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**Dr. K.VICTOR BABU**

Editor-in-Chief



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### *Editorial .....*

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research (IJMER) endeavors to promote and spread knowledge in the multidisciplinary field.

The objectives of the journal are to encourage modern thinking on concepts. The theoretical frameworks in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences are to disseminate such new ideas and research papers with emphasis on renewed implications of social sciences, having broad relevance in society in general and man's life in particular.

IJMER published six issues of the journal in 2012. Each of these issues contained full-length papers, discussions and comments, book reviews and other relevant academic information.

This special issue provides articles of S.Prasanthi Sri and Dr.S.Prasanna Sree, covering wide range of thoughts with a flavor of poetry and other aspects.

**(Dr. Victor Babu Koppula)**

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Visakhapatnam  
02-12-2012

To  
**Dr. K.Victor Babu**  
Editor-in-Chief  
IJMER

IJMER's philosophy is to map new frontiers in emerging and developing areas of research, industry and governance as well as to link with centers of excellence worldwide to stimulate young minds for creating knowledge based community.

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The focus of papers ranges from the finely grained and empirical, to wide-ranging multidisciplinary practices, to perspectives on knowledge and method.

I wish Dr.K.Victor Babu, Editor-in-Chief all the success in the New Year 2013.

*Prasanna Sree*  
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## SUGARING THE SOUR PILLS - DECIPHERING LANGUAGE OF THE SILENCED

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*The key to understanding women's history is in accepting-painful though it may be- that it is the history of the majority of the human race writes Rosalind Miles. Traditionally, the image of woman has been what men have wanted it should be. This image of woman is found in the cultural attitudes of the world and departure from this has come to stand as the dividing line between tradition and modernity. Images restrict a person and hamper personal freedom and a woman not conforming to the image is either annihilated or denigrated. This is the predicament of women all over the world. Ernestine has observes that:*

*Humanity recognizes no sex; mind recognizes no sex; life and death, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery recognize no sex. Like man, woman comes involuntarily into existence; like him, she possesses physical and mental and moral powers... like him she has to pay the penalty for disobeying nature's laws, and far greater penalties she has to suffer from ignorance... like men she also enjoys or suffers with her country. Yet she is not recognized as his equal! (Ernestine: 1)*

In a male dominated society, a woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home-maker with multifarious roles to play in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance



are her required attributes. Excessive endurance, service of adjustments, she makes in her life faithfully and obediently, are her admired qualities. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement becomes her normal way of life. **Mary Ann Fergusson opines that:** *In every age women has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress, and as sex object-their roles in relationship to men!* (Fergusson: 4-5)

The introduction of literacy into the predominantly non-literate West African societies brought about an even more profound social change. Through the introduction of literacy, the corpus of world civilization, indeed Western, its institutions and values, arts and sciences, philosophies and theology, its aesthetic values, and the artifacts of its material culture have been made available to people in West Africa. Literacy and written literature are potent factors in the shift from the traditional direction to inner-direction in educating the individual...and in shaping of the individual attitudes and values.

Women writers of Africa challenged the image of African women as already liberated persons and examined the ways in which African women view their lives in contemporary society. Major writers like Bessie Head and Ama Ata Aidoo are involved in issues of women's experience which do not depend on man's perception of his needs but on the woman's awareness of hers. Their writings have elements of protest and their direct statements reflect the complexity of their art

There were 'writers like Achebe and Ekwensi who projected women with a different outlook – giving a high status to motherhood. But there were writers who projected women as mere 'subjects' in literature. Nigerian novelist, **Cyprian Ekwensi** is well known for his interest in women characters, the realistic portrayal of their lives, and in the woman's situation in modern Nigeria. But even these characters are ultimately shown to have redemption and fulfillment by their subsequent devotion to motherhood and rural ways of living. Achebe offers an important distinction between an idealized image of womanhood and the limited status of the African woman who is required to do her husband's bidding in her day-to-day life.



In the recent years **Nadine Gordimer** and **Laurens Vander post** who have used fiction with respect for life and protest against oppression as they have created a fictional reality which is closer to the contemporary times. Women Writers like **Yvonne Vera** and **Ama Ata Aidoo** have jettisoned male-centered invention of the nation, and doing so envisioned identity and community in newly liberating ways. Woman is born free and her rights are the same as those of a man

Whenever blacks and women are linked black women are ignored in two ways - as black people and as women. The woman is always a representative of the victim of colonization. With colonialism woman were forced into a subordinate position. In many instances, African woman writers were marginalized by their male counterparts, and their works either remain unacknowledged or tokenized by the literary critics. Ama Ata Aidoo, who has been described as perhaps the most renowned African woman writer declares that she and her female colleagues are just receiving the writer's 'version of the general neglect and disregard that women in the larger society receives. Even when the education has become more varied and sophisticated for women, the writer's gap was not closed rendering the authorship, critiquing and publishing of African literature, a dominantly male enterprise.

Women's experience is now perceived worldwide as humanly and 'universally' valuable. Women writers are 'special' when compared to men as they deal with women's experience from within and their understanding and perception of the ideals of the society and culture they live in and an outlook on life of their own. Women's literature finds useful clues to identity in psychology and social sciences. Women writers are now challenging the romanticized and stereotyped portrayals of women in earlier fiction written by men. Women writers have created three-dimensional female characters both with strengths and weaknesses and explored their frustrations as wives and mothers and their search for personal fulfillment in a rigid framework of social expectations and taboos Women writers insist that the experience and roles of women are different from that of men. Women's experience as depicted in their works revolves around her self-perception



rather than around man's needs. Generally, the protest is directed at sexual inequalities in traditional as well as in colonial African. This protest is largely to develop and assert female strength of will and character. It is true as **Trinh T. Mina** writes: *I write to show myself showing people who show me my own showing.* (Trinh T.Mina:22.) Many of the works that modern woman writers produce are reflective of three main roles - the female writer 'as a writer', 'as a woman' and 'as a Third World person'. These roles are demonstrative of the various identities women assume and perform in the society. Both male and female writers attempt to transcend the racial situation in Africa. However, always there are differences in representation. The colonized woman is doubly oppressed under the double yoke which indigenous patriarchy and a foreign masculine's colonialism impose upon her. Women writers thus interrogate the sexual as well as the racial codes enforced by colonial discourse. The tendency of male - literature is to counter colonial representations with comments on exclusive indigenous traditions where women writers are critical both of those traditions and of colonialism. The implementation of women's -resistance both to colonial and indigenous male domination is suppressed in the male literary tradition and is finely highlighted in the writings by women. In the recent years **Nadine Gordimer** and **Laurens Vander post** who have used fiction with respect for life and protest against oppression as they have created a fictional reality which is closer to the contemporary times. When the novels of Africans started seeing the light of the day in 1950s, the Western literary world labeled them as the literature from the 'under developed' and 'backward' by comparing those to the earlier periods of English literature.

When women began writing and publishing their work in the mid-sixties, in Africa, they faced problems not only of encoding their experiences as women but also of combating the orthodoxies of colonial and anti-colonial writing. **Grace Ogot**, **Flora Nwapa** are two important African women writers who have challenged a number of orthodoxies like the 'voiceless ness of the 'black women', their lack of personal representation with specific references leading to the definition of female creativity not as residing solely in the womb and corollary. African women's literature takes its primary undertaking: the interrogation of male texts and colonial texts. The female



tradition of African literature which emerges through the writings of **Grace Ogot, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Mariam Ba** is in part defined by their inverse relationship with men's literature. Women's fiction interrogates the imposed racial and sexual codes of colonial discourses and aims at the inversion of African male literary discourse. African women also write out of their own needs and their literature evolves in a dialogic relation with counter discourses that operate in their societies.

