomes almost an instrument of violence upon Celie’s body as it is a relationship sans tenderness, Celie tells Shug “how Mr. _____ clam on top of me, do his business in ten minutes & us sleep.” Ironically Albert remains unaware of this dehumanizing aspect of sex and the husband wife relationship instead of becoming mutually satisfying turns into obligatory exercise. He is impoverished of the spirit. Once he is married to Celie, his sensuality for Nettie overpowers him. To hook her in, he lavishes praise on her “dress”, “shoes”, “skin”, “hair”, “teefs” and everyday finds something to admire in her. Failing to find response from Nettie, he stoops so low as to tell Celie “one night” that “Us done help Nettie all we can. Now she got to go.”. The cunning beast that he is, he knows well that Nettie has no other place to take shelter.

Albert is mean and measures up to the level of a beast. Frustrated in attempt to seduce Nettie he vows to break all communication in the two sisters and intercepts all Nettie’s letters written to her. “Because of what I’d done I would never hear from you again and you would never hear from me” is Albert verdict recorded in Nettie’s letter to Celie.

Albert is a male Chauvinist, he may not be like his father Pa—a blind conformist to the traditions and customs of the society but by and large his belief in male supremacy is deeply rooted in his psyche. It is under the impact of such a psyche that Albert tries to rule with his rod. It is but natural that any resistance or protest from a woman is unthinkable for him. So secure is he in his male dominion that he beats Celie, for the simple reason that “she my wife” and heaps upon her all kinds of insults and ignominies. His wake up call comes when Celie infuriated over his oppression and the use of vile invectives “dumb”, “pore”, “woman”, “nothing at all” she reacts. To silence her, he raises his hand to slap her — the usual patriarchal practice to silence women. But he is taken off his feet when the confident Celie no longer covering before him “Jabs at him with a knife.” Spitting venom Albert’s threatens to lock he up in jail but the defiant Celie is roused beyond control & retorts, “The jail you plan for me is the one in which you will rot, I say.” For once, Albert is awakened to the slipping clasp of patriarchal order and the readers find that he gradually comes to acceptable change. Celie’s defiance in the face of men fact is to serve as an eye-opener for men like Albert and a timely call for them to come out of the world of patriarchal culture. Walker through Celie’s defiance seems to convey how attitudinal changes in men towards women, are urgently required.

Walker has been accused of portraying black men in black colours and thereby betraying her race. The change is baseless as Walker’s character have been delineated in a way that they appear as realistically drawn human beings capable of both human weaknesses and strengths. She shows the process of their transformation, thus logically offering the reader an insight into the causes responsible for the change in their attitudes towards women. Albert also undergoes this transformation. He overgrows his meanness, violence, selfishness and ignorance since men like

Albert. Walker shows are individualistic, fragmented, friendless and without love. Once he receives his resurrection begins. He begins to respond positively to the women's freedom and movement. The reader dreams of this change in Albert at the funeral of Sofia's mother, "Mr. ___ act like he trying to git religion. . . . he not so quick to judge." "He work real shard too. . . . And clean that house just like a woman." Another factor that saves him from total failure as a human being is his irrational but sincere love for Shug. It is because he loves Shug & she loves Celie that he can begin to see other women and to find something in them to appreciate. He is still following someone else's lead rather than his own but unlike his father is no blind alley of misogyny. Celie herself testifies of Albert's redemption: "I mean when you, talk to him now he really listen, and one time out of nowhere in the conversation was having, he said Celie, I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experiences." (267)

Albert as compared to Harpo is a weak man. He fails to wriggle out of the patriarchal clap trap by epitomised in men, like Pa, his father whose gender-bias and traditional concept of purity, chastity and servility are pre-conditions for marriage, the cause enough for disallowing Albert to marry Shug. But Albert deserves a word of praise for his bold stand in bringing-alling Shug home despite strong opposition from his father, Church, the strong holds of patriarchy and religion.

Infact, it is during Shug's illness that he learns a significant lesson of life. From human love, Shug and Celie lead him to the source of love itself i.e., wonder over the universe, existence itself. On return from Memphis Shug and Celie find Albert a changed man, keeping a neat house, cooking, washing up and collecting shug reversal prompted by his recognition that "meanness kills" (231). From the role of male oppressor, he changes to the traditionally female roles of seamstress and housekeeper. Redeemed by love he shares with Celie how he underwent such a change and how it lead him to love and be loved.

He tells Cellie: "you ast yourself one question it lead to fifteen, I start to wonder. why us need love. Why us suffer, Why us black. Why us men & women, Where do children really come from. It didn't take long to realize. I didn't hardly know nothing And that if you ast yourself, Why you black or a man or a woman or a bush it don't mean nothing if you don't as why you here, period.

So, what you think? last.

I think us here to wonder, myself, To wonder, to ast, And that in wondering about the big things and asting about the big things, you learn about the little ones, almost by accident. But you never know nothing more about the big things than you start out ast. The more I wonder he say, the more I love.

And people start to love you back, I bet, I say. Rising above narrowness, meanness, reaches out to the unknowable leads to a state of innocence and openness of heart where the man purged of all evil, all meanness. And Albert grows and develop to achieve this state. It is not Albert alone, who is the beneficiary in the process, it Celie too is redeemed. She is cleansed of her bitterness for Albert which strengthens and enriches their mutual bond.

This bond of friendship based on mutual understanding & love lends Celie a glow of its own kind. Shug is quick to spot it out and it is her turn, now to be jealous of this love. Back from Memphis Shug asks Celie, "What you and Albert been upto? She ast: Nothing much I say.

She say, I know Albert & I let he been up to something, with you look as fine as you look.

Us sew I say, Make idle conversation.

How idle she ast.

What do you know, I think. Shug jealous. I have a good mind to make up a story just to make her feel bad. But I don't (291). And she tells her now both of them had been talking about their deep love for her. It is this force of love, that redeems Albert. Walker shows how it is not women, who are impoverished of love but men are equally starved of it. Albert needs this love, since his relationship with Shug is a quest of love; a love he has been robbed of because of his father's stubbornness of forcing him to marry Anne Julia. This forced marriage fills his life with a void and the "loveless" & "joyless" relationship between Celie & him has a dehumanizing effect on him, The frustration of which he takes out on his wife.

Walker has faced a barrage of male bashing by those writers who would prefer that the varied forms of violence against women be discretely ignored by the Black literary record. So she has been accused of portraying men in “totally unacceptable light”⁴⁴ for “vilifying the male” by showing that “masculinity is unredeemable, masculinity is radical evil, irreducible, the causeless cause of all that’s wrong in the world.”⁴⁵ Commenting on *The Color Purple* Staid complains that it, “dramatises rather the virtues of women & vices of men. . .brutal in the flesh” and “impoverished of spirit.” Above all they are “lechers”, “mechanical mosters of sexual appetite.” Examined against this background, Albert measures up the criterion, he is brutal in flesh, impoverished of spirit and if not a lecher he has a lot of sexual appetite. But there is another face of Albert that we meet towards the end of the novel, an Albert who sits with Celie, as her equal & not her superior. He reaches out to meet her and even propose to her to marry her again, this time in “body & spirit” — a proposal rejected by Celie but accepted in terms of friendship.

So it is wrong to say that Walker’s black men are painted in black colours or Walker has “high level of enmity” towards her men folk as said by Bradley. The changed Albert, Harpo and men like Adam, Samuel, Raffee, Swolo in *The Temple of My Familiar* who are sensitive and alive to a woman’s predicament are the ones who are close to Walker’s heart & whom she celebrates in her fictional world.

Shug Avery

From Albert the readers come to know about his beloved, Shug Avery, a blue singer and the craze of the town. About Shug Avery, Walker tells how she had in her mind both the “spirit” of Zora Neale Harston and the life style of her aunts. In an interview for television conducted by Sharon Wilson with Studio audience, the editor of “kalliope” asked Walker if in her book *The Color Purple* she “was calling on some people to come to you, and they do. Is Zora any place in your book? Is some of her spirit in, Shug?” Walker answered, “Oh I think so, yes. How could that not be? But Shug is also “partly my aunts who worked as domestic help up North and who would come to visit us in the South. I couldn’t believe they cleaned anybody else’s house, because. They looked like they needed somebody to clean them. They had wonderful nails and were all beautifully dressed—just fantastically, vibrant woman with great perfumes. It still astonishes we that my aunts worked everyday for other people and yet retained such a magical life of their own, which we saw during the summer and sometimes on very brief week end visits.” Shug Avery’s entry in the novel is dramatic comparable to that of super model. The readers see her through her photograph which falls from Albert’s “billfold” and reaches Celie’s hands. Celie is mesmerized by her looks. Her immediate response on seeing the photograph is “Shug Avery was a woman I ever saw. She more pretty than mamma. She bout ten thousand times more prettier than me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair something like tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motor car” and almost bewitched by her beauty Celie, all night long stare at it. And now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dress to kill, whirling and laughing.” (7)

Shug is a woman of dubious morals yet she sends the town buzzing with all kinds of news. “The honey bee is back in town.” Albert, Shug’s lover though has fathered three babies of Shug behaves like a new lover. His usual latherygry kicked off, he dresses up in front of the glass, looks at himself, then undress and dress all over again. “He stick back his hair with promade, then wash it out again. He has been spitting on his shoes and hitting at with a rag.” (25) Celie is simply dying to see her. “I just be thankful to lay eyes of her.” Shug’s ill reputation does not allow people to welcome her and more so as she suffers from some “nasty woman disease.” However Albert, still inflamed by his love for her gives her shelter.

Celie’s liking for Shug is instantaneous and almost religious. Celie welcomes Shug and immediately sees something more in Shug while she “wash and comb out her hair, she got the knottiest, shortest and kinkiest hair I ever saw and I loves every strand to it. The hair that come out in my comb I kept.” (55) The keeping of the hair becomes, a scared act of preserving hug’s hair as a relic.

Shug possesses a strong physcal and sensual presence quite the antithesis of Celie’s timidity. She is a blues singer as Nandita Sinha records “traditionally these singers had assertive and demanding voices and personalities with very little respect for sexual taboos or for breaking through the boundaries of respectability and connection. True to her profession Shug’s charm is irresistible. So great is her sexual appeal that Celie’s first look at Shug’s naked

body seems to arouse her, "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples looks like her mouth. I thought I had turned into a man. (51) The blues singer that Shug is, she has no inhibitions. When she finds Celie's gaze transfixed on her naked body, she unabashedly flaunts it and has the "nerve to put one hand on her hip" inviting Celie to have a "good look" at her.

Shug's beauty is not confined to her body alone, she possesses a beautiful soul too. Her empathy for the suffering is exemplary. Finding a sympathetic comparison in her Celie's lays bare to Shug her private life, the ignominy of being raped by her father and his horrible lies in this connection conveniently, passed on about to her. She tells Shug how my mamma die ...My sister Nettie run away. Mr. come git 'git me' to take care of his rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me and flick and fuck even when my head bandaged. No body even love me, I say. (117) And Shug becomes Celie mother and sister put together, she tells Celie, "I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on my mouth." And the spring of love dried up in Celie's heart starts flowing. "Us kiss and kiss till us can't hardly kiss no more" and she feels "some real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth." (118) Shug love has cathartic effect on Celie's emotions. Through Shug Walker shows the fundamental goodness of the human spirit, Shug's humanness is thrown in relief when she insists that Celie will also come with them to Harpo's juke joint much against Mr. _____'s wish. Shug's empathy for Celie is made evident when she put her arms around her and declares that she "won't leave.....until I know Albert won't even think about beating you." (79)

Thus Shug Avery acts as a superwoman for Celie. It is she who transforms her gradually and helps her overcome all the rooted inhibitions and demoralising complexities of her mind. Shug not only evolves Celie, freeing her from the dehumanising slavery of the domestic life, but also liberates her mind, from the victimising ideas of submission and self impression as virtuous qualities of womanhood.

Shug the blues woman becomes a role model and a catalyst for change not in Celie alone but in her community as well. Through Shug, Walker shows the vitality, resiliency, creativity and spirituality of African American women illuminating the core aesthetic concepts which have been crucial to the survival in a society that has largely used or abused them for its purposes. Celie's response to Shug's music is, "She say my name again. She say this song I'm bout to sing is call Miss Celie's song, because she scratched it out of my head when I was sick." And Celie is overwhelmed by a this new identity given to her, "First time somebody made something and name it after me." (77) Even Squeeze realize her worth when she first sings her song with Shug and regains her real name, Mary Agnes. Agnes prodded by Shug shapes into a professional singer. Celie's creative arts 'finds consummation in stitching pants of all sizes, shapes and colours. Thus the-faculty of creative art in Walker's women gets instilled effecting their own regeneration and serving as an instrument of regenerating others.

Shug becomes Walker's symbol of empowered femininity—free, strong, generous and talented. She is economically independent and therefore beyond the reach of male tyranny. Celie sometimes feels that Shug has something masculine about her. She observes, "when you look in Shug's eyes you know where she has been, seen what she seen, did what she did. And now she know." (276) Though she is an object of men's desire, with her bright black skin in her tight red dress, her feet in little sassy red shoes. (77) She has presence that keeps them at a distance. To her "Mr. _____ is merely Albert and a "little man" who has to be firmly kept in his place. Her dismissive attitude towards Albert is clear when she overrides his decision of not allowing Celie to go with Shug to night club. "Mr.—mutter, putting on his clothes. My wife can't do this. My wife can't do that, No wife of mines. He go on aricf on." Shug Avery finally says, Good thing! aren't your damn wife. He hush then." (76)

Despite Shug's dubious reputation of a sexy loose woman whom society hated the reader, finds her to be warm compassionate at heart. Her sexy style, sharp tongue and weakness for men especially when she comes to love "Grady" a boy of nineteen, comes as a shock to Celie as well as to the readers as it gives the impression of a woman lustful and jaded but the fact she is basically a natural woman who has appetite for living. Shug's many roles as a lover, confidant, mother, sister, teacher and healer make her an unpredictable and dynamic character. She may be compared to Fanny- Nzingha, of *The Temple of My familiar* who heals peoples mind and souls by Massaging

their bodies. Walker highlight this quality of a healer in Shug. Shug acts as Celie's healer when she forces Albert to stop brutalizing Celie. Again, it is Shug with whom Celie first consummates a satisfying and reciprocally loving relationship; thus "it don't surprise me you love Shug Avery." Albert tells Celie. I have love Shug Avery all my life... I told Shug it was true that I beat you because you was you and not her... Some women would have just love to they man say he beat his wife cause she" wan't them. But Shug spoke right up for you, Celie. She say Albert you been mistreating somebody I love. So far as you concern, I'm gone." Under Shug sealing touch both Celie and Albert are able to transcend their suffering and be at peace with themselves and each other.

Harpo

From Celie's husband Albert we move on to Harpo, Albert's son, tall skinny "black like his mama with great big eyes." When we meet Harpo, we find him in deep pain as his mama died in his arms and "he don't want to hear nothing but no new one." He suffers from nightmares and sees his "mama running cross the pasture trying to git home." Haunted by her murder he cries out his mother's name in sleep. Death has unhinged this "twelve year" old boy to the extent that he welcomes Celie, his stepmother with a piece of "rock" ripping her head open and the "blood flowing down her breasts." Harpo is a weak willed boy in the beginning and, can not set his will against his father. He is conscious of his father's laziness which bothers him and compels him to question, "why don't, you work no more"? Albert's curt reply, "No more for me toyou here, ain't your" leaves him mute. Celie rightly' observes, Harpo better at fighting his daddy back than me." Basically good at heart, Harpo and Celie developed good rapport., They work hard in the fields and by the age of seventeen Harpo comes to share his personal feelings with Celie. He is in love with Sofia Butler, whom he would like to marry, he confides in Celie. But he is too weak to override his father's decision to marry Sofia whom Albert rejects because "young omen no good these days..... Got they legs open to any Tom Dick and Harry." And further accuses her of fastening 'fatherhood of her baby on Harpo. It is Sofia who sharply reacts to these insults and walks away with head held high. Harpo remains tumb "hanging there" between Albert and Sofia. It is laudable that later on he is able, to shed away his initial cowardice and marries Sofia and brings her home, The patrich's verdict for defiance falls heavy on him and he is made to work for his father on his farm, on wages.

Harpo like his father before him, and largely because of his father thinks of women as a subservient race. He is therefore expected to assume the patriarchal Marthe, of his father, passed on to him by Albert who in turn received it from his "Pa" creating a "camaraderie" between father and sons. The outcome is disastrous. He loved Sofia, married her because of her strength and assuredness. But all around him, he finds the weight of tradition pulling him down, contaminating his happy married life. He wants a slave master relation to repeat and for this it is essential to make his wife "mind". He becomes blind to all Positive traits of Sofia's character like "She a good wife, Good to the children and good looking, Hard working, God fearing and clean." All he wants is, "I want, her to do what I say, like you do for Pa", he tells Celie. He gets so obsessed with the idea of subjugating women that no argument works on him. He continue to harp on, "The wife spose to mind" and pays a heavy price for it. He loses his wife and his child as she walks out of his life saying, "He don't want a wife, he want a dog." Harpo's blind adherence to patriarchal system reflects the lack of his mental growth. Harpo becomes fat as compared to his father Albert who is small and slender which mirrors his inner development, for Harpo matures and begins to become a real human being before his father does. His juke joint becomes symbolic of growth of one and all.

Sofia Millie Episode

Sofia and Millie episode is significant as it unveils the ugly face of racism prevalent in the society even after emancipation and so called promise of equality of whites and blacks, Emancipation brought little relief to the black. Its shadows continued to linger on throughout their lives. The kindness and sympathy which the white showed to the black was the direct result of a deep rooted sense of ownership which the whiteman had cultivated for centuries in relation to the black whom he had become habitual to treat as his chattel. This aspect of the white's personality is incisively understood and equally Powerfully rendered by Walker in Millie Sofia episode. Millie, the wife of white mayor of the city is representative character of the white hypocrisy.

Millie like countless other white women, becomes the cause of a black woman's suffering and imprisonment. During a chance encounter, Millie expresses appreciation for Sofia's "children so clean" (CP. 90) and shows

magnanimity by inviting Sofia to work as “maid” in “her house - an offer which is resolutely turned down by Sofia, an “amazon” and natural fighter, The mayor whose super ego refuses to pocket this impudence sticking out his chest, questions Sofia again but gets the same response This expression of self-respect in Sofia’s refusal to accept maid’s job is totally unacceptable to a mayor, a lineage of the white race. His super ego as a man of the superior race is hurt spurring him to exerting the old coercive methods of repression. The encounter immediately takes on racial colour and as the ruler comes down heavily with full vengeance upon Sofia’s audacity in not submitting herself to they will she is subjected to a merciless beating so as to serve as an example for other blacks. The machinery of white justice swings in to action, the police arrives, They threaten to blow off Sofia’s husband in a prizeu fighter and they mutilate her body with merciless beatings. They “start slinging the children off the mayor, bang their heads together and beat Sofia”. They “crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side, They blin her in one eye. She swole from head to fot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it stick out between her teef like a piece of rubber. She cannot talk. And she just about he color of a egg plant.” (CP 92) and she is put in the prison and made to wash dirty clothes of the convicts.

No doubt the nerve-racking and soul-draining work leaves her deformed with “face yellow and sickly” and fingers “fatty sausages” (CP, 93).

The affected kindness and generosity is discernable in Millie and Sofia relationship; rooted in *the slave and mistress*⁴⁶ pattern of relationship. Millie, the mistress, further adds to of Sofia’s afflictions. The gesture which seemed to stem from generosity, in absence of any depth and genuineness becomes a cause of further deepening of sorrows and misery. It is revealed through her forced separation from her family and children “for five years” (CP. 108). Millie, who shared the common experiences of becoming a mother with all other-members of her gender including those of her white race was never moved to realize the agony of Sofia, who was never allowed for five years to see her children. In a fit of magnanimity to blacks, she offers to drive Sofia to her place. She realizes all of a sudden that it was a “same” for her to keep Sofia away from her children for so long. Displaying a piece of rare generosity she tells her to get ready to spend the whole day and celebrate X-Mas with her children. But this condescending attitude lasts only for fifteen minutes as MilFe tears Sofia back from her children on the pretext that she cannot drive her car back home.

