

## INTRODUCTION

The novelists studied in this thesis share the female space in two ways: first because they are all women writers and secondly because they write about women. The main characters in their novels obviously are women. These women are sensitive human beings gauging the social reality around them. The sense through which they look at the world is tainted with a peculiar sensibility which I have called 'feminine sensibility', a heightened sense of perception which acts as a catalyst in charting the oscillograph of woman's inner life. Feminine sensibility, though contributory to the making of feminism, is not feminism per se. Primarily, it is that feeling which differentiates the female from the male in sphere of emotions: women are more involved with human kinship. To them emotional bindings are more fulfilling than to men as men's emotional needs are not as intense as those of women's.

Similarly, remembrance of things past, also occupies a large territory of the female space. Writing of diaries, journals and private fictions, preservation of family histories, and legends, narration of folk tales in the privacy of a hearth has been primarily a female territory since time immemorial.

Of all the human emotions love is supposed to be the governing factor of feminine psyche. It could therefore be called the moving spirit behind feminine sensibility, which involves round the family nexus and human relationships; the two

territories of the female space inhabited by almost all the characters in the novels under study.

To give a historical perspective, this study in the first Chapter presents an account of the status of the women in Indian and American societies. With the help of a host of literary and religious texts from the Vedic ages to the present, the study identifies two traditions in India--the "great tradition" of the twice-born Brahmins and the "little tradition" of the non-Brahmin castes. As the great tradition was essentially literate and elitist in nature, it excluded women from its discourse. Hence, women in ancient and medieval India (except the Vedic or Pre-Vedic India) have always belonged to the little tradition, which has denied them the status given to the Brahmins and the upper caste males. The cult of the Devi, though a part of "little tradition", gives spiritual status to women, but it does not give them a socio-economic status. As the feminine principle is held high in the Devi cult, the woman is supposed to have a high social status, but the denial of socio-economic freedom pushes her invariably in the "little tradition" even when she is born Brahmin. Consequently the woman is always in a state of conflict, constantly divided between the two traditions.

The black American women live in the doubly enslaved white, patriarchal racist society. Their lot is to suffer, struggle and be silent. Black American women called "the mule of the world", has the status of the wretched of the earth. Extending the thesis of the great and the little Indian traditions to black American

society. The black American women can be placed in the "little tradition" which belittled their status below that of a male slave. Doubly oppressed in a racist society, the black American women like her Indian counterpart has maintained a tradition of tolerance, patience and persistence. This tradition of a passive resistance to male oppression developed by Indian women over a long period of time forms the basis of feminine sensibility discussed earlier.

The question of resistance to oppression is studied in Chapter three of this thesis. This resistance, offered by the rebellious heroines in novels under discussion, originates in the feminine sensibility of these characters who attempt to order the fictional world in their own way. Nanda Kaul in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* rebels against the way of life in which her very existence is controlled by the needs of others and also against an overcrowded, mundane, monotonous existence. The female protagonists of Desai are deemed inferior and are emotionally vulnerable. From such a position she tries to make an imaginative escape through rebellion. The rebel who strikes us among all the women characters of Desai and Sahgal is Sonali in *Rich Like Us*. She rebels against the hollow ostentation in the social fabric. Her rebellion is both personal and socio-political.

Almost all the heroines of Alice Walker are rebellious in nature, but their rebellion has a feminine quality of understanding and wisdom. It is through her feminine sensibility

that Mem Copeland in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, though in rebellion against an unjust social order, attempts "to be whole". The heroine of *Meridian* is a radical who owns nothing. She rebels against the system only to find herself trapped in male politics which she finally rejects for finding a creative role for herself. Walter in this novel presents a new angle of seeing motherhood through Meridian's perspective. Rebellion thus leads to creativity. Similarly Toni Morrison's Pilate, Sula and Claudia rebel for finding a creative role for themselves. All these female rebels in the novels under study are in search of an expression of their creativity and self-worth.

The genesis of these heroines' rebellion can be traced in their oppression in their respective societies. Female oppression therefore is the subject of discussion in the Fourth Chapter.

Black women novelists portray the sexual and racial injustice done to black women with an insider's touch. Morrison and Walter reveal the oppression of black heroines like Pecola, Sula, Mem, Meridian and Celie. They are victimized within and without the black community. Mem is a "slave of a slave". Racial and sexual oppression destroy her body and spirit. Walter portrays the "multidimensional assault" of her heroines in her novels vividly. The narratives of Walter mirror the faith, hopes, values, tragedies, failures and celebrations of an oppressed community. Walter's heroines, Mem and Margaret Copeland represent the burdens heaped upon them by society and by family. Mem wits under the sexual oppression of Brownfield's her husband, and

accepts him in total passivity and blankness "like a church". Nonetheless, Mem struggles heroically to overcome the sexual oppression by fighting back Brownfield. Mem strives to surmount her double oppression by exercising her will to live her own life. Her feminine sensibility lends a touch to her house and turns it into a home. She hates to leave a home, as and when the white master dictates. In *Meridian* Waller depicts the oppression of the woman on the basis of her sex. Mrs. Hill, *Meridian*, mother feels that motherhood means "becoming distracted from herself." Her personal life, as it seems to her, is over as she becomes a mother. Alice Waller's celebrated novel, *The Color Purple* projects female oppression of black women at physical, sexual and psychological levels. The devastating idea of western, white standards of physical beauty impairs the self-worth of Celie. Similarly, Pecola and Pauline Breedlove are oppressed beyond redemption because of the dominant culture's prevailing norms of beauty and romance.