While Africa is in a process of change more rapid than that has been typical of other societies, nevertheless traditional African social patterns remain strong in their own right and exert a very significant influence on its other developments which are taking place under modern pressures. In traditional society the individual is seen first and foremost as part of a corporate whole, and his existence as part of the social pattern overwhelms any private life he might lead within the confines of his own consciousness. In such a situation, social conventions exert great authority. The communal good is all important and any personal denial of group commitment appears to weaken the whole and is deplored. Similarly, when it comes to the question of identity of women, it becomes more complicated to estimate the place and role of women in the tradition bound Nigerian society in particular and in the African society in general. There emerged a new identity and a new literature out of this experience. The growing sense of dissatisfaction against colonial authority and the desire to articulate the African aesthetic have been major influences on African writing. The introduction of new education system, after independence, is another important factor, which brought out young readers eager to study African literature.

In most of the communities, the woman as oral artist has been known to voice her society's experience as a whole. Women artists have not totally disappeared from the literary scene in contemporary Africa as a whole. This is mostly because the women were not provided equal opportunities to educate themselves. But still they contributed to some standard themes which have been the regular slated writer and critic alike in modern African literature. When it comes to serious women writings, it is generally expected that female oriented and feminist perspectives form the basis for the subject



and theme of the women writers. And the real issue is that the very existence of clearly demarcated sexual roles in some African societies has left room for those women writers who have chosen to elaborate upon the women's perception of her own role. As a consequence, these women writers are much more involved with those aspects of the women's experience which do not depend on the man's perception of his needs, but are based on women's awareness of hers. This kind of involvement is most explicit in the works of feminist women writers.

Reason for the sprung of strong note of feminism in the writings of most of the Black women and especially in African women writings, is that Nigeria and Africa were oppressively masculinist. Nigeria's traditional culture, Muslim as well as non-Muslim had been masculine-based, even before the advent of the white men. The source, nature and extent of female subordination and oppression have constituted a vexed problem in African literary debates.

The status of women in pre-colonial Africa is comparatively different from the status of women in post-colonial Africa. The beginning of colonial rule brought to Africa the European notion that women belonged to home alone, nurturing their family. At the same time societies expected women to work - work which the society considered correspondent to that done by men. Furthermore, child-rearing was not considered only to be the mother's job as even the other members of the family helped to rear the children

The colonization of Africa brought Africa into the world economic system as a major target for exploitation. Males began to dominate the international market which brought better returns and women were confined to growing food crops which received lower returns with this the economic status of women was brought down, which resulted in their degeneration in the other spheres also. Like-wise colonial administrators and Christian Missionaries introduced the assumptions of European patriarchy into Nigerian society. Their ideas of the appropriate social role for women differed greatly from the traditional role of women in indigenous Nigerian societies. According to the ideas of the colonizers women belonged



to home engaged in child rearing - an exclusively female responsibility and other domestic chores. They thought if a woman obtained financial independence, she might not give her husband and his family their entitled respect. In the same manner, the colonial governments also posed many restrictions on the African and especially on the Nigerian women. Such violent measures on women inspired many Nigerian women to hold a series of protests throughout the colonial period against particular colonial policies and against colonialism itself. Many women writers have also made this discrimination their main forte for writing and have basically reflected and exposed the predicament of women in a sensitive manner, in their literature. However, African literature so far was understood as literature by men, for interest in African literature has, with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers. The contributions of women to African literature have not been limited to the modern period. As Butchi Emecheta says in an interview to Julie Holmes:

*Many other areas of traditional culture, including personal dress and adornment, religious ceremonies, and intra-gender patterns of comportment, suggest that Africans often de-emphasize gender in relation to seniority and other insignia of status {Butchi Emecheta, Interview by Julie Holmes, The Voice, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1996}*

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It is to be noted that African women writers are positioned in the margin *and* also more specifically on the edge. They are not just marginal, they are rather luminal figures. This luminosity results from their position in an ambiguous space that is neither “here” nor “there”. This being on edge creates conditions analogous to the “nervous conditions” attributed to the precarious position of the so-called “natives”. However, sitting “on the edge”, African women writers are nevertheless sustained by a fear of living on the precipice. The cultural schizophrenia often associated with the alienated colonized is, in their case, further complicated and intensified by the social politics of their environment. One of the factors that accounts for these “nervous conditions” is the African women writers’ awareness of the powerful gaze of the reader or critic (usually male); this gaze circumscribes them and compels them to “negotiate” the creation of their fictional characters. As these women writers assume their marginal position in a masculine’s literary culture, they deploy different strategies to represent the specificity of their position. The works of two second-generation African women writers - **Buchi Emecheta** and **Mariama Ba** graphically illustrate the nature of these negotiations. The centrality of women in African oral tradition is undisputed. The claim of the modern African women writers to be descendents of great female story tellers in the oral tradition, in which strong, radical women and symbols of womanhood are visibly recognized, is often at stake as a dearth of similar materials still exists when it comes to written literature. In that case, the pervasive marginality and subalterity of radical women characters who symbolize change appears to be difficult to be explained. As a result of such complexity, the protagonists consistently remain to be “characters of reaffirmation” in the sense that they reaffirm the commonly accepted notions of woman and women’s reality.

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The root cause of all economic and social problems was the lack of education and this gave men a reason for refusing political rights to women. **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** wrote the 'Declaration' for the '1848 Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, U. S. A., in which she described the injustices being done to women by men:

*He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise... He has made her, if married, civilly dead... He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women.( Louise Michele Newman:192-193 )*

The historian **Amaury de Rein court** in Women and Power in History ruled out strange masculine aberrations that required women to be useless. She said: *the historical record shows that women, one way or another, always have to be at the centre of things and will not for long stand being made idle or put on the shelf. (Amaury de Reincourt: 306.)*

Women started questioning this enforced inactivity and their economic and social dependency on men. Women were being subjected to all kinds of restrictions like in the West. While men were enjoying several rights in the society. After ages of endless waiting and submission women in the West raised their voices to break the silence under the leadership of **Mary Wollstonecraft**, before the close of the eighteenth century. She commenced her feminist critique, Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), with antagonism at the 'baneful lurking gangrene' of 'the tyranny of man



over woman'. With the demands for education, for work and for equal companionship, Mary Wollstonecraft's contribution is of great importance in the history of the women's movement. For a **Tristan**, a French disciple of Wollstonecraft, resembled a handbook of feminist struggle and had insisted upon *the right to juridical equality between men and women as 'the only means of achieving the unity of humanity.* **Flora Tristan** as quoted in **Rosalind Miles, The Women's History of the World**:235.) Those men, who realized that they were enjoying several privileges at women's expense, started distinguishing themselves from the rest of their sex. In 1825 **William Thomson**, a socialist philosopher published his Appeal of One-Half The Human Race, Women, Against The Pretentious of The Other Half, Men which was almost a prophetic document. He connected the sexual and racial oppression of women and said that women were made the involuntary breeding machines and household slaves and were reduced by the tyranny of men to the condition of Negroes in the West Indies. He insisted upon the political equality and championed the cause of women for their right to vote:

*Women of England, awake! Women, in whatever country ye breathe degraded - Awake. Awake to the contemplation of the happiness that awaits you when all your faculties of mind and body shall be fully cultivated and developed... As your bondage has chained down Man to the ignorance and vices of despotism, so will your liberation reward him with knowledge, with freedom and with happiness. (Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson.23)*

The new women's movement expanded into a commanding political force. A new note in the voice of protest is found which gave the movement an authority and authenticity which commanded attention of **Anna Coate** and **Beatrix Campbell** in their work Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation(1982):