The whole incident, thus underlines the ruthless exploitation of the black woman by the white who treat her as their legitimate property. This further shows how slavery for black woman persisted in racist system in one form or the other even in the 60s’ nearly one century after emancipation. Walker, here is unsparing in lashing at the white’ man’s justice which promised to the blackman, nothing but the perpetuation of the chains of slavery and dsufferings in one form to the other.

Major Themes

Eros (love)

Eros love as Walker celebrate in her works is never an unconflicted garden of earthy delights, mystic, romantic lush. It is rather, learned often fought for, birthed in pair. Thus Eros takes on my colours and shapes. Love is sometimes twisted into beating or the killing of one’s own children as in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* when Grange kills his own son Brownfield to save his grand daughter Ruth. It is there in the story. The Child - takes the shape of love of his daughter *Who Favored Daughter* where the father’s merciless’ beating of his daughter as he cannot stand her love for a white boy.

Loves are sometimes traded and betrayed as in *The Temple of My Familiar* as revealed through the intersecting triangles of Arvedya, Carlota, Zede and Shwelo, Carlotta Fanny. Sometimes loves simply disappoint and dry up as in the love between Meridian and Truman or Truman and Lynne in the novel *Meridian*. Another aspect of love emerges where loves are undone by the psychic damages done to the beloved in Childhood as in the love of Adani and Tashi in *Possessing The Secret of Joy*.

“*The Color Purple* is a multivalent erotic symbol of ‘a sign’ of indomitable female spirit a way to encode (a)

specifically feminine jouissance... Associated with Easter, 'and resurrection, and thus with spiritual regeneration. This is how Linda Abbandoanto reads *The Color Purple*.

Love in Walker literary world is always hoped for, indulged sexually to the extent that it can be, and always rejoiced in when it seems most closely to approach wholeness or most likely to endure. Both in her fiction and nonfiction, Walker celebrates young love, gay and lesbian love, partnerships that last, marriages that mature and grow. Yet the inadequacies of love are themselves testaments to the worth of loving. In her journal of feature film making, Walker tells of separation and recovery of friendship with her past lover. In the record of the documentary, she includes notes on a birthday and musing over her "beloved." To love or to be in love demands physical expression, seeks delight. In the poem, "Awakening" Walker writes "for S", "love is watching, waking holding, knowing the beloved's breathing and heartbeat. Love makes us new." Eros includes orgasm. In her 1997 book *Anything We Love Can be Saved*, Walker shows a photo of a man from India hugging a tree. She remarks "It gives me hope that when the time comes each of us will know exactly what is worth putting our arms around." Love thus is the force which gives life, pleasures life and also preserves life.

Activism

Another theme that is prominent in Walker's works is activism. This concept of love broadly conceived, forms ethos. Walker declares in the poem "On Stripping Bark from Myself that she, evidently the persona of the poem is engaged in a struggle... against inner darkness" a struggle which impels her "to unlock life". Over the more than three decades of her writing Walker has immersed herself in protest, civil disobedience, writing, speaking, travelling and film making on behalf of numerous causes. One thing that crystallizes in her works, however is the denunciation of destruction. In her book *In Living by the Word*, Walker borrows a condemnatory term from Oglala Sioux to denounce patterns of destruction. She notes that the Sioux called white people the "Wasichu" meaning fat eaters" or "fat takers." Walker applies the term to any and who are racist, sexist, classist, environmentally insensitive. The poems which appeared in *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful* repudiate the Wasichu.

Walker's rant is against consumerism, male-dominated politics, assassinations, rape, the arms race and all such factors, issues which scalp the earth. "Earth itself" admonished Walker has become the nigger of the world." And she firmly believes that Earth will assuredly undo people if they do not learn to care for it, revere it and even worship it. While the earth is poisoned. And if the earth is enslaved, none. on this earth is free. Adam the son of Celi of *The Color Purple* narrates in the novel *Possessing The Secret of Joy*, What his father Samuel taught him: "Adam he would say, what is the fundamental question we must ask of the world? I would think of and posit many things, but the answer was always the same: Why is the Child Crying? (P.S.J., 165) in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, "Mr. _____" in *The Color Purple*, Suwelo in *The Temple of My Familiar* among them learn as best they can to hear the cry and ask the question. In *Warrior Marks* the book which bears witness to the interventions and interviews involved in the making of the documentary against the genital mutilation of women Walker shows her activism in educating people to stifled and defied cries. She also shows how old taboos like genital mutilation tribal loyalties revealed through tattooing of body, misplaced priorities and a desire for the panoply of progress can swerve the ability to hear and respond, the ability to see alternatives. From the beginning of her writing life, it seems, Walker has seen her role as voice for the voiceless. She finds sometime ancient voices guiding her pen. Walker repeatedly issues a call to listen to attend. The call may be through the "Dear God" letters of Celie, through the poems and stories which often arise from pain, through blissful lands of women and landscapes and lovers and Earth. Raising her voice and using loving weapons of resistance are Walker's ways to Earth-saving and people-saving. Motivated by an indefatigable trust in the power and persistence of love, Walker continues to speak and stir through her works. She acknowledges the forces that disappoint and the powers that destroy but she values every effort on behalf of blessing change, every act of love.

Walker indicates that activism is the constructive alternative to suicide, murder, wholesale slaughter. Yet, she also allows for the possibility that the rage which fuels resistance may also require killing. Grange Copeland kills. Tashi kills. It is as if to say that where life is suppressed and growth stunted, where persons and systems conspire to suffocate resistance and activism may sometimes have to kill before anyone or anything can begin to heal. Walker's celebrations of Eros and commitments to activism are clearly religious activities.

Pantheism

She firmly believes that true religion and vibrant spirituality require the renunciation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and the adoption of pan religious and pantheist sensibilities. Walker regrets that the image of God that Christianity has transmitted is that of a “task master” and “inhibitor” a God “who said women deserved to suffer and were evil anyway” (A WL 13) She redefines the role of God and replaces the historical Jesus not in the unique role of only-begotten Son but as one among many beloved children.

In the character ‘Shug Avery of *The Color purple*, one may see the pan religious amalgam Trudy Bloser Bush observes: “Shug develops the holistic consciousness of the Christian mystics of Buddhist and Hindu thought, and of African animism.” Shug tells Celie, the protagonist of the novel, “God is inside each person; people come to church to share not find God.” Walker in an interview with John O’ Brien professed a pantheists faith: “Certainly I don’t believe there is a God beyond nature. The world is God. Man is God. So is a leaf or a snake.”

The pantheistic belief further develops and colours her works. Walker calls her works “a prayer to and about the world”, (SRT) The most befitting way of worship is “In day-to-day life, I worship the Earth as God- representing everything—and nature as its Spirit (AWL). This God is present in ocean or drifting clouds, melons. Mangoes or any other kind of attractive seductive fruit, the God who “workships” us too. The Earth God provides starry nights in which one may find calm, lover’s arms in which one may rest and thrill, fields’ and hills where one may take refuge and all sensuous sights and sounds, tastes and ,smells in which one may revel. Walker’s however had to pay a heavy price for her habit as a born-again pagan to be on the earth in worship. She was bitten by a tick-and got afflicted with Lyme disease and was totally ‘sapped of her strength. But She describes facing the long delayed and much mistken diagnosis as a faith crisis. She admits how the benign Goddess Earth turned on her. The experience, however, led her to a more subtle pantheist theology of suffering. Walker sees Lyme disease as an outcome of the Earth’s need to fight back against assault and presumption, When it becomes “tired of people, worshippers or not for taking her granted.” (SRT).

The Same River Twice

Walker arrives at a rather blithe acceptance of suffering. Suffering has a use; it helps push away the old skin. But unlike her attitude of adamant resistance to the suffering wrought by humans, she tends to a more laissez-faire approach to the suffering imposed by Trinity - Earth, Nature and the Universe. She would not, however, leave such suffering untreated and with her hopeful faith for cure she finds the universe spirit right in the garden of life. Walker remarked to Oprah Winfrey in 1989: “There is no heaven. This is it We’re already in heaven, you know, and so in order... for the earth to survive, we have to acknowledge each’ other as part of the family the same family... The “family” clearly is larger than the human family. It is an inclusive family of cosmos, nature creatures.

List of Possible Questions

Essay Type Questions

1. Show how, *The Color Purple* is the’ depiction of the courageous struggle of blackwomen towards self environment.
2. ‘Love’ and ‘Resistance’ the two dominant forces are cure to all kinds of oppression. Discuss the statement in the context of *The Color Purple*.
3. *The color purple* is encoded in the novel as a sign of female spirit.” Elucidate.
4. Celie’s tale told in the epistolary form “charts the triumph of sheer will over oppressive forces.” Discuss
5. “Meanness kills” whereas ‘Love redeems’. Discuss with special reference to Albert.
6. Walker has been accused of “vilifying blackmen.” Comment.
7. Trace Alice Walker’s literary tradition by bringing out her contribution as well.
8. Celie becomes an archetype of the “new woman” who completes the odyssey of her liberation in a male dominated society. Discuss.

9. In the novel, *The Color Purple* Walker through Shug asserts the fundamental goodness of human spirit. Discuss.: ‘
10. Feminist writers use subversive narrative strategies to infiltrate and reshape ideological fictions of femininity. Discuss.
11. In *The Color Purple*, the theme of reclaiming one’s sexual freedom as a major step in achieving sexual power, emotional wholeness and spiritual autonomy plays a critical part in the story. Illustrate.
12. In Gabriel Sen Scholl words “Celie letters to God give way to communication with her lost sister, a trade with which she seems quite happy, and her increasing self-reliance leaves her little need ‘or’ inclination to continue her relationship with the Christian God of her earlier and more vulnerable days.” Discuss.
13. The pleasure in reading Walker’s complex novels can be found in experiencing secondary characters such as Sofia. Butler. What is the importance of Sofia and her relationship with the Mayor’s family?
14. Walker states, “Organized religion has systematically undermined and destroyed that sexual and spiritual beliefs of millions of indigenous people.” Discuss with reference to Walker’s fiction. ‘
15. “Emancipation for blacks was more of a blue print than a reality.” Illustrate this ‘statement with reference to Walker’s novels.
16. Whiteman’s justice was nothing but perpetuation of the chains of slavery and suffering in one form or the other. Do you agree? Support your answer by citing from Walker’s novels.

Short Answered Questions

- a) What light does the Sofia-Millie episode throw on the evil of racism?
- b) Mr. _____ Harpo, Mr. _____’s Pa are different and yet alike. Discuss.
- c) Write a short note on the role of Women-Bonding in *The Color Purple*.
- d) Write a short note on the role of male characters. What is their significance in the novel?
- e) Sofia is an epitome of resistance. Discuss.
- f) Briefly sum up of Nettie’s letters.
- g) Write a short note on ‘Panteism.’

Suggested Readings

1. Angrew Billingsley, *Black Families In White America* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968).
2. Betty J. Parker Smith, “Alice Walker’s Women: *In Search of Some Peace of Mind*,” *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation* (Garden City, N.Y. : Anchor Doubleday, 1984).
3. David Bradley, “Novelist Alice Walker telling the Black woman’s Story”: *New York Times Magazine* (8 Jan 1984).
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5. Trudier Harriet, “*On The Color purple, Stereotypes and Silence*”. *Black American Forum* (Winter 1984).
6. John Blassingame, *The Slave Community : Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).
7. John O Brien, Alice Walker: An Interview to Alice Walker: *Critical Perspective Past and Present* New York- 1993 ::’
8. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge: Mass University Press, 1963).
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10. George Stade, "Womanist Fiction. and Male Characters" *Partisan Review* (1985).
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 14. Alice Walker, *Honoring the Difijcult*, Pocket Book Washington Square Press, 1997.
 15. Sharon Wilson, "A Conversation With Alice Walker", Kalliope(1984).
- All questions are from Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (Pocket Book Washington Square Press, 1985).

Notes:

1. Patricia J.W. Williams, *the Alchemy of Race and Rights* p. 162.
2. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Po Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* p. 51.
3. Daniel W. Ross "Celie in the Looking Glass: The Desire For Selfhood in the Color Purple," *Modern Fiction Studies* 34.1 (Spring 1988): 70.
4. Ibid.
5. J.M. Coetzee, *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York: Amistad Press, 1993), p. 26.
7. Barbara Christian, "Alice Walker," DLB: 33
8. Deborah E. Mcdowell, "The Self in Bloom Walker's Meridian," *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York: Amistad Press, 1933), p. 176.
9. Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of Americans Feminism, The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 84.
10. King – Kok Cheung, "Don't Tell: Imposed Silences in the Color Purple and The Women Warrior," *PMLA* 103 (1988): 167.
11. Patricia J. Williams, *the Alchemy of Race and Rights*, p. 47.
12. Andrew Billingsley, *Black Families in White America* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey Prentice–Hall, 1968), p. 193.
13. Michael G Cook, "Intimacy: The Interpretation of the One and the All in Robert Hayden and Alice Walker," *Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The Achievement of Intimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 159.
14. Ibid.
15. "Racism," *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1970 ed.
16. Patricia J.W. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 162.
17. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge: Mass University Press, 1963), p.51.
18. Mark Twain, Qtd. In, "Who Will Revere the Black Woman," *The Black Woman An Anthology* (New York: New American Library, 1970), p.80.
19. Andrew Billingsley, *Black Families In White America* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968), p. 59.
20. Ibid, 49.
21. Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: diary of law professor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 153.
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Shashi Deshpande - Unit V

Brief Biography and Works

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad in 1938. She is the daughter of the famous dramatist and writer Shriranga. She received an English education at the protestant mission school in Karnataka. She was exposed to and influenced by British classical texts at a very young age. She studied Economics in Bombay and graduated in Law from Bangalore. She later did MA in English Literature. After marriage when she was in Bombay she did a course in journalism and worked as a journalist for the magazine Onlooker. She started publishing short stories in magazines like Femina and Eve's Weekly. Her first collection of stories *Legacy* was published in 1978. Till date Shashi Deshpande has published seven novels- *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *If I Die Today* (1982), *Come Up And Be Dead* (1983), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1992) and *A Matter of Time* (1996). While her novels were taking shape, she wrote four books for children. Deshpande's reputation however, rests on her mature novels. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is her favourite work but in an interview she also confessed that *That Long Silence* was more meaningful than any of her works. With more than a dozen fictional works to her credit, Deshpande has created a niche for herself. *Roots and Shadows* was awarded the Thirumati Rangammal prize for best Indian novel of 1982-83, and *That Long Silence* received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990. Her collection of short stories *The Legacy* is prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has been translated into German and Russian. And the publication of her novel *That Long Silence* by the Virago Press, London, has established Deshpande as a reputed novelist of considerable worth. Her writings are characterised by a racy style of narration and crisp language. There has been, however, no cause for complacency on the part of the novelist. Like any great artist, she is not yet fully satisfied with what she has achieved till date. "I will one day write one such book that will survive the test of time. My best book is yet to come." This would explain Deshpande's serious efforts to venture into fresh fields and pastures. Her short stories have been widely anthologised. She currently lives in Bangalore with her husband.

Key Influences and Themes

Born in Dharwad, a smaller city of Karnataka, Shashi Deshpande moved to Bombay later, where she completed her graduation. One can see these movements between city and smaller hometowns in her novels too. These movements, in fact, give shape to her metaphor of home—the parental home and the home after marriage. If one were to talk about intertextuality in her works, two streams of elements are dominant there. First, her constant references to the characters from one of the two great Indian epics, *Mahabharata*, and the second, the knowledge of English literature that her characters exhibit and share. Literature is a well-liked subject for her characters—there is always somebody teaching it or studying it. Her narrative mode is social realism and she has an abiding interest in small social landscapes, especially that of either joint or nuclear family. She prefers the first person narrative and there is an absence of issues, which directly deal with the questions regarding nation, imperialism, neo-colonialism or the conflicts and differences between cultures. The feminism depicted in her novels may not be palatable to many because almost invariably her novels seem to end where they began—with only a changed protagonist who has followed the tortuous route of self-examination and self-realisation. No structures are changed and no changes are visible in the private sphere of home in this fictitious world.

One striking feature of her novels is that the re-presentation of women belonging to a particular class of Indian society is very 'realistic.' If one wanted to read a good allegorical representation of the middle class, upper-caste woman subject who is caught between tradition and modern/western mode of thinking and living one can conveniently turn to her novels. Her attention to the minor details of day-to-day life reveals that in a country like India, it is not simple for a woman to be interested in causes and issues. In at least two of her novels, the huge traditional house with its joint family structure, and the love hate relationship of the female protagonist with this house and the power, which is associated with this house, symbolises its conflict. This is a certain aspect of her work, which a certain section of her readers will recognise straightaway and react to in a nostalgic manner. But more than the symbolic theme in the novels, what touches some of the Indian women readers in these novels is the story of the female protagonist, a story

which seems to be written and re-written in all her novels with such concern and conviction that one needs to pay more attention to these novels than simply discarding them as being naively representative.

Shashi Deshpande began her career with short stories. She then began writing children's books and then published many novels. Her novels primarily deal with the complexities of modern Indian society. The frustrations and insecurities amidst all the ostensible signs of progress and prosperity form the theme of her writing.

Her subjects are women-oriented. She portrays the realities of women's lives in high middle class surroundings. Her writing emerges from her own experiences of being a daughter, a wife, a mother and most importantly a woman whose life has more meaning than all these roles that Indian society imposes on a woman. In an essay "Of Concerns and Anxieties" she writes: "Most of my writing comes out of my own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing different roles enjoined on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing clearly women's writing." Clearly she is concerned about the status of women in Indian society. This concern emanates from her experiences as a woman. Her protagonists are common people whom we might meet on the street. What sets her apart from other Indian writers in English is that she has never "exoticised" India for the western reader. She has been steadfast in refusing to compromise to suit global market trends. Shashi Deshpande is a widely read person, though she has never identified herself with any particular group of writers, whether in India or abroad. Her love for Somerset Maugham was "just a passing phase." "I think Jane Austen had a more lasting influence." She also enjoyed reading Dickens and Tolstoy. A careful perusal of her works would reveal some influence of the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing and Erica Jong. Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer stimulate her writings but their influence was evident quite late in her fiction. Shashi Deshpande approaches contemporary Indian writers with an open mind. She does take cognisance of their merits but is not overawed by their popularity. She considers Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* to be an excellent book. But at the same time she does not like Desai's vision of India, which is that of a foreigner and finds that her novels lack the intensity of human relationships. She calls Salman Rushdie a pathbreaker. His *Midnight's Children* is according to her, "original, brilliant, bizarre, and at times incomprehensible"—a novel which changed everything for Indians writing in English. Vikram Seth's much hyped novel *A Suitable Boy* has not earned unqualified praise from Deshpande. According to her the book is quite readable if one skips a lot, it is "very unsatisfactory, because there is nothing to grip and shake" the reader. The novelist is "too superficial. Very clever on the surface but he can't go beyond that." It is the absence of proper editing and organicity that mars an otherwise excellent novel.

Notwithstanding her readings and familiarity with works both Victorian and modern, Shashi Deshpande is essentially a self-taught writer. She began writing rather late. Her novels present a sensitive portrayal of Indian womanhood but she never presents a pitiful picture of women. The novels do not peter down into self-pity. The male characters are more or less neglected in her works. They are marginal characters. Her plots are derived from traditional, patriarchal, male dominated middle class society. Her protagonists begin as marginal characters but have the capability to transcend their marginality and finally occupy centre stage.

For Deshpande, "every novel starts with people". Character occupies a pivotal role in her fiction. But she carefully avoids creating wooden characters. The novelist excels in portraying women characters. She is however averse to idealising or sentimentalising them. She says, "My characters are all human beings one sees around the world." She also opines, "My characters take their own ways. I've often heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are." Deshpande's women characters have strength of their own. In spite of challenges and hostilities, they remain uncrushed. As compared to her women characters her male characters are generally typed or flat. She admits her inability to create a round character of the opposite sex. Deshpande has however created authentic female characters—flesh and blood characters with recognisable credentials. Her novels like those of Jane Austen's have a narrow range. Most of the novels present a typical, middle class

housewife's life. Deshpande's main concern is the urge to find a space for oneself to grow on one's own. Many of her characters are frustrated either sexually or professionally. Her novels generally centre on family relationships—particularly the relationship between husband and wife and the latter's dilemmas and conflicts. According to Deshpande, everyone has to live within relationships and there is no other way: "It's necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don't agree with is the idealisation of motherhood—the false and sentimental notes that accompany it."