Morrison has depicted the oppression of young black girls in *The Bluest Eye*. The narrative is charged with poignancy which recalls the horror experienced after reading the Greek tragedies. The female oppression can be seen moving in a vicious circle with regard to Pecola and Pauline. Pauline Breedlove is an artist at heart. She is oppressed by racist, sexist and classist norms of the white society. In return she gives the fullest measure of her misery to her daughter Pecola. Thus, in the narratives of Waller and Morrison we see the black woman as the "other" who is the perfect scapegoat.

The Color Purple by Walker depicts Celie's grim oppression at the outset. Gradually the heroine; Celie, learns to value herself. Her feminine sensibility takes the better of herself and she forms a female bonding with Shug Avery. It serves as a bulwark against Celie's multiple oppression in Albert's house. Shug helps Celie not only in overcoming her oppression, but also proves catalytic in concretizing her creative potential. Celie achieves a sense of self-worth by love of self. It invigorates her to overcome the oppression she undergoes for a long period of time. The religious faith and practices sustain black women's efforts to oppose the many facets of oppression. The Color Purple enhances our insight into the nature of black women's oppression. The novel also suggests means of restructuring morality, spirituality and aesthetics to overcome black women's oppression. ✓

Compared to her black American counterpart, Indian women's oppression is more psychological than physical. Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal portray the oppression of Monisha, Sila, Maya, Saroj, Rashmi and Sonali in a male dominated society. The custom, and traditions prove too stifling for these sensitive heroines. These novels provide an insight into a peculiar kind of female oppression where the victim and the victimizer are female. The joint family system proves an ideal breeding ground for female oppression.

Voices in the City captures Monisha's acute sensitive being pitted against the harsh inmates of her in-laws' family. She throbs with quivering sensitivity, but the stolid husband hardly reciprocates Monisha's need for affection or companionship. She

becomes a prey to the oppression at two levels: the male oriented set up compels her to marry. But in her matrimony there is hardly any love or understanding on the part of the male. At another level Monisha's existence is monitored by her female relations at her in-laws. She falls an easy prey to the politics par excellence within her own household. At times the checkmate is either her own mother-in-law or sister-in-law. She feels choked emotionally, as she being a woman of finer sensitivity cannot withstand the crude remarks passed by other women about her looks, when all her "necessaries moist with blood" are "laid bare to their scrutiny". The horror of living an empty life, "dedicated to nothing" adds to Monisha's psychological oppression. The intensity of Monisha and her brother Nirodo's experiences conveys the torture Monisha undergoes in her in-laws house. Life Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Monisha feels trapped and her voice is completely stifled. Her self-esteem is continuously assaulted in the huge household, under one or the other pretext. Desai deftly delineates female oppression which is not violent, nonetheless violates humanity. In the end, Monisha feels utterly dejected and commits suicide.

Aunt Mira is another representative character in *Clear Light of Day*. She is a widow in her in-laws' house who has aged in her youth. Miramasi (mother's sister) is one of Desai's most memorable and pathetic portrayals of woman oppressed geometrically in the complex web of Indian society. She is denied any self-esteem in her in-laws' house, because she is believed to be the root cause of her husband's early death, who went for study to England. The

sheer authority and cruelty perpetrated by the in-laws on women is reflected in Desai's fictional universe. Aunt Hira's in-laws proclaim that the death of her husband is brought about by her "unfortunate horoscope". This belief, so deep rooted in the psyche of an average Hindu mind, is well captured in Cry, the Peacock as well as in Clear Light of day. The blind beliefs and tradition operate against the women, their dignity and aspirations in Hindu society. Reading between lines we can perceive that a widow in the Hindu society is the most neglected, oppressed and exploited being, at the hands of men and women, children and servants.

Nanda Kaul, the dignified, sari-clad wife of the Vice-chancellor is another woman who is oppressed, but her oppression is more psychological. She is humiliated as a woman by her husband, who has a liaison with the mathematics teacher, Mrs. David. Thus, the woman has to fight oppression at more than one levels. Nanda Kaul is oppressed in her own huge household, whereas her childhood friend Ila Das is a study in female oppression of a very grim kind. She is assailed and murdered by the respectable man who favours child marriage, which Ila Das tries not to take place in the village where she works as a social welfare officer.

Nazimova Saligal's portrayal of Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh reveals another aspect of the woman's life and her humdrum existence. The infidelity of the husband is not to be reprimanded in patriarchal society. Saroj, the homely housewife of Inder is hardly allowed to live her inner life as Inder has no compunction



for his extra-marital relationship with Mrs. Sonali Pandey, too feels oppressed in the world of men, where intrigues and corruption hold sway. Her devotion and commitment to the cause of nation's progress are made defunct in such a corrupt society as the one we encounter in Rich Life Us. All these women live on the fringes of both the male and the female worlds. This state leads the heroines of Dasa and Solgal to alienation.