*Women are an oppressed class... We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants and cheap*



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*labour.... Our prescribed behavior is enforced with threats of physical violence. Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political contention.... (Anna Coate and Beatrix Campbell: 15)*

The new strength of women lies in the recognition of self. As **Lisa Tuttle** observes in Encyclopedia of Feminism(1986) *We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves. Our sisters and our community allow us to continue our struggle and our work...* (Lisa Tuttle: 42) Even though issues of access to male privilege and power were undeniably important for women and men in the European past, they sought other goals as well. Moreover, the ways in which Europeans expressed their claims seemed to differ considerably from the Anglo-Americans. **Karen Offen** through her work Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach in SIGNS (1988) comments that

*Europeans focused as much or more on elaborations of womanliness; they celebrated sexual difference rather than similarity within a framework of male/female complementarities; and, instead of seeking unqualified admission to male dominated-society, they mounted a wide-ranging critique of the society and its institutions. (Karen Offen: 124.)*

Considering all the aspects that the word feminism incorporates and realizing feminism as a rapidly developing major critical ideology, or system of ideas in its own right, Karen Offen attempts at defining feminism: *As a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society. (Karen Offen: 151)*

The word 'feminine', 'feminist' and 'female' are also used by several authors with several contextual meanings. Of all the writers, **Elaine**

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**Showalter and Toril Moi** deserves special mention as they tried to follow a distinct pattern in using these words. While Showalter used these words to correspond different stages of literary tradition of women, Toril Moi distinguished these words as meaning three different kinds of approaches to women's movement. Showalter suggests the style of imitation, protest and autonomous aspects of woman's literature.

Toril Moi, on the other hand, draws out a distinction between feminism as a political, femaleness as a matter of biology and femininity as a set of culturally defined characteristics. She equates the word feminist with feminism and explains that both are political labels indicating support for the aims of new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s. Feminist criticism is a specific kind of political discourse – a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. She recognizes different political views within the feminist camp and insists that feminist criticism studies the social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes. She cites the work of **Kate Millet's Sexual Politics** and explains that for Millet the essence of politics is power and the task of feminist critics and theorists is to expose the way in which male dominance over females constitutes, *perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power* (Kate Millet: Sexual Politics:25).

Following Kate Millet's approach, feminists have politicized existing critical methods thus forming a ground for feminist criticism to grow into a new branch of literary studies. Moi feels that feminists find themselves in a position more or less similar to that of other radical critics. In doing so, the feminists have adopted several theories relevant to their goals. Toril Moi supports this application she makes a mention of these reflections through her work Feminist, Female, Feminine in The Feminist Reader, Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism(1989) edited by **Catherine Belsey** and **Jane Moore** and aptly writes: *Like socialists, feminists can in a sense afford to be tolerantly pluralistic in their choice of literary methods and theories, precisely because any approach that can be successfully appropriated to their political ends must be welcome* (Toril Moi:118.)



While accepting that many women have been victimized intellectually, emotionally and physically by men, Moi highlights the fact that some women have managed efficiently to counter male power. She advocates that there is nothing wrong in adapting some ideas as mentioned by herin her book The Feminist Reader *stressing our right, aggressively if necessary to appropriate other people's ideas for our own political purposes. We may avoid a defeatist analysis of the situation of intellectually and culturally active women.* (Toril Moi: 120) Further, Moi supports and appreciates the work of Juliet Mitchell and many others who have mobilized the massive task of turning Freudian psycholanalysis into a source of truly feminist analysis and Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray's efforts in applying the philosophy of Jacques Derrida to illuminate feminist issues and **Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar** who have rewritten the literary theory of Herald Bloom.

The kind of patriarchal stereotyping which many women writers indulged in their earlier works prior to the 1960's is what the feminists wanted to wombat. Thus she states that a female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a feminist one. Supporting her argument Toril Moi brings in **Rosalind Coward's** discussion in her essay Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels? (1986). She also criticizes the mistaken belief in experience as the essence of feminist politics which later became the main political base of the new women's movement which emphasizes on the concept of consciousness rising. She explains that the notion of representative experience in consciousness rising cannot itself be a ground to politics, since any experience is open to conflicting political interpretations and in no way guarantees a common political front. She emphasizes that feminism as a political theory cannot be reduced to a reflection or a product of that experience and supports the Marxist view of the necessary dialectical relationship between theory and practice in applying to the relationship between female experience and feminist politics.

The terms male and female purely represent biological aspects of sexual difference and thus female is equated to nature and feminine represents nurture in this usage. **Simone de Beauvoir** in her work The



Second Sex(1949) implies that *a woman is not born but becomes woman* through socialization as femininity is a cultural construct. **Millet** argues for the re-socialization of society as a feminist strategy. **Germaine Greer** (1971) and **Anne Ockley** (1972) pursued the same line of reasoning but with idiosyncratic differences. Education or reeducation, for many feminists, at the time seemed a particularly viable programme for radical social change. Mitchell's argument, instead, is to view the Freudian story to understand how subjectivity, sexuality, and sexual differences are constituted within the patriarchy. However, many felt that the dynamics of sexual difference require a historical dimension to their characterisation. **Teresa Brennan** argues that there is an impasse at present between the terrains of feminism and psychoanalysis, which is creating tension for the politics of feminism and the issue of change. Brennan also looks at the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan and asks in the work Philipa Rothfield in the Introduction to Part -IV Feminism and Subjectivity in a Reader in Feminist Knowledge. Ed. **Sneja Gunew**, *if the avowed phallic centrality of Lacanian theory is not tied to any particular historical reality, what hope for change?"* (Brennan 112.) Moira Gatens introduces the body through her critic of sex/gender distinction, which pre-supposes that the body is some 'tabula rasa' upon which the production of gender has been inscribed. **Gatens** develops an alternative perspective to this in which the body is always to be situated socially and historically. She examines the body in relation to the questions of biology, masculinity/femininity, and the imaginary. (Moira Gatens:137) Many contemporary feminists began to view this sex/gender distinction as not necessarily a helpful approach. Some feminists have argued that sex is not natural at all, that there is no natural identity behind the masks of gender as these are merely masks. Gender thus would be constituted as the ensemble of representations of women- housewife, mother, whore, etc. They further argue that gender is culturally determined yet culture is made up of an ensemble of gender discrimination.

**Susan Faludi** in Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women (New York: Crow Publishers, 1991) remarks, *Examining gender differences can be an opportunity to explore a whole network of power relations - but so often it becomes just another invitation to justify them."* (Susan Faludi:



326) Analyzing the question of sex/ gender distinction, **Diane Elam** explains that *The rough distinction between sex and gender can be made as follows: either sex is privileged as a biological attribute upon which a gender ideology is imposed, or sex is defined as merely the ideological mystification that obscures cultural facts about gender. Thus if women are a sex, they are oppressed by gender; if women are understood as a gender, they are oppressed by sex. I fear that the desire to decide this issue is a significant problem for feminism. Whichever way feminists argue – whether women are understood as naturally sexed or as culturally gendered – the result is a kind of vicious circle*” (Diane Elam:42) *Feminism and Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1994),