There is in Deshpande's novels a revulsion to normal physical functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and procreation. Women, she feels, must not be reduced to the level of a breeding machine. She highlights the fact that a woman is not merely a conglomerate of feminine functions. She must be judged at par with her male counterpart on the basis of her potential.

Despite imaginative flashes, Deshpande is at heart a realist. She presents a convincing story of authentic characters and not shadowy abstractions. Realism according to Engels is "besides truth of detail, the truthful representation of typical characters under typical circumstances." Deshpande observes this kind of realism in her novels. Her India is that of the eighties. According to Veena Sheshadari, "She believes in presenting life as it is not as it should be" and like Jaya in *That Long Silence*, many Indian wives keep on "perennially groping about their fate, but unwilling to do anything that could result in their being tossed out of their comfortable ruts and into the big, bad world of reality, to fend for themselves."

For her portrayal of the predicament of middle-class educated Indian women, their inner conflict and quest for identity, issues pertaining to parent-child relationship, marriage and sex, and their exploitation and disillusionment, Deshpande has been called a feminist. The publication of *That Long Silence* substantiated such claims. Asked whether she would like to be called a feminist she replied, "Yes, I would. I am a feminist in the sense that, I think, we need to have a world which we should recognise as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior, we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone de Beauvoir that 'the fact that we are human, is much more important than our being men and women.' I think that's my idea of feminism."

Deshpande is against categorisations. "When you deal with just my work, then take me as an individual writer and deal accordingly. Don't call it women's writing or feminist writing. Today we have women writing about women, for women. These works are being published by women, criticised by women, read by women and studied in the Women's Studies Departments and so on. I hate this 'women's lib' separating women's writing. It is just self-defeating." Elsewhere also Shashi Deshpande has vociferously denied her allegiance with feminism as a theoretical concept. "I do not like to be branded as this or that because life is more complex than that." If at all her work betrays feminist leanings it is not done so consciously. She believes in spontaneity in creative writing and believes that propaganda and good literature do not go together. Being a woman herself she empathises with women easily. Therefore it would be unjust to categorise her work only under the title of feminist writing.

Deshpande has portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemmas, her efforts to understand herself and to preserve her identity as a wife, mother and above all as a human being in the tradition bound, male-dominated Indian society. The Indian woman's plight is a part of a general human predicament, though her experience is significantly more intense. Virginia Woolf points out the differences in male and female experiences and that their expressions in literature are different. She writes, "There is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place; but the essential difference lies in the fact not that men describe battles and women the birth of children, but that each sex describes itself."

Deshpande's novels contain so much that can be regarded as the staple material of feminist thought: woman's sexuality, gender differences and self-discovery and so on. But according to her she chanced upon feminist writing very late in life, in fact much after publishing many novels. To Deshpande's mind, no amount of theorising will solve women's problems—especially in the Indian context. Elaborating on her viewpoint she remarked: "But to me feminism isn't a matter of theory, it is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children etc. I always try to make a point now about

what feminism is *not*, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our lives, our experiences. And I think that a lot of women in India are feminists without realising it.” This is a highly mature approach. Deshpande, unlike hard-core feminists, does not agree that being a wife or mother is unnecessarily imposed on a woman. According to her it is needed. She craves for “a greater balance.”

The focus in Deshpande’s writing is on the delineation of the woman’s inner world. She herself admits in an interview, “We know a lot about the physical and the organic world and the universe in general, but we still know very little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing as far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it and write about it. And still find it tremendously intriguing, fascinating.” Deshpande’s protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice and are continuously in search to define them. But they “become fluid, with no shape, no form of... (their) own.” (*Roots and Shadows*). Jaya in *That Long Silence* undertakes a futile search for herself: “The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.”

That Deshpande has been genuinely interested in issues pertaining to the lot of women in India is irrefutable. Some of her views expressed through her characters may be mentioned briefly. Matrimony is often regarded in India as the *summum bonum* of a woman’s life. In many cases however it serves as a weapon in the hands of patriarchy to coerce and silence. Manju, in *If I Die Today*, summarises the common experience of marriage succinctly: “A marriage. You start off expecting so many things. And bit by bit, like dry leaves, the expectations fall off. But... two people who have shut themselves off in two separate glass jars, who can see each other but can’t communicate. Is this marriage?” This is undoubtedly not an enviable situation. In India, a wife finds it impossible to relate to the world without her husband, for it is held that “a husband is like a sheltering tree.”

Marriage is no longer a sacrament; it is a convenient arrangement always to the disadvantage of woman. The central character in *Roots and Shadows* observes: “... what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after a cold blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that generations might continue.” “It’s a trap,” she adds, “... that’s what marriage is. A trap? Or a cage?... a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other. ... And it’s not a joke but a tragedy.” To Urmila of *The Binding Vine*, the back of the bride’s neck nervously waiting the first night onslaught, looks “like a lamb waiting for the butcher’s knife to come down upon it.” In *That Long Silence* also, a couple is compared to “a pair of bullocks yoked together.” In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru finds her marital condition unbearable and feels “the desperation of a trapped animal.” Her grandmother, deserted by her husband had accepted it as her destiny and had taken recourse to silence. In her novel *A Matter of Time* she writes “only movies can elevate marriage to... a pedestal, making it the culminating event of a lifetime, of several lifetimes.” This is a bitter commentary on marriage and married life, which have lost their original sanctity and are reduced to the level of façade or sham.

The novelist is pained to notice ways of subordinating women by male members of the society. Economic deprivation and rape are the main instruments employed to curb the spontaneous growth of a woman. The role of a wife in the present times is nothing less than walking on the razor’s edge. Realising this fact, Saru was obliged to give this ironic (imaginary) advice to future wives, “a wife must always a few feet behind her husband. ... That’s the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role... Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That’s nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it is unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you, both of you.” What makes it worse for Indian women is that there are no choices before them. Like marriages, their decisions are made in heaven—in their husband’s mind. As Shashi Deshpande puts it in *Roots and Shadows*: “Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country. ... What choice do I have? Surely it is this, this fact that I can choose that differentiates me from the animals. But years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no-choices.” This is a sad commentary on the incompatibility in and hypocrisy of married life, which the novelist has presented realistically.

It is creditable that despite her family background—in particular her father’s intellectual pursuits—and her own philosophical orientation, Deshpande has taken up for discussion some crucial aspects of a woman’s life such as a woman’s sexuality and her body. In a male dominated society a woman is not expected to feel any sexual urges. She is expected to be passive and unresponsive. It shocks people to see passion in a woman.

The time must come when a woman’s body must be heard. According to Raman Seldon, “Woman must uncensor herself, recover her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal. She must throw off her guilt...” Anything like this is yet to happen in Deshpande’s fiction. Though her fiction does not have anatomical descriptions but the reticence in this respect in her novels is a proof of the novelist’s comprehensive understanding of the grassroot reality and woman’s plight in India. While remaining well within the bounds of Indian middle-class respectability, the novelist has raised some significant questions pertaining to the position of women in society.

The novelist does not believe in offering readymade solutions. But the conviction that “we can always hope” and that “life has always to be made possible speaks of a genuinely positive attitude to life. Deshpande’s protagonists finally try their best to conform to their roles, and the novel end with an optimistic note with the possibility of some positive action in the future. The novelist emerges in them as a bridge between tradition and modernity. For this and for portraying the basic reality of Indian society and the place of women in it in a sensitive and authentic manner her novels are of immense value.

Shashi Deshpande is a careful and conscientious writer. She re-wrote the short story “The Liberated Woman” seventeen times. Her novel *That Long Silence* begins with the sentence: “To achieve anything, you’ve got to be ruthless.” A certain ruthlessness characterises all her writing. She frankly admits that “even writing requires a certain amount of ruthlessness.” One thing that characterises all her writing is its transparency. She does not indulge in technical innovations or stylistic deviations, but her use of language is precise and fresh. She learnt the secrets of language assiduously. As a mature writer she has been conscious of the significance of this aspect of fiction writing right from the beginning. “I learnt about language. Craftsmanship is so important in writing, and you only learn it by doing it. And the short story was the perfect form to learn from, because one has to be brief. One had to be careful. And that training is still with me: I am very careful about not using extra words. I was also very conscious that I didn’t want to make any melodramatic or overt statements, ever. That’s how I learnt a kind of subtlety of approach. Not that I wanted to be subtle for the sake of being subtle, but because I didn’t want to overplay anything.” Her writings once again prove that art lies in concealing art. The highly functional language with telling economy that she uses is an important asset of hers as a fiction writer.

In her modesty, Deshpande thinks of herself as “an ordinary woman who writes sitting at home.” But she would not like to compromise with the dignity and essential freedom of a writer. Without subscribing to the myth of elitist snobbery clamped on to Indian writing in English she is honestly concerned with expressing herself in English as clearly and effectively as possible. Asked whether she thinks in English while writing her fiction, she replied, “When I write narrative, I think in English; when I write dialogue I think in Kannada or Marathi, which are my languages.” Justifying this kind of code switching, she added, “In our middle class families, most of us converse in English but automatically switch over to our mother tongue when we speak to our elders, relatives and so on.” At places, the dialogue in her novels reads like a translation from Kannada, Marathi or Hindi, but her narrative is generally free from all Indian coinages. “I do not use Indianisms to make my writing look Indian... I never try to make India look exotic.” Deshpande writes in English because she finds it the most convenient mode of self-expression. She is however aware of handicaps of doing creative writing in a language other than one’s mother tongue. Writing in English makes her somewhat inhibited. She frankly admits: “I lose the range of nuances which are available in Marathi—for example, the richness of the phrases that make up the language. So I lose out on that, but I gain in other ways because English has its own special qualities too.” But her English is different from other writers, she says: “I am different from other Indians who write in English, my background is very firmly there, I was never educated abroad. My novels don’t have any Westerners, for example. They are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives. Our inner lives and outer lives and the reconciliation between them. My English is as we use it. I don’t make

it easier for anyone really. If I make any changes, it's because I think the novel needs it." Despite all constraints, Deshpande uses language comfortably. According to her English should not be called a foreign language because of its wide application in India.

Technique is an important aspect of creative writing. Deshpande concedes her choice to a fiction writer in technical matters: "There are some maybe several, choices in the technique: in the way you 'tell' the story." But once the choice has been made, the artist has to be faithful to and meticulous about it. About her travails in developing the right technique for herself, Deshpande says: "Technique is something which I have to worry a lot about. I have to work at it and it takes me a long time to hit upon it exactly. It's like setting a tanpura... before a concert begins. The orchestra goes on strumming, tuning up, while you wonder what it's all about... Suddenly you know that this is exactly right for your needs. But you know at the beginning that this is the way. The beginning is much more fumbling, blundering and very chaotic. There's always too much." Deshpande has been very careful about her technique in her fiction. Her writings are free form strain and form has never been allowed to smother the content of her works. Consequently, despite their solemnity, her novels make fascinating reading.

One may find in Shashi Deshpande's novels occasionally autobiographical strains, but her characters and incidents are not directly lifted from her own life. What the novelist does is to make the creative use of her experiences and memories in her works. This is particularly true of her early writings. In an interview, Deshpande quotes Dom Moraes approvingly who says: "Most of what a creative writer writes is his autobiography; if not of his life, of his thoughts. All one's life doesn't go into one's writing and all of one's writing doesn't consist of just one's life." Deshpande adds: "... certainly, some of my thoughts are always there. They are for the reader to pick and choose... all that I can say is 'This is what I, as an individual, believe in.'"

Memory plays a significant role in Deshpande's novels. The narrative keeps on moving back and forth in time. "I come to the end of one incident, but then I have to go back because it links on to something else. I'm interested, I think, with what we do with our past as well as what the past does to us." The novelist also uses some devices of the stream-of-consciousness-technique novels like flashback, interior monologue and so on to probe into the psyche of her characters. Jaya says at the end of *That Long Silence*: "All this I've written—it's like one of those multi-coloured patchwork quilts the *kakis* make for any new baby in the family. Quoting this statement Shashi Deshpande opines that this was how she viewed novel writing: "And I think that is how we really see our lives when we look back upon them." Creditably enough this kind of presentation never degenerates into a senseless collage. Deshpande does not write for foreign readers and there is no attempt in her novels at "window-dressing": "If you try to make everything easy for everything, then, you end up belonging nowhere. So I've left it at that—characters in their locales, without providing glosses for the Western readers.... Also literature can be appreciated even without understanding every word of it—one can still respond to the core of it."

Shashi Deshpande is gifted with a rare literary bent of mind. She has matured with experiences in life and her reading has also contributed to her development as a writer. She has made a niche for herself among Indian English novelists. The transparency of her language and her spontaneity make her novels highly readable. Her real contribution lies in the portrayal of plights and problems, trials and tribulations of the middle class Indian women—especially those who are educated and have chosen a career for themselves. Deshpande knows this segment of the Indian society very well. Once she remarked, "I realise that I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing." Deshpande is not unconcerned about Indian reality in respect of the lot of women, but she is not a strident and militant kind of feminist who sees the male as the sole cause of all her problems. Her concern, in fact, is nothing less than the human predicament. As a chronicler of human relationships she is superb. The interplay between tradition and modernity and tensions generated by it have been faithfully presented. Deshpande does not offer readymade solutions, for she believes, in literary writing "one does not pose a problem and present a solution. It's not maths." The value based fabric of life that she projects are of great significance.

The desire for conveying a meaning is seen in Deshpande's novels, but it does not take the shape of the

omniscient author who goes around imparting meanings. The desire to create a meaning, to convey a message, which outlives the plot of a novel, continues in her case in the form of repetition: repetition of character types, plot construction, social milieu and the literary interests of her female protagonists. The repetition, and the seriousness, with which the repetitions are made, also gives rise to more than one set of meanings. Though they are similar to the meanings one could get from individual novels, together, they attain the stature of something like a testimonial. Her very attempt at representing lives of women takes the form of repetition. It is the mode not the meaning that is significant.

In spite of all the physical and the mental abuse that her protagonists undergo, they cannot be called subaltern. This is so because of the peculiarly privileged positions they occupy despite their gender and despite their awareness of themselves as being female. Their class, caste, education and also their ability to read and appreciate Western literature give this privilege. Yet the protagonists cannot be termed as liberated either. There seems to be something which all protagonists as narrators are trying to convey and establish. The privilege of their position does not exclude elements of subjugation.

If one could superimpose her novels upon each other, one would arrive at the common pattern with one or more of the following themes: uneasiness in marriage but a desire to go on with it, the crisis caused by the death of a loved one; the conflict with a mother or motherly figure; the presence of a male figure outside marriage, who generally understands the creativity and the sensitivity of the narrator; the wise father or the father figure who is kind to the daughter; the transition from the joint to the nuclear family, the longings and the nostalgic memories which are attached to an ideal childhood. Yet these are not to be dismissed as same refrain or monologue. The refrain so produced breaks the myth of the wholeness of character and thus goes against the argument that it is the individual who is important in her novels. The universalisation of woman is not brought about by the narration of one story, but it seems to have been achieved by the compelling re-narration, which happens in many of her novels.

In the contemporary Indian literature in English Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent position as a novelist. Her introspection and psychological probing make her second to none in revealing the subconscious or unconscious psyche of her female protagonists. As compared to many other Indian women novelists of the twentieth century, she is much more vociferous in voicing her fears and concerns regarding the future of women in uncongenial surroundings. Her female protagonists are sensitive, self-conscious, intellectually brilliant and creative. Both Jaya (*That Long Silence*) and Sarita (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*) evince the novelist's concern for women who are misunderstood and passing through great turmoil and suffering. Her protagonists are desirous to revolt against the stereotyped roles assigned to them by society. Initially victims of self-denial, they are at conflict with their inner selves because they suppress and deny their inner feelings. Psychology tells us that denial of desires does not mean that the feelings cease to exist; they will still influence behaviour of the subject in various ways even though they are not conscious of them. Through Jaya's portrayal Shashi Deshpande has expressed the ambivalent attitude of the modern independent Indian woman. Sarita of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is quite different from Jaya. Deshpande's novels move from self-abnegation to self-realisation. Their experiences compel them to struggle for their self-emancipation. Jaya is tolerant, submissive and taciturn, but the admixture of brilliance and creativity introduces complexity in the character by providing her with an individual identity. She is going through great emotional turmoil and suffering though outwardly she tries hard to become a nice housewife. In the process of hiding her true self and to adjust with her insensitive husband, she gets reduced to a puppet. At the close of the novel she is unable to suppress her emotions and becomes neurotic. *That Long Silence* depicts the effects of a prolonged suppression on the personality of the individual.

Since her early childhood Jaya had designed her life according to the desires of the members of her family. In those days, for example, the titillating music of Lata Mangeshkar allured her but since her father had a fascination for classical music, therefore film music was banned in their house. Her father would remark, "What poor taste you have, Jaya" and this would make her feel ashamed of herself. She had neither the courage nor the will to assert herself. This was the beginning of her predicament.

After her father's death Jaya's brother persuaded her to get married to Mohan, an engineer, whose only desire was "to get married to a girl who can speak good English." This was the most disastrous compromise in her life. Totally

engrossed in this process of adjustment and compromise, she tramples on her own desires and ambitions. She decides to emulate the women of Mohan's family, for she feels there lay if not happiness, at least consciousness of doing right, freedom from guilt." Happiness, certainly, is beyond her reach, as is evident from the use of the imagery of "two bullocks yoked together" by which she means herself and her husband.

Adjustment and compromise are, no doubt, the signs of her maturity but every compromise shatters her individuality into pieces. Mohan tells her to please the chief engineer's wife and despite her disapproval and disinclination, she concedes to his wishes. But she is shaken when Mohan charges her for being neutral to him, adding that he never "mattered" to her. She transforms herself so much that she, who had been the pampered only daughter of her parents, changes entirely. The never-ending series of compromises, makes her realise that "it's not that life is cruel, but that in the process of our birth we submit to life's cruelty."

Jaya domesticates herself and accepts the stereotyped role of a housewife who is "nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support." A sharp contrast can be noticed between unmarried Jaya and married Suhasini, as her husband calls her. Jaya is an optimist and full of vivacity, intellect and creative upsurge. She is fully aware of her own potential and artistic talent. Her nostalgic recollection of her father's words and her own opinion about herself results in an optimistic outlook towards life. "You are not like the others", her father had said and had agreed that she would get that Chatfield Prize, or Ellis prize, or go on to Oxford after her graduation. The same Jaya becomes different when she stops writing in order to please her husband. Instead of expressing her true emotions she shifts to a convenient style of writing, something that could be published easily in a weekly magazine. This reversal perplexes herself and she expresses her dissatisfaction to Kamat who asks her frankly: "Why didn't you use that anger in your story? I will tell you what is wrong with your story. It's too restrained. Spew out your anger in your writing, woman, spew it out."

After years of adjustment and self-surrender, Jaya is even afraid of her real self she feels that "self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real you never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces." Thus Jaya, a devoted and loving daughter and sister, is totally different from "soft, smiling, placid and motherly" Jaya. She is a personality split between what she is and what she could be. Consequently, she finds a relief in self-abnegation, which highlights her maladjustment in married life. As a married woman she is expected to play versatile roles: those of wife, mother, a submissive and perfect housewife and so on. She shows her disinclination to please the chief engineer's wife and earn Mohan's anger. He says, "I know that I have never mattered to you, not really." "I have heard Dinker and you laughing at your own mother. How can I expect you to have any feelings for me." The truth, however was that she had been taught that a husband was like "a sheltering tree", and from the very first day of their married life, she tried to make his life comfortable by "keeping her mind off the office—life, like Gandhari bandaging her eyes." But now discernible cracks begin to appear in her marriage.

Jaya, already a mother of two children, aborts her third pregnancy and thus feels guilt and remorse. Her guilt weakens her image of the modern Indian woman. Confused in a love-hate relationship, she is unable to confess her frustrations to her husband. They are living with each other because they have no alternative.