The black woman is alienated from the white society because of the color line, and from the male dominated black society; because of her sex. The female protagonists in the novels of Morrison and Walker are denied political and economic power and remain alienated in the hierarchical society. The Fifth Chapter deals with the theme of alienation from the perspective of Indian and Black American women. The Bluest Eye portrays the fractured self of Pecola and alienation of her mother, Pauline Breedlove graphically. Psychologically, Pauline feels alienated as she migrates from her rural southern homeland to the northern city. But, the most poignant aspect of her alienation is her drifting away from black values. She imbibes white cultural norms and values through the world of "silver screen". She longs for the beauty, order, and praise which she visualizes in white homes. Pecola's alienation ensues because she is not seen as a person by both, the white and the black society, but is reduced to an object, unworthy of any attention, love or praise including her mother. The Bluest Eye is a novel, which can be read at myriad levels, one among them is female alienation. Morrison gives the most moving portrayal of alienation of Pecola as she lapses into

insanely. Sula reveals the emotional isolation of adolescent black-girls in black community of the Bottom. Sula is a rebel, who struggles to "make herself". Through her varied experiences in and outside the Bottom, Sula experiences alienation. She learns that there is no one, not even her close friend Nel or her mother who can be a true compatible companion to herself. Pilate in Song of Solomon also leads alienated life, as she does not think the values and standards of white middle class society compatible to her way of life. The technological advancement brings forth alienation and the malaise seems all pervading under the guise of progress in black and Indian societies.

In the novels of Desai women remain marginal, because they have little power in the joint, patriarchal family system. The female protagonists in Desai and Sanghal are not only existential outsiders but also social outsiders within the matrix of their small world of family and the larger society. Maya in Cry, the Peacock, Monisha in Voices in the City, Sula in Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain Or Bim in Clear Light of Day experience a sense of alienation. Most of these heroines feel alienated because they do not agree to live their lives like other women who live "ordinary dull life at low pressures". Like Maya and Sula, Sonali and Sonia in Sanghal's Rich Like us and Storm in Chandigarh are educated, sensitive, middle class women who long to live their lives to the full and want to share the worlds of their husbands. But the male dominated world they live in, has no place for them as intelligent, sensitive individuals endowed with feminine sensibility. The traditional

society forces these heroines to live according to the traditional roles ascribed to women.

The young daughters-in-law, as delineated in Desai have no power in joint family system where there exists an inherent hierarchy of elderly women in-law. These young heroines have no access to attain their personhood and no outlet for their creative urge. Heroines like Sita feel thwarted and alienated in her own small world in metropolis and craves for fulfillment. She discovers her alienation in the peculiar social reality.

Thus, Morrison, Waller, Desai and Sahgal treat their heroines with deep understanding and in the process of creating a world of their own articulate inner and outer realities of women's existence. These women novelists are tellers of stories, so far untold by male writers, in a distinctive manner. They authentically transmute uncertainties, complexities and paradoxes which thwart women in two different cultures through their novels. These master craftswomen tell their tales in a unique manner by using techniques and vision which embody feminine sensibility.

The ~~Sixth~~ Chapter is devoted to the study of the vision of the novelists under study. They accommodate their feminine sensibility in their narrative which is discernible in the use of their language and techniques and point of view. Sahgal authentically employs historical documents to reveal the predicament of women in Hindu society in past and juxtaposes it with present reality. Desai's poetic imagination is revealed in

the delineation of the innerworld of her heroines. She uses the stream of consciousness technique, flash backs and interior monologues for exploring the inner worlds of Haya in Cry, the Peacock and Bim in Clear Light of Day. Her prose is charged with poetic grandeur. She excels in her use of imagery. The intense experiences of her heroines are conveyed by the use of language, moulded for her purpose is unforgettable. The references to music, art and poetry reveal her as the connoisseur in all her novels. The delineation of the experiences of her heroines invest all the senses: that of taste and hearing, seeing, smell and touch. Such a condition call for the reader's participation in the narratives. Morrison uses a highly metaphorical language. She invests names of places and people which symbolize the jeopardy of the black existence in the white society. In each of her novels, she employs different technique and establishes herself as an innovator in narrative strategy. Lola Morrison excels as a story teller and a craftswoman who employs a specific language, specific symbols and images with which she renders life experiences which come to fruition in her novels: The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon and Tar Baby. Alice Walker does employ the epistolary form of novel to establish the sovereignty of black woman in The Color Purple. She moulds the form of the novel in such a way that it becomes an excellent expression of the feminine sensibility of its protagonist; Celie, who writes letters in black pen. Thus, these women novelists have achieved a rare distinction in the genre of novel and made it their own, charged with feminine sensibility.

## CHAPTER I

### WOMEN IN INDIAN AND BLACK AMERICAN SOCIETY

#### (I)

The Indian sub-continent with its diversities has a long cultural and social history of women's position in society. Over many centuries, a host of literary and religious texts have depicted the position of women in Hindu society. All great works of classical Hindu literature belong to the line of tradition which McKim, following Robert Redfield, has called the "great tradition" in contrast to the "little tradition" (Mies 38).

The "great tradition" was upheld by a small class of 'twice-born' Brahmins who had monopolised education and literary activities. They enjoyed the patronage of royal families which enabled them to live in courts in cities. This "great tradition" is corroborated by the Vedas and Brahmans, the two great epics: the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

It is worthwhile to note that the "little tradition" is like an undercurrent to the mainstream of "great tradition". It is also called 'particularistic'. To the elite in the cities it reflects the social, religious and cultural life of the illiterate masses living in villages. Besides it often revolves around a local god or 'a mythical hero' (Mies 197). It is diametrically opposed to the "great tradition" as the literary productions of the "little tradition" are legends, songs, stories, anecdotes, proverbs etc. in the regional languages which

are mostly handed down orally.

If literary education is a marked trait of the "great tradition" then as Mies states the "women of all castes and not only of the non-Sanskritized castes are excluded" (39) from it. It is a well-known phenomenon that until the mid-nineteenth century women were excluded from the study of the classical religious and philosophical texts. Thus, in reality women belonged to the "little tradition" which represented the culture of the illiterate masses.

