CHAPTER II

FEMININE SENSIBILITY : THE CONCEPT AND CREATIVITY

After tracing the position of women in Indian and black American societies, I propose to go deeper into the concept of feminine sensibility since these literary writings of women bear the stamp of this distinct quality.

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to trace this concept historically, through the disciplines of psychoanalysis, anthropology and psychology. In the second part of this chapter, I have analysed the novels of black American and Indian English women writers and establish that these novels have "feminine sensibility" integrated within the structures, techniques and thematic patterns of their works.

"A woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine: the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine." Virginia woolf (qtd. in Abel).

The concept of femininity is culture-specific as it is interpreted differently in different cultures. It depends specially on each society's particular social and economic order. As a result of particular societal and economic arrangement, every society formulates its own specific definitions of masculinity and femininity.

The term feminine for example is defined thus in **Webster's**

New Twentieth Century International Dictionary: "Having qualities regarded as characteristics of women and girls, such as gentleness, weakness, delicacy, modesty: etc." Although in diverse ethnic groups feminine has different connotations. Variables like parenting, societal code and status rendered to females in society play an important role in deciding what one means by 'feminine'. It also depends on an individual's "social environment and occupation." as defined in the **Encyclopaedia of Psychology.**

In traditional Hindu culture, a female by convention and practice ought to be shy, modest and should exhibit childlike obedience and reverence to elders. In addition to these, dependence, deference and servitude are other attributes of the female gender in Hindu Culture.

In both, Hindu and Judaic-Christian tradition women are considered lesser beings. Hence feminine has come to mean servitude and economic dependence of women on men. Within the framework of the monogamous patriarchal family, women's function of being mothers and wives is considered the fulfilment of their 'nature'. But outside this framework as Marcuse says, "...the woman is still predominantly a plaything or a temporary outlet for sexual energy not consumated in marriage" (390-91).

Compared to her Hindu or Indian counterpart, black American woman underwent oppression both as a woman and as a member of another race. The White Christian culture considered all blacks inferior to the dominant culture. A black woman is mythicized as

'mammy', 'matriarch', 'seamstress', 'washerwoman', and 'field-labourer'. She is considered a sex object by both the white and the black men. However, the woman in both the cultures has survived under the most harrowing conditions. Both, the Indian women and black American women have borne physical, psychological, and emotional exploitation and oppression heroically. This heroism is not taken note of by the male discourse defining 'feminine'.

Having defined feminine let us now consider sensibility which is described as "a capacity to respond intelligently and perceptively to intellectual, moral or aesthetic events or values." in Webster's Dictionary.

The Shorter Oxford Dictonary on Historical Principles defines the term 'sensibility' as "emotional consciousness, glad or sorrowful, grateful or resentful, recognition of a person's conduct, or of a fact or a condition of things." It also explains the term with another shade of meaning: "readiness to feel compassion for suffering and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art."

In patriarchal societies, women's life the world over, is shaped differently from men's life due to complexity of forces beyond their control. In modern times research has shown that, women excel in all spheres of life. However, they are still considered inferior to men. Emotionally, women are branded as inconsistent and easily moved to tears. All this, unfortunately, is included in feminine sensibility in the dominant male

discourse.

Broverman and Broverman, in a study by these psychologists, reports that a woman endowed with feminine traits 'cries very easily'. Brownmiller states that women are 'very emotional', "very excitable in a minor crisis" (207). Their feelings are easily hurt. These, then, are additional characteristics of femininity. Further more Brownmiller observes that Broverman and Broverman report mentions femininity as a negative assessment of the female sex. One wonders why women are characterized as 'very easily influenced', 'very subjective', "unable to separate feelings from ideas", 'very illogical' and 'very sneaky' (207). On the contrary, male traits are defined by opposite values: 'very direct', 'very logical', "can make decisions easily", 'never cries' etc. (207). Thus when the traits common to men and women are juxtaposed the male bias creeps in. Man's point of view in assessing feminine traits has generated hardly any positive facts, impressions or results favourable to women. It is like one singular masculine facet accepted to be the only facet of human existence.

Jung makes a distinction between the characteristics of a man and woman on the basis of love. A woman's psychology is based on "the principle of Eros, the great binder and loosener..." (65). In case of man, love for a thing is 'man's prerogative'. From times immemorial the dominant principle ascribed to man is Logos. The concepts of Eros and Logos could be explained in modern terms as 'psychic relatedness' and 'objective interest'

respectively. Women are far more 'psychological' than men. Men are usually satisfied with 'logic' alone. Everything 'psychic', is abominable to them. They think it vague, nebulous and morbid. Men, by and large, are not involved or interested in feelings and fantasies. They are interested in things, in facts. To a woman, how a man feels about a thing is of more primary concern than knowing the thing itself. Thus, a woman is the most direct exponent of psychology and gives it its richest content. A human relationship leads her into the world of psyrhe.

Margaret Mead, the noted anthropologist observes :

> "...in all cultures without any known exception, male activity is seen as achievement. Whatever women do; gathering seeds, planting, weeding, basket making, potmaking--is valued less than when the same activity, ... is performed by men" (99-100).

Thus, women are treated as subservient in a male dominated society by virtue of their sex and activity. Hence it is imperative that women and their sensibility be viewed from a fresh point of view.

Horney, a noted psychologist agrees with Georg Simmel, a German philosopher who considers the exiting arrangement of human society from the view point of the female. The philosopher maintains that our whole civilization is a masculine civilization. The state, the laws, morality, religion and the sciences are the creation of men. Horney believes that the very

standards adopted by society to estimate the values of male and female nature are "... not neutral, (but) arising out of the differences of the sexes, ... They [are] in themselves essentially masculine..." (172). The psychology of women so far has been studied only from the man's point of view.

Since, societal code is operated more in favour and support of men, the appraisal of feminine sensibility becomes a complex matter. In such a situation in almost all cultures, women have learnt to adapt themselves to the wishes of men.

The evolution of woman, ~~has~~, as shown by anthropologists and psychoanalysts, has been measured by masculine standards. So, to a large extent, this picture fails to present accurately the true nature of woman. From the biological point of view a woman has in motherhood an indisputable, immense physiological superiority. Nonetheless, from the social point of view in the initial period of conflict which ends sadly for the female, the male as victor imposes upon her the burden of motherhood and all that it involves. This state of affairs has produced in women a feeling of inferiority. To a great extent, the actual social subordination of woman has implanted in her mind the unconscious motive for feeling aversion towards her state of womanhood. Georg Simmel describes the relation of the sexes as one of master and slave. In this situation the master has not constantly to think that he is master, "while the position of the slave is such that he can never forget it" (qtd.by Horney 184). This analogy can well be applied to woman who cannot forget her subservient

position.