Jaya's friendship with Kamat is one angle that Deshpande does not describe in great detail. It has not been given the attention that it deserved. Kamat is the man who provides emotional succour to Jaya in times of distress. In his presence Jaya does not have to pretend to be someone else. She can simply be herself. She can share her frustrations and complexes with him easily. But Kamat's sudden death puts an abrupt end to the relationship. In fact Jaya did not even go near his dead body for fear of what people would say.

The novel is remarkable for its exploration of the inner landscape. Shashi Deshpande does not betray any inclination or any ulterior motive to sell India abroad by liberal doses of oriental mysticism or sociological data. For her the psychological milieu of the individual is quite an empirical canvas to work on.

Critical Exposition

That Long Silence was published in 1988 and it was an immediate success. It also won the Sahitya Akademi award for the best novel. It is set in very familiar surroundings of urban high middle class society. The book is divided into four parts. Jaya and her husband Mohan are a happily married couple with two children. But Jaya's secure life is threatened when Mohan is accused of malpractice at his workplace and is asked to leave as long as the investigation is on. They shift into a different home and Jaya is forced to live alone for a few days. This time spent alone makes her analyse her life from childhood. The novel is written in first person narrative and it traverses back and forth in time.

Part One: The book begins with the protagonist (Jaya) deciding to write her story. But she also realises that "self-revelation is a cruel process." Right in the beginning one can notice the fact that this is typical women's writing because there are references to childbirth. In fact according to Shashi Deshpande, "I think it is very clear that my own writing is very much women's writing. I think that just one little example, the beginning of *That Long Silence* for example: it's a very stark beginning—at the same time it uses the metaphor of childbirth for the act of writing. It uses the idea of looking into mirrors to speak of different images. I somehow feel that anybody who reads this would know this is a woman writing." Jaya recounts her childhood years and what she remembers most about them is the humiliation that she felt when she was scolded for listening to Hindi film music. Her father liked classical music but Jaya did not and she had to bear the taunts of her father when he said, "what poor taste you have, Jaya." Then she goes on to make an assessment of their life and she concludes that they were "Well educated, hard-working people in secure jobs, cushioned by insurance and provident funds, with two healthy, well-fed children going to schools." She longed for some variation from the monotonous routine and she even wished that some tragedy would occur so that their lives would be shaken out of boredom. And then the variation came in the shape of Mohan's problems at work. He was charged with business malpractice and had to go on leave till the investigation was on. Jaya was shocked at this news. They had to shift from their posh Churchgate home to a flat in Dadar. Mohan, in order to justify his wrongdoing, said that he had done it only to give his family a better future.

After shifting in their new flat Jaya faces the ghost of her past self. She recounts how after marriage Mohan changed her name from Jaya to Suhasini and she had accepted. Her previous name meant victory and was chosen by her father. But at this juncture of her life she is anything but victorious. She is a woman who has lost her identity in marriage, but this sudden change in their life forces her to think about her secure world which is being threatened. "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you are safe. The poor idiotic woman Suhasini always believed this. I know you better now. I know that safety is always unattainable. You're never safe" this is what Jaya thinks at the most critical point in life. Surprisingly she felt more at ease in the Dadar flat and she does not miss the comfort of her posh Churchgate house.

Both Jaya and Mohan begin to think of their new life. Jaya does not know how to spend her time because her life revolved around her husband but now with Mohan rendered jobless her own life became meaningless. She realises that all the signs of prosperity in her house were a sham and that movement in her life was an illusion. There had been no progress in her life as a human being at all.

Jaya is reminded of her widowed grandmother who had shaved her hair as part of the rituals that are required of widows in Hindi society. It has been seen that the greatest curse in Hindu society for women is widowhood. They are treated in the most inhuman way, they are kept in solitary confinement, no one is allowed to talk to them and they are considered inauspicious. Her widowed grandmother, Ajji, as she was called was one such woman. Jaya recalls that Ajji had warned her not to ask too many questions from her husband. But now Jaya realises that she had obeyed her grandmother and yet, "I had neither any questions nor any retorts for Mohan now, and yet there was no comfort. So many subjects were barred that the silence seemed heavy with uneasiness." The silence is all pervading in their relationship. It is a delicately balanced marriage based on lies and secrets.

In their new surroundings there is a sweeper named Nayana, who is expecting a child. She has had four children, two boys and two girls, both boys had died and the girls had survived. She is confident that this time it would be a boy. Jaya asks her why does she want a boy when all her life she had suffered at the hands of men—her father, brother

and husband. They had all been worthless drunkards. Nayana's reply is "Why give birth to a girl, behnji, who'll only suffer because of men all her life?"

Throughout their stay in the Dadar flat Jaya was uncomfortably conscious of Mohan's presence. Mohan on the other hand is restless because he has been robbed of the one thing that gave him a sense of purpose. The waiting frustrates him and Jaya thinks, "He did not know what waiting was. He had always moved steadily from one moment to the next. But for women the waiting game starts early in childhood. *Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws' home. Wait until you have kids.* Yes, ever since I got married I had done nothing but wait. Waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for them to come home. Waiting for the milk, the servant, the lunch-carrier man..." This is a classic exposition on the status of women in Indian society.

Before her marriage Jaya's aunt Vanitamami had given her some advice. She had said, "Remember Jaya... a husband is like a sheltering tree." Jaya is reminded of those words in her present situation. She realises that since a husband is like a "sheltering tree" he must be nourished and nurtured adequately even if the wife had to suffer to give it nourishment. While it seems that it is only the woman who is suffering, it is revealed that even Mohan has ghosts of his own. His past comes back to haunt him at this point in his life. He belonged to an underprivileged family and had reached this affluence with considerable hard work. His father and mother had an almost defunct relationship. His mother was abused and exploited as any lower class wife is. However as any man Mohan could not understand his mother's agony. He dismisses her silent suffering by saying, "God... she was tough. Women in those days were tough." But Jaya thinks to herself, "He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender." Like any ordinary man Mohan was unable to alleviate his mother's pain.

Part Two: In this section Jaya dwells on the aspect of family feuds because of the distribution of property. She dwells on the rebellion of her Makrandmama who had left his home to become an actor, which was an unpardonable sin for the rest of the family. He was ostracised from the family and yet secretly they all admired him because he had the courage to live his life on his own terms. The flat that Jaya had inherited was Makrandmama's and though he had died Jaya could still feel his presence in the house. She felt that she had never left this flat and that her life in the Churchgate home was an illusion. It is here that Jaya writes about her children- Rahul and Rati have gone south with Mohan and Jaya's friends in their holidays. Therefore they have been spared this change of home. It is at this point of time that Jaya reveals her 'friend' Rupa. Their friendship is a big pretence and so much is it that even the children feel it. Jaya's son Rahul is the one who doesn't join in the pretence. Jaya had transferred her cynicism on to her son Rahul. In one episode Jaya sees a group of men marching in protest with "TOTAL REVOLUTION" written on their placards. At this point of time she faces an existential dilemma—a crisis of identity. She also felt a fear of the unknown—a typical existential dilemma. Her entire personality is in a crisis and she thinks "I had a queer sensation, as if something was breaking up, a design or a pattern I was familiar with. Without it, I would have to face the unknown..." The break in her mundane routine had precipitated such thoughts where she felt so uncertain of the future. Here she also describes the city of Bombay in all its filthiness and squalor. She had felt lost in the vast urban landscape.

At this point of time Jaya and Mohan had stopped speaking with each other except about the bare necessities of life. Their relationship had been engulfed by silence and at night Jaya knew that he was awake on his side of the bed but did not have the will to comfort him. At night they heard a fight between a poor man and his wife. The man was beating his wife and Jaya and Mohan were listening though unaware of each other. When the man had stopped beating his wife Mohan said, "Thank God... I thought I'd go down and strangle that man." Here Mohan's own sordid background comes into perspective. His own father was an abusive and irresponsible man and Mohan's greatest fear was that he should become like his father.

In their Dadar flat Jaya has neighbours—Mukta and her daughter Nilima. Nilima is a pert, talkative young girl. She is a dark girl amid her fair brothers. The constant taunts regarding her complexion had made her defiant. She was proud of her dark looks. The conversation then turns towards her monthly periods and Jaya thinks of the birth control

pill. She thinks of how the pill gave her the illusion of freedom from the 'monthly curse' but gradually the side effects began to show up. The birth control pill that ostensibly gave a woman control over her body destroyed it too.

Jaya repeatedly experiences an identity crisis. She feels that she is a daughter, a wife and a mother and nothing else. She is trying to achieve a totally integrated personality but realises "Trying to find oneself"—what a cliché that has become. As if such a thing is possible. As if there is such a thing as one self. Intact and whole, waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, there are so many, each self attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other." As she flips through her diaries where she had recorded so many things so meticulously she realises that there were many things that she had not written about. There was silence on the aspect of her own frustrations, her silent sobs and her awareness that she could not cope with the demands made on her. The only thing that she thought about was breakfast, lunch and dinner. This was what her capabilities were reduced to.

Jaya is not only concerned about her private failures but is also aware of the world around her. She is aware of India's poverty and the exploitative foreign policies of America. She remembers the famine and the worst quality of rice provided by America in the name of aid. She is also aware of the poverty—stricken people who come to Bombay and sleep on pavements. They had become a part of Bombay and it was the children who learnt the lessons of survival quickly.

The identity of a woman is defined by the man. It is for his service that a woman has been created. Jaya conforms to this stereotype of being a woman. "I'm ... almost the stereotype of woman: nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support. But what puzzles me is this: how did I get this way? I'm sure I wasn't always like this. I can remember a time when I was not so full of tears, when the unknown, when darkness and insects did not terrify me so. When did the process begin to change?" This is a classic exposition on what Simone de Beauvoir means when she says "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." This process of becoming begins in childhood in the subtle gender discriminations between boys and girls. Jaya has become a stereotype woman.

In Mohan's house a woman's role was very sharply defined. They followed a pre—set pattern and there was no deviation from their routine. Jaya was surprised to see this when she went to his house. Mohan's ideas about womanhood came from his family where there were rigid codes of conduct and well-defined roles for men and women. When Mohan and Jaya had a fight he could not accept that Jaya was capable of such a rage. Later Jaya learnt that Mohan considered anger in women "unwomanly". Thereafter Jaya began to control herself and began to stifle her own needs and desires.

One theme, which recurs in many of her books, is marital rape. Her first novel (and by far considered the best) *The Dark Hold No Terrors* is based entirely on this violent act. *That Long Silence* also had references to forced lovemaking within marriage. Perhaps a man and a woman are most incompatible sexually. Jaya, before marriage had a very different concept of romance. She was the typical dewy-eyed girl expecting the romance depicted in films. She had believed that physical intimacy developed gradually but she was shocked at Mohan's urgency. She had not been prepared for this kind of intimacy so soon. Finally she realises that "It was then that I had discovered what it was all about—the songs, the poems, the stories. This, I'd thought, feeling his heavy, damp body on mine, this is the real truth." After each episode of lovemaking Mohan would ask Jaya "Did I hurt you?" and each time Jaya replied "No". But it is not only Mohan who needed her physically, Jaya too discovered that her need for him was also immense. Perhaps this was love. She thinks, "Love...? Yes, what else could I call it but love when I thought of how readily, almost greedily, I had responded to his touch?" She also remembers the pains that she had taken to look beautiful for Mohan. She had rubbed cream and brushed her hair a hundred times but she realised that he would have slept with her twice a week even if she had not taken care of herself.

But now in this Dadar flat Mohan's lovemaking was not the same. Jaya could hear him whimpering and this left her cold. It was as if the loss of his job had robbed him of his identity. She then thinks that "Man and woman—... the deep chasm between the two. They are separated forever, never more than at the moment of total physical togetherness." She realised that Mohan had not asked her the customary question "Did I hurt you?"

The second part ends with Mohan asking Jaya to take up a job because of financial reasons. Jaya realises that she

had given up writing but chooses not to tell Mohan anything. “It was so much simpler to say nothing. So much less complicated.” The second part too ends in silence—and endemic part of their marriage.

Part Three: This part of the book begins with Jaya meeting her brother Ravi. Ravi is the quintessential black sheep of the family. He is a lying, deceitful and sly person. Jaya’s mother is old and needs the support of her children but both her brothers conveniently washed their hands off this responsibility. It was left to Jaya to take care of her mother. This is what irritates Jaya, why does she always have to bear responsibility. She remembers how her mother used to dote on her sons never even caring about Jaya.

Ravi himself had his problems—his marriage is on the brink of divorce and his wife has left him after a bitter fight. Jaya knows that Asha (Ravi’s wife) was intrinsically a good person. Though she knows that it is her brother’s fault yet Ravi asks Jaya to persuade her to come back. Jaya knows what she has to say to Asha, “*Go home like a good girl, Asha...Go back home and obey your husband. And never mind whatever it is he has done, he’s your husband after all, and a husband can do no wrong.*”

When she returned from her meeting with her brother Mohan was waiting for her at home. Jaya had told Ravi that Mohan and her were living in the Dadar flat. Ravi replied cheekily that he had heard something about some trouble that Mohan was in but Jaya covered up the issue. When Mohan heard that Ravi knew about his problems he began to question Jaya forcefully and when Jaya could not answer his questions adequately he began to argue with her and there followed a vicious fight. Mohan accuses Jaya of not being a supportive wife. He accuses her avoiding his company and Jaya once again is shocked into silence. She cannot say anything to defend herself. She realises, “I was under attack. The questions rained on me. An adversary? Yes, that was what Mohan was; and an adversary more hostile than I had imagined.” Mohan accused her of not being friendly enough with his boss’s wife and therefore jeopardising his chances of promotion. Then Jaya thinks to herself of how unhappy she had been in Lohanagar where Mohan was working before shifting to Bombay. She would cry for no tangible reason at all and the tears would come only when she was alone. There was no one to comfort her. During this fight Mohan also said that he had always encouraged her writing but Jaya remembers of the time when she had written a story about a couple where the husband could only approach his wife sexually. This story had won a prize, but Mohan was furious at her because according to him people would think that the story was about them. He did not care about the prize or that the story was good. Their fight grows more and more fierce and the accusations fly thick and fast. As the argument goes on one realises that their relationship is full of misunderstandings and also comprises of Jaya’s silence. Mohan says that Jaya’s stories were accepted in the woman’s magazine *Woman’s World* because he had spoken to the editor. Jaya realises that her family had eclipsed her own identity. She realises that now she has to bear “the burden of wifhood.” After this nasty fight Mohan walks out in a huff leaving Jaya alone.

His leaving reminds Jaya of the death of her father. She remembers the insecurity and the uncertainty that she had experienced at that time. She also remembers the time when she was waiting for Mohan and Rahul had said, “...he must be dead somewhere.” Jaya had slapped him hard then. But then Jaya reassures herself that Mohan had not deserted her and that he would come back to her and apologise.

She also remembered how her brother, Dada, as she had called him, left them and went to America. She also remembered the abortion of hers that Dada knew about. She remembers the child that she had aborted and about whom Mohan was ignorant. She also dwells on the words of Karl Marx, “*The relation of man and woman is the most natural of one person to another.*” But she knows that Marx may have been right about many things but certainly not about the concept of man-woman relationship.

She was disturbed from this reverie by Mukta. It was Mukta who gave her something to eat and brought her back to the present. But after having a bath Jaya takes recourse to memory. She dwells on the thought of widowhood and what a curse it is in Hindu society. She thinks of the desolation of widowhood. She also dwells on the utter cruelty meted out to a child-widow, “She was only a child, and they humiliated her, disgraced her in public because she hadn’t shaved her head. They called her a whore, a daughter of a whore.” She had written a short story about a child widow and the editor asked her to send it to a woman’s magazine. This made Jaya furious because it was as if women’s experiences were of interest only to women.

Mohan’s sudden departure forces Jaya to think about her life. She realises that all those stories about staying inside

the house and you'll be all right were false. The real threat lay inside the house not outside it. "Close the doors, stay in and you're safe. But what happened when everyone went out and you were left alone inside? ... Why hadn't they warned me that the threat, the hazard, lay inside? A wave of sickness overcame me and I found myself longing for someone to come and comfort me." She remembers her friend Leena, the girl who stayed in the room next to hers in the college hostel. Leena was the girl who had helped Jaya emerge from her loneliness and despair. But Jaya had dropped Leena like a hot potato when someone told her that she was involved with a married man. At this critical juncture of her life Jaya thinks of an apology for Leena, "*I'm sorry, Leena, I was stupid, naïve, ignorant. I was a narrow-minded idiot and the kind of person you were was beyond my comprehension then. Forgive me Leena, I didn't intend to be cruel.*" Jaya's strict middle class upbringing could not accept her unconventional lifestyle.

After her marriage Jaya lost her own identity and tried to resemble others. She began to copy other people's looks. She thinks to herself, "... a woman in a crisp cotton sari, with huge dark glasses, shaped eyebrows and short hair—all about me. If I ever wanted to be like others, I had achieved my heart's desire at that moment. I was so exactly like the others, I was almost invisible." She also remembers seeing her family tree and was shocked to see that her name was not in it. When she asked why it was so she was told that she belonged to Mohan's family and had no place in her father's family. But she was astonished to see that even her mother and all the other women of her father's household were not in the family tree either. Jaya noticed the absence of women in the family tree but does not say anything.

Kamat was a man with whom Jaya had shared some wonderful moments. He was a neighbour in her Dadar flat. Kamat was the person who had inspired Jaya to put anger in her writing. But Jaya interrupts him and says that there was no such thing as an angry woman. She says that a woman can be hysterical or neurotic but never angry. But Kamat does not agree that women are the victims of circumstances, rather he hates women who project themselves as failures. He accuses Jaya of being scared of failing. He says that she is too scared to write forcefully. He exhorts her to work and not to hide behind the comfort of being a wife and a mother. Then Kamat had died and Jaya discovered his body but she did not call anyone because she was scared of what people would say. She thought that people would question her relationship with Kamat and this would affect her marriage as well. Jaya remembers how close to Kamat she had been. She could confide in him about all her fears and insecurities. But when Kamat died she could not even bring out her relationship with him in the open because of the fear of society and this is what gave rise to a feeling of guilt.

Part Four: This part begins with the sweeper Jeeja recounting how her stepson had been injured in a fight and was in the hospital. Jeeja begs Jaya to talk to the doctor in the hospital who is a friend of Jaya's brother. Jaya agrees and goes to meet him. He asks the usual questions about her husband and children. He invites her to his house adding that she must come with her husband and Jaya contemplates telling him the truth that her husband had probably left her. After the hospital she goes to her home in Churchgate which had been empty for so many days. She had gone there thinking that Mohan would be there, but she was disappointed. As she was looking at the letters, the phone began to ring. The call was from Rupa and Ashok (the couple with whom Jaya's children had gone south for a holiday). Rupa told her that Rahul was missing and that he had probably run away. As Jaya stood recovering from the shock the phone rang again. This time it was Vasant (Mohan's brother). He said that Rahul was with him and he would come with Rahul shortly.

Jaya began to wonder why Rahul had run away from Rupa and Ashok. Jaya loses all faith in her as a mother. She began to question all those assumptions of motherhood. She had thought that once she became a mother everything would fall into place, that she would know her children, that motherhood would directly lead to wisdom and understanding. But she realises that the reality is somewhat harsher. She cannot cope with so many responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood.

Jaya calls Rupa and Ashok to tell them that Rahul was safe. Thereafter she left her Churchgate home to return to the Dadar flat. When she went outside it was raining heavily. On the road she encounters two men and a young girl. The girl was in all probability a prostitute. They were all smoking and the men were touching her breasts openly. Jaya could not tolerate this impropriety. She began to shout at them and asked them to stop. But they carried on as if they had not heard her.

Jaya gets drenched in the rain and develops a high fever and becomes delirious. Mukta, Nilima and Manda looked her

after. After the prodding of Mukta, Jaya remembers what had happened the night before. She was returning in the train and she could not tolerate the voices of the people talking animatedly. She wanted to get out of the compartment but could not. She had felt trapped there just as she had felt trapped in her marriage and the responsibility of motherhood and wifehood.

Jaya asks everyone to go away and leave her alone. She thinks that if anyone asks her what she wanted she would say that she just wanted to live. "To know that at the end of the day my family and I are under one roof, safe, enclosed in a secure world. If it's dark outside, what does it matter? I can close the door and windows, switch on the lights and the darkness will recede. But now I knew that I could never shut out the darkness; the darkness had invaded me."