According to **Teresa de Lauretis**, *one must unravel and deconstruct the sex/gender relationship so that gender is no longer seen either as unproblematically preceding from biologically determined sex, or as an imaginary construct that is completely beside the point.* (Teresa de Lauretis:3) She alternatively proposes that gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings; rather it is a product and process of a number of social technologies which crosses any number of languages as well as cultures. *Technologies of Gender* (Indian University Press, 1987), p. 3.) In short, de Lauretis’s feminist theory of gender views it as a subject of multiple, rather than divided or unified conception. **Monique Wittig** however, calls for an all out destruction of gender and sex. She argues that within society women are marked by sex, while within language they are marked by gender. Given this distinction, any power granted to sex and gender categories is grounded on ontological falsehoods. Gender, she maintains *is an ontological impossibility because it tries to accomplish the division of Being.* (Monique:64) However, Wittig’s argument was later criticized as being a radical project of lesbian emancipation as she stood in the defense of pre-gendered person. Diane Elam keeps her stress on focusing the sexual difference which is to be understood as the complex interplay of sex and gender rules but open as the space of radical uncertainty. She agrees with Cornell that Derrida’s attempt to move beyond binary or oppositional definitions of sexual difference, however Utopian they may be, becomes important for feminism because it *demands the*



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*continual exploration and re-exploration of the possible and yet also the unrepresentable.* (Drucilla Cornell:169)

Feminists espouse womanism. The aim of “African feminism” is the feminism of wholeness and self-healing. The Nigerian born expatriate writer, Buchi Emecheta, along with their critics, maintains that African women were traditionally subordinated to sexist cultural mores. Feminist consciousness permeates the works of Buchi Emecheta. Her novels explore to determine those customs and traditions which cause the most suffering in the lives of her female characters and what signs of change suggest hope so that the cause of this suffering will eventually be eliminated. The works of Emecheta believe in the myth that feminist issues are not important to African women, as they already have sufficient power, as women who choose to suffer polygamy because they like it, and that whatever misery African women suffer can be blamed only as an aftermath of Western culture’s introduction into Africa. Most of the novels of Emecheta depict extreme suffering in female characters, and they also portray some increase in feminist consciousness, and indicate optimism that some change will occur. Furthermore, these novels suggest that until men become the kind of people with whom an egalitarian relationship is possible, more and more African women will be saying no to marriage.

Though the artistic merit of these protest writers is limited, their frequently pervasive charges of sexual inequality offer their readers direct insights into the African women’s perception of herself and her society.

These insights provide a wide range of concerns from the subject of poverty to the everyday chores of motherhood and the inescapable drudgery of rural life in poorer communities. The protester’s straightforwardness in reflecting such realistic aspects is especially helpful in the study of women’s literature in Africa because their vehemence is in itself significant. It challenges the entrenched image of African women as already liberated persons. With all of their artistic failings the protest writers occupy a special place in literature as they voice a passionate sense grievance that compels the attention of anyone who seriously undertakes an examination of the ways in which African women view their lives in contemporary Africa.



The protest elements are traced from the writings of many women writers of different generations belonging to different parts of Africa. Some such implications are found in the writings of **Mabel Dove-Danquah** **horn Ghana**, the first women to be elected to a government assembly in Modern Africa. Her writings usually reflect certain distaste for traditional sexual roles. Her short story, "Anticipation", is a sardonic account of polygamy and male arrogance. Like-wise, one finds similar implications also in the writings of **Grace Ogot**, a minor writer from Kenya, whose protest is subdued or indirect. This is evident in her novel The Promised Land (1966) and her collection of short stories Land Without Thunder (1968). She describes sexual roles and attitudes with little or no narrative commentary or political judgment. The kind of subtlety or multiple suggestiveness normally associated with this kind of narrative technique makes Ogot's limitations as a writer.

Modern African-born women writers continue to produce sophisticated narrative art even without the attention and acclaim they deserve. Rudo Gaidanwa of the University of Zimbabwe and author of *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*, pointed to the gap between the strong character of African women in real life and the passive images of womanhood in published works. *Some of the materials existing do not depict anything women can identify with*, she noted. Addressing the question of role models, South African writer, **Sindiwe Magona**, author of five books written within a ten-year period, declared, "If our children don't read about us, how they would want to be like us?".

Women in Africa have been writing for almost as long as men have, overcoming quite significantly the colonial bias that favored the education of boys. While modern African writing of the 50s and 60s began on a small scale and was mainly produced by men (anthologized in 1969 by the late Trinidadian author, Whitney Carter as *Whispers from a Continent*), women's contributions helped to animate this first wave of literary production. Further, the *two* dramatists from the Ghanaian theatre - Ama Ata Aidoo and Efua Sutherland who received very limited attention in spite of their great creditable contribution to the Ghanaian theatre succeeded



well in integrating their treatment of women with the literary forms in which they work. The roles of their theatre are deliberately modelled on prevailing sexual roles in society. Moreover, as a short story writer also, Aidoo develops her techniques in such a way that each story becomes a direct, structural reflection of the personality of the woman it describes.

Ama Ata Aidoo's play, Dilemma of a Ghost, performed at the University of Ghana in 1964 and published a year later, explored further the clash-of-cultures theme enunciated in Chinua Achebe's groundbreaking novel, Things Fall Apart (1958), and simultaneously broke new ground by examining the complex ties between Africans and African Americans. Anticipating the cultural climate of the civil rights movement in America, Dilemma appealed to the Pan-Africanist sentiments later articulated in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun.

In 1966, two English-language novels by women appeared on the scene: Flora Nwapa's Efuru and Grace Ogot's The Promised Land, published in England and Nairobi, respectively. In her novel, Nwapa attempted to find a new and independent voice to express her disenchantment with Nigerian patriarchal society, but critics were either dismissive or unimpressed. As a matter of fact, the first generation of sub-Saharan women writers writing in English – Aidoo, Nwapa, Ogot, Eflia Sutherland (Ghana) and Bessie Head (South Africa) – were largely ignored in the emerging African literary criticism, prompting the African American feminist critic, Roseann P. Bell to question the invisibility of African women writers in a 1977 conference paper appropriately titled " *The Absence of the African Woman Writer*. In the 80s, within the framework of the international women's movement, the climate of opinion towards women writing in Africa began to change and a number of female writers rose to attention.

For example, three of the novels she wrote during this period **The Bride Price** (1976), **The Slave Girl** (1977) and **The Joys of Motherhood** (1979) – represent different arenas of women's struggle against hostile traditions and formidable obstacles to self-realization. In particular, The Joys of Motherhood, her most widely read novel, makes elaborately ironic the crippling despair of the childless woman in a culture



that overvalues motherhood. A quiet devastation is discernible in Emecheta's work, but there is also a corresponding validation of ordinary women living heroic lives. Destination Biafra (1983), her high-minded narrative about the Nigerian civil war, celebrates one such woman.

**Debbie Ogedemgbe**, who casts her lot with her country's fragile prospects for ethnic unity, fights valiantly to end the war and proudly proclaims, "I am a woman and a woman of Africa. I am a daughter of Nigeria and if she is in shame, I shall stay and mourn with her in shame."

Senegalese writer Mariama Ba also drew the adulation of readers around the world with the publication of So Long a Letter (1981), a poignant look at polygamy through women's eyes. This novel-as-letter examines the rites of courage of a woman abandoned for a much younger wife in an Islamic marriage. Writing to her friend, Ramatoulaye, the protagonist sets out on a journey toward self-healing. *I am beginning this diary, my prop in my distress. Our long association has taught me that confiding in others allays pain.*

The other protest writer, whose voice is more potent when compared to writers, is **Bessie Head** from South Africa. Her writings exhibit a direct protest and such presence of protest element has not compromised the complexity of her art. She is deeply suspicious of all prevailing traditions and institutions, since she associates them with the widespread disorder she encounters in the world.

However, both the major as well as the minor women writers insist that the experience and roles of women are distinguishable from men's. In their works, the woman's experience revolves around her self perception rather than around the man's needs. The major figures among these writers are those who are able to communicate this kind of female self perception in complex and intense terms in works that are often artistically imaginative and innovative. The writing of the distinguished group of women writers in contemporary African literary writing is directed at sexual inequality in traditional as well as in modern Africa. This protest is usually interwoven with a frank emphasis on the woman's own need to develop and assert her own strength of will.