Literary works of the "great tradition" have extensively recorded the prevalent views on women. They have codified the duties and rights of women, but have not described women's culture as all of them have been written by men, primarily for male readers.

It can, therefore, be said that women, like all down-trodden groups, are excluded from the "great tradition". They belong to those 'mute' masses who dwell in darkness, and who do not exist for the "great tradition", since they do not articulate themselves in writing.

However, a few questions regarding the position of ancient women in India remain unanswered in these texts. One such question, according to Mies is, whether the social reality corresponded to the norms fixed in these writings. Here the

contention is that:

the classical texts reflect what a particular literary elite, the Brahmins, thought in various epochs on the position of woman in the society, but not necessarily what the social practice was in these epochs (37-38).

The answer to such a question, obviously, is not simple. as the classical texts reflect what a particular literary elite, the Brahmins thought in various epochs, that necessarily was not the social practice during these periods.

In order to assess the status of women in the Vedic, Post-Vedic, Puranic and post-Puranic ages one has to examine various religious texts of these epochs, in which women are considered as beings belonging to the "little tradition".

*check* | Not only are the many local and regional "small traditions" of Indian villages are decisively sustained by women, but their contents are determined by many female elements. Thus to the "little tradition" belongs the cult of the "Devi", the mother-goddess, who is found in many different local and regional representations and under various names and plays a big role in village festival. ....(Mies 40).

Besides, some all-India festivals like Holi (March) and Dasserah (September-October) are celebrated in honour of

goddesses. McKim in 1957 found about ninety different deities whose cults were practised actively. Forty-five of them belonged to the "little tradition", and most of them were mother-goddesses or goddesses (Mies 40).

It is an established fact that in India the cult of the "Devi" is older than that of the Aryan and mainly masculine Hindu deities. The cult of the Magna Mater in her various aspects existed in India before the Aryan invasion and has survived in the "little tradition". A popular representation of the 'Devi' in the "little tradition" is Sitala Devi, the goddess of contagious diseases, particularly of smallpox, which is also called "visit of the goddess" (Mies 40).

Feminine principle is hailed high in the Devi-cult, which assumed the status of "little tradition" with the predominance of the "great tradition" of the Aryans.

An initiation through a spiritual specialist, a "Guru" is required in the "great tradition" for its propagation. The "Guru" initiates the disciple in the religious symbols and usages and in the sacred lore. Compared to this, no such requirement exists in the "little tradition", it is passed on through imitation. Often, only women are allowed in the ceremonies of the "little tradition" as revealed in the works of R.S. Freed and S.A. Freed on the Silisat (Sitala Devi) ceremony. The disease of smallpox though eradicated in India, is still known after the name of the most feared goddess, "Sitala" to millions of Indians.

To conclude, we can say that in actual practice women in



Hindu society belong to the 'little tradition'. Yet some of the norms governing their day-to-day life are those derived from the 'great tradition'. Thus, ideologically women belong to the 'great tradition'. As an outcome, they are always in a state of conflict, constantly divided between the two traditions.

Thus, women do share the fate of oppressed castes, tribes and subcultures. To gauge the position of women in family and society and the role expectations which a modern educated Hindu woman faces, it is essential to know the Brahmanical norms laid down by the ancient Aryan Hindu culture.

In the ancient traditional society of the Hindus the social and legal position of women was, as Narain states, inextricably linked up with religion and caste. The pivotal position of women in domestic life is well expressed in the Rigvedic term 'Jayedastam' which means "the wife is the home" (Narain 22). All invocations of divinities are addressed to the gods as well as their wives, the goddesses. The philosophical concept of the feminine principle is well developed in the Vedas.

Initially during the Vedic period in the Hindu culture, the husband and wife were conceived as complementary to each other. Hence the highest manifestation of male and female relationship is found in the concept of 'Ardhanarishwara' -- a half-male and half-female deity. The ancient dictum was that man and woman complemented each other to form a single image as personified in the unique form of 'Ardhanarishwara'. On the whole, the women of the Vedic times enjoyed equal status with men in every field--

religious, social, economic and political.

The vedic society was patriarchal. Though the birth of a son was more favoured, once a daughter was born, she was entitled to all the privileges given to a son. Especially, "in the matter of education the daughter was not distinguished from the son" (Desai 11). Girls were inducted into the 'Sacred Initiation' ceremony and they observed 'Brahmacharya' (state of celibacy) like boys. This indicates that the girls were taken to the teacher as pupils or were initiated into learning. The names of Gargi and Maitreyi are testimony to the fact that women scholars and philosophers were not uncommon. There are references to a class of women known as 'Brahmavādinis' who continued their studies for their entire life-time. Learning itself was deified as Saraswati, a feminine symbol.

There were several women poets and some of their verses have been honoured by inclusion in the canonical literature. Desai notes that a large number of women were among the composers of the Rigvedic Hymns. It is acknowledged that the 'Vivaha Sūta' in the Rigveda which forms "the foundation of the Hindu Marriage sacrament was composed by Sūrya Sāvitrī, the daughter of the Sun god" (Apte 3).

Many women were honoured with titles like Ācharyā, who were adept teachers. "Often the learned rishis or seers initiated their wives," as Chattopadhyay establishes "into intellectual and spiritual pursuits"(9). The name of Maitreyi is well known for her pursuance of spirituality along with her husband, whereas

Katyayani, the second wife chose to manage a huge "Gurukul" in its entirety.