After sometime Nilima tells Jaya that they had a fight at home. She talks of suicide, of jumping from the terrace just like Kusum had done. Jaya talked of Nilima's intentions with Mukta. But Mukta shrugs it off by saying that Nilima would never do such a thing, as she was too curious about life. Mukta and Jaya began to talk about their lives and Mukta asked Jaya if she believed in rebirth. Mukta believed that a new birth was one chance to redeem the previous birth, but Jaya opines that the aim of each human life was to be free from the cycle of birth and death. Then Jaya tells her the truth about what was happening between her and Mohan. She says, "I'll tell you what's wrong. I've failed him. He expected something from me, from his wife, and I've failed him. All those years I thought I was Mohan's wife; now he tells me I was never that, not really. What am I going to do? What shall I do if he doesn't come back? Mukta, I was so confident, so sure of myself, I felt so superior to others...and now, without Mohan, I'm...I don't know, I don't know what I am." Mukta thought that her problems with Mohan were because of Kamat. She confronts Jaya and asks her as to why did she leave Kamat when she saw him dead. Jaya explains that there was nothing between them but then she thinks wryly that there was nothing between Mohan and herself either.

Jaya now stops writing her story. But she realises that it is a disordered account. It is a chaotic account of her thoughts and also the events that make up her life. She had wanted to write a chronological account of her life—from her carefree childhood to the restricted wifehood and motherhood. Her writing is "...a crazy conglomeration of shapes, sizes and colours put together. What have I achieved by writing this?" While she is thinking to herself, Rahul and Vasant come. Rahul asks Jaya about his father and Jaya tells him that he has gone to Delhi for some official work. Rahul talks intimately with Vasant, his uncle, and Jaya wonders why can he not talk to her with such ease. After a while Rahul and Vasant go out and Jaya watches them from her balcony. She notices that Rahul is very happy in the company of his uncle. She notices that he walks with a light step and her own heart is filled with buoyancy as she watches him.

Jaya goes inside and begins to put her writing in order, but a little fragment slips through. It is about an incident that had occurred years ago. She had gone for a walk and had come across a beautiful garden rather unexpectedly. As she sat on a bench a man came and sat next to her and began to leer at her suggestively. She got up and left in a hurry. When she entered her home everyone was waiting for her because they were hungry. She had quietly gone and resumed her role of a mother without telling anyone anything. She had suppressed her desire to cry out that she couldn't cope with her responsibilities any more.

Jaya once again questions as to what has she achieved by writing out her story. The result of her writing is that she is not scared of being herself anymore. The fear and panic has gone. She is not only Mohan's wife but also much more than that. She had compared her marriage to "two bullocks yoked together" but she realises through her writing that this is not the truth. She used to think that there was only one life and there were no chances of redeeming oneself. But she realises that within this lifetime there are many chances and choices by which one can redeem oneself. She was reminded of the saying "Do as you desire!" It is now that she has understood the meaning of this saying. This was said by Krishna to Arjuna, it means, "I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire."

In the end Jaya understands that she is to be blamed for the state that she is in. She has received Mohan's telegram, which says that "All well returning Friday morning". She begins to think whether they would go back to their life as if nothing had happened. She knows that "...he will come back and give me a carefully edited version of what has

happened—as he has done so often till now—and then ask me, ‘What do you say, Jaya?’” Until now Jaya had said only what Mohan had wanted to hear. But now she knows that is not possible, she must be true to herself. She decided that she will “...have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us.” Jaya knows that it takes a long time to change but she also knows that she must not give up hope for a better future. She decides that she would no longer be silent.

In spite of all the problems that Jaya has faced the novel ends on a positive note. Contrary to expectation, Jaya does not turn away from marriage rather she goes ahead with renewed confidence in her abilities. Through this novel Shashi Deshpande seems to say that the problems in relationships cannot be sorted out by walking away from them. On the contrary one must put in efforts to make a relationship strong so that there is little room for problems. Jaya realises that life has to be lived and one must not have any regrets in it. The novel ends with the lines, “And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible.”

As a Feminist Novel

Feminism was a social and political movement aimed at securing equal rights for women in all spheres of life. Forms of feminism range from straightforward campaigning for sexual equality to outright and often strident rejection of the male and all aspects of language and society that represent male dominance. Feminism also resulted in approaches to literary criticism, the social sciences, history and theology. Among the popular and influential feminist writers are Simone de Beauvoir who wrote *The Second Sex*, Germaine Greer (*The Female Eunuch*), Betty Friedan (*The Feminist Mystique*) and Kate Millet (*Sexual Politics*).

Simone de Beauvoir quotes Balzac in her seminal book *The Second Sex*, “Pay no attention to her (a woman’s) murmurs, her cries, her pains; *nature has made her for our use* and for bearing everything; children, sorrows, blows and pains inflicted by man. Do not accuse yourself of hardness. In all the codes of so-called civilised nations, man has written the laws that ranged woman’s destiny under this bloody epigraph: “*Voe victis!* Woe to the weak!” In this book De Beauvoir’s thesis is that the subordination of women is not a fact of nature but the product of social conditioning. She traces a woman’s journey from childhood to motherhood and shows how the concept of woman’s inherent weakness is a construction of society. She writes, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.”

The question of the identity of a woman has been perplexing feminists since the advent of feminism. Apart from the obvious biological differences (a female body is designed for child bearing if one considers the wide pelvis while man’s body is designed for brute force and he is thirty percent stronger than woman) that separate a man from a woman, there are many psychological differences as well. Society imposed tremendous pressures on the sexes and gender differences emerged from such pressures, in fact in ancient times the very existence of society was because of gender differences. But how did these differences originate? The answer lies in primitive society. In ancient society the roles of men and women were very rigidly divided. The men went out to hunt and the women stayed at home taking care of the house and nurturing children. Consequently there was a natural balance of power and the society’s survival depended on this balance of power. Because men had to go out to hunt therefore even today it can be observed that men are good at long term focussed thinking and have a single minded vision. They have better spatial skills and are much better at reading maps. Men are also better at strategic planning. Woman on the other hand stays at home and has to do various chores. Therefore women can think of many things at once. If man has more strength, woman has more stamina. She has more manual dexterity and flexibility. Since it is women who have to deal with people more than men they are much better at verbal skills with people. They can communicate more efficiently with people since they have to deal with them daily. This balance of power was the mainstay of primitive society. Since women lead protected and less dangerous lives they live longer. Interestingly, it can also be seen that grandmothers live longer than grandfathers not only because of the reason cited above but also because they provide practical help in rearing grandchildren. Society functioned smoothly because of this balance in power. Thus men and women were different but equal or equal but different.

How did this change? It is culture and modernisation of life that has modified male and female behaviour. It was with the advent of private property that women were relegated into the background. Though the lot of women was very hard in the primitive times yet there was no discrimination against her. This was because gender difference was not institutionalised as yet. There were no property rights or inheritance rights. Laws were made when human beings decided to settle down and begin farming. After this came the concept of ownership of land. The land required successors who could look after it thus childbearing became very important. While the nomads lived only in the present, the settlers created a society where the past and the future became very important. But even now women played a crucial part in farming. Since woman was the progenitor man regarded her with high respect. She would sometime till the soil in order to make the soil more fertile. In fact even today we regard earth as the Mother that provides us with sustenance. Gradually with the advent of private property and the importance of a son in inheritance undermined the value of women. Society became positively male and all the political powers were in the hands of men. When man became the owner of land he also claimed ownership of woman. Thus woman lost her pristine importance in society with the advent of private property. In patriarchal society woman becomes man's property and he can then desert her at will. Before patriarchal times the rules concerning virginity and adultery were comparatively lenient but ever since man began to own woman he expected high moral standards of her.

Feminism recognises the inadequacy of male created ideologies and struggles for spiritual, economic, social and racial equality of women sexually colonised and biologically subjugated. An expression of the mute and stifled female voice denied an equal freedom of self-expression, feminism is a concept emerging as protest against male-domination and the marginalisation of women. Feminism strives to undo this tilted and distorted image of woman whose cries for freedom and equality have gone unheard in a patriarchal world.

Elaine Showalter posits three phases in the growth of feminist tradition: "limitation, protest, and self discovery." Shashi Deshpande's novels are directly related to all these phases. They encapsulate her artistic vision of femininity. In her novels, she explores the long smothered wail of the imprisoned psyche of her female protagonists confined to the four walls of domesticity and sandwiched between tradition and modernity. Concerned with quest for an authentic selfhood and an understanding of existential problems of life. Deshpande's heroines are all agog to retain their individuality in the face of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity. In an interview Deshpande admitted that hers is not "the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles." Deshpande does not make women stronger than they really are in their real life. Woman is presented in her novels as a partial being, and is in need of a catalyst to improve her lot. Bugged down by existential insecurity and uncertainty, women in her novels are in search of refuge.

A woman's role is not only confined to the needs of the family in which she lives but she also has to be a 'society lady' as Shobha De put it. She has to be more than a housewife. They can neither choose nor express themselves adequately. They can neither love nor hate but have to be content with "the gift of silence" that marriage has given them. Marriage enslaves and subjugates a woman. According to Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*), it leads her to "aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose." Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom. Such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high, for the kind of self-contentment and security that marriage offers a woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness. As members of the subordinate sex, women are characterised by obedience and submission, and under male dominance they have to develop "a tendency to prevail by passive means."

But the question is that is this western feminism applicable to the Indian situation. Some scholars feel that it is a travesty, an importation of a western notion into some imagined Indian situation-"a clear sign of intellectual imbecility." Enumerating the undoubtedly high place of women in Indian society intellectually from the Vedas, Narasimhaiah opines that women are in no way inferior to men. He also comes out with a significant statement: "There can't be separate ideals for man and woman. Why then are we exercised about the status of woman as if for centuries man has not been exploited by women and children?" History, however, shows that Indian society is patriarchal and the whole representation is gendered to such an extent that women are graded as second class citizens. There are ample

examples in Indian mythology: what could be more humiliating than the suffering of Sita or Draupadi. Sexism is still threat to women, who are exposed to murder, rape, torture and a variety of other crimes. Sensitive women writers do not lose sight of their plight in society, and feminist agenda is based on the principle of similarity and difference-similarity because “women are human beings like men and therefore ought to be granted equal rights”, and the difference because “women are different from men and therefore ought to be granted the right to represent themselves.” Under the circumstances to talk of feminism and women’s rights is no more a futile activity. Writing about women by women is a clarion call to feminine representation. According to Helen Cixous and Raman Selden, “Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then all the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth.”

During recent decades a galaxy of Indian women writers have started writing with this self-imposed task of representing themselves in a style away from the stereotyping of women in fiction by Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and others. This time they do not stand in the patriarchal circle of confinement. Instead they do come out of their grotto and address the world from their vantagepoint. A characteristic feature of feminist writer is not only to articulate woman’s voice but also to critique the canons of patriarchy. It scrutinises the position of woman in the male dominated social context. Shashi Deshpande brings out the boiling issue of marriage as a social practice that is a history of woman’s suppression, right from beginning to end. It is a long drawn out drama of negotiation in which she feels uncertain and humiliated. In marriage a poor woman fares worst. She is literally bracketed with animals.

For a girl marriage is a cul-de-sac making her so dependent lest she should be a spinster, who in Indian society is constantly questioned not to mention shamelessly badgered about her marriage plans. Marriage, which is considered a sacred tie of two souls, is thus desecrated to an extent that it becomes nothing but carnal, involving no responsibility, sharing and understanding of the two minds.

Wifehood and Motherhood

Marriage is the essential destiny of women. This is irrespective of the fact whether she is rich or poor, beautiful or ugly. Marriage is very different for men and women. Woman’s experience of marriage is different from that of a man. Whereas a man is independent even after marriage because he is the breadwinner of the family, a woman is relegated within the four walls of the house after marriage. The woman’s role of childbearing and domesticity has not given her any dignity in society in fact in patriarchy this had been the cause of her oppression. These roles which form the basis of society are not considered at par with the man’s position as the chief earning member. Man’s work is considered more important than that of the woman. Marriage is what gives her support and also guarantees social acceptance. Marriage serves a two-fold purpose: bearing children and satisfying the sexual needs of man. These duties of a woman are considered as service to the husband and the society. In return for these services the man gives her a home and supports her. Society thus enjoins upon man and woman to fulfil the vows of marriage. A woman’s rights are protected in marriage to a very large extent. Though polygamy was practised, yet man has to protect his wife, he has to fulfil the duties of marriage. Thus marriage binds both man and woman. If woman loses her identity in marriage even the man is saddled with responsibility. But even then marriage is the most important part of their lives. It is the only way in which they are part of society. This is the only way in which they can integrate with society.

For the security that man gives to woman, the woman has to pay a very high price. He virtually owns her. She even gives up her name, family, caste, and class. She is uprooted from her parental home. Since the husband is the productive worker, he is the one who can transcend from the family to the interests of the society, but the woman is doomed to the roles of childbearing and domesticity. Man has the best of both worlds: the home and outside the home. When man is tired of the outside world he can go home to the comfort of a home whereas woman remains confined to domesticity. The wife makes no concrete decisions and has no role to play either inside the house or outside it.

Even contemporary marriages in the lower middle class society are oppressive for the women. A woman’s love and her body are for the benefit of man. When she gives these to him she is serving the interests of society, her own individual needs are totally ignored. The husband takes the wife and pays in cash or kind in return. The wife on the other hand considers the husband as the man who can give her financial security. Thus marriage becomes the only viable career for a woman because there are relatively fewer career options for women. Due to all these reasons

when young girls are asked about their future plans, marriage figures most prominently. It does not figure so prominently in a young man's future. Besides in the modern era marriage has lost its benefits. For a young man, sexual gratification is easily available. But in spite of these aspects marriage still has some benefits. Even a man needs marriage to integrate with society. Marriage is one comforting institution in the modern era of uncertainty. It ensures a home and children that is a source of joy to man. But a man demands independence even in the bond of marriage. Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, "It is the duplicity of the husband that dooms the wife to misfortune of which he complains later that he himself is the victim. Just as he wants her to be at once warm and cool in bed, he requires her to be wholly his and yet no burden; he wishes her to establish him in a fixed place on earth and to leave him free, to assume the monotonous daily round and not bore him, to be always at hand and never importunate; he wants to have her all to himself and not belong to her; to live as one of a couple and yet to remain alone. Thus she is betrayed from the day he marries her." Man and woman can unite only when they are two individuals, if union is in the form of a conquest, then it is doomed.

However there are irreconcilable differences between love and marriage. Love is a natural spontaneous emotion whereas a marriage (especially an arranged marriage) is a planned event. The reason why marriage is a complex relationship is because it performs at once both sexual and social function. In fact according to many philosophers there should be no sexual feelings in marriage because of the social pressures involved. Sexuality, in a marriage, should only be for procreation. Marriage is considered to be a "religious conception." God ordains it, and therefore there should be no sexual response to it (especially for a woman), rather the woman's response to marriage should be religious or spiritual. In traditional marriages the woman is given to the man, he is her lord and master. He is her teacher and guide. She is to remain under his wings all her life; in short he is akin to what her father was before marriage. But a woman finds it difficult to respect her husband due to his sexual needs. This fills her with revulsion towards man and sex. But today's marriages seek to integrate both the sexual and social functions. There are many books and articles being written on the subject of marital fulfilment. Marriage counsellors are increasing day by day. A husband has sole authority on his wife. His desire to dominate is palpable in marriage. He vents all his resentments, his failures and his frustrations with the outside world onto his wife. The next step of this domination is domestic violence. But it is not as if the woman is passive in the marriage, she does rebel. There does come a time when she realises that her husband is an individual and not her lord.

In the contemporary scenario marriage has undergone radical changes. For one, women are much better informed about marital responsibilities. They have access to books and education, which enables them to prepare for marriage. Today's educated woman does not get married with rosy dreams in her eyes. But in spite of this there is still oppression. As long as the man is the only earning member of the family, he will expect the woman to serve his needs. It is only the economically emancipated woman who can truly attain an independent relationship with her husband.

The natural consequence of marriage is motherhood. It has been said that no woman is complete till she becomes a mother. If marriage is the ultimate destiny of every woman, motherhood is the very reason for her existence. No matter howsoever painful childbirth may be, this is the most defining moment of her life. It is as a mother that a woman gets respect in society. If the child is by her consent this will be the most delightful experience of her life. In India motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can. In India the gender of the child is very important. Even in mythology girls are considered a curse, boys a blessing who will carry on the family name. But in patriarchy myths are man-made and biased against women. In such a patriarchal society, where girls are constantly devalued, they begin to suffer from an inferiority complex.

Right from childhood, a girl is trained to be a good woman. She is taught the virtues of submission and docility. Besides this, skill, grace and talent in various household affairs are also the mark of a virtuous woman. The Indian ideal of womanhood is Sita, pure, chaste, gentle, tender and most important of all rabidly faithful. But the Indian ideal of a man is Rama, who in spite of his god-like attributes is jealous and mistrustful. To be a good wife is concomitant to being a good woman. In fact in Hindu society a girl's name is changed after marriage. This is symbolic of the fact that she has to break all ties with her parental home. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya's name is changed to Suhasini by

her husband Mohan. In the *Mahabharata* there is a conversation between Shiva and Uma, in which Uma recounts the duties of an Indian woman, she says: "The duties of a woman are created in the rites of wedding, when in presence of the nuptial fire she becomes the associate of her Lord, for the performance of all righteous deeds. She should be beautiful and gentle, considering her husband as her god and serving him as such in fortune and misfortune, health and sickness, obedient even if commanded to unrighteous deeds or acts that may lead to her own destruction. She should rise early, serving the gods, always keeping her house clean, tending to the domestic sacred fire, eating only after the needs of gods and guests and servants have been satisfied, devoted to her father and mother and the father and mother of her husband. Devotion to her Lord is woman's honour, it is her eternal heaven." This is the status of Indian woman. The roles of men and women are still very rigidly divided in Indian society, which has remained largely unaffected by Western feminism. "To be mothers women were created, and to be fathers men" writes Manu categorically in *The Laws of Manu*. Even in contemporary Indian society the status of women is more or less the same as it was fifty years ago. The burdens of a traditional Indian marriage are heavy. The woman is expected to repress her needs for her husband, her children and her husband's family. Tradition and patriarchy make rebellion impossible. But if a woman does dare to rebel it is considered to be a result of western decadence. A woman responds to centuries old oppression with silence. That is her only option. She suffers and does so in silence. *That Long Silence* presents the stereotypes about Indian femininity through various characters. In the beginning of the novel Kusum is portrayed as a parallel character to Jaya. She is the touchstone against which Jaya tests her sanity. Kusum's mother was constantly burdened with child rearing. She therefore looked after the youngest child on her lap while all the others were neglected. Kusum was one of the neglected children. Her aunt Vanitamami later on adopts Kusum, but she is never fully accepted in her foster family. Passivity and submission remains her destiny in her new home too. Kusum's madness and suicide represents those women who are socially conditioned to suffer in silence. She is symbolic of those women who tolerate injustices, humiliations and insults because they have been conditioned to have faith in the virtues of patriarchy, as they have no faith in themselves.

Vanitamami, "who had never known what it was to choose" represents another facet of the traditionally suppressed woman. After her marriage her life was dominated by her mother-in law. Her role in the household affairs was passive and she had no role to play in any decision making. Vanitamami had advised Jaya to please her husband at all costs. She even asks her to accept his mistress, "... if your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it; take up a hobby instead cats, may be, or your sister's children."

The novel sensitively portrays feminine aspects before its readers. The figures of Mohan and his mother and sister can be seen as examples. The silent wait of Mohan's mother assumes inhuman proportions, "the woman crouching in front of the dying fire, sitting blank and motionless, the huddled bundles of sleeping children on the floor, the utter silence, the loud knock on the door..." Mohan's mother had to wait for her husband late into the night, cooking the rice again when her husband returned and keeping it hot because he would not eat from a touched vessel, and would decline to eat what he called "your children's disgusting leavings". The wife's waiting becomes futile as Mohan's father becomes angry with his wife for not making fresh chutney. He throws the brass plate at the wall and leaves without eating anything. Mohan's mother picks up the plate and cleans up everything silently. Patiently, she prepares another meal, this time with fresh chutney. When her children wake up after the commotion she asks them to go back to sleep. What is painful is not only the cruelty of the husband but also the reaction of the son, Mohan. Mohan who has seen his mother suffer eulogises her by saying that she was a "virtuous woman". He comments that. "... she was tough. Women in those days were tough."