Few female writers developed such a dramatic profile even into the 80s, but in spite of critical neglect, African women continued to write perhaps out of what Aidoo calls a sense of “desperation” to be heard. The distance between **Lloyd Brown’s** pioneering text Women Writers in Black Africa (1981), an assessment of the work of five writers, to Africa Woman Palava: The Nigerian Novel By Women (1996), Chikwenye Ogunyemi’s full-scale critical treatise, represents a dramatic shift in the critical attitude towards African women’s literary production. The strength of the feminist dialogue among black and white American female scholars in the 80s no doubt helped to boost critical re-appraisal of Africa’s writing women.

Leading the way in this regard is Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature, edited by **Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Grave**. In Kenya, **Micere Mugo, Rebecca Njau, Marjorie Macgoye and Asenath Bole Odaga** laid out the concerns of women and the nation in poetry, drama and fiction. However, their male compatriot, gifted writer **Ngugi wa Thiong’o**, leapt far ahead of them in international acclaim. But if these women operated under the radar, they were not doing so in a vacuum.

In South Africa, **Miriam Tlali, Laretta Ngcobo and Ellen Kuzwayo**, among others, continued to write against the mounting tide of despair during the Apartheid era. In West Africa, **Aminata Sow Fall** (Senegal), **Zaynab Alkali** (Nigeria), **Ken Bugul** (Senegal) and (Cameroon) were contributing to the evolving history of female creativity in Africa.

By the 90s it was clear that women writers could no longer be kept on the fringe of African literary culture. To date, international recognition has been small but significant: the Noma award for Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*, the Grand Prix de Litterature de l’Afrique for *The Beggars’ Strike* (1979), by Aminata Sow Fall; the 1992 Commonwealth Prize for Literature for Ama Ata Aidoo’s novel, *Changes* (1991); and the 1997 Regional Commonwealth Prize for Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue*. Among critics, women writers have gone from being viewed as a collective oddity, reflected in *Female Novelists of Africa* (1984) by the Nigerian critic Oladele Taiwo, to being more widely seen as talented individuals who inspire more in depth



study of African literature.

Of all the writers Flora Nwapa like her contemporary writers, Emecheta and others speaks on the matters of blackness and womanhood. The Nwapa novel is typical of the kind of African novel that resists purely western-oriented approaches to the genre. A harsh social realism pervades Nwapa's writings, which may be a conspicuous effect of her own close involvement in public life in Nigeria. But a serious protest element is not very much seen in her writings as in that of Emecheta's writings. Her treatment of feminine or feminist themes is more indirect when compared to Emecheta if Flora Nwapa is a challenger, Buchi Emecheta is a fighter. African women have to acknowledge their mothers and fathers who have ensure them education in spite of the patriarchal tradition prevailing in the African society the enlightenment provided by education that these women writers could dismantle the myths of female inferiority and challenge the roles of faithless worn. Educated African women in modem period are now occupying prominent positions in important decision making-bodies and realizing their duties to make society an equitable place for the less privileged women. They are scaling great heights with their education and willingness to survive in order to prove their capabilities. African women writers – have made contributions as lecturers, ministers and directors of many institutions and are also involved in various movements against forced marriages and widowhood practices.

African women writers have been successful in acquiring a status along with their male counterparts in national progress and development. This has helped them to gain self-realizaion and fulfillment. After many years of silence, women through their writings could forge ahead in their aim to overcome the barriers of oppression and social tyranny and enlighten the other women through their works. It is in this context that the present study is made in order to look at the various experiences of women, who have transformed their attitudes by escalating positivism towards their life.



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FROM THE LAND OF ANCIENT PROMISES ....LONGING FOR  
NEW PROMISES A REFLECTION OF JAISHREE MISRA'S NOVEL  
ANCIENT PROMISES

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Jaishree Misra's first debut novel Ancient Promises (2000) is a semi autobiographical novel of the author herself. My marriage ended today.'Ma had said as we left the court her voice and her eyes brimming with Sadness that it had been My fate!. She knows her territory well – her inner universe and the narrow world of Valapadu with its hypocrisies, stuck in the simulacrum of age-old values. She describes it vividly in a few deft strokes and fleshes out her characters with closely observe details

In the novel Ancient Promises.Janu's character is crafted with care. With a deep insight into her psyche, Misra makes her at once vulnerable and strong. The writer has a keen ear for conversation, and uses this effectively and astutely to make the acid-tongued mother-in-law and her cronies come alive. Janu's mother and grandmother evolve from defeatist flag bearers of middle-class morality to unlikely champions of Janu's freedom, almost entirely bearing the brunt of the collective wrath of their neighbours.It is not easy to depict a weak character like Suresh, but Misra creates a realistic portrayal of him.Arjun, with his brief appearance could have easily degenerated into someone wishy-washy, but it is to Misra's credit that he is not a uni-dimensional character. Jaishree Misra is a perfect artist, her novels naturally offer a wide variety of social, Cultural and psychological interpretations The present novel Ancient promises (2000) is shown through series of flashbacks. The Protagonist Janaki is the narrator. Janaki is referred as Janu throughout the novel. She accidentally meets Arjun outside their school gate in Delhi.. Janu says:Something so big I was certainly not to know of its existence then....Something old and timeless and unstoppable



had been slowly set into motion again. Something packed full of dangerous promises. (AP:21-22)

Arjun also gets attracted towards Janu . Janu describes her adolescence love with Arjun who was a young charming Punjabi boy, equal to her age. Therefore they had much common topics to share with, they enjoyed talking and sharing their thoughts with each other. The author describes in the above statement that the birth of adolescence love was the beginning where all the dangerous promises sets themselves in motion. Discussing the importance of talk or communication in human relationship, Rollo May, a Psychotherapist in his book *Love and Will* (1969) Observes that: Communicating leads to mutual understanding by strengthening the bond between two individuals (LAW:247) The uniqueness of Jaishree Misra's fiction lies in her treatment of feminine sensibility. In India where women have redesigned role, which does not allow any room for individualism, identity and assertion, Jaishree Misra talks of women who question the age old traditions and want to seek individual growth. They try to reassess the known in a new context and find a meaning in life. Even if she had known the havoc their love would wreak, She realises that it would not have stopped their surreptitious meetings. But Janu was flattened by the exotic charm of Arjun . On the other hand Misra portrays that a young woman Janu, cannot hinder her desire of her first love, She cannot deny his attraction towards Arjun. Even though she believes that her parents will not accept a non-keralite boy as their son in law, who is too young to her age, she continuous to meet Arjun and takes their relationship to another level. Misra portrays that Janu as a teenager feels that she has a right to make choices, take decisions and become aware of herself as a person. Jean Maurice de Montremy in *A Writer is not a Professor* (1990) opines that :

Where a free woman has no place to make a choice of her own, Out of this struggle to be free is born a new person who makes choices, take decisions and becomes aware herself as a person, regarding the complexities of the life of a free woman and the ironic nature of the freedom they enjoy. (AWISNP:42)



Dorris Lessing has commented in the same book:

I was simply trying to understand what was happening to us, to all of us, who refused to live according to the conventional morality. And who all encountered, nevertheless, many difficulties, submissive to the point of absurdity in our need to proclaim our freedom. (AWISNP: 198)