Equal status was enjoyed by women with men in the Vedic era in performing religious ceremonies. They could perform sacrifices independently and were not regarded as impediments in religious pursuits. If the husband went on a journey, the wife was required to perform the sacrifices. "Seetayagna", "Rudrabali" and "Rudrayaga" were performed exclusively by women.

The social ethos of the period under discussion was congenial to a woman's all-round development. Grown-up maidens had a voice in choosing their partners. Daughters, as they grew older, contributed significantly to the management of their parents' household. Marriages were entered into when girls were mature. As the stanza twenty-six Pusan of Rigveda addressed to the bride states: "Speak to thy people as a lady" (Apt 6). This substantiates that a woman had a status of her own. She was unfettered and stood in high esteem at home and in communal life.

During the Vedic age, women were required to accompany men in performing rituals as they were equal with men in the pattern and social fabric of Vedic society. The presence of the wife was essential for all sacrifices and ceremonies. A single man, in such a society was regarded as spiritually incomplete and was therefore not allowed to offer oblations. This sort of partnership between man and woman was visualized as a means to fulfill four 'purusharthas', or the purposes of life during the Vedic period. Woman was not an object to satiate male hunger or

a plaything. The groom addressed his bride tenderly during the marriage ceremony :

I take thy right hand as a pledge for our happiness, I wish thee to become my wife and grow old with me; the gods gave thee to man to rule over our house together... may there be happiness in our home for both humans and animals. ... (Das 19-20).

Thus, woman was held in high esteem at the root of the family system, in the "great tradition" in the Vedic period.

During the Post-Vedic period, the social structure of the Aryans became rigid and it got organized in a caste system. However, among the higher sections of society, the girls were still eligible for 'Yagyopavit Samskara', the Sacred Initiation Ceremony. As a result, they attained distinction in various disciplines like medicine, philosophy and theology. The former practice of sending the girls to far off places and to renowned teachers was discontinued. But the daughters did receive education. They were endowed with religious and secular training. Many of them pursued the teaching career. Though religious rights and privileges of a woman were curtailed, in the cultured families women recited their morning and evening prayers. Minor religious sacrifices were continued to be performed by women. Tending of the sacrificial fire continued to be entrusted to the wife. Thus, by and large, women enjoyed religious privileges like men in society. The only visible change was that women no longer

attended public meetings.

The process of change in society being very complex and continuous, one cannot adequately describe the whole process. In short, the status enjoyed by Vedic woman was reduced gradually to that of middling. Manusmriti seems to be responsible for relegating the low status to Hindu women in later periods. There were several other 'Smritis' composed during this period. All these sources were works of several men spread over a vast stretch of time. They represent various schools of thought and their impact was all pervading. However, it is obvious that society had already moved in the direction of rigidification.

It was Manusmriti who invested the Brahmin with new privileges. He deprecated the 'Shudras' and women and conceded to them an inferior status. Thus, theoretically a foundation was laid for the social and legal subordination of women.

The curtailment of the woman's right to perform religious sacrifices on her own proved pernicious to the status of woman. It brought abnegation of her rights of Sacred Initiation and education, participation at important political and social assemblies. She no longer had the privilege of selecting her own spouse. As the lawgivers were all men, the age of marriage for the girls was decided on what they considered the age at puberty. Thus, whatever was achieved by way of status, women had to relinquish due to lack of education; hence perpetual tutelage of women gained ground.

Manu (2 B. C.) depicts the functions of the wife in

Manusmriti. The 'Smritikars' or the lawgivers perpetuated the myth of the husband as a veritable god for the wife, even if he is devoid of virtue, or tries to find pleasure outside home or beats her. They, however, prescribed no code of conduct for husbands. The marriage vows were binding only to the wife.

Woman, before the advent of Buddhism, as Kautilya remarks was not permitted "to move alone and see spectacles"(Desai 17). Manu advocates only domestic duties for women. Thus, the freedom enjoyed by her Vedic counterpart in the earlier era became unimaginable. Woman was steadily and progressively suppressed in the later epic period. Women also lost their religious rights and spiritual inheritance during this period.

To sum up, Manu laid down an outlook for the future subordination of women. The gradual lowering down of the age of marriage, the strict adherence to the rules of widowhood and the curtailment of her freedom in public life prepared the later day commentators to forge rigid laws for her subjection. This period can be called the formative period in women's subordination. The major change in the outlook regarding woman was set in; the writers of the second phase in the age of later Smritis were left to take the last step in that direction. Buddhism later on provided an alternate mode of perception of the status of women.

Buddhism is primarily a religion of self-culture and self-restraint. Whosoever is capable of fostering these two attributes, whether man or woman, can have an access to 'Nirvana'. If a woman is capable of achieving this, she is also

entitled to attain 'Niravana'. Thus, since the disintegration of the Vedic society, the portals of religion were once again opened to women, and her right to salvation proclaimed. Almost immediately after the establishment of the Buddhist order, women were admitted to it.

Buddhist faith recognised equality of sexes and did not fetter women. Several women embraced this faith which assigned them a right of equal participation in religious pursuits. Though woman, in accordance with Buddhism, can reach the highest state, she was however, considered inferior in status to a male Bhikkhu. Nonetheless, the famous dancer-artist Amrapali was befriended in the Buddhist fold. Buddhist "Jatalas" reveal several unorthodox events as depicted by Chattopadhyay. "Tolerance was shown to courtesans when they became the symbols of art and general culture, a feature which continued for a long time"(23).