The poor women of the novel need special mention. The lives of Jeeja, Manda and Nayana are a living hell. Their life is a continuous drudgery. They are poor and illiterate; their work does not provide them with any comfort. For them work is not a choice, rather they are forced into it. The poor characters will be familiar to all of us. Their common stories of an abusive and alcoholic husband are common occurrences in our own everyday life. Nayana, the maid has an apathetic attitude to life. She wants to have a son because she does not want her daughter to suffer at some drunkard's hand like she herself has suffered. A boy will at least have an independent life, which she knows will be denied to her daughter.

Jaya, the protagonist of the novel, has been conditioned since childhood to cope with this male dominated world. She moulds herself like the other women. She accepts her new name Suhasini which meant “placid” in lieu of her real name Jaya which meant triumph. But the conformity does not make her happy. She feels like rebelling from this monotonous routine. Her life as a wife and mother fails to provide her with any intellectual or emotional fulfilment. Her relationship with Kamat, which Shashi Deshpande has not elaborated in the novel, is an escape without which she would be a wreck. Aware of her own shortcomings she prefers silence, surrender and passivity. Mohan, her husband, takes on the duties of the provider without attempting to understand the silence of his wife.

Jaya did not risk annoying Mohan lest that should break her marriage. Jaya was scared of hurting Mohan and jeopardising the only career she had i.e. her marriage. She was fed up with the routine work of domesticity. *That Long Silence* projects, through Jaya, the plight of middle class women and also the fact that the male psyche has not undergone any change. The changing scenario has given women the opportunity to educate themselves but it has not brought about any tangible change in their status. Even the most educated, financially independent woman has to conform to the patriarchal concept of life. The novel portrays the sufferings and deprivations of feminine life in India. It is also a critique of the myths and stereotypes that shape Indian wifehood and motherhood. Towards the end Jaya decides to take charge of her life. She realises that she must assert her identity and that she will now no longer be silent. She decides that even while fulfilling her responsibilities as a wife and a mother she can have an independent existence. Her duties as a wife and a mother need not be binding upon her.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan critiques Shashi Deshpande by saying that the author is trying to universalise the problems of women in the third world through the character of Jaya. She writes, “The force of Deshpande’s indictment of women’s lives lies in the way she is able to universalise their condition, chiefly by drawing similarities among Jaya and a variety of other female figures, including characters from Indian history and myth: and among three generations of women in her family (Jaya, her mother, her grandmother); among three different classes of women (Jaya, her maid Jeeja); and among different kinds of women of the same class and generation (Jaya, her cousin Kusum, her widowed neighbour Mukta). So compellingly realistic is this rendering that no Indian woman reader can read the novel without a steady sympathetic identification and indeed, frequent shocks of recognition.” There are moments in this novel where the irony is subtle but so ‘realistic’ that it will certainly produce a compellingly different reading in somebody who is a part of the Indian societal and cultural structures than in someone who wants to identify with the larger universal concept of being a woman. In *That Long Silence* the narrator Jaya thinks to herself, “Looking at those women, I had begun to think with contempt of Ai’s slapdash ways, and how she could not even hem properly. It was all her fault, I had thought; she had prepared me for none of the duties of a woman’s life. So that when Prema had said, “Mohan, you have a button missing,” I had not realised that I was expected to feel ashamed, to take the shirt immediately and sew on the missing button. To me it had seemed a conversation between Prema and Mohan, nothing to do with me at all. And so I had been silent even when Sudha a spoilt pert girl, had added,

“Poor Monanna, looks like he’ll have to fix his own button.”

“Certainly not!” Prema had retorted. “Here, Mohan, give it to me.”

It had not occurred to me that this too had been intended as a reproach, even though Prema had made it explicit by raking me from head to toe with an elder-sister-of-your-husband look...

These women of Mohan’s family were right, I had decided. I would pattern myself after them. That way lay well, if not happiness, at least the consciousness of doing right, freedom from guilt.”

This is a shocking moment of recognition for a woman who has been broadly shaped by dominant and obvious form of patriarchy. She recognises this as a ‘normal’ situation in many families. This is recognition of the micropolitics that is operative within many of the Indian families, which are supported by, and support in turn patriarchal relationships. It is through these moments of recognition that one or more interesting aspect of the patriarchal set-up is revealed: the perpetrators of the power structures within the family circle are most often women, and it is the relationship of one woman to another woman mediated through a man that reinscribes the power of a woman over another woman. These

are women who have internalised patriarchy. Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak corroborates this when she says, “the woman in culture may be the site of internalised phallocracy.” Once again it goes back to the issue of marriage which so often gives rise to exploitation. But on the other hand it is also sought obsessively because it offers the possibility of exerting power. When a woman (belonging to a certain section of society) reads a passage like this she will definitely recognise this as her own predicament. She will say, “I have known this” and thus give rise to a sympathetic reading.

This feeling that we have known the micropolitics of home makes it difficult for us to characterise her feminism as being completely influenced by western feminism. The very structure of the dominant part of the Indian society which makes it possible at one stage for a woman to exert power over another woman, even while being subject of subjugation herself, is something which prevents universalisation of the situation of the Indian woman. Added to this, the differences between the classes are so great that the condition of women cannot be universalised.

Once again, in this novel we see that the protagonist is able to be what she is because she has been created with a skill to express herself, to write. This given position of the writing, thinking, ennobled, middle-class woman allows the protagonist to think the way she thinks. However the end of the novel is drawn up rather hastily. It is as if the conflicts faced by Jaya, the protagonist, are resolved in the form of some kind of individuation, which is perhaps only possible only to somebody like Jaya, with a superiority inferred upon her because of her ability to write.

There is another very important point to be understood in terms of writing. Even to write, to have enough time to write, to have money to buy time is a luxury in Indian society, especially in a class which Shashi Deshpande seems to be representing. But her protagonists are often aware of their dependence on that other class of women who by offering their own services at a cheaper rate make it possible for creativity to exist. There are really no solutions being offered in this novel.

The female characters that occupy the margins of the story are crucial to the development of the main character. Without them the main characters would not have gone into these tortuous route of self-examination. The critical readings available on Shashi Deshpande show that there is a kind of monolithic concept which all of them are talking about: the Indian woman-she is one torn between tradition and modernity, she is the one who tries “to give shape and content to (her) individual existence in a sexist society.”

Jaya realises that in order to attain selfhood she must not be silent anymore. In the end she decides that she would not be passive in her relationship with Mohan. The novel ends on a positive note with Jaya determining to better her lot by speaking out. *That Long Silence* presents feminism along with contemporary realities of the Indian wife and mother. Shashi Deshpande’s first published novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is also her favourite. As in the case of her other novel, the protagonist is a woman. Saru, the daughter with whom the mother never reconciled, especially after the death of her younger brother, defies her mother, goes to the city, studies to become a doctor and marries the man she chooses for herself.

It is once again (as in *That Long Silence*) a story of introspection. Saru, a successful doctor, finds that her husband, an English lecturer who once aspired to be a poet, is as split as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. A loving father and a caring husband during the day who, with evident pride shows off his doctor-wife to his colleagues, turns into a monster in bed, abusing her and bruising her, creating such terror in her that she finds no voice to scream for help. During the day, there is no evidence in his behaviour to suggest anything that should be a cause for anxiety. There are only bruises that show that the night has been real. Her inability to protest, to find out what was actually wrong, prevents her from doing anything about this problem till she finds out that her mother, who had spurned her all these days, has died of cancer.

Saru goes back to her father’s house after many years because her marriage had alienated her from her mother all these years. It is here, living with her father and Madhav, the young student who stays with the father, that she tries to come to terms with the various events of her life. It is here that the tortuous introspection goes on. *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* are similar in the respect that the protagonists reassess their lives in time of a crisis. But what is interesting is that this introspection cannot be compared to a journey that reaches a goal, which gives a sense of fulfilment. This is not a bildungsroman. Saru, the protagonist, who is looking for someone with whom she could share her fears, finally she tells her father everything, in a manner that reminds one of the ancient mariner in Coleridge’s *The Ancient Mariner*, who compels the wedding guest to listen to his story.

It is true that in this novel, the figure of mother—more than that of the mother-in-law, who is conventionally seen by women writers as a dominating figure—takes an ambivalent shape. There is very often a sense of frustration and non-comprehension of resistance in the daughter when she thinks of the mother. It can be seen that Shashi Deshpande sees frustration and a lack of understanding in the closest of human relationships—the husband-wife (Jaya and Mohan in *That Long Silence*) or the mother-daughter relationship (Saru and her mother, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*) which should be the source of succour and support become complex and hostile. This complex relationship between the mother and the daughter cannot be simplified as hatred nor can it be claimed that her heroines are anti-matriarchal. Many critics do not take the ambiguity of Saru's relationship with her mother into consideration. Most of them desire to make woman an autonomous being. Prasanna Sree Sathupati writes in her essay "Conflict and Identity in Shashi Deshpande's Novels," "The woman in order to achieve her freedom seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the paternal family. The simple need to be independent eventually becomes a demand of the inflated ego and takes the shape of love for power over others. She resents the role of a wife with the hope that her new role will help her in winning her freedom." This kind of criticism, on the one hand, holds such tradition-bound notions as 'one should be good to the mother' and on the other, 'western' individualistic notion of freedom.

It is not that generalisation regarding women's situations cannot be made. The presence of a dominant cultural mode enables us to make generalisations. For example in one of the short stories of Shashi Deshpande, a young girl is raped and there is a necessity to hide that rape. This is because the mother fears that rumours will ruin the girl's prospects of marriage. She is of the opinion that marriage is essential in the life of woman. This is perhaps one of the many generalisations which could be made in a patriarchal society like India. But the problems with these overarching generalisations is that they can be used everywhere; that the specific case of one novel, one woman character is made to stand for the generality of a real world of women.

It is not possible to accept such easy classifications. Shashi Deshpande's protagonist herself does not give the feeling that she is anti-mother. Saru, while trying to sort out her own reaction to her husband's split personality, also tries to come to terms with the unforgiving nature of her mother. Her mother had refused to see her daughter till she died. A feeling that her daughter's irresponsibility was the cause of her son's drowning increased the dislike for Saru. Yet it is Saru's decision to go to a different place, study medicine, and a little later, Saru's decision to marry Manu, a man whom she herself chose, which act as a turning point in Saru's relationship with her mother. When her daughter was mentioned she said, "What daughter? I have no daughter." Saru herself believes at one point that she is unhappy in her marriage because her mother cursed her.

Many of the critics who have written about the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's novels do so, while eliminating all traces of other women who are present in the novels. This generalising tendency is reflected in their analyses too. Kamini Dinesh writes in her essay, "Moving out of the Cloistered Self": Shashi Deshpande's Protagonists", "(The woman's) emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife, in the end is therefore not a rebel but a redeemed wife—one who has broken the long silence, one who is no longer afraid of the dark. She is the wife reconceptualised as woman and an individual—a marked contrast to the older generation of women around her with their uncomplaining, unresisting fatalistic attitude. Hers is the dilemma of the new woman that could be resolved when the claims of selfhood are reconciled with the claims made upon her by her family and society." In analyses such as these there is no reference to the pain such difficult expectations cause in a woman. The burden of tradition and modernity has further complicated the lives of women in India. It is all the more difficult because there seems to be some kind of intellectual sanction for 'drawing upon untapped reserves of strength.' There are some obvious conclusions to be drawn here. This interpretation is responding to the need to talk about the woman who has to resolve the dilemma between her claims to selfhood and her respect for the claims made on her by society and by her family. In this interpretation the solution lies in reconciliation. It may be noticed that in both *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the female protagonists are incapable of changing their surroundings—their husband or children—rather it is the protagonists who change themselves according to the given conditions.

But Saru can also be seen not as a rebellious daughter seeking her identity, for her freedom, not as an egoist who cannot understand the inferiority complex of her husband, not as the guilty sister who was responsible for the death of her brother, not as a daughter who was never forgiven by her mother, not as a traveller on to a spiritual quest that ends in no resolution, but as a woman who possesses 'white, soft and clean' hands in the beginning and 'roughened' palms towards to the conclusion. The roughened hands at the end echo two other silent figures in the novel: that of her mother and Jankibai. Saru recognises her domestic servant Jankibai as the one who looks after all of them; it is because of her that Saru possesses 'white, soft and clean' hands.

If Jane Austen's comment about the plantations of Antigua should not go unnoticed, should not the passing comments about a Jankibai who comes to Saru's house to look after the family, be given some more attention? Jankibai is perhaps the slum dwelling woman who comes early in the morning, cooks cleans and sweeps the house. She could be the live-in maid who has been abandoned by her husband or has no one to look after her. She is a 'good servant' who has learnt to look after other children as her own. The story of Jeeja (*That Long Silence*) is also roughly the same the difference being that she has to look after a large family that is not even her own. But by a quirk of fate she is saddled with responsibilities of the children of her husband's second wife. Once again the women at the margins of the narration are the women who make this narration possible by allowing the protagonist to leave the smooth running of her own small family to them.

The single word 'woman' even when used in the context where generally woman is marginalised as in a patriarchal society like India defies generalisations. It is only by being aware of the different kinds of women that we can rationalise their status. And it is only by being cautious about these jarring notes coming from the margin, that one could continue to talk about the status of women in India. The notion of margin is not anymore the second component of the binary centre-margin.

Saru herself sees marriage as something that would make her like her mother. It is her wish not to be like her mother that makes her dream of becoming a doctor into a strong ambition, an ambition for whose fulfilment she works very hard. Finally when she gets a First Class in her Intermediate school studies and is sure of getting into the medical college, she tells her family about her plans of becoming a medical doctor. She is headstrong about her career but not about her relationships. The end of the novel is vague resulting in an inability to make any judgements.

What is striking about this story is, however, how well defined, and small this world is. This world is a world that is hardly exposed to hybrid cultures, although her reference to the city life, to colleagues and friends do bring us into contact with the external world. It is her life in the small town, where everyone seems to know everyone else. The novelist does not attempt to mix other cultures in her novels. Saru is homebound during most of her stay at her father's home.

Feminism in Indian English literature is a by-product of the western feminist movement but it got sustenance from our freedom struggle. The availability of Western feminist theory should not lead us to indiscriminate application because cultural contexts must be considered. This is different because we have different history, different ethos, different forms of social stratification and patriarchal domination and if we need a feminism specific to our social situation, we also ought to develop, as K. Satchidanandan observes, a feminist literary theory specific to our own creative and critical situation. He further says that the White middle class feminist theories of the West can never explain Mahasweta Devi's account of the tribal Jasoda or Draupadi. Vrinda Nabar observes that the "vastly different scenario in India encompasses contradictions of a kind undreamed in the mainstream feminist philosophy." She lists factors such as caste, class, economic deprivation, sectarian fragmentedness, overpopulation, the growing power of fundamental forces, the sway of superstition, female foeticide, and, above all, the essential nature of Hinduism." All these factors combine to create a situation that defies an easy solution. Western individualism may prove to be impractical in the Indian context because the collective unconscious still operates on the principles of faith and dogma. *That Long Silence* is a feminist text but not on the lone basis of the female centrality. The novel focuses on the woman's awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognised as a person than as a woman and her wanting to have an independent social image. In a society where all this would be considered an out-stepping the limits, *That Long Silence* can also be called a protest novel. The framework of the novel provides good acoustics for a woman's

voice and establishes that a woman, too, has choices in life. But nowhere does Deshpande glorify the sufferings of a woman. Though she enlists a sufficient amount of sympathy for her protagonists, it is not on the grounds of her being a female sufferer or a martyr in patriarchy. Throughout the novel she maintains commendable objectivity and avoids generalisations or partial views.

Imagery and Metaphor in the Novel

Through analogies, similes and metaphors, an author makes his/her expressions concise, concrete and condensed. Of all the literary devices employed by the author, metaphors speak volumes of his/her mental attitude and creativity. That is why Aristotle gave a lot of importance to the use of metaphors. He remarked: "But the greatest thing by far is the metaphor. It is one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius..." A metaphor is very important in image making and crystallising emotions. It is a recognised literary device to capture the intensity of an artist's creative vision and his/her imagination. According to Middleton Murrey, "All metaphor and simile can be described as the analogy by which the human mind explores the universe of quality and charts the non-measurable world."

Some of the recurring metaphors in Shashi Deshpande are 'the dark', 'the sunlight', 'death' and 'life', and 'silence'. These tend to neatly summarise the fluctuating moods of a woman. The very first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), is built around the metaphors of 'the dark' and 'the light'. There was a time when Sarita (Saru), the protagonist, was afraid of the 'dark' fearing that her husband would invade her body and commit monstrosities upon her. The woman, who had been defiant in her childhood and adulthood, felt utterly helpless and panic-stricken with the approach of the terrible dark. The suffocating dark, the heavy weight, the pain and the hurt associated with the sexual act made her life agonising. She longed to see the light and to emerge out of sickening state of ennui and exhaustion. In this novel, the metaphor of 'the dark' is inseparably linked with "panic and sensation" simultaneously. As the novel opens, Sarita is already in the grip of irritation and frustration owing to the unbridgeable gulf between her husband and herself. She is a medical doctor by profession and a self-reliant woman, yet her marriage with Manohar (Manu) does not turn out as expected. So, she turns back to her parental home, leaving behind her children. She is seized with a "strange new fear of disintegration" and a "terrified consciousness of not existing." The real cause of the disintegration of the family is a searching interview of Manohar by a reporter for a women's magazine: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but bread as well?" Since then, Manohar becomes a sadist, torturing Saru in bed at night. Her dreams of a happy home with loving children and husband were shattered.

The metaphor of 'the dark', with the same significance, is also used in one of the short stories "It Was Dark". The story brings out the miserable lot of an unmarried girl who was molested by an unknown young man, resulting in an illegitimate pregnancy. In the story 'the dark' is identified as 'evil'. The unfortunate girl of the story eventually veers round the idea that the 'dark' represents tyranny and forced submission.

Another metaphor that recurs in her novels is 'silence'. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru says: "Silence had become a habit for us." But it is the Sahitya Akademi award winning novel *That Long Silence* that the metaphor of silence is worked out majestically. In this novel, the protagonist, Jaya dreams of having a happy home with her husband and children, but all her dreams come to a naught. The corrupt practices of her husband in his office and his overgrowing jealousy towards her literary career create a wide chasm between them and they adopt an unbreakable yet unnerving silence towards each other. As elsewhere, here too 'silence' denotes lack of communication, frigidity of feeling, and want of understanding and compassion. Being devoid of emotions in real life, Jaya's short stories also become sterile. As Sarabjit K. Sandhu reflects: "This unhappiness is reflected not only in her conjugal life, but also in social life. Her books, her stories lack anger and emotion." Consequently Jaya loses her own vision, her individuality, and identifiable characteristics and so she fails miserably in her writing. A strained relationship with her husband creates a void in her married life, which ultimately results in failure and frustration in her creative activity. There is a complete communication-gap between the couple, and they drift apart. Then Jaya finds a companion in Kamat (her neighbour in Dadar). She discusses her writing and her personal problems in an uninhibited way. After his sudden death, Jaya again feels empty and lost. When the mood of loneliness overpowers her she realises the mistake of leading a cocooned life and finally resolves to "erase the silence" between herself and Mohan. At the end of the

novel there is a positive note: Jaya decides to break the wall of silence and start her relationship afresh with Mohan. *That Long Silence* evokes feminist sentiments and propaganda, but only at a superficial level. In fact Jaya's character wallows in self-pity. Kamat, the only male character whom Jaya respects after her father, put it succinctly and even harshly when he says to Jaya, "Spare me your complexes. And you're a fool if you think I was joking. I'm warning you—beware of this 'Women are the victims' theory of yours. It'll drag you down into a soft squishy bog of self-pity." But this is exactly what happens. Jaya resorts to cheap justification and claims of martyr-like sacrifices on her part and nothing else. It appears as if she is trying to gain the reader's sympathy in her self-proclaimed miserable life. From the very beginning of the novel Jaya is not presented as an inferior to her husband. She is portrayed with an air of superiority and condescension. She is aware that she has married beneath her and wages a "guerrilla warfare" for which she excuses herself by saying, "We all do it. It is part of family life." At every stage in the novel the protagonist asserts her superiority and exhibits the powerful position of women. It is Kamat again who sees through this trait of hers, "You really enjoy it don't you? Making others dependent on you? It increases your sense of power and that's what you really want, all you bloody looking—after others, caring for others women." But Jaya, who can wage a guerrilla-like warfare against her husband is absolutely unsure of herself. Forever there rages in her mind a battle between tradition and modernity. This is symbolised in the two names by which the protagonist is known: Jaya and Suhasini, Jaya which means triumph is the name given by her father and Suhasini, the name given by her husband meaning "soft, smiling, placid motherly woman". Thus the protagonist has two selves. Suhasini is traditional and Jaya is trying to break free from the chains of tradition. The result is a fragmented self, oscillating between these two personalities. Suhasini is a "humourless, obsessive person" trying to carry the burden of wifedom and Jaya is a person who is capable of laughing at everything—"marriage, us, the whole absurd exercise we call life".