Looked at from a psychological angle, a woman's nature as Coles believes, is affected by an "interaction of psychic and social factors" (189-90). In a way, it is possible to trace the development of feminine sensibility. Perhaps, it can be stated that feminine sensibility does not consist of specific female traits and fantasies, but also of several related attributes like dress, speech, mannerisms, interests, preoccupations, emotional responsiveness and aggressiveness. These "attributes of femininity are not inevitable concomitants of femaleness, but are to a large degree subject to modification in response to changes in child-rearing practices and social roles" (Person qtd. in Strouse 260).

According to Thompson, "every culture has its own stereotype of femininity (which) is a changing concept in a changing culture" (Moulton qtd. in Strouse 285). These changes, unconscious in nature, affect the socio-cultural and legal systems slowly.

Brownmiller believes that "femininity, in essence, is a romantic sentiment, a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations." She argues that femininity has an exquisite (a)esthetic, experience as one can gain an enormous pleasure from feminine pursuits as a creative outlet or purely as relaxation or indulgence for the sake of fun or art. Femininity, as Brownmiller states, promises the continuous "struggle to survive, and perhaps to triumph" (Prologue 14).

Since biologically women have a unique function, their mode of thinking also differs from that of men. In women, feminine sensibility revolves round the family nexus and human relationships. It is more attuned to the softer aspects of nature. Women have more intimate perception of thoughts, emotions and feelings. Their interests encompass life forces, creativity and exhilaration of vital forces in nature. As already noted, feminine sensibility has constitutents which have several attributes including emotions.

Feminine sensibility is an inner feeling. It transforms consciousness, which is a response to surroundings in all aspects. Such a trait of sensibility operates as a value system of thoughtfulness and sensitivity. Feminine sensibility is thus a phychological phenomenon which is not to be confused with feminism; a movement towards an assertion of the positive traits of the feminine. Feminine sensibility, being innate to a female, is a heightened sense of perception which acts as a catalytic in charting the oscillograph of woman's inner life. To conclude then, feminine sensibilty is something that contributes to the making of feminism. By itself, feminine sensibility does not become feminism. It needs certain outside agencies to worl on it. As it is not the intention of this dissertation to discuss feminism, some space is now being given to discuss the difference between the male and the female sensibilities.

Women differ from men in their emotional nature. Men have tough mental fibre. They are usually in control of their emotions. Man's world has a broader circumference than the female

realm. To women, human relationships are paramount and binding. Emotionally, women are more involved with human l inship, whereas men are not so keenly interested in the sphere of human ralationships. Women find emotional binding more fulfilling. Men's emotional needs may not be as intense as women's.

In all cultures and nations, remembrance of things past is a feminine province. It may be a birthday, an anniversary, the death of a close or distant relation. Woman is supposed to be endowed with a keen memory. The Biblical parable of Lot's wife is symbolic. She looked back for one last precious glimpse of their city, their home, their past. In turn, she was transformed into a pillar of salt.

Women are not supposed to be inclined to express their rage just as men do. For men, outbursts of anger are not a disqualifying factor. A woman who seethes with anger is generally considered 'unattractive'. A woman is always expected to cultivate forbearance and patience. In spite of the social inhibitions to feminine sensibility, women are decidedly less likely to behave in an irrational, anti-social manner. The result of inhibited anger and nonviolent temper may, however, be a bucketful of tears.

Of all the human emotions, love is supposed to be the governing factor of the feminine psyche. It may be true as

Brownmiller states:

> A celebrated difference between men and women (either women's weakness or women's strength, depending on one's values) is the obstinate reluctance, the emotional inability of women to seperate sex from love. Understandably, love makes the world go round, and women are suppose to get dizzy—to rise, to fall, to feel alive in every pore. to be undone (216).

Thus, love is supposed to govern feminine logic and the world of woman. As the life of women, by and large, is restricted in the narrow sphere of personal relationships, the women novelists delineate this feature with great skill and mastery as they have a distinct feminine sensibility.

Having discussed the traits of feminine sensibility let us now look at the novels of Toni Morrison from this point of view. The narrator in **The Bluest Eye** Claudia MacTeer, a nine year old is placed centre stage along with her sister Frieda; ten, and their friend Pecola Breedlove; eleven. It is a narrative permeated with experiences as intimate as the first menses. Thus, it is an initiation story of a young girl.

Morrison charts the onset of menstruation of Pecola Breedlove who is a guest at MacTeer family as her own family was 'put outdoors'. Pecola stands on the steps, flabbergasted, blood trickling down her legs, scared to death. She even asks Frieda if

she was going to die. Frieda knows about the 'mystery and reassures Pecola. She explaines, that's 'menstratin', and sends Claudia to get some water, and asks her to clean the steps. Claudia resents going into the house as she thinks that she would miss something important in the bushes. The minute details like. Frieda slipping through the back door and bringing a white rectangle of cotton, are graphically portrayed.

Mrs. MacTeer then rushes to pull a switch from the bush. She whips Frieda with four stinging cuts on her legs. Her rage knows to bounds. About to punish Pecola, too, she sees 'the white tail' and the 'little-girl-gone-to-woman pants' (TBE 25) and hugs them both. Such an intimate rendering of girlish innocence and fear, the warmth and security of a mother in an hour of crisis are portrayed graphically. This rendering reveals the feminine sensibility of the artist which one perceives throughout the narrative.

Mrs. MacTeer embodies many feminine traits. She struggles heroically to survive in a hostile world and in turn trains her daughters. The emotional stress and endurance undergone by Mrs. MacTeer symbolizes black women's strength and a 'culture of survival'. The seeds of emotional endurance are sown at a tender age, during the period of girlish innocence. Mrs. MacTeer "gives form to daily trials, life's disorders, and shows her daughters how they can joyfully face the reality of growing up in an imperfect world" (House 34). This education of daughters by the mother is an act of female bonding which brings them together to

face the male world.

Pauline Breedlove is portrayed in conrast to Mrs. MacTeer. She gradually changes to 'Polly' and her world gets reverted to white Fisher's norms consisting of "beauty, order, cleanliness and praise" (TBE 101), she suffers a loss of 'rainbow' from her life. The intense pathos oozes as Pauline tries to make adjustment of her own view of life. She crushes the very life of her own family, falsifying the truth by make-believe consolation. "But I don't care 'bout it no more. My Maker will take care of me. ... Only thing I miss sometimes is that rainbow. But like I say, I don't recollect it much anymore" (TBE 104).

Thus, Morrison shows us two different families with different values. One survives the onslaught of circumstances and forces, the other gets annihilated. Mrs. Breedlove's creativity does not find expression in her own home, whereas Mrs. MacTeer's gets an outlet in singing in her own home. In Kentucky,Pauline's creativity was not crushed, hence she survived there. In Lorain, Ohio an outlet for her creativity is not found in her own home. She fails to form any female bonding with Pecola or with other women as does Mrs. MacTeer. With Mrs. MacTeer, feminine sensibility enhances her outlook and provides her a chance to survive and triumph.

Morrison has portrayed like a painter the world of young black girls, middle aged women, adolescent girls, young wives and old women. She makes one live through the varied expriences of her women characters. Morrison's perception touches the very core

of female existence.