The lot of lay women was improved during the prevalence of Buddhism in India. The birth of a daughter was no longer considered a calamity. Women had ample opportunities for their education. They participated in philosophical discussions which reveal their high intellectual capacities. Marriage for girls was no longer a must. They were free to opt to remain single. The sight of a widow was no longer considered inauspicious. Many instances of widow remarriage are known during this period.

To conclude: as long as corruption did not creep into the Buddhist faith, it worked well. It also proved a powerful democratic force against the narrow outlook of the Brahmanic

cultural pattern that gradually emerged. As Desai interestingly remarks, "With the growing perception that their life was worth as an end in itself, there was liberated a spirit of independence in women and for women" (Desai 19-20). The "great tradition" of the Brahmins excluding women from the religious economic and political life, thus lost to the "little tradition" of Buddhism, in which a woman was perceived as an equal partner. However, Buddhism could not gain ground in India. Women's status remained low during the Puranic age which followed the fall of Buddhism in India.

During the Puranic age around 500 A.D. onwards the concept of 'Pativrata Dharma' was developed. It meant fidelity and marital love and duty from woman without imposing a similar obligation on the male. The Puranas demanded 'abject obedience' of wife to the order of the husband - god.

The religious life of women thus severely contracted. Women were expected to observe some 'vratas', - fast for the longevity of the life of the husband and for progeny. Women and 'Shudras' were no more entitled to hear the Vedas. They could, however, hear the Puranas, written exclusively for their good.

Women as a class were thus excluded from the intellectual world. This put the woman in double jeopardy. She was neither allowed to receive education nor was her voice considered important in the selection of her spouse. Writers of Dharmashastra who flourished between 400 B.C. to A.D. 100 advised that girls should be married soon after puberty. Thus since A.D.



100 onwards India remained "the land of child marriage for many centuries" (Narain 23).

The Puranic period is marked by the horrible custom of 'Sati'. Initially, the practice of "Sati" was recommended as an alternative to leading an austere life of a widow. But later on, the Kshatriya caste adopted it and turned it into a regular institution. Glancing through the history of Rajasthan, one comes across several episodes of 'Jauhar' (mass of women whose husbands have died on the battlefield submit to the flames of fire) and 'Sati' on a grand scale. With the spread of this custom, the oppression of the Hindu women reached its climax. The practice of 'Sati' intensified further with the flux of foreign invaders. In the earlier phase of Puranic age, some noted intellectuals like Devanbhattacha, astronomer Varahamihir, the writer Madhatithi, and the poet Bana Bhatti condemned the inhuman customs imposed on women. But the Hindu society was so rigidified that the pleas of the enlightened few fell on deaf ears. The Moghul rulers like Humayun and Akbar tried to restrict this hideous custom of Sati, but without much success.

Thus, the status of Hindu woman before the Muslim rule in India had deteriorated. The social scene was disturbing and the high esteem rendered to women in the Vedic period reached its nadir due to hideous customs, like child marriage, total absence of education among girls, restrictions on widow remarriage and prevalence of Sati. The adoption of Purdah restricted women to secluded inner apartments in the royal and aristocratic families. To give a final blow to the status of women, polygamy

spread among the upper strata of society.

Hindu woman in the post-Puranic age, with the advent of Muslim rule in India after the thirteenth century was devoid of any rights and her freedom was impinged upon. As a result of the Muslim conquest, the foreign rulers tried to promulgate their coercive norms on the conquered Hindu community. In defiance of such gestures the Hindu society turned so strict, that it cut short the rights and freedom of women, as well as of lower classes. Hence the trials and tribulations of women aggravated.

Consequently, the Hindu woman was totally cut off from the healthy main stream of life at the expense resulting in the loss of her mental freedom and progress. Due to child marriage, marital infidelity on the part of man was rampant. There were more polygamous marriages amongst the Hindus than the Muslims. Gradually evolving patriarchal society, even, dropped the conditions laid down as necessary for men for a second marriage. Such a trend marred chances of a Hindu woman in the social hierarchy. The practice of child marriage in its trail brought the evils of child widow and 'Sati.'

Despite their long contact with the Muslims, the Hindus failed to assimilate the liberal rights accorded to women by the Islamic 'Shariat law'. As Narayan puts it, the Hindus "continued to adhere to the theoretical basis of the legal subordination of women as laid down by Manu" (25). The Hindu society had no vision to follow better customs prevalent in the Muslim society like divorce, widow remarriage and a larger share of property for

women. In addition to the short-sightedness on the part of Hindu leaders, the Hindu society had become rigid. Besides Brahminism was too inhibitive a force for Muslim rulers to exert any direct liberating influence upon Hindu customs or on the servile condition of the Hindu woman.

At this juncture in the fifteenth century, medieval saints emerged throughout India and served like a beacon to the Indian society. Through their devotional practices they established equality of sexes, minimising the degradation of women. Hence women were <sup>once</sup> ~~one~~ again allowed to partake in the religious activities along with men. The 'Bhakti Movement' proved catalytic in allowing a breath of fresh air to women where anathema prevailed. Challenging the supremacy of the Brahmanic 'great tradition', they popularised the 'little tradition' in which woman was visualised as 'Shakti'. The worship of Durga, Kali and other goddesses was popularised by some of them. Thus, after many centuries of servile conditions women were brought out of the grip of abomination and considered as human beings.

In spite of their humanistic appeal and approach, the saints in various parts of India could not succeed in bringing about social or economic revitalization of Indian society, precisely because their appeal was emotional rather than rational. As Mukherjee remarks, 'the mystic revolution', proved a minor revolution as there was a lack of fundamental reform in the Indian economy. The medieval saints, within the social system of their work were "active revolutionaries but not dynamic ones."