Janu, wants to liberate herself and escape from pressurized traditions, as she deeply adores Arjun, she goes with him on his bike. Betty Friedan says that the core problem for women is not sex but identity which has always been denied to them. Friedan opines about it in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that : for woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment autonomy self realization, independence, individuality self actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted. (TFM: 282) In fact awareness in a woman that she can live a different but happy and purposeful life is of no avail unless the patriarchal forces in our society support her and does not pressurize her to accept the stereotype as it normally happens. Here Janu too is facing the same condition but she doesn't urge for physical need but urges for kind texture and love, therefore she wants to escape from the patriarchal forces, but her uncle spots her with Arjun and gives complaint about them to her father. When Janaki reaches home unaware of the situation that she had been caught with Arjun and her uncle had given complaint about her, She tries to escape due to which she lies. Therefore her father slashes her and abuses her and warns her if she steps her feet out of the house. As Janu says in the novel:

I had said I was at a special Maths tutorial class, when friend of my father spotted me on the pillion of Arjun motorcycle. (...) when I returned home late that evening my father face was like thunder and I could see that my mother had been crying. My father asked 'Where have you been?' I should have taken cue from the cold anger of his words and spoken the truth, but instead I blurted, ' Maths tuition...' (AP: 48)

Misra proclaims in the novel that Janu, who was born in a traditional keralite family, wants to lead a life of a liberated woman who can make her own choice in her life, but her parents warn her if she crosses traditional



bounds. So in order to escape from the threat Janu lies. Janu can be compared to Krishna the protagonist of Raji Narsimhan in *The Sky Changes* (1991) as Krishna asserts herself :My body is not my jail. It is my boat. I will row to freedom in my boat (TSC:30) The New movement gave an authority and authenticity that urged woman to make their voices heard which is turned equally demanded the attention of the world. New woman has come to signify the awakening of woman in to a new realization of her place position in family and society, conscious of her individuality. The above statement can be strengthened with the opinion of Ellen. E. Jordan who states that:

The English feminists endowed the New Woman with her hostility to Men, her questioning of Marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self sufficient single and yet fulfilling life. (Ellen. E. Jordan: 19)

Education infused necessary confidence in women and soon a large number of women entered many fields of social service like working for prison reforms, fighting against alcoholism, cruelty to children, Slavery and fought for feminine cause like reforms in marriage and divorce laws. As Meena Shriwadkar in her book *Image of Women in Indo-English Novels-Different Distortions*. in *Feminism and Literature* (1987) observes that :

As women received education they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with tradition—bounds surroundings resentment of male dominated ideas of morality and behaviour problems at home and at place of work or in society –all come up in a shelter of projection. (Meena Shriwadkar: 20)

The Indian nationalist movement under the leadership of Gandhiji led to further emancipation of Indian women in the 20th century by involving them in the struggle of political freedom for the country. With the growth of educational and vocational opportunities, the educated middle class and upper class women, particularly in Urban areas have become conscious of their rights. More and more educational opportunities and employment



avenues were thrown open to women and exposure to reformist movements – all helped woman to go a long way in bringing about domestic changes in their position and attitudes impelled by a desire to realize their aspiration for a new way of life, Women began to voice their feelings freely.

Simone de Beauvoir in her famous book, *The Second Sex*, (1979) takes stock of the gravity of this problem:

The woman of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femininity; they are beginning to a firm their independence in concrete ways; but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of a human being ..... masculine prestige is far &from extinction, resting still upon solid, economic and social foundations.(TSS:30)

The socio-political and economic changes during the past three or four decades have altered the position of women in life and literature alike. But the women have yet to traverse a long way towards their goal of taking up their position alongside men on terms of perfect equality. As the Protagonist Janu who wants to liberate herself is forced to tie the knot of marriage. Beauvoir aptly stated above that it is a fact that the number of women with an irrepressible yearning to break lose from the time- honoured crippling and iniquitous social laws, condemning women to a role far inferior to that of men is increasing day by day. But it is quite disappointing to note that they too, often, lose their moorings and find themselves in perilously embarrassing situations. Under the circumstances, one expects the writers to present the picture of woman who would alter her present plight and open up new possibilities in life. But as Meena Shirwadkar laments, the writers still seem to be interested in showing the actuality of life, when we expect from them the persuasive possibility. Misra projects the same vital condition of Janu who wants to be educated so that she can attain financial stability but her dreams are shattered when her parents forces her to marry after her exams during her eighteenth birthday, She was forced to marry a rich keralite businessman called Suresh Marrar. Suresh desires about his better half with his parents and he says that she should have the following three qualities in her: She has to be pretty. She has to be young so that she would adjust. She has to be able to speak English well, so that he could take



her to Bombay in the hoped- for expansion of his motel business Nothing else was too important... (AP: 96)

As Janu aptly fits in to this three conditions of marriage, Suresh agrees to marry her. Therefore the mighty Maraar clan approving of her so easily puts Janu in a bind. The pressure from her extended family is subtle and incremental. She was forced to tie the knot of marriage. Here the life of Janu is passing through a male dominated society The life of Indian woman is so pressurized with traditional limitations and social conditions that Janu's feeble protests are brushed aside, as Janu says: ... I don't feel ready for marriage and I'm looking forward for going to college here (Delhi), are brushed aside... (AP: 24). Parents despite their love and care towards their daughters, they bow to the rules of custom and traditions and feel that there must be a male guardian, i.e., husband, for their daughters so that they as well as their daughters too gain respect in the society as well as in their respected communities. This can be compared to the lines of the author in Dilip Tiwana's A Journey on Bare Feet (1990) that: Girls can't live in their parents' homes all their lives. They must go where they belong (AJOBF: 61).

The fact however remains that marriage is no more than one event in a man's life, but the only important event in a woman's life. In case of arrange marriages in India the Indian parents try to arrange the marriage of their daughters as it is taken as an obligatory responsibility on them. In this marriage a girl is given off to a groom completely unknown to her. She marries a man to whom she has never met and her approval is taken for granted and she moves to a land with her groom which she has never seen and for goes all individual rights. Simone De Beauvoir in his book The Second Sex Opines about Marriage that ... it is the destiny traditionally offered by society (SDB: 445). As it is considered indecency on the part of girl to tell her parents of her choice in marriage. That's why these decent girls obey their parents and silently bow down before them without questioning about their marriage or their groom.

Similarly Janu as the only daughter of her parents, sacrifices her love and she resigns herself to her fate as she feels ashamed of hurting her parents by transgressing the limits they had set and by daring to fall in love



with a non keralite. She looks upon her marriage to Suresh as a compensation for her sins. As Janu says: ...to ensure that I began to pay off some of the debts that had accrued against my name somewhere ,She knows she can make people she loves happy –in one fell swoop, by this one act. (AP: 68).

From Delhi, Janaki was brought to a small village in Kerala called Valapadu there she tries to put down roots of bondage with her in laws and attempts to survive. But she is never allowed to. She soon realizes that the soil she has been replanted in to it is hard and unyielding, as she fails to impress her domineering Mother in Law and overbearing Sister in law and tacky turn Father in law. She is always going to be the fashioned city type outsider not schooled in Kerala ways. Her indifferent husband is too busy to notice the needs of his young wife. Janu was left all alone to her fate.