Feminine sensibility is visualized throughout the narrative. Cholly's Aunt Jimmy and her three friends' conversation is a concrete example of female bonding. Morrison excels in her meticulous use of analogy. She calls upon her readers to employ their the sense of hearing as well as seeing. The voices of Aunt Jimmy's friends, " ...blended into a threnody of nostalgia about pain." Their voices were rising and falling, complex in harmony, uncertain in pitch, but constant in the recitative of pain" (TBE 109).

Pain is part of the black women's fare. Their experiences of physical pain, illness and agony are portrayed, which calls for feminine sensibility:

> ... they hugged the memories of illnesses to their bosoms. They licked their lips and clucked their tongues in fond remembrance of pains they had endured--childbirth, rheumatism, croup, sprains, backaches, piles ... (TBE 109).

Morrison visualizes Cholly's complex life with equal empathy. To render the picture of the orphan Cholly poignant, the novelist resorts to another analogy from music:

> The pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of a musician. Only those who tell their tale through the gold of

> curved metal, or in the touch of black-and-white rectangles and taut skins and strings echoing from wooden corridors, could give true form to his life" (TBE 125).

Behind such moving pen-portraits and pictures of complexities of black life one discerns feminine sensibility. For Cholly the orphan boy turned man, the complexities of his black existence and the cruelties of life merge with his sense of tenderness for his eleven-year-old daughter. She was a child--he was puzzled at her state of unhappiness. Bereft of any fondling himself, he had no idea as to how to raise children or share joy with them in their adolescent joyousness. Just "on what he felt" at that particular 'moment' he did, "a wild and forbidden thing" that 'excited' him (TBE 128). And he assaulted Pecola. Thus ensued a tragic event which recalls the heart rending experience of Greek tragedy. Pecola's dream for blue eyes, her ardour to get them and her frustration in fulfilling her dream reveal the tragic element inherent in the black situation.

During their visits to neighbours' houses to sell seeds, the two MacTeer sisters hear about Pecola and her baby to be born. They forget their coveted bicycle. Their perception of Pecola and her state of being, differs from that of the rest of the people. Such a unique way of looking at Pecola reveals Claudia's feminine sensibility:

> Our sorrow (for Pecola) was the more intense because nobody else seemed to share it. They

> were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story. But we listened for the one who would say 'Poor little girl', or, 'Poor baby', but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been. We looked for eyes creased with concern, but saw only veils (**TBE** 148).

Thus, the hypocrisy in the world of grown-ups is revealed. Young Claudia, with her amazing capacity to cope with changed circumstances, is bubbling with a spirit of camaraderie, a female bonding, which is a marked trait of feminine sensibility.

What touches one is this 'hard ground' that the novel explores where marigolds do not sprout, young black girls do not experience innocent joys. A world that permits the foreclosure of childhood, that inflicts a premature adulthood on nine and ten years old girls is satirized in the novel. In the case of Claudia and Frieda they are emotionally precocious, because they have had vicarious and personal experience of violence. They learn early, the strategies of defending themselves more vigorously than their friend Pecola. "Although these preadolescents have encountered harshness and cruelty" they as Rosenberg remarks "develop survival skills" (442).

Morrison's **Sula** is a study in 'female bonding'. Friendship between two adult girls Nel Wright and Sula Peace forms the core of the narrative. Even the dreaminess of those two friends in their sap green young days, their inner thoughts and feelings are

rendered with a painter's touch through the medium of words.

Nel, an only child of Helene Greene sat on the steps of her back porch enveloped in the high silence of her mother's incredibly orderly house. She felt the neatness pointing at her back. She studied the poplars and fell into a reverie of herself lying on a flowered bed. She was tangled in her own hair and waited for some fiery prince. He approached but never quite arrived. "But always, watching the dream along with her, were some smiling sympathetic eyes." (S 51). These eyes could not be anyone else's but that of her friend to be, Sula. Sula was as interested as she herself was in the flow of her imagined hair, in the thickness of the flowered bed, in the voile sleeves "that closed below her elbows in gold-threaded cuffs" (S 51). The preoccupation with fineness of dress and dreaminess laced with vague feelings testify to the feminine sensibility of heroines.

In sheer contrast to Nel's background is Sula's family. She too was an only child, but wedged into a house of complete disorder humming with "things, people, voices and slamming of doors" (S 52). How did she pass her time before she meets Nel ? She "spent hours in the attic behind a roll of linoleum galloping through her own mind on a gray-and-white horse tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of someone who shared both the taste and the speed" (S 52). Who does not Know, how the growing girls crave for the company of someone of their own age group ? Hence when Sula and Nel met first in 'those chocolate halls' and next through the ropes of the swing, they felt the ease and comfort of old friends" (S 52). Both the girls were to be happy in the

company of each other, as "they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (S 52).

Such closeness of spirit and the intimate touch of girls' friendship lends a sustained feminine touch to the narrative. Sula and Nel grew up in the midst of the black neighbourhood, of the Bottom. In '1921' they both were twelve years old, a highly impressionable period in their life. The two friends shared the common places of interest and entertainment in the Bottom: "Edna Finch's Mellow House, an ice-cream parlor", 'Reba's Grill', 'Time and a Half Pool Hall', along with 'Elmira Theatre' and 'Irene's palace of cosmetology' (S 49). These entertainment places evoke in them a touch of feminine sensibility as it evokes imaginatively the ethos of the Bottom and the interior landscape of Sula's and Nel's universe.

Sula and Nel grew up together in a female bonding. **Sula** is a unique novel as it treats a theme closely connected with adolescent girls, their dilemmas, and progress in life. The theme reveals feminine sensibility at the centre of the narrative. Before Morrison no male writer ever gave such an intimate touch to a theme central to the life of adolescent black girls. The process of change from being into becoming reveals the struggle which these teenagers pass through.

There are several facets of the feminine sensibility. Eva's undefined feelings at the visit of Boy Boy get crystallized when she hears the laugh of "a woman in a pea-green dress" (S 35). It was "a high-pitched big-city laugh. ...", (S 36). Then Eva

realized how this woman and Boy Boy's relationship compared with her singularly lonesome predicament did hurt her: "It hit her like a sledge hammer, and it was then that she knew what to feel. A liquid trail of hate flooded her chest." (S 36). It was no secret that Eve openly proclaimed her hatred for this only one, "Hannah's father Boy Boy, and it was hating him that kept her alive and happy" (S 37). Eva's hurt and hate due to Boy Boy's infidelity reveals another facet of feminine sensibility.