They had to wait for Western commerce and capital for more substantial changes" (qtd. in Desai 45).

The position of Hindu woman on the eve of British rule in India was further impaired. When the Hindu elite came in touch with the British in the later half of the eighteenth century and especially with the introduction of English education in India, they were appalled at the disgraceful social conditions of their own people. They realised that the degradation of women was a shame.

Hindu woman was thus conditioned to an institutional framework and an ideology in such a fashion that she might not rise in revolt against the abominable customs. Rather she would remain docile and in perpetual subjugation. Consequently, Hindu women at this period had not only lost her independence, but her sense and urge for freedom and consciousness of an independent personality.

To conclude, the genesis and growth of the movement for the emancipation of Indian woman was the outcome of the influence of advanced democratic civilization on medieval India. The new economic background provided a ground for a new society and societal relations in an orthodox society. As an outcome radical changes ensued in the thinking of the Indian people. These urges and yearnings were articulated through the enlightened, social reformers in India. They imbibed the liberal ideology of the West. Thus, there emerged champions of women's cause in various parts of India.

Although, the status of upper and middle class women in the cities has changed since independence, the majority of rural women in villages lead the same life as lived before. Even when woman has acquired juridical equality with man, her actual position is still very unsatisfactory. It is revealed in the report on the Status of Women in India :

Society has failed to frame new norms and institutions to enable women to fulfil the multiple roles expected of them in India today. The majority do not enjoy the rights and the opportunities guaranteed by the constitution (35).

Today, theoretically, women are recognized as socially equal with men. (But) In fact, the old institutions like caste, patriarchal family, religious mores and dominant social value system still hold sway. There also exists a conflict between two cultural traditions. This is the conflict between the Sanskritized "great tradition" with its patriarchal-ascetic family and sexual ideology and the mother-worship based on pre-Aryan mother cults of "little tradition". The complexity is all the more intricate as the binary traditions operate within the larger Hindu tradition simultaneously. Accordingly, the conflict between discrimination against women and idealization of women takes place not only between individual groups, castes and regions, but also in the sphere of the most intimate interpersonal relationships in the family. Thus, the exaggerated "husband-worship," as it is laid down by patriarchal morals and

in religion, is the opposite of the likewise religiously exaggerated 'mother-worship' (Mies 105).

(II)

**Black American Women in White America**

Among the women of all cultures, the black American woman has a unique position. She has drawn attention by and large due to her abject situation. Uprooted from her native African culture she has been placed in the dominant white Euro-Christian culture. Even in such a conflicting situation she has maintained ideals of womanhood undeterred by any force or intimidated by racist, oppressive cultural norms.

The black woman was doubly enslaved in white, patriarchal, racist society. Her lot was to suffer, struggle and be silent, in comparison to the white woman who was in a position to plead for her emancipation. Prior to and after the Civil War, the status of the black American woman as a class of human beings was decided by "their blackness and their womanhood rather than by their creative, intellectual and psychological composition" (Blackburn 133).

The nefarious system of slavery hardly permitted or allowed an individual identity to the black woman, leave apart recognition of her talents or entity. As Beale notes, she was a "slave of a slave" (98). Before the European infatuation of property as a foundation for social organization, African

societies were equalitarian and cooperative towards women.

When ~~we~~ glanced through the annals of her African ancestress, prior to the black woman turning servile in America through slave trade, ~~we~~ learn that she performed certain tasks which were not based on gender. Neither was there any rigid and hysterical compartmentalization based on sexual taboos. Even black man had specific duties to attend to. The woman in her native Africa often accompanied man on hunts and got into the warrior's array on the battle-field. Likewise, man often partook in food gathering and in the education of children.

The black woman in Africa enjoyed very many privileges. There is absolutely nothing to show that the African woman was servile or inferior to man in any respect. She ran the market place, built dams, she was also engaged in international commerce and state craft. Cade states that this woman also sat on the throne, "who donned armor to wage battle against the European invaders and the corrupt chieftains who engaged in the slave trade, who (women) were consulted as equals in the affairs of trade" (103-4). On the contrary, "the European white was confused and alarmed by the equalitarian system of these (African) societies and did much to wreck it: creating wedges between the men and women" (Cade 104). Thus, prior to the chains of slavery the black woman's position was deemed high in the African culture.

From the harrowing middle passage to the migration to North for the promised land, black woman's condition in exile was

traumatic. Her dilemma was peculiar as a woman placed in the larger white society. She was doubly oppressed, racially and sexually. As Lindsey notes, "to be a black woman. . . . is not just to be a black who happens to be a woman, for one discovers one's sex sometime before one discovers one's racial classification" (81). Blackburn also reiterates that "being black and female in America is a complex matter" (133).

On the basis of the evidence provided in history and folklore, black women in America are called "the mule of the world." Alice Walker deliberates on this issue in In Search of Our Mother's Gardens where she remarks that black women "have been handed the burdens that everyone else-everyone else-refused to carry" (237).

One can well imagine the black woman's subservient position as racism and sexism have been used as the justification for their repression and exploitation in America. Social equality for black women was totally ruled out in a society guided by Euro-Christian, patriarchal bourgeois society. Again, just as blacks as a group were 'relegated', as Christian notes, "to an underclass in America by virtue of their race, so women were relegated to a separate caste by virtue of their sex" (72).