The protagonist's morbid, chaotic, fragmented self is revealed in her preoccupation with death. Besides the sense of decay and desolation, an atmosphere of death has settled in the very core of the novel. From the beginning to the end the novel is strewn with images of death. Early in the novel the novelist uses the images of lemmings to represent the suicide committed by the Nair family, "May be it isn't the death-wish that drives them (lemmings) into the depth of the sea but a kind of altruism, unconscious, of course, carried to the extreme." Jaya asks, "Could we have chosen death in such harmony?" Her fascination for death is revealed in her description of gruesome scenes of death whether it is her other-ajji's or Kamat's: "Yes he was dead. The scene came back to me. Kamat on the floor near the sofa, as if he had fallen off it, his eyes glassy and wide-open, vomit dribbling out of the corners of his mouth, the smell of vomit in the room, of urine too, as if he had voided himself at the moment of dying. A sordid scene. A sordid ending." Kusum's attempt at suicide is described in the following terms: "Kusum at this window, flailing wildly in agony, crying out—I want to die, I want to die—her face terrorised, her eyes blank, her nose running, dripping disgustingly on my hands as I grappled with her." Such images of death recur in the novel.

If it is not the description of a real death scene, then Jaya imagines the death of her husband with agony, "Perhaps he'd fallen out of the train...perhaps he'd had a heart attack...perhaps he'd been run over. They would bring his body home and then carry it away again. *Ram nam satya hai* they would chant as they took him away. And I would lie down here and watch the shadows move along the walls, the ceiling. *Ram nam satya hai.*"

Jaya, who is forever complaining about life and who imagines that we can have a perfect relationship only with the dead, finds herself friendless, wretched, lonely and sad when she realises that her husband has perhaps left her forever and her son has been lost. Desolation strikes her wherever she turns. She finds just "emptiness and silence" in the Dadar flat and when she goes to her Churchgate home in search of Mohan it is the same. She is devastated by a terrible isolation, which is brought out in a nightmarish hallucination that she has: "All that I could see instead, even with my eyes closed, was a stark nightmarish picture of an eerie caravan of skeletal vehicles...each vehicle driven by a silent, masked, hooded figure, each driver looking straight ahead, each totally unaware, it seemed, of the vehicle ahead of him or the one behind, each vehicle moving in a chilly isolation." Jaya symbolises in her the malady of the modern woman. Instead of accepting others as they are and herself as she is, she lives in a world of self-deception thus leading a fragmented life.

Behind the simple story of Indian married life in the novel lies a swell of frustration in the married life of the protagonist. She had failed to strike a chord with her husband mentally. Despite her marriage and motherhood she has remained lonely all her life. Shashi Deshpande uses a beautiful image to describe Jaya's married life: "A pair of bullocks yoked together... a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality. A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were only two persons. A man. A woman."

To an Indian reader a "pair of bullocks yoked together" suggests a world of meanings. It means that the bullocks so yoked share the burden between themselves but no one knows whether they love one another or not. The image of beasts performing the duty mechanically undermines the husband-wife relationship, who are supposed to be united in marriage for love and not for leading a mechanical life resulting in mutual hatred and distrust. Jaya resents the role assigned to a wife in our country, when she is enjoined upon to stay at home, look after the children and keep out of rest of the world. She could not continue her writing as Mohan had discouraged her.

Another very important image that pervades throughout the novel is that of the "sheltering tree." When she was getting married, Jaya was given advice by her Vanitamami. She told her that a husband was like a sheltering tree. This connotes security and protection. It also conjures up the image of the provider. A woman is considered to be safe as long as she remains under the aegis of this tree. But on the flip side the tree also connotes a posture that does not bend under any circumstances. It becomes a monstrosity as it grows, but ironically it is the woman who nourishes it. It is the woman who makes her husband or allows her husband to convert into a demon.

Thus Shashi Deshpande has woven a delicate and subtle texture of her fictional world with a good deal of thought and dexterity. Though the metaphors and images used in her novels are not many, yet they powerfully highlight the dichotomy of human life, characterised by joy, sorrow, failure and success, death and life, alienation and attraction. These metaphors also reveal that Shashi Deshpande's world, like, Jane Austen's, is a closed one, where the novelist is definitely at home.

Jaya's Predicament

Deshpande's heroines are never static or passive nor do they remain clinging vines, depending parasitically on their husbands. Jaya is no different. Hers is a painful, uphill struggle to become more and more independent and strong, to fall back on her inner resources. "The ghost most difficult to confront is the ghost of one's own self", she knows, but she doesn't flinch from facing up to the past and seeking to overcome her limitations.

It was Jaya's father who taught her to have confidence in herself. It was he who had named her Jaya. "I named you Jaya. Jaya for victory," he would say. On that fateful day too, he had given her his blessings to her as she was appearing for her secondary exams, showing "a V for victory sign" and reminding her yet again that she must be a victor. Her throat chokes with emotion and she starts crying when she thinks of it even after a gap of twenty years. Jaya's father is not only the source of some of her strongest emotions but also a part of her moral make-up. It is he who inspires her to be resilient and courageous. She knows that it is easier to acquiesce, to be passive; to struggle is to invite trouble upon her. He "gave me a wrong idea of myself", she ruefully concedes, meaning thereby that she will never be able to accept a merely passive role; that would be tantamount to accepting defeat. But she has never been a "trodden worm" in relation to her husband. No doubt her early training at home made her obedient and submissive towards her husband but as she grows, she realises more and more that if there is anything wrong, it must be resisted. In fact, after the first few years when she was rather callow and naïve, she admits to have offered "subtle resistance" to him on issues where his perceptions were different-to even carrying on a "guerrilla warfare" with him for a number of years. And it is this fighter in Jaya that refuses to hand him the keys of her Dadar flat. She is aware of what it signifies. "It was not he who has relinquished his authority, it was I who no longer conceded any authority to him."

It is also this Jaya who seeks to create a private life of her own. Deshpande's heroines are not merely housewives; they are often career women too: Saru (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*) is a doctor, Indu (*Roots and Shadows*) is a

journalist. Jaya does not have such a well-defined profession, but she is a successful columnist, and an aspiring writer of fiction. On her husband's suggestion, she takes up writing middles. Her "light humorous pieces about the travails of a middle class housewife" called Seetha are quite popular.

This however does not give Jaya much happiness. She is an intense, thinking woman, eager to probe the meaning of marriage and love. Therefore such "skimming over life" as these sketches imply, is not enough. In fact she considers such writing as merely a form of escape, a creeping into a 'safe hole.' She is too strong to be content with such devious tactics for long. She longs to confront life directly through her fiction, and she had made a good start too. Her story about a man "who could not reach his wife except through her body" had won a prize for its authentic description. Yet her husband had been hurt by the story, he believed that it was a literal representation of their life. Feeling guilty and ashamed, she had stopped writing honest stories and had turned to frivolous pieces.

Jaya is not only an inhibited writer but the inhibitions exist on a personal level i.e. in respect of her sexuality. "Physical touching is for me a momentous thing", she confesses. It is so for most women, particularly in conservative cultures. It was her father who had hugged her as a child, she tells us, and then it was her husband. The trouble with Mohan is that sex seems to exist in isolation for him, a fact that Jaya resents. Slapdash, and superficial in most ways, he fails to understand that a woman's sexuality is a complex phenomenon, made up of physical as well as emotional factors. Jaya hints at this when she says, 'First there is love, then there is sex-that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan I realised that it could so easily be the other way round.'

With Mohan physical intimacy is mostly "a silent, wordless lovemaking", "feeling his damp body" on hers. She certainly fails to be stirred deeply by such purely physical encounters. In fact she begins to distance herself from the very act of sex. "I could stay apart from him without a twinge", she says. "I could sleep with him too without desire." Thinking over it Jaya wonders if there can be any emotional involvement between a man and a woman. "Love? No, I knew nothing of it," she bluntly confesses.

Women like Jaya who are romantic to start with, become disenchanted later. The relationship thus becomes dissatisfying to her. Looking back on it she feels that she and Mohan, did not really make a family, a home. They were just a man and "a woman married for seventeen years" but with no bridges of understanding between them. The damning realisation finally dawns upon her: "We lived together but there had only been emptiness between us."

It is this emptiness that draws Jaya towards Kamat. He is the opposite of Mohan. Mohan is conventional, looking eagerly for wealth and status, which he achieves to a certain degree. Kamat unlike Mohan was good-looking or well groomed. He is not wealthy or socially distinguished. He is an intellectual whose life is lonely. Jaya is drawn towards his intelligence and the fact that she can exchange ideas with him. She shows him her stories and he analyses them objectively but critically. What attracts her even more is the fact that he is warm, friendly and Jaya is compatible with him. She is not so much a sexual object rather she is a friend and that is why she can open her heart to him. He is free of the usual male complexes that put men on their guard in their relations with women. Kamat has no qualms about being seen working in the kitchen, he had no inhibitions of any kind. In fact, he takes pride in his culinary skills and invites Jaya to have lunch with him. Jaya thinks, "With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself-Jaya. There had been an ease in our relationship I had never known in any other." She can reveal herself uninhibitedly to him.

It is only to Kamat that Jaya talks about the most tragic event of her life: the death of her father who had been affectionate and encouraging towards her. The memory of that searing gesture brought tears to her eyes: "suddenly I realised that I was crying and he was holding me." Yet Jaya understands that this is not a sexual gesture at all, but indicative of the warmth and affection that her father had given her. "It had been warm and comforting, like wearing Appa's coat on a chilly night, like sitting before him on his bike", she recalls.

Physical intimacy with Kamat was characterised with a spontaneity and ease that she had never felt with Mohan. Kamat had once told her that the relationship between a man and a woman was the most natural of all and his "gift of casual, physical contact" had amazed her. Sex had always seemed such a momentous thing to her, but he made

her feel it was just another part of the overwhelming scheme of life. Physical intimacy remained a minor aspect of their relationship; more important was the intuitive understanding and friendship between them.

It is no wonder that she feels heartbroken when he dies suddenly one afternoon, unattended and alone. But all that she can do is slink away, scared to acknowledge her clandestine relationship before the world. The self-imposed calm after the event results in crying secretly in the bath: “the tears had cascaded over. It had been like a sudden haemorrhage. The racking sobs tore me apart as I had tried to contain them.”

Deshpande’s protagonists raise their voice against the traditional role models of daughter, sister, mother and wife. They refuse to be the objects of social and cultural oppression. They are also sensitive, intelligent and career oriented middle class women of a changed time and feel suffocated in male-defined codes of life. Her protagonists revolt against social taboos. They tirelessly question the very concept of love, marriage and sex, and try to redefine human relationships. There is a quest for the self i.e. a search for identity. But their anger, their resentment against the existing system and tradition does not, however, bring them satisfaction; rather it leads to frustration, hopelessness and the sense of meaninglessness. A sense of alienation seems to sap up their energy.

Shashi Deshpande tries to explore the root cause of the fragmentation and the dichotomy of her characters. Her protagonists suffer from ego-inflation. Jaya is also a victim of ego inflation on account of her rearing. She is a convent-educated girl with a sense of being unique and extraordinary. In her childhood her father’s commitment to the demands and his encouragement led to the development of an inflated ego in her. Being a convent-educated girl she feels suffocated in the traditional role defined by patriarchal society. She is resentful against tradition and conventions but she does not give vent to her resentment. In Jaya’s case expression of anger is not a direct outburst. Her first outburst with Mohan, soon after her marriage, results in days of Mohan’s silence. Since then she adopts the strategy of silence and withdraws into it. She turns the anger on herself and in this way the anger becomes self-destructive. It is, psychologically speaking, a displaced anger or reaction. In the case of displaced aggression the person directs his negative emotions on an object or a person other than the one causing anger. Thus this other object or person becomes a scapegoat. Sometimes the expression of anger does not find a scapegoat and may turn inwards, and the person begins to blame himself for his failure.

Jaya belongs to this category. Patriarchal home, her conformist husband Mohan, the very concepts of marriage and sex are the actual objects the expression of her resentment should be directed to. Her convent education and her vision of women liberated from male chauvinism, flare up her sense of anger against these real causes of her frustration. But the traditional role-model archetypes of Sita and Gandhari, which form the other part of her psyche, force her to cling to Mohan, a traditionalist. In her parental home Ramukaka (Jaya’s paternal uncle) sketches the family tree:

“Look, Jaya, this is our branch. This is our grandfather-your great grandfather-and here is father, and then us-Laxman, Vasu and me. And here are the boys-Shridhar, Jaanu, Dinkar, Ravi...” Jaya questions the patriarchal tree: “I’m not here!” Ramukaka gets irritated and says: “How can you be here? You don’t belong to this family. You have no place here.” The loss of place in the family tree is symbolically the loss of identity, which wounds her self. She wants to find a place in Mohan’s family and heal her wound. To her surprise she finds that she is taken for granted and Mohan fails to be a “sheltering tree.”

In the moments of crisis when Mohan is in danger of being caught and defamed for some malpractice in his office, he, being a traditionalist, expects Jaya to share his anxiety, and wants that his wife should comfort him in this time of stress. But Jaya reacts differently to the situation. She finds that Mohan has lost interest in her. The disturbance in his office threatens the peace of their house as well. And now in her ancestral house in Dadar, she analyses her life and her relations with Mohan.

She has given up writing for the newspaper column “Seeta”, which symbolically means giving up her traditional role model of wife. Mohan persuades her to continue writing for the column but now she inwardly refuses to be Mohan’s wife and Rahul and Rati’s mother. Like Gandhari, she had earlier bandaged her eyes to become blind to her husband’s

faults. She says, "I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn't want to know anything. It was enough that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that we could have the things we needed."

Jaya suffers in silence. She does not express her feelings lest it should spoil her relationship with her husband. Expression of anger in silence is best evident in an incident when Mohan accuses her for no fault of hers. She wants to burst out in anger, but she fails to break her silence: "I was full of a sense of angry confusion. What was he charging me with? And, oh God, why couldn't I speak? Why couldn't I say something? I felt foolishly inadequate having nothing to offer him in exchange for all the charges he was pouring on to me... I could say nothing. I was in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a monstrously huge spear that went through me, excruciatingly painful, yet leaving me cruelly conscious."

Jaya undergoes the same experience when Mohan leaves the house in anger. She feels deserted. An utter loneliness darkens around her. Silence fails to be the protective shield and there is close contact with death. But she is conscious of Kusum whose madness drove her to suicide. Jaya escapes suicide but becomes hysteric. She walks alone and aimlessly on the streets of Bombay. But finally she goes back home.

But a change has occurred in her. All her defence mechanisms broken, she comes face to face with her 'demon' fear. Now in her terrible loneliness she understands what Kamat had meant when he had said, "the pursuit of happiness is meaningless" and loneliness is the essential condition of human existence. Everyone has to fight his own battle. The novel becomes a self-critique of Jaya. She understands that she has contributed to her victimisation. She cannot blame her husband for all the things that have happened to her. Neither total extinction of the ego nor complete conformity can help her realise her own identity. Only a balanced relationship between the ego and the self can give a stable outlook on life. Silent anger and seething resentment are not a convincing weapon for fighting our battle and leading a peaceful life. When she hears the news from Mohan that all was well and that he was coming back, she is again in danger of being trapped in the prison of marriage. But she decides that she will no longer be led by the nose. She has finally learnt how to articulate her predicament.

The novel is aptly called *That Long Silence* and it depicts the plight of an educated Indian woman of our time. In a way the protagonist Jaya, is any modern woman who resents the husband's callousness and becomes the victim of circumstance. By implication her character represents the modern woman's ambivalent attitude towards marriage. Deshpande hints at the modern woman's refusal to comply with the wishes of the husband. Jaya is both individual and type and the reader is free to take her in any manner he likes.

In *That Long Silence* the most important attribute of Jaya is silence. In fact in many of her novels this seems to be the main theme. Whether it is the forced silence of a rape victim or that of a subjugated woman. Silence is present in many forms and often there is a desire to break "that long silence" of these characters in her novels. But most of her protagonists are able to transform their silences through writing in most cases. Many of them write poems, plays and columns for women's magazines. On the periphery of the lives of these women, enabling them to pursue the luxury of writing, however, there are those other women who are denied speech—by the society in which they live, their family. Yet Jaya must fight her way through heartbreak and tragedy. To live is to take repeated knocks and suffer, but it's also to keep on going nevertheless. Jaya seeks to do precisely that. She is in a dark tunnel, as she knows well enough. All avenues seem to close in on her. Her husband is on the verge of losing his job and her marriage is breaking apart. "We could not go on as before", she confesses. "We had come to the end of the road."

Some Indian women writers also take a dim view of marriage. Vineeta, the heroine of Jai Nimbkar's *Temporary Answers* (1974), is suddenly thrown into a world of men after the sudden death of her husband. She distrusts most of them, but finds affection and understanding to some degree from Abhijit, a college professor and playwright. She does not hesitate from establishing physical intimacy with him but recoils when he becomes over-protective. She says, "We must stand alone, complete in ourselves, before we could meet in marriage."

The novel shows progression as the protagonist undergoes a kind of transformation through self-recognition. She

makes an introspective study in the end and asks the question: "What have I achieved by this writing?" She gets an easy answer to this question: "Well, I've achieved this. I am not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that this kind of fragmentation is not possible." Having realised her position, Jaya would not accept the earlier image of a pair of bullocks yoked together signalling a loveless couple.

Deshpande makes us hope that a slightly different Jaya will return to the Churchgate bungalow. "I'm not afraid anymore," Jaya affirms with confidence. "The panic has gone." Elaborating, she adds, she would no more mutilate herself to please Mohan. She will stop making servile adjustments in life. She decides that henceforth she will be more objective, ready to take the blame where it is due rather than finding convenient scapegoats, whether in the form of Mohan or somebody else. She knows that the journey henceforth will not be easy: it would be a highly challenging one. Self-transformation is never easy to accomplish. "We don't change overnight," she concedes. "It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time" but Jaya is optimistic that her life will find fulfilment someday. The traditional Indian wisdom stands Jaya in good stead at this juncture. The words from the *Bhagavadgita*: "Yathechchasi tatha kur (Do as you desire)" appeal to her after her moment of illumination. She comes to realise that life has to be made possible. The earlier impulsive Jaya becomes a mature woman. And with her realisation "the wheel has turned a full circle" and the shadow that existed between the husband and wife tends to disappear.

Myth and Folklore in *That Long Silence*

One of the most enjoyable features of Deshpande's writing is the unselfconscious use of literary allusions, myth and folklore, which seamlessly meshed her work with earlier literature. In *That Long Silence* (1988) Maitreyee and Yagnavalkya, the wife with the enquiring and probing mind and her legendary philosopher husband, are evoked as naturally as Sonia and Raskolnikov and Fanny Price and Aunt Bertram. Indian writers have been greatly influenced by both Western and Indian literatures.