Eva's haunting dream of her son Plum, who wanted to be in her womb and Hannah's dream of her "wedding in a red bridal gown" on a hot summer day. are concrete examples of feminine sensibility. It is women who attach great importance to omens and signs, symbols and dreams. This characteristic Morrison has captured and conveyed deftly in her novels. The seasons are vitally important. So are the varying moods of her heroine in the novel. Sula's 'sulking' and 'irritation' and her "birthmark over her eye" turns darker and looking more like 'a stem and rose' are described with accuracy and conviction. The women who washed 'beautiful Hannah' and dressed her body for funeral "wept for her burned hair and wrinkled breasts as though they themselves had been her lovers" (S 77). These are touching embodiments of empathy which are an integral part of female psyche. The total oneness with the pain and burns of the deceased is an integral part of feminine sensibility. Even Eva's afterthoughts of "the perfection of the judgement against her" (S 78) puzzles one. more so because "she remembered the wedding dream and recalled that weddings always meant death. Although, on the spur of the moment

neither she nor Hannah could put two and two together.

Human relationship, a marked trait of feminine sensibility, is celebrated in **Song of Solomon**. Pilate's character is created with an authenticity. Her compassion and feminine sensibility augur happiness in the lives of Milkman and Ruth. Due to her distinct way of life, "She gave up, apparently, all interest in table manners or hygiene, but acquired a deep concern for and about human relationship" (**Song** 150).

Pilate is perhaps the most majestic and regal character among Morrison's fictional heroines. Intuitively sensing the harm to Ruth by Macon's decade-long abstinence, Pilate prepares an aphrodisiac that brings him to Ruth's bed. She protects Ruth and Milkman from her own brother. Her concern for the frail and vulnerable in the world reveals her lovable, towering personality. Pilate's size, her protective energy, her intelligence and selfless devotion reveal her trait of giving intimate protection of the larger to the smaller.

The bourgeois values are not a part of Pilate's way of life. Having been reared up in the midst of nature she evolved in herself a love for nature, a constituent of feminine sensibility. The materialistic world never had much impact on Pilate. Especially, when she turns to her own values, human bonds become her study and concern. The surroundings of her home in Darling Street in a Michigan town were marked by four pine trees. As a child she relished pine needles and smelled 'like a forest' (**Song** 27) as her brother Macon Dead reminisced to his son Milkman Dead.

Her demeanour had a magnatic attraction for rebellious Guitar and Milkman. She, "who had one earring, no navel, looked like a tall black tree" (**Song** 38). She embodies feminine sensibility and creativity. Morrison symbolically compares Pilate to a tree, a part and parcel of nature. Pilate appeals to the reader due to her homogeneity with nature admixtured with spirituality.

Pilate meditates on different shades and textures of black. Her description of the perfectly boiled egg to Milkman and Guitar reaffirms her dignity and nurturing quality. On the very first visit, she gives Milkman, the hero, his 'perfect soft-boiled egg' which aught to feel like 'wet velvet.' She remembered her idyllic past in Danville in Montour County and her brother Macon's affection for her which cooled down afterwards. She only cherished the fact that he was a nice boy and awful good to her. She even tried to initiate Milkman in loveing the affectionate Macon. The preoccupation with the past, with different shades and colours, scents and smells indicates feminine sensibility. **Song of Solomon** thus has a sure touch of feminine sensibility.

Milkman, Pilate's nephew and Guitar the boy with 'gashes of gold' in his eyes are spellbound when they listen to Pilate's anecdote of her dead father's visit, and how Pilate was scared of darkness. Once again she and Macon watch their father's visitation on a sunny day, charged with blue. It was blue like the ribbons on her mother's bonnet. She in the narrative relates the story of her life to Ruth. She makes it "deliberately long to keep Ruth's mind off Hagar" (**Song** 152). In the scene with Ruth a

well as with Milkman and Guitar as Skerrett makes interesting comment that, "Pilate's story-telling is an art of love and nurture, closely associated with food--an egg, a peach--and structured to meet the needs of others, not self" (198). Thus, through her association with food and nurturing Pilate reveals her feminine sensibility. As women from early childhood are initiated to take care of others . Pilate's life and her stories benefit those around her whom she loves.

Skerrett also notes, that Pilate is a figure of "motherly nurture in the folk tradition" (198). The flow of the narrative is interspersed with fables and stories of the days gone by. This intimate recapturing of the past as I have already stated, is an intrinsic trait of feminine sensibility. Pilate with her unique sense of touch and seeing divulges the colour blue to Milkman in the streak of sky behind the houses and hickories so that he should really see it. Blue reflectes infinite spirituality. By providing an opportunity for a true communion with nature Pilate taught Milkman spiritual responsibility.

Morrison's keen perception of her heroines' eyes reveal her penetration into the quintessence of female psyche. The eyes of Pecola, Sula and Reba figure as the paramount feature of their beings in **The Bluest Eye**, **Sula** and **Song of Solomon** respectively. The remarkable quality is the innocence in the eyes of these heroines. They are as clear as rain; at another time they are bluest of them all. The blue reflects the association with the spiritual aspect in human beings. Reba has "the simple eyes of an infant" (**Song** 46). Thus, women's deep concern and interest in

their own physiognomy is obviously a mark of feminine trait. The poignant story of Pecola in **The Bluest Eye** is women around this theme which reflects feminine sensibility.

In the detailed description of his past Macon tells Milkman about his childhood in Montour County. In this episode too one discerns feminine sensibility. The cooking of wild turkey, and the way Macon's papa cooked provide a fine example of feminine preoccupation. Macon's mother, Song's response to the changed, distorted name suggests the nuance overridden with the hope that the horrid past would be wiped out with Dead as the last name for Macon's family. This throws light on another female trait, namely hopeing against odds.

In the narratives of black women novelists conjuring is a domain where women's woes are healed. In Alice Walker's "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff" rootworking is resorted to by Hannah Kemhuff to ensure justice, as in Ann Petry's **The Street**. Min in Petry's novel gets help of a witch doctor and obtains a shiny cross and coloured powders. She hangs the cross over her bed to get rid of the fear of Super. In like manner Pilate helps Ruth by assuring her that "Macon wouldn't bother her no more; she, Pilate, would see to it" (**Song** 132). The ritual of keeping a small doll on Macon's chair in his office evokes the power it exerted on him. As a result, after that "he left Ruth alone" (**Song** 132).

Ruth had borne trials and tribulations for Milkman and it did hurt her when she heard that, "Somebody was still trying to

kill him (Milkman) to deprive her of the one aggressive act brought to royal completion (**Song** 133). The intensity of pain felt by Ruth at the attempt to rob her only son's life was "as the annihilation of the last occasion she had been made love to" (**Song** 134). Thus, Ruth too longs to be loved like the heroines of Anita Desai, a feminine trait.

Thus, with Morrison, feminine sensibility has as many hues and shades as a full range of notes orchestrated in a symphony.

Why does one get inspired to explore such a theme as "feminine sensibility"? Let us listen to Morrison: "Women probably do write out of a different place. There's some difference in the ways they approach conflict, dominion, and power" (Tate 122). Thus, one feels justified in handling such a theme.

With the publication of **Tar Baby** Morrison once again emerges with a new dimension of feminine sensibility. Morrison celebrates blackness symbolically recalling the genuine properties of tar which unites objects.