According to Manusmriti : Pita Rakshati Koumare, Bharta Rakshati Yauvane, Rakshanti Sthavire Putra, Na Stree Svatantra Marhati.(Manu:140) The protection of women thus became a pressing issue for the society and the men had to shoulder this responsibility. The critical need to protect the women during the ancient period is clearly reflected in the above verse of the Manusmriti: Father protects in childhood, husband protects in youth, and sons protect in old age. A woman cannot be left unprotected. Thus, the husband became the protector of his wife. This led to social structure in which a wife was expected to cling to her husband for protection In a male dominated society, a woman is supposed to be under man's care at every step of her life and she should build herself as an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home maker with multifarious role in the family. As a Wife and Mother, Service, Sacrifice, Submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Excessive endurance and services of adjustments, if a woman adopts these qualities she is admired for it. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. In the words of Mary Anne Fergusson Images of Women in literature (1973) she opines that : In every age women has been seen primarily Mother, Wife, Mistress and as Sex-Object, their roles in relationship to men! (IOWIL: 4-5)

For centuries the Hindu women idealized the mythic models from



the Ramayana and other Puranas. Indian women were asked to get inspired by the archetype women like Sita, the silent sufferer. Often the Indian women are passive and accept the given role in shaping their destiny. At every stage of her life she is dependent of her status and survival upon Man – her Father, her Husband, and her Sons. The role of women has been full of contradictions as far as Indian women are concerned. Janu suffers from her indifferent husband who is too busy to notice the needs of his young wife. She was left all alone to her fate. She believes that her marriage was not only unbearable but not even worth living. Here Janu can be compared to Maya in Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock*, where Maya is also deprived of marital bliss. Madhusudan Prasad in his book *Anita Desai: The Novelist* (1981) Opines that:

Maya's neurosis also denotes a collective neurosis which tries to shatter the very identity of woman in our contemporary society dominated by man in which woman longing for love is driven mad or compelled to commit suicide. (ADTN: 3)

Marriage in a traditional society is a continual self-sacrifice for a woman, a denial of even her selfhood as a person. Whatever she does, she actually does for her husband to please him as her master. In the present novel Janu too is a silent sufferer as she thinks that her marriage was not only unbearable but not even worth living. She tries to gain respect and love from her in laws but it proves fatigue with the birth of a mentally disabled girl baby. She was looked down upon by her in laws for giving birth to a mentally handicapped child. This similar gender-discrimination has been found in Dilip Tiwana's *A Journey on Bare Feet*, (1990). Tiwana was born in to a traditional family of rich and prosperous Zamindars. She remembers her mother as a neglected woman in the family because she had not given birth to any son. Tiwana's grandmother never spoke gently to her daughter in law. She rebuked her daughter in law in the worst manner: What good are you if you cannot give us a son? God it's our bad luck that you have fallen to our lot. That bride of the Peepal tree house took no time in giving birth to two sons in quick succession. A lucky family indeed! And you? (AJOBF: 39)



Motherhood is treated as glory if the Mother could give birth to a Son. The birth of a girl child is considered as a curse. Indian sacred books like Vedas , Smritis, Samhitas, Puranas etc, offer numerous illustration of this gender bias society. For example in Atharva veda there is a prayer: Let a female child be born somewhere else , here let a male child be born (Atharva Veda: 2.3). The practice of female infanticide and female feticide has its roots in the golden past of India.

Jaishree Misra in all her novels unravelled traditional gender inequalities and how they are still haunting our contemporary Indian society. Nature created all human beings equally but gender inequalities erupted in society. Misra's novels basically portrays quest for kind texture in women's life in the busy patriarchal society, where in men have all the privileges, and women are burdened with only responsibilities. Her novels are also built in the question of marriage and fidelity in the family system.

Ramabai wrote a book on the high caste Hindu women in which she describes a typical arranged marriage and aptly commented on the conjugal satisfaction of the women in terms of their marriage. Susie Tharu and K.Lalitha in *Women's writing in India* (1991) observes: When the conjugal relation is brightened of mutual love, the happy wife had nothing to complain except the absence of freedom of thought and action; but since wives have never known what freedom is, they are well content to remain bondage (WWII:247)

Janu's indifferent husband is too busy to notice the adolescent's lonely battle against the family's veiled jibes that tear her self-esteem to shreds. Her marriage is not unbearable, but it is not good enough, either. Her creature comforts are taken care of, but her life is sterile and stagnant. Her narrow, provincial, Jane Austenian existence - visiting family friends and extended family and attending weddings - drives her to despair. With no sense of self-worth, she feels powerless to fight back. In a desperate attempt to gain respect from her in-laws, she gives birth to Riya. Her hope that motherhood will improve her status in the household remains unfulfilled as she gave birth to a mentally handicapped child. Janu feels that it is unfair to compare her daughter with her elder sister in-law's healthy children. Janu expected



a beautiful life after marriage but she became a victim of tragic married life. Anita Rao Badami in *Tamarind Men* (1997) projects where Saroj's mother advises her: Marriage is a crop that will last thousand years and a women's happiness lies in marriage (TM: 162). In this ritualized marriage the life of a married woman is clearly defined. Therefore Janu desires to get out of the traditional bounds and live an independent life. As the author says:

Janu tries to find emotional sustenance in her child, but her world comes crashing down when the baby is diagnosed to be definitely mentally handicapped. Why me? Janu asks, unable to comprehend the magnitude and harshness of the undeserved punishment. She thinks that this would be a shared sorrow - being able to cry together must create the strongest of human bonds. But she soon realises that Mararaars were not the crying sort of family So, her tears over her child's fate are shed in solitude. (AP:131)

The life of Janu can be compared to a common traditional Indian women where the traditional system extends women suffering. The law of Dharma approves and affirms her life of bondage. It is the law of Dharma and a overbinding concept of Karma which has contributed to womens tolerance and self effacement. Even when they are completely crushed by the injustices done to them, they take it as the dispensation of their previous karma. The more the suffering the sooner it will wash away their sins. In a way, she also sees a sense of inevitability in the sudden sequence of events. Janu says that :

I had been meant to come here all along, she says. She later analysis it- Weddings were decreed in some otherworldly place where accounts were being totted up and evaluated who should marry whom ... and already our destiny's and our many pasts were combining in a grand dance so meticulously choreographed, we could easily delude ourselves into believing we were making it all happen. (AP: 39- 40)

Janu marries Suresh with an expectation of beginning a new life but she realizes that she is only a namesake wife leading a loveless life by gaining respect and honour of being a wife and mother. Here Janu can be compared to Kalyani in Shashe Deshapande's *Matter of time* (1998). As the author



opines: It is enough to have a husband and never mind the fact that he not looked at Your face for year ... but her kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife. (MOT: 167)

In a traditional society marriage is the promised end, marriage restricts the movement towards a Perception of herself as an independent human being and not buffeted by the circumstance or the social Prescriptions, Marrying Suresh, Janu realizes that it is because of him. On one view, she has meaningful life as she received the honour of being wife and a mother; and in another view, her life is meaningless as she is subjected to emotional turmoil. She wonders as to why she in all the way is trying to please her husband, feeling of having lost her independent identity. Her other aunts and for that matter, other woman had surrendered themselves to the concept of the ideal women, without any independent identity performing all the time self-effacing notions and rituals. Janu knows quite well that she can never fit herself into the ideal woman compartment, and that she could never think of performing self-effacing rituals, which justified her existence in relation with a man. But in course of her own introspection of herself, she realizes that she is not very different from her conventional female counterparts, for she was unconsciously and consciously trying to mould and change and shape herself according to Marrar's desires and needs. Till know, she was independent, intelligent, logical thinker and rational thinker, after her marriage, she becomes one of those archetype submissive Indian women, now, whose identity is only an extension of her husbands. Marriage has taught her things like, deception, pretentious and from affection to hypocrisy. Modern, young, women like Janu are bricked a between tradition and modernity Again we get a glimpse about the concept of marriage in Shudha Majumadar, A Letter of Life (1977):

The hand that holds yours tightly as you walk around the fire receive like a gift. You can't do anything, the house wife should be always joyous, adopt at domestic work, neat in her domestic works and restrained in expenses. Controlled in mind, word, and body, she who does not transgress her lord, attains heaven even as her lord does. (ALOL: 75)