The fiction of Shashi Deshpande especially her novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) and *That Long Silence* offer a startlingly vivid perception of the inner world of Indian womanhood, forced to remain silent for so very long. The decolonization of the Indian creative mind is best seen in the use of myth and folklore that Deshpande makes in her fiction. Since many of her novels have women as their protagonists these devices are especially useful to the novelist as a means of illuminating the inner landscape of women's minds. Jaya and Sarita (the protagonists of *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* respectively) are educated women and have access to European literature through English. Effortless literary allusions mark their thoughts. Jaya recalls Fanny Price and Aunt Bertram when a particularly ineffective aunt of hers had given her advice on the morning of her wedding. Vanitamami holds a tray of things used in worship and she is near the Tulsi shrine in the yard of the house. The myth of Tulsi, (from the Srimadbhagvata purana) who by her selfless devotion to Krishna became an indispensable part of his worship, is part of the cultural heritage of Hindu women. This plant-deity enshrined in the Hindu households commands daily worship from women, for it is believed to free a wife from the fear of widowhood.

Another mythic ritual that is faithfully reflected is the Ganapati festival, in which everybody participates. The myth is that when Gouri, wife of Shiva went to have a bath, she gave birth to a child from the sweat of her body to guard on the door while she was bathing. Shiva returned and was obstructed from going inside to meet his wife. In his fury he cut off the head of the child. But on realising the truth and to please the disconsolate Gouri, Shiva promises to revive him provided a head is found of someone sleeping with his head to the north. An elephant was found and thus his head was put on the body of Ganapati who came to be known as "remover of obstacles." So every year the images of Ganapati are worshipped and immersed in water. The god represents prosperity and togetherness. In *That Long Silence*, this ritual is described at the end of the novel when Jaya goes with Manda to talk to the doctor regarding Manda's father. Such festivals play a very important role in the perpetuation of cultural harmony. It binds a human being to his culture, religion and country. Deshpande does not use myth as an embellishment or to make her novels

ethnic or exotic. Myths, legends, folklore are deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche. They are expressed naturally and spontaneously. One of the best instances of the pervasive influence of myths is found in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, where the story of Dhruva serves as an analogue to Sarita's story.

King Uttanapada had two sons by his two wives. Dhruva, the son of Suniti, was sitting in the lap of his father when Suruchi, the younger wife, pushed him so that her own son could sit there. A hurt and bewildered Dhruva went to his mother, who told him to pray to the father of all mortals. The child's prayers were answered by Vishnu who made him into the North Star. In the novel, Sarita too had a younger brother named Dhruva. As a child she was jealous of the attention given to a son. After she hears the story of Dhruva, she pushes Dhruva off her father's lap. On being questioned about this rude act, she replied that she wanted to see whether Dhruva turned into the North Star. In a child's mind there is no distinction between myth and reality. Her intense dislike for her brother continues through their childhood. When he does drown, Sarita is held responsible for it. Her mother bitterly says, "Why are you alive when he is dead?" To Sarita, it is like being pushed off her parent's lap again. Dhruva's death results in a rejection of her as a child and this curse of rejection pursues her throughout her life. In her married life as well the shadows of forgotten ancestors, mythic and real continue to haunt her. Her children, the elder a girl and the younger a son, behave in much the same way as she and her brother did as children.

Sarita learns of her mother's death and goes to visit her father. While she waits for the door to open she thinks of the myth of Krishna and Sudama. Sarita wonders why the story came into her mind, for she herself was no Sudama in rags. This seemingly inconsequential detail illuminates her inner world, which contrasts so sharply with her outward prosperity and success. Career, marriage, motherhood, freedom and success have not given Sarita what she has craved for. Manohar's mindless savagery, her children's rivalry and the meaningless routine of everyday life have created in her an undefined longing to belong and to be wanted, something that has eluded her all her life. Her mother only sees her as an object that will one day go to her husband's house, which is kept with her parents as a loan, to be trained as a wife.

A reticent person, Sarita's mother had almost stopped speaking but liked her husband to read to her from the epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. To an uneducated woman, ill and dying, only the large verities could hold any meaning. An unhappy and deprived childhood, marriage, the loss of a much loved young son and the estrangement of the daughter—these were the facts of Kamala's life. When her husband read to her, it was the episode of Duryodhana, the Kaurava king, at the end of the epic battle that especially caught her attention. She asks him to read it once again and makes one of her rare remarks: "Yes, that's what we all have to face in the end. That we are alone. We have to be alone."

The themes of domination and cunning are illustrated in *That Long Silence* through a folktale, i.e. the story of the Sparrow and the Crow. The provident little sparrow builds her house of wax and the foolish crow a house of dung that melts in the rain. The crow comes knocking at the sparrow's door. The sparrow takes her time opening the door—she is bathing her baby, feeding it and putting it to bed, and finally, the crow is let in and directed to the roasting pan to warm himself where he predictably perishes. In another version, the crow eats up the sparrow's provisions, fouls the place and flies away. In short, the sparrow is virtuous, the crow is not. Jaya, the narrator of *That Long Silence*, thinks it is an ugly and sadistic story to be told to children. "I have a feeling that even if little boys can forget this story, little girls never will. They will store this story in their subconscious, their little unconscious or whatever, and eventually they will become that damnably, insufferably priggish sparrow looking after their homes, their babies... and to hell with the rest of the world. Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you are safe... I know better now...you're never safe." Jaya did precisely this for many years and when misfortune like a crow came knocking at her door, she ignored it for as long as it was possible to do so. Once she admitted misfortune, her troubles began. But Jaya's story like the sparrow's has a happy ending. Her husband returns, his job secure again, her missing son is located and all is well.

A significant myth used by Deshpande is that of Gandhari from the *Mahabharata*. Gandhari, on realising that her husband was blind, tied a cloth around her eyes out of her own volition. She did so out of a sense of duty as a wife.

A wife must be inferior or at par with the husband. Gandhari's eyes and her vision would make her superior to her husband. In the novel, Jaya too blinds herself to the goings on in the house. She is blind to the relationship between Mohan and her. She seems to be concerned only about her luxury. Because of her blindness she cannot even see herself: she is far removed from reality. While Gandhari's blindness was self-imposed—a duty of a wife for a husband, Jaya's blindness is because of apathy: because she cannot take any action against her miserable condition. Therefore she chooses not to see whatever is painful for her. Thus Jaya is not only silent but also blind albeit metaphorically. Shashi Deshpande thus makes extensive use of mythic allusions and parallels in her fiction. Even a less important early work like *Come Up And Be Dead* has a fascinating strand of mythic material. In her short stories like "The Last Warrior", "My Beloved Charioteer" and "Seetha"—also she has drawn upon material from mythology in order to reinterpret it. But her most subtle and successful use of myth and folklore is to be found in her mature novels where they sustain and illuminate narration. Shashi Deshpande has created a familiar world anew in which authentic experiences of the interior landscape of Indian women are powerfully projected through devices like myths and folktales.

The English Language

In *That Long Silence*, it is clearly stated that Mohan wants to marry a girl who can speak fluent English. The role of English and the power it gives to people belonging to certain section of society and the cultural elevation which the ability to speak English fluently can guarantee, is a factor to be reckoned with in the Indian middle class today. Here English remains a language that apparently keeps one in touch with the upwardly mobile. For a man like Mohan in *That Long Silence*, this language brings the hope of a movement within the rigid structure of society. It is a movement from the small town to a metropolitan city like Bombay, and it is a movement from being 'uncultured' to being 'cultured.' It is Mohan's desire to marry a girl who could speak English, or as Jaya's brother puts it, it his desire to marry "an educated, cultured girl." This is the only reason why Mohan agrees to marry her. His own fantasy for an English-speaking wife arises from the house-warming ceremony of his patron's house where he, for the first time in his life comes across women who could talk in the language as if it were a real language. He remembers, "They spoke it as if it were a real language, easily and fluently, you know, quite unlike the English I'd heard till then. They stood in the doorway for a while—from the way our host fawned upon them, I imagine they were rich relations. As they were leaving, the girl said something. I can't remember what she said, but I can remember how wonderful it seemed to me to be able to talk like that, to be so...easy and...confident and how terrible it was to be shut out...to be different."

It was Jaya's father (Appa) who sent his children to the convent school (the connotation being that it is a school run by Catholic nuns, in which the medium of instruction is English). It is her father who has the opinion that English is going to be more helpful to his children than "being good Brahmins" and it is indeed this decision which ultimately makes Jaya "ready for Mohan." This identification of English with culture, education, with a liberalising effect is not peculiar to Mohan. It is something, which has afflicted generations of post-independence India. It is not just Mohan who tries to improve his position in society by marrying a woman who can speak fluent English. As Jaya herself puts it, Mohan's ideas are amusing "today when even Jeeja and Tara are planning to send Tara's two sons to an English school."

The power wielded by the English language, by the people who call themselves educated, who see themselves differently because of their ability to talk in this language is a sign that the discourse of colonialism has to read texts not only the texts of empire but also the texts produced after the official ending of the foreign rule. If Mohan and his desire to possess respectability and privilege given by the English language is not regarded as positive by the critical Jaya, there are distinct moments in this and the other novels of Shashi Deshpande, when one could clearly point out the influence of a particular set of books written or translated into English.

Concluding Perspectives

The tradition-oriented Indian society has experienced various changes in the last six and seven decades. The processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and secularism have brought about political, economic, cultural and social changes in the life styles and attitudes of the people of this country, especially among the urban population. One of the fundamental

and far-reaching social changes brought about after India's independence has been the emancipation of women from their tradition-ridden ethos, which has resulted in the participation of women in male dominated professions.

The socio-economic emancipation of women in India has brought in its train changes in their status and outlook. The widely affected area of this change has been the vital relationship between man and woman. The concepts of love, marriage and sex have undergone a lot of change. Woman, who was dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural and sexual roles assigned to her drawn from the patriarchal India, is now gaining strength to rebel against the social and cultural oppressions. But at the same time she fails to reject totally her social and cultural background. She stands therefore at the crossroads, caught between tradition and modernity.

Shashi Deshpande, in all her novels, has dealt with the problems of new women. She has specially concentrated on the theme of meaninglessness and sexual confusion suffered by women in tradition-oriented institutions. The reality of modern Indian woman is that even to the basic needs of life like love, marriage and sex, she is in state of utter confusion. Coming out of home she has seen and experienced the world on her own and therefore has developed different attitudes towards this aspect of life. These attitudes sometimes reject the tradition and sometimes rebel against them. That is why she feels a kind of imbalance between the traditional expectations and her new sexual demands. In this process she suffers questions and looks for answers. Shashi Deshpande projects the reality of such women and tries to resolve their dilemmas.

In novel after novel Deshpande has dwelt on the native cultural scene and presented a faithful picture of familial, marital and filial bonds in the Indian society. She deals with love between married couples of different higher and lower categories, love among themselves, love between children and parents, relationships of grandfathers and grandmothers, the family bond of the typical Hindu society, family under traditional feudal days and modern times. The novels present corporate solidarity of different related Hindu families as one integrated family, inalienable joint participation in the woe and weal of an individual and family by all close relatives.

Shashi Deshpande is unlike Jane Austen in painting the human spectacle. The latter paints the comedy of human life whereas the former depicts the serious, the painful, and the agonising aspect of life verging on the tragic.

Shashi Deshpande is certainly aware of a woman's predicament in male-dominated society, especially when she is educated but not economically independent. The society presented in *That Long Silence* is one going through changes where at least the upper middle class women have some choices. The novel reacts against the traditional concept of the fact that everything a girl does should be to please a man. Though there are references to the feminist movement and British novels but Shashi Deshpande does not get trapped in the framework of the Women's Liberation Movement in the West.

The novel does not limit itself to woman's problems. With the woman as the central figure, Shashi Deshpande probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships, man's tragic aloneness, and so on. Even Jaya, who sees the ultimate human reality in the human body and its processes of decay, sees aloneness as a painful but inescapable human condition. Jaya is gifted with a double vision and she is as critical of herself as of others. All along it is the woman's point of view that is presented and there is no sentimentalising. This is a remarkable achievement for a writer who belongs to the suppressed sex.

That Long Silence ambivalently reconstructs gender roles as the female protagonist is constantly, and often unconsciously, in search of an inner space. This search is instrumental in the reconstruction of gender identity. Central to the novel is the motif of home and family relationships, which establishes the ambivalent aspect of female gender construction. The novel projects the post-modern dilemma of a woman who strongly resents the onslaught on her individuality and identity. The antagonism was from her husband. In fact there are many times when Jaya talks about her relationship with her husband using violent vocabulary. Mohan represents the patriarchal viewpoint.

A good storyteller that Shashi Deshpande is, she presents the predicament of women in such a way as would voice her concerns for problems and perils of those of her sex. But she is not self-conscious. Further her female characters

contain larger and universal connotations. She depicts very effectively as to what happens to women after marriage. What they have been, what they have become, and what is in store for them. On the surface all is well with her middle class women. They have a relatively happy life and their husbands are well placed in life. They are also blessed with children in most cases. Yet there is something rotten in the state of their domestic and married life for which to some extent their husbands are responsible. Education, economic independence, and motherhood disturb the existing equation. The real problem, however, does not lie in either wifehood or motherhood but in the attitude of the middle-class male who negates the woman's identity the moment she becomes his wife. In most of her novels marriage seems to have failed or reached the point of wreckage, in spite of education, economic independence and material well being. It is the middle class mentality that prevents them from revolting against the tyranny.

The middle-class woman of today is not merely educated: she is a co-breadwinner and supplements her husband's income to maintain the standard of living they aspire to provide for their children. She has thus assumed a new role herself in the wake of changing circumstances. This has however not exonerated her from the traditional role and the responsibility in the family which, in addition to her career-consciousness, has led to severe problems of adjustment and is the main cause of agony today.

In all her novels the woman's condition remains her favourite theme. In *That Long Silence* she continues this strain of thought. Jaya examines her state of existence and resists from being defined with reference to her husband-as a footnote to him that compliments but has no independent existence. Her agony however does not bog down Jaya for long. The novel surely has positive suggestions to offer. Jaya places her trust in self-confidence and the possibility of human interdependence.

Jaya seeks to "reposition the stars", looking hopefully into the future. The return to the Dadar flat was like a homecoming for her where she does not feel vulnerable. While the heroines of Shobha De or Nimbkar walk out of marriage or refuse to enter it, Deshpande with her innate pragmatism as well as her traditional middle class background does not take rebellion against a male dominated world to a bitter end. Marriage may not offer the best of all possible worlds to a man and woman, yet in the present dispensation it is more or less essential and must be made to work, for neither a man nor a woman is complete in himself or herself. Both biologically and emotionally they need each other and if they can develop a harmonious relationship, so much the better. Even Jaya begins to realise this and anxiously waits the return of Mohan. She even visits their former Churchgate home in search of him. She also re-links herself with the past accepting its bittersweet memories.

Deshpande gives an unexpected twist to the plot at the end. The preceding events lead us to feel that the marriage of Jaya and Mohan is tottering on the verge of collapse. Mohan has left her never to return, but we subsequently find out that he has only gone off to Delhi to try and get reinstated in his job. He succeeds in his efforts and sends a happy telegraphic message to that effect. The message implies that he too wants to get back to his married life with Jaya, the strains and stresses of the past notwithstanding. Thus both Jaya and Mohan have been busy trying to salvage a collapsing union. Maitreyee may aspire for nothing short of immortality, but Jaya is content "just to live" and to know "that at the end of the day my family and I are under a roof, safe, enclosed, in a secure world."

Through the female characters of her novels Shashi Deshpande gets to the root of existence itself. Male or female, there is a divide within ourselves that lead us to love or hate, to be gentle and good and at the same time become an agent of cruelty. This is the message of the novel that it is human nature that is hardest to bridge. A search for 'self' necessarily implies an individual's quest for identity in this distracting world. It is self-analysis and a self-probe into the existential problems of a woman. In Deshpande's fiction, the traditional and taboo-ridden Indian society provides little scope for the independent growth of a woman. Consequently, she has to undergo a number of restrictions and inhibitions, originating from her terribly controlled life during her childhood, youth, and old age. This kind of an attitude is neither reasonable nor appropriate for the fulfilment of womankind; it totally negates the great wisdom and courage

displayed by our womenfolk in the illustrious past, forgetting all about Gargi and Maitreyi. A search for self is a very valid point of departure for modern Indian women from the shackles of society, for it enables them to throw away the superstitious customs and rituals and to instil a sense of dignity and self-respect in their lives. Thematically she dwells on desperation, frustration, misunderstanding and incompatibility, sense of guilt and loss of face, loneliness and alienation of a sensitive woman pitted against an ill-mated marriage and hostile circumstances. As A.G Amur remarks, “women’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find, preserve her identity as wife, mother and, most important of all as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer...”

Shashi Deshpande’s relentless search for ‘self’ in her fiction shows that she has largely confined herself to problems and tortures of the female world. Nowhere does she encourage her protagonists to rise in rebellion against the males of the family matters; instead, she wants to build a harmonious relationship between man and woman in a spirit of give and take, in a mood of compromise and reconciliation. She maintains that man and woman are like two wheels of a chariot, and that no chariot can race forward if either of the wheels goes out of order. A proper co-ordination, a reasonable, mutual understanding between husband and wife is essential for a happy married life. But according to some critics Shashi Deshpande as a feminist writer has put on blinders. Like a slum photographer who would refuse to waste his plate on anything that is not sordid, she stays away from what is bright and happy in a woman’s life. There are families and situations where a woman plays a pivotal role. This she ignores or lets go by. She chooses to bring into focus the weak, woeful woman. This, however, she has done with commendable success.

Shashi Deshpande is often asked as to why she writes only about women. The critics call her writing feminist propaganda but she vociferously denies any such intention. She finds it strange that any women’s writing is branded as feminist. According to her, “it’s like saying that when a man writes of the particular problems a man is facing, he’s writing male propaganda. Nobody says that. Why is it said only about women writers?” She asserts that she writes from the viewpoint of a woman. To the experiences of the female protagonist she brings her own experiences. Her own anger at certain issues is illustrated in her fiction.

Deshpande’s fictional achievement should not be seen in terms of her subscription or non-subscription to feminism, for a writer of some substance is committed to human situation and not necessarily to any ideology. She, for herself, chooses the path of conciliation without succumbing either to absolute acquiescence or to the temptations of embracing the feminist mould, which she would have with slight manipulation of her creative endeavour. Her works mediate between the existing state of women and the feminist consciousness. However, her insights and depth of perception ensure that her fictional creations rise above the staple ideological work and go on to become serious reflections on the human condition with particular focus on the perils and predicament of her sex in their world.

Questions

1. Trace the thematic concerns of Shashi Deshpande’s novels with special reference to *That Long Silence*.
2. In *That Long Silence* the women characters are prisoners by choice. Do you agree or disagree with this statement. Illustrate your answer by using suitable examples from the text.
3. How does Shashi Deshpande deal with the institution of marriage and motherhood in *That Long Silence*?
4. Does *That Long Silence* go beyond women’s issues or does its concerns extend to larger human problems?
5. *That Long Silence* is primarily about the power politics that operates in a marriage to a woman’s disadvantage. Illustrate this statement with suitable examples from the text.
6. *That Long Silence* is a light feminist text, as it does not have any radical feminist propaganda. Justify this statement according to your reading of the text.
7. Do you think that *That Long Silence* is a typical Indian novel or are there elements of universality in it?
8. *That Long Silence* is a novel in which death and desolation pervades. Comment.

9. Analyse the use of imagery and metaphors in *That Long Silence*.

Write short notes on the following perspectives:

- a) Jaya-Kamat relationship
- b) Mohan's insecurities
- c) The importance of the poor characters
- d) Use of myth in *That Long Silence*
- e) The metaphor of silence in the novel

Suggested Reading

1. Deshpande, Shashi. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Delhi: Penguin India, 1990
2. Pathak, R.S. Ed. *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1998
3. King, Adle. "Shashi Deshpande: Portraits of an Indian Woman," *The New Indian Novel in English*, ed. Viney Kirpal, Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1990, pp. 165-66
4. Dhawan, R.K. *Indian Women Novelists*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991
5. Sandhu, Sarabjit. *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. New Delhi: Prestige Books
6. Sebastian, Mrinalini. *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Postcolonial Arguments*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2000
7. Bharvani, Shakuntala. "Some Recent Trends in Modern Indian Fiction: A study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*." *Indian Women Novelists*, ed. R.K. Dhawan, Set I, Vol. I, 20-31.
8. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. London: David Campbell Publishers, 1993.