The distinct feature of the fictional world of **Tar Baby** is that it is permeated with the sylvan beauty of the tropical Caribbean island, Isle des Chevaliers. The shift from the existing set up in the world of nature to the mechanized world of consumerism and industrial degeneration is vividly captured. The rivers have to persuade daisy trees that indeed men have wrought destruction of the serene beauty and quietness of nature. The

loss of natural kingdom, tropical rain forests and demented stream along with the broken-hearted river foreshadows the dichotomy in the life of Valerian and Margaret Street, the wealthy white American couple. The American candy king settled on the island and "turned his attention to ... killings off rats, snakes and other destructive animal life, adjusting the terrain for comfortable living" (TB 45). Like Soaphead Church and Macon Dead II, Valerian wanted to control his environment completely: he desired to mould the world according to his own whims.

Valerian has created an artificial greenhouse on the island where rain forest abounds. This reflects his perverted view of life and nature. While Valerian and Margaret are alienated from their son, Michael, they support Jadine Childs' schooling. Hence Jadine feels indebted to Valerian for her success in the world. As an outcome she has lost her 'original properties'. As Wagner remarks, Jadine "longs to have everything, both the white and black world or, rather a black world with largely white values and appurtenance" (202-3). Jadine falls in love with Son Green a young 'vagrant'. Their relationship forms the core of the novel. Jadine soon becomes estranged from her African heritage. Son tries "to insert his own dreams into her" of "the fat black ladies in white dresses minding the pie table in the basement of the church" (TB 119). But as old Therese, the blind spiritual healer tells Son that there was nothing in her parts for him (Son) as she has forgotten her 'ancient properties' of nurturance. Morrison's concern for the intrinsic quality of nurturance in black woman is evident through Therese's magic

breasts which give milk. Against the backdrop of this Caribbean woman, Jadine represents the progressive westernized-black woman who cares more for white Valerian than for her aunt or uncle. Christian notes that her aunt and uncle are the ones "who made her access to wealth possible by becoming life-long servants to the rich Valerian" (78).

Ondine, her aunt spent her life's savings, to see Jadine educated and successful. Jadine's success exalted Ondine. "She crowned me, that girl did. No matter what went wrong or how tired I was, she was my crown" (TB 166). Thus, Ondine endowed with feminine sensibility, nurtures Jadine.

Jadine's sensitivity to her own heritage has been blunted. She does not feel the joy at the sudden appearance of Son in Valerian's mansion. She looks on him with more distaste than Valerian. All the values a black young lady ought to have are relinquished by Jadine, who acquires the tastes and manners of White Culture. She studies art history and cloisonné.

Jadine watched the tall African woman in yellow robe, whose 'too much hip, too much bust' and three carefully held eggs suggest fertility and abundance, she felt shocked. Her own superficially successful life seemed to be suddenly empty, 'inauthentic' to her. She returned to the Isle des Chevaliers to sort out her feelings. But Son once more makes her feel 'inauthentic'. He has seen Jadine's fallacy in relinquishing her African heritage.

In contrast to the much photographed Jadine, the African woman in the yellow robe and her beauty could not be contained in images made by a mechanical, lifeless camera. She was "mother/sister/she; that unphotographable beauty. ..." (TB 39) who spits at fashionably dressed Jadine. She made Jadine think of her own worth, precipitating in her an identity crisis.

Thus, woman as nurturer, mother is more valuable at the core of human existence in **Tar Baby**. The feminine sensibility in Jadine is awakened, but it is so hazy that she fails to grasp the message, and hence unable to act upon it positively. And that is precisely the message of Morrison's narrative, in **Tar Baby**. Jadine is trying to be a competent woman of modern time. As Morrison tells to Ruas that "Jadine's femininity becomes sexuality rather than femininity, because that is perceived as weak." (229). As Morrison perceives, the "impetus of the culture is to be feminized, and what one substitutes for femininity is sexuality" (Ruas 230). Thus, compared to Ondine, Jadine is not aware of her nurturing characteristic and finds it a burden. "Femininity for Jadine is the outward image; she is a model. Her focus is on herself. She is essentially narcissistic" (Ruas 230). She, therefore, does not want to share the responsibilities of "nurturing".

Even the "night women" in Eloe frightened Jadine because she is afraid of being a true, nurturing woman. The message of **Tar Baby** is conveyed through the character of Ondine who tells Jadine:

> ... a girl has got to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never

> learns how to be a daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman-I mean a real woman: a woman good enough for a child: good enough for a man good enough even for the respect of other women (TB 242).

Ondine's message of "nurturing" is in fact a characteristic of the 'culture of survival' of the blacks in the new world.

Thus, to Ondine nurturing is essential not only for physical survival, but it is also needed for the spiritual survival of the blacks. She tells Jadine, "what I want from you is what I want for you. I don't want you to care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours". (TB 242).

Thus, Morrison portrays a world of relationships, interdependence and nurturing. Though Jadine might not be like Ondine "she needs, according to Morrison a little bit of Ondine to be a complete woman" (Ruas 229). While in **Song of solomon**, Morrison invests Pilate with nurturing quality, in **Tar Baby** it is Son Green who understands intimacy and knows about the positive properties of women. He is close to the elements of nature. He represents the cultural values of his African heritage. When he looks at western culture and the so called training of Jadine he finds that she is dispossessed of the quality of bonding to her own roots. Her superficial education proves an obstacle in trusting her feelings. Thus, feminine sensibility has positive overtones in Morrison's **Tar Baby**.

Morrison is in favour of a strong sense of male/female differentiation. Analogous to Sula, Jadine too 'suffers' when she sets aside standard definitions of femininity and enters into traditionally masculine territory. At the close of the novel one feels that Jadine is "at loose ends, drifting in trouble, and that her desire to 'make it' may be 'self-destructive" (Ericlson). Son has been invested with nurturance; his involvement has been limited by his belief in the male and female divisions of Eloe. He does not attain according to Erickson "a nurturant identity of his own, but rather fuses with the nurturance proffered by a maternal figure" (31). Yet the progression of nurturant capacity in Son, without a mother, but provided with a mother figure by Church women, is one essential condition for a way out of the impasse in which the novel leaves Jadine.

Feminine sensibility as perceived by Morrison is the core of human existence. Due to the lack of this element in urban settlements, the most joyous, formative stage of human existence-childhood gets stunted. In **Tar Baby** the children in the city of New York are turned into 'short people.' They have 'no child's vulnerability, no unstuck laughter' (TB 185). It is the feminine sensibility which accounts for the care, warmth and affection shown to the old and the young. The city island has pushed the old-Thereses and Gideons-in kennels. **Tar Baby** decries the vaccum on the emotional scale created by materialistic, capitalist culture.

Morrison weaves several strands in the fabric of her novels. Various parable-like folk tales lend an authentic touch to her

narration. One such event which evinces feminine sensibility is Jadine's being trapped in the swamp. There she struggles to get out of the slime by clutching, clinging, pulling, caressing a tree. By giving a female identity to these trees, Morrison beautifully contrasts the two characters; trees and Jadine: one symbolizing nature (nurture) and the other symbolizing culture. Jadine feels more of an orphan at the end of the novel as she cannot choose between nurture and culture.