The impact of sexism on the black woman's social status was that she was manipulated by the system for almost three hundred years. Her virtue was violated. Her silence was the silence of the oppressed. That profound silence ensued due to resignation and acceptance of her lot. Until the Civil Rights Movement of the



sixties she refused to be in alliance with the whites. She had not gained any concrete results whenever allied to such groups. Likewise she did not see "womanhood" as a vital aspect of her identity. As Hooks argues, "racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness. ... we were asked to deny a part of ourselves--and we did " (Intro. 1). Her heroic struggle to overcome oppression at twin levels often ended in horrible death. Several heroic women like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells and Anna Cooper campaigned, lectured, wrote and performed heroic deeds for the racial, class equality of black women in the nineteenth century Victorian America.

Anna Cooper's speech on the status of black woman at the World Congress of Representative Women in 1893 reveals that black woman was thought to be "no more than chattel, an irresponsible thing, a dull block, to be drawn hither or thither at the volition of an owner" (Hooks, Intro. 2). In spite of such ignominious conditions she maintained the dignity of her person. She had no male protector whatsoever, as black man was reduced to the abject status of a slave. In addition, she had been used as the scapegoat for the evils that the horrendous system of slavery has perpetrated on black man.

Beale projects the persona of black woman in America, "her physical image has been maliciously maligned; she has been sexually molested and abused by the white colonizer. ..." (92). Economic autonomy was never a windfall for black woman. She suffered the worst kind of economic exploitation, as "she was

forced to serve as the white woman's maid and wetnurse for white offspring while her own children were more often than not starving and neglected" (Beale 92). One can surmise that for the black woman, "it is the depth of degradation to be socially manipulated, physically raped, used to undermine your (black woman's) own household, and to be powerless to reverse this syndrome" (Beale 92).

Gerda Lerner finds 'double invisibility' in black women, first for being black and secondly for being women. Their status on the societal plane was subject to all the restrictions against blacks and to those against women. Thus, for long, black women have remained the most powerless group in the entire society in America. Their social along with economic as well as political status was the lowest in the ladder, as it consisted of white men at the top, then white women followed by black men and at the bottom rung of the ladder, black women.

As far as the economic power and position are concerned, there is no evidence that black women have enjoyed any economic advantage over black men, leave apart white men and women in the fabric of broader society. By and large, black women's income, even in the seventies was the lowest as Lerner states, "... after 1920, black women ranked lower than black men in political representation and in access to economic power positions in society. ..." (XXIII - XXIV). Evaluating the position of black women in the mid-eighties, Ebony reports that, "... it should be remembered that most Black women are still confined to low-paying

jobs at the bottom of the economic ladder" (62).

In the field of politics, black woman has undergone a great struggle to obtain her voting right. She has participated in the suffrage movement along with her white sisters. Nonetheless, she was not allowed her political right for long, even after the black men achieved theirs. Several black women leaders like Ida Wells-Barnett, Sojourner Truth and others fought for their right as women to engage in public political activity. Due to several determined women's efforts black women gained their political rights. Sojourner Truth boldly declared that black women must have their rights. She asserted that this right was soon coming. Very rightly she expressed the fundamental truth that, "... women don't get half as much rights as they ought to; we want more, and we will have it" (Spender 267).

It is of considerable interest to look into the history of black women's struggle for equal legal rights. The towering figure, Sojourner Truth declared at the first annual meeting of the American Equal Rights Association in 1867 that she wanted black women to have their rights. "In the courts women have no right, no voice, nobody speaks for them. I wish women to have her voice there among the pettifoggers. If it is not a fit place for women, it is unfit for men to be there" (Spender 268).

Thus, to conclude, there were many black women who protested vehemently against their double oppression. They were in a state of continuous conflict. As the previous discussion reveals, black women in the black community as well as in the

larger society has to assume twin personalities. Through history, black woman has struggled to achieve equal status with white woman and man. Various club movements, campaigns, conscious raising meetings and life activities reveal her commitment to the cause of amelioration of black women.

It is evident through various feminist movements that there is a female aspect to all history. Black women have made their special contribution to the building and shaping of American society and their contribution is different from that of white men, women and black men. For too long this difference in equality has meant invisibility and insignificance. It was only after the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties, in the seventies and eighties, that the literary works of black women writers received the attention of white critics and writers. Creative literature of black women reflects "... a stunningly accurate record of the impact of patriarchal values and practice (along with racist) upon the lives of women" (Smith 159). It also provides essential insights into female experiences.

### (III)

While discussing the history of Indian women, we traced two traditions: the "great tradition" which excluded women from its Brahmanic discourse completely and the "little tradition" which ascribed the attributes of a "Devi" to a woman, but still the latter could not get due status to women in society. Extending this thesis to the black American situation, it may be argued that the black American women could be placed in the "little tradition" which belittled their status below that of a slave.

Doubly oppressed in a white racist society, the black American woman, like her Indian counterpart, has maintained a tradition of tolerance, patience and persistence. This tradition of passive resistance to male oppression, developed by women in India, over a long period of time, forms the basis of feminine sensibility discussed in the following chapter.

Is it worthwhile to study feminine sensibility? It is certainly worthwhile, as the female aspect of women's being is different from that of men. Hence feminine sensibility is the central theme of the novels by women writers. Their creativity provides authenticity to their life experiences in a divided world of men and women. Be these experiences black or white, Indian or American, but they are identical at the level of 'universality'. Such novels describe the struggles and strife, exaltation and suffering, servility and resilience of women of Hindu culture as well as black American culture. In these works, in spite of odds and stumbling blocks women emerge with : beauty and strength, talent and genius on the canvass of life; undeterred, dauntless.

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