It is expected from a married woman to be joyous and to be dutiful



to her husband but Janu who is deprived of independence and kind texture longs for true love and fails to fit in the traditional bounds of marriage. Therefore Janu blunders through her marriage and brings up a child with a debilitating learning problem, she reaches two apparently contradictory conclusions, ironically, one stemming from the other. To begin with, she comes to terms with giving birth to a child with disabilities, by attributing it to her Karma:

Somewhere in my distant past, perhaps even a thousand years ago, I'd done something that had committed me to dedicating this life to Riya's care. Had I been a thirsty traveller at her door and she had taken me in, washed my feet and watered me? I would never know what ancient promise I had made to her, just as she would never know what deed had robbed her of words in this life. Or how it would be compensated in the next. But somewhere along the way, we had both lived many lives that linked us together now. (AP: 160)

Janu thinks about her fate that may be she is indebted to Riya in her past life that she is paying back them in this life and she also thinks that it is the law of karma which is having its sever rule on their lives and they are silently surrendering to it. According to the doctrine of karma, for every morally determinate thought, word, or action, there will be corresponding karmic compensation, if not in this life, then in some future life. As a man sows, so shall he reap (Katha Upanisad (Radhakrishnan), I.1.6)

But Janu wants to rebel against her fate and patriarchal system. Therefore she wants to free herself and her daughter from the miserable condition where there are like birds in a golden cage. Suresh's increasingly long absences on 'business trips'. And paradoxically, her attempts to find a school that will admit her child, opens a path forward for her. In all this, Janu is only vaguely aware that she is at last taking her destiny into her own hands, Attempting to fight all that was the equivalent of trying to fight against fate, defeating their very purpose. Riya's schooling ends in disaster, when she is expelled within a few weeks from school. Janu bitterly realises there is no place for Riya in that horribly normal world back there, where children could paint purple mountains and sing the National Anthem.



With no support or sympathy from Suresh, and no system of education to speak of for children with special needs in the town, Janu admits Riya to a school of sorts where an assortment of children of different ages and different stages of disability are sent. Janu asks herself about the miserable condition of her loveless life. And she finds the answer to the seemingly rhetoric question when she decides to get a BA degree in English Literature through distance education thus, unknowingly the slow process begins her evolving as a person. She also gradually frees herself from the oppressive burden of having to constantly live up to the impossibly high standards of the Maraars and the stigma Riya's condition carries.

Janu soon offers to help the early intervention group at the short-staffed school, partly to keep an eye on Riya and to escape from the Maraars' caustic jibes, but also to equip herself better to deal with Riya's problem. This proves to be Janu's first tiny window to the world outside. As she starts researching for centres of treatment and training for Riya, Sheela Kuriakose who runs the school, sows the seed in Janu's heart, of the possibility of going abroad to do a course in special education, and taking Riya with her. The idea soon develops a life of its own as Janu dreams: She could go to a wonderful Special School, the kind whose pictures I'd seen in American magazines, bursting with toys and special equipment. I'd do well in the course and then I'd be offered a job at the end of it. I'd work in Riya's Special School. We'd get ourselves an apartment.... (AP:146)

Misra projects Janu, a young lady who is yearning for true love but still brushes her desires aside and selflessly aims for the welfare of her disabled child. Therefore we can get a glimpse of it where Simone De Beauvoir Opines in her book *The Second Sex* (1983) that a generous mother who sincerely seeks her child's welfare, will as a rule think it is wiser to make a true woman of her since society will more readily to accept her if this is done. (TSS:445)

As Janu is deprived of marital love she is afraid that a frank admission of her desires may disturb the delicate balance of her relationships. To survive emotionally she prefers to live in a make believe world of her own. Through timidity, awkwardness or laziness she surrenders her



decisions to her husband. Here Janu can be compared to Jaya in the novel *Long Silence* (1988) by Shashi Deshpande where Jaya too faces a tragic married life and teaches herself to wait in silence. She feels bewildered when she thinks about her –Self as she says To know what you want .....I have been denied that .....Even now I don't know what I want (LS:21). As the conviction that education – for herself and for her child – is the only escape route for her and thus Janu is now prepared to fight her own battles and achieve her goal. When she gets her first letter of acceptance from the Arizona University in Phoenix, Arizona, with the condition that she would have to produce her MA certificate before joining, Janu begins to believe I had inched closer to my great escape! (AP:166)

Mentally disabled Riya thus becomes an agent of Janu's empowerment and escape. The transition from a sense of victimhood to agency is slow and gradual. Janu, who once passively endured her lot, believing it to be a Karmic inevitability, is willing to pay the price, instead it being extracted from her by fate. But now, she expects to get something in return. After a long struggle Janu gets a BA degree in English literature through distance education. On her struggle to give Riya to her special education. Sheela, the principal of that school sows a seed in Janu's heart of the possibility of going abroad to do a course in special education and taking Riya with her. Finally, on her way to Delhi for a scholarship interview which will fund her education in the USA, Janu muses: I wasn't really clever, but I had achieved quite a lot merely through a combination of boredom and determination – a BA by the former and an M.A by the latter. (AP:170)

In Delhi, the city of her childhood and of her adolescent love, once again, the unseen hand of fate brings her face to face with Arjun. In all these years, the only link she has had with him is a vague awareness at the back of her mind about their different time zones. But now she walks into his arms and into adultery, as if it is the most natural act. After facing the severe traditional marital rules for a decade, she breaks the first cardinal rule of marriage. But on her return to Kerala, she is filled with grief and sorrows that she backstabbed and cheated her husband, Suresh.



The penalty she pays for an afternoon of bliss and peace is heavy. But now, she has a scholarship, an admission to a university in London for a diploma in Special Education and a chance at last for a modicum of happiness with Arjun, who, after all these years, still loves her deeply. It is Arjun who urges her to apply to a university in London so that they can be together. But even now, she believes that happiness is given, never taken, with careful calculations being made all the time. Janu when she meets Arjun forgets that she is a married woman and decides to opt for temporary happiness by staying with Arjun, knowing that nothing in life, especially happiness, is ever doled out free, and She seeks to end her marriage, for she and Suresh are Like prisoners who hated each other but were forced to serve endless sentences side by side. Here vJanu can be compared to Indu in Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* (1983) where the protagonist Indu says: It's a trap ..... that's what marriage is. A trap? (RS:59).

As Janu is the silent sufferer of this trap she desires to release herself, therefore on her visit to Delhi the place of her happy childhood and beautiful adolescent she meets Arjun. Though she had not intended to meet Arjun, but on her way for scholarship in an interview she meets Arjun by fate, after ten years of hardship and surrendering to rules and limitations, she finally breaks the first cardinal rule of marriage by staying with Arjun. After ten years of tragic married life, along with sorrow and grief. Now Janu is offered with a scholarship and job in London. She has a chance for the specialization of studies in London. On her return to Vallapadu, Janu dares to tell the truth about Arjun, Janu says :.... I told him about Arjun. That I had known him when I was still at school, that I would have liked to have married him one day, that my parents disapproved, that he had gone abroad and then I allowed my parents to arrange my marriage for me instead. I had not kept in touch with him.....but I had met him again, in Delhi. He still loved me and was willing to marry me. I believed I still loved him too, .....With every word I uttered I knew I was taking one more unreturnable step in to the territory previously trodden only by very foolish or very bad women....(AP:219) When she reveals this bitter truth to her husband, Suresh adopts silence and later on he takes revenge on Janu by claiming that she is



suffering mentally and admits her into the mental hospital. Janu says I couldn't believe my ears,... treatment?... Help?(AP:225)

Janu's Mother and Grand mother rescues her from the hospital and later on she fights for divorce but her daughter was taken back by Suresh, Therefore Life was impossible for Janu without her daughter Riya. But her consciousness refuses to