Feminine sensibility is the focal point in Alice Walker's narratives as her characters are endowed with a very strong sense of the past. Creativity is a constant urge in her heroines. Yet they are socially and psychologically conditioned, and denied expression of their creativity. Their voices are stifled. Apparently Walker's overt concern in **The Third Life of Grange Copeland** does not seem to be with her heroines but she, it seems, insists on exploring the meaning of male development by its impact on female characters. This deft handling of male/female relationship through a female point of view reflects Walker's feminine sensibility.

Brownfield's portrayal is vivid and lively because of his relationship with many women. Even in the case of Grange, his relationship with his mistress/wife Josie as well as his granddaughter Ruth are central to his experiences. In the later part of the novel, Grange's obsession with Ruth's nurturing shows the novelist's feminine sensibility. His act of nurturing by educating Ruth in folk wisdom kindles hope for a better tomorrow

while preserving an awareness of suffering. Ruth is aware of this suffering as she has learnt about her mother Mem and her grandmother Margaret's struggle to survive in sexist and racist society. The feminine strength with which Mem is endowed makes her invincible for Brownfield even after her death. As Alice Walker writes, instead of "rage she had inner sovereignty, a core of self, a rock, ... she had possessed an embedded strength that Brownfield could not match ..." (TTLGC 226).

Amongst all the heroines of Walker it is Mem Copeland who appeals most because of her idealism, her devotion to her family and positive approach to responsibility. On the wider spectrum of human relationships, Mem proves to be the axis of Brownfield's family. Her sensitivity to and commitment for the betterment of her daughters' future reflect her feminine sensibility. Like Margaret she does not neglect her daughters.

In the third generation of the Copeland family Ruth's remembrance of her past life, her mother's affection and care for the entire family is another dimension of feminine sensibility as discussed earlier. Evocation of the past is a feminine trait. Ruth also remembers and appreciates Grange's ambrosia making process during Christmas. It reveals feminine preoccupation with food and wine.

The sentiment of love in this novel is overpowering. Love was central in the early life of Mem. Mem's love for Brownfield enables her to sustain the shocks and inhuman treatment for nine years. Initially She is so immersed in love that she "sang while

she cooked breakfast in the morning ... and sang to him when he crawled in weariness and dejection into the warm life-giving circle of her breast" (TTLGC 49).

It is ironical that in the life of the second generation of Copeland family, Mem's love does not function as a redeeming force. Even Margaret too loved Grange; so did Josies. yet the oppressive nature of the societal structure annihilates these women. It is in the third generation, when Grange returns to the South and takes up the responsibility of his granddaughter Ruth that love proves a great binding force. He survives many degradations; "But to survive whole was what he wanted for Ruth" (TTLGC 214).

Thus, in Walker's treatment of her heroines, feminine sensibility has many facets. One may posit that this peculiar trait proves to be the redeemer and life-giving force for bettering the third life of Copeland family. Morrison and Walker do not portray ideal heroines. They depict characters that are down to earth, ordinary, common place men and women, even those who are most neglected, lowest of the lowly. They reveal these writers' awareness of the complexities of black women's lives and the added complexity coming from double oppression. These heroines are as Harris asserts "good and bad, victimized and victimizing, enslaved and enslaving" (73).

Indian women's life, compared to black American women is limited as far as their social ethos is concerned. Yet the Indian women novelists depict certain features which Indian women share

with their black counterparts. Anita Desai's novels for example, are charged with feminine sensibility. They describe the lives of her heroines in emotionally tense situations. The large body of her fiction delineates the inner scape of modern, sensitive women protagonists in Indian society. Like Morrison, Desai too reveals a world view visualized by her heroines. In **Cry, the Peacock** Gautama's arid, rationalistic way of life thwarts Maya. In Gautama's world even love is not love. Everything is reduced to the dictums of the **Bhagavad Gita.** It reminds one of the parallel situation of Ruth who too suffers from lovelessness in Maconian, materialistic world in **Song of Solomon.**

The heroines of Desai are endowed with a heightened receptivity experienced by the women protagonists. Like Morrison, she too depicts inner lives of women from girlhood to ripe old age. Monisha in **Voices in the City.** Sita in **Where Shall We Go This Summer?,** Bim in **Clear Light of Day** are such heroines.

Maya in **Cry, the Peacock** longs for Gautama's sympathy, affection, care and love. Maya's urge for love is intense, yet it is hardly reciprocated. Gautama's inability to fulfil Maya's longing for love is resultant of his underdeveloped Jungian 'Eros'. He is governed more by the principle of 'Logos'. In his world even love is a metaphysical abstraction.

Maya loves life so intensely that it is impossible for her not to recollect the joyous days of her childhood spent with her father at Lucknow and Darjeeling. This trait of recollecting past memories is peculiar to feminine sensibility.

Maya and Gautama do not share anything between them, not even the sensibility that can differentiate between the 'half-sweet, half-sad fragrance of petunias' and 'a sour', 'astringent', scent of 'lemons'. Gautama is impervious to the very significant sentiment of love and emotion.

Maya's journey through life yearning for that great and splendid 'ideal love' ends on a note of despair. Her feminine sensibility fails to endure the assaults of the sordid, unfeeling environment around her. Gautama exhorts her to train herself to be a 'yogi', a 'sannyasi' who can liberate himself from both attachment and illusion. Such ideas are naturally against her grain.

She, like the heroines of Morrison and Walker longs for the human touch and a binding relationship with her mate. She craves for the warmth and soothing presence of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

Desai's interest in the consciousness of her heroines enable her to perceive the Indian woman from the inside. She is like an artist who unravels the inner feeling and thoughts, tensions and trauma women face in a taboo-ridden society. The problems faced by Maya and Monisha are not peculiar to fiction alone or to Indian women only. They are a part of the universal malaise afflicting women all over the globe in fact and fiction. It is the woman endowed with feminine sensibility who is aware of the malaise in all human relationships.

Though one does not discern any concrete bonding between the heroines and other women characters in Desai as one notices it in the narratives of Morrison and Walker, yet with regard to Maya one can trace the cause of her anguish to a detached human existence, in spite of fervid craving for a friendly human touch from her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. It is a case of craving for female bonding. Maya speaks within herself:

> 'Nila, talk to me. Tell me about -- ' ... I hung upon every word of hers, every gesture, all the while watching her mother out of a corner of my eye, longing for her arms, hating her detachment. ... if I could tie them all into one burning knot of contact and relationship with me, nothing not even the fiercest fingers, would be able to extricate and banish me or Gautama" (CTP 164).

Thus, Maya's fear-ridden and haunted mind would have found some solace had the relationship between the women of the family been made more concrete and nurturing. The tragedy could have been averted with a little more communicaton, a touch of understanding and accomodation on the part of Gautama and his family. Maya is the first of similarly isolated, trapped heroines endowed with feminine sensibility in Desai's fiction. She is seen as a delirious woman by the busy mother-in-law, who instead of extending compassion or nurturance suggests that she is in need of a therapy.

command respect of the younger persons.

The patriachal set-up of society has a tremendous power. It also includes the power of senior female in-laws. Thus, with double edged power, Monisha's in-laws cut her to the quick. She being an intelligent, educated and sensitive woman feels stifled as she has nothing to occupy her except simple chores like 'cutting vegetables, serving food, brushing small children's hair' etc. (VITC 115). She longs for privacy, to be herself, to be left in peace for a while. But privacy is never allowed to her in her large joint family. The subtlety of oppressive female relations, their power over her and tensions experienced by her come alive in the pages of Monisha's 'Diary.' Instead of affection or bonding, Monisha's sister-in-law Kalyanidi derides her when she glances through her wardrobe to inspect her 'saris' and instead discovers only Monisha's classics and dictionaries. This reflects the different scales of values of the heroine and her sister-in-law.

Like black women protagonists relationship is the key word for Monisha, but with Jiban she has no bond of relationship. He hardly feels the pulse of her 'quivering sensitivity.' Like Maya and Gautama in **Cry, the Peacock**, and Sita and Raman in **Where Shall We Go This Summer?**, Monisha and Jiban as husband and wife are diametrically opposite to each other in their values and perceptions of life. Monisha reacts to every phenomenon and change in nature. She longs to meet and talk to her brother Nirode. Yet, she is not given any chance to see her brother in peace and privacy. The first meeting of Monisha with Nirode at

her in-laws' house reveals the inner feelings of a sister ensnared in a huge family with its customs of 'hospitality, hollowness and rotund relations'.

Her attendance at the concert gives some respite to Monisha in the turmoil of her everyday humdrum existence in the huge household devoid of any aesthetically fulfilling experience. Her fulfilment reminds us of Claudia in **The Bluest Eye** who, while listening to her mother's singing feels that even sorrow and misery could be bearable and pain may be 'sweet'.

Some of the black heroines like Celie in **The Color Purple**. Mem in **The Third Life of Grange Copeland** or Claudia in **The Bluest Eye** find an outlet for their creativity in stitching folksy pants or in planting flower plants or scattering flower seeds. Whereas Desai's heroines Maya, Monisha, Sita or Nanda Kaul do not pursue any fine arts or perform creative activity. They, however, try to lead an artistic life. Despite their being thwarted in a rigid social structure, Maya and Monisha enjoy music, Sita appreciates painting by her daughter Menala. They are connoisseurs as far as their tastes are concerned. The uniqueness of Desai's narratives lies in the depiction of the lived experiences of her heroines.

Memory of the past, a feminine trait characterizes heroines of Desai like her black American counterparts. All the heroines of Desai fall back upon memory, a peculiarly feminine domain.

Monisha like Celie keeps her intimate female experiences a secret. The frequent miscarriages and stillbirths haunt her continuously through waking hours and restless nights. The

feminine sensibility of such deep experiences is well captured by the black American poetess Gwendolyn Brooks :

> Abortions will not let you forget.
> You remember the children you
> got that you did not get.
>
> ... ...
> ... ...
> You will never leave them, controlling
> Your luscious sigh.
> Return for a snack of them, with
> gobbling mother - eye. (4).

Just in order to survive, Monisha lives the 'culture of survival'. She advises her brother Nirode: "accept defeat, accept insignificance, accept solitude, a truer gift than any communication, any art, any faith or delusion in the world. ... If he accepts it he will survive (VITC 128). Such ideology of Monisha reflects her strategy to live a life as mere existence. This takes one back to Sula who too discovers that in this world no one wants 'too much glory' in 'nobody's heart' and that too in a woman's heart.

Monisha realises the lack of love in her relationship with Jiban. His relationship with her is characterized by "loneliness and a desperate urge to succeed" (VITC 135). His lackadaisical stance plunges Monisha "into the most calamitious pleasures and pains, fears and regrets..." (VITC 135). Like Maya, Monisha too

realizes that such relationship would never bind Jiben to her.

Sita in **Where Shall We Go This Summer?** is endowed with feminine sensibility, but her point of view is hardly taken a serious note of by her businessman husband Raman or by her children. They are alien to her nature and needs. She longs for a life of fulfilment and responds to the smallest event intensely. As she has placed herself in bondage to Raman and her children, she directs all her ambition and energy their way.

Like several heroines of Morrison and Walker, Sita is very imaginative and emotionally vulnerable. Her heightened sensitivity allows her on the one hand to enjoy the splendour of nature around the sea and on the Manori island which (nature) seems most healing to her parched soul. On the other hand, the same sensitivity hurls her into the abyss of excruciating encounters with her children who seem to relish destruction. They are curt and tough, stubborn and self-willed. They stand in total contrast to their mother. They no longer prize their mother as a powerful parent or revere her as a mother. Her husband and children thrive in a world where wanton and cruel destruction is the main characteristic. In such a setting creation is merely a freak, a temporary and doomed occurrence.

Sita reminds us of Morrison's Ruth Macon who tried to protect her only triumph, namely saving her unborn child in the materialistic Maconian world. Similarly, Desai's Sita wishes to protect her child against the violence of the world all around her by retreating to the Manori island, her childhood abode. She

wishes to keep the child safe from the cruelty and destructiveness of her surroundings. Both the heroines, though cowering in fear in a male dominated world, struggle heroically to protect life within them. Thus, their creativity is considered high.

Human relationship is the very quintessence of feminine sensibility. Desai portrays a chasm between mother and daughter in **Where Shall We Go This Summer?**. The relationship is soured between Sita and Manaka due to a basic difference in their perception. At the outset, an adolescent Manaka displays an indifference towards her mother's feelings. The tenseness in their relationship is evinced through Manaka's pert responce to Karan's query and Sita's stillness at her daughter's pertinacious attitude.

Sita lives her emotional life alone. She struggles to stay whole. she is like a jellyfish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sand bar. She feels she had not run away at all. She is just thrown up there by the sea. Sita has an urge to be left alone before parturition. The sight of foot-prints Raman makes in the wet sand on the Manori sea shore solves the enigma for Sita. Then she could recall the entire verse by Lawrence she had been struggling to recall for long:

> The wild young heifer, glancing distraught,
> With a strange, new knocking of life at her side
> Runs seeking a loneliness.
> The little grain draws down the earth, to hide.

Nay, even the slumberous egg as it labours under the shell

Patiently to divide and sub-divide,

Asks to be hidden, and wishes nothing to tell.

(WSWGTS 150).

Thus, Sita longs to be left alone like the young heifer, the grain and the slumberous egg. Her feminine sensibility tells her that the act of creation could be brought to perfection in great seclusion only.

Clear Light of Day by Desai depicts female consciousness through the remembrance by two sisters Bimla and Tara of their childhood and adolescent days strewn with 'dullness, boredom' and 'waiting.' Bim recalls the ethos of the past and juxtaposes it with the present. At this juncture she considers herself and her retarded brother, Baba as strange persons. They never go out. She also recalls Aunt Mira, swigging secretly from her brandy bottle and Baba winding his old gramophone. And Raja, playing Lord Byron on his death-bed. Tara, her younger sister her triennial visit to her old home recaptures her childhood memories and the atmosphere of 'surrealistic status' that the old house generates. Her improvement brought about by her prudent husband Bakul evaporates as she enters the zig-zag lanes of her childhood memories in her old Delhi house.

In spite of years of westernised and antiseptic life style in various capitals of the world, the ghosts from a vividly remembered past were not exorcised from Tara's mind. As her visit

is about to be over, she plumbs the darkest depth of her past. The two sisters pass through anger, guilt, fear and remorse. All emotions are spent up. Krishnaswamy writes, "There remains only a new awareness of the continuity of life, a life that marches along with time, destroyed and preserved by it, a life that is sustained by the old bonds of family life..." (271).

Like Morrison, Desai depicts children and childhood world with a sure touch which reflects her sense of feminine sensibility. The depiction of the Childhood days of their protagonists has a fair share in the narratives of both these novelists. This phenomenon can be attributed to their sensitivity to and an awareness of the sheer neglect of children who are retarded, abnormal, neglected, ill-treated or ignored in the urban, changing societies, be it East or West. Desai penetrates the world of children with a sensibility that is neither 'atrophied nor calcified'. She recreates the children's world with infinite imagination, love and understanding. The children of the Das family and their childhood are recreated vividly. Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba were perpetually neglected, starved of love and scolded. Their joy at the onset of the new season in their lives is evident, when MiraMasi (mother's sister) comes in their lives. Then it turns out to be "a season of presents and green mangoes and companionship" (CLOD 105). The relationship of the four children of the Das family with their father was not emotionally sustaining. They had known their father only as 'the master of the entrance and exit' (CLOD 53), into and out of their house.

The portrayal of Aunt Mira has become very striking because of the artist's feminine sensibility. Desai has a rare gift of probing underneath the outer shell of mundane life. MiraMasi's character is subtle and humane. **Clear Light of Day** is more appealing, as it holds within its fold the characters of an aunt like Mira and a sister like Bim. It is with immense compassion that Bim deals with aunt Mira as she grows more old. Varied human emotions glide through Bim's consciousness creating innumerable patterns of light and shade in the narrative. As emotional intensity is a vital trait of feminine sensibility, **Clear Light of Day** is a memorable tribute feminine sensibility.

Human relationships could be considered an interesting phenomenon of feminine sensibility and Desai's protagonist Bim provides a new dimension to this feature.

Unlike the heroines of Morrison, Walker, Desai's and Sahgal's heroines belong to the upper middle class in Hindu society. They being free from economic problems, are highly conscious of their status as women in a social system which is male dominated. Feminine sensibility coupled with political consciousness therefore, mark their characters. Sonali in **Rich Like Us** is one such character. She cherishes her friendship with Rose, of whom she is fond. Their female bonding is strong despite their difference in age and background.

Sonali feels so close to Rose, that she being young and inexperienced makes no bones about her bruises and simply reveals them to Rose. Nayantara Sahgal beautifully describes their

relationship using the metaphor of a table cloth. This is typical of feminine sensibility, as the image is very much a part of female consciousness. Rose believes that relationship is like a table cloth put to use. She does not mind it when it looks messy and darned. In case some relationships do not go through ups and downs. Rose feels suspicious of such relationship. Thus, relationship is the core of feminine sensibility.

Rose, though an English woman and belonging to another culture evinces the strength of female bonding. It is she who takes the initiative and bridges the gap between Ram's first wife Mona and herself. Through love, both Mona and Rose come close to each other and their bond thrives in mutual trust and affection.

Sonali represents the sensitive, committed, intelligent, educated modern woman in India. She tops the list of the successful candidates of the Indian Administrative Service Examination, the apex examination in India. However, Sonali becomes a prey to the bureaucratic set up. As she does not grant a licence to a fizzy drink 'Happyola' factory to be set up with foreign collaboration, she incurs the wrath of the Ministry of Industry. She gets an order of transfer, a kind of demotion. Her dreams of building a new democratic country crumble. Despite the lackadaisical socio-political structure of India during the Emergency of 1975 she upholds the values she cherishes most. Her integrity and moral courage add strength and charisma to her character. It is her feminine sensibility which sustains Sonali against rampant corruption indulged in by the male bureaucrats

and politicians.

Like Bim, in **Clear Light of Day** by Anita Desai, Sonali too finally finds her vision and becomes optimistic. In the spirit of female bonding Sonali recapitulates her association with Rose, even after her murder. The ghastly event of the murder proves a great personal loss to Sonali. Now, she attempts her utmost to help the beggar whom Rose fed and sustained, by getting him artificial limbs and teaching him a vocation. Thus, Sonali pays a true tribute to Rose. This reveals the strength of character in Rose and Sonali and their positive feminine sensibility.

When she is offered an unexpected assignment by Brian and Marcella to work on an art exhibit of mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries in India, Sonali takes it up as Rose's legacy. Such an offer restores Sonali's spirits and disperses the gloom she felt when she was transferred. Sonali once again feels young and alive, with her dream of taking the country to a better tomorrow.

Compared to characters like Maya, Monisha and Sita of Desai, Sonali of Sahgal emerges as a very strong character. Independent, courageous and endowed with feminine sensibility, Sonali is as firm as a rock. This obviously appeals to us in the vistas of Indian fictional heroines created by women novelists.

It may thus be inferred that feminine sensibility in the fiction of Morrison, Walker, Desai and Sahgal has varied hues and shades which enrich the female characters that orchestrate in the symphony of their fiction.

Feminine sensibility seems to be fulfilled in emotionally fulfilling and rewarding experiences. Morrison's **The Bluest Eye** is an apt expression of feminine sensibility. Against this backdrop, Desai's delineation of Maya, Monisha and Sita reveal their emotionally intense lives. The poignancy of their lives is due to their stolid, stiff and logical husbands.

It may be argued that, feminine sensibility is as basic and essential to human beings as water is to the soil, or sunlight to the greenery. The malaise of the modern, urban, industrial civilization all round the globe is that a vast majority of so called civilized beings hardly prize the wide range of human emotions as vital to the nurturance of human spirit. Instead, one is made to belive that when such emotions erupt one must crush them. Like many of the black educated girls in **The Bluest Eye**, they are trained to:

> Wipe it away; where it crusts, they dissolve it; wherever it drips, flowers, or clings, they find it and fight it until it dies. They fight this battle all the way to the grave ... (TBE 68).

In such a circumstances, women novelists' perception seems a redeeming feature. According to Demetralopoulos, it becomes a new window, a view upon all that has only been seen patriarchally before (127).

Often the heroines of the novelists under study rebel against the crushing circumstances. This theme is studied in the third chapter of this thesis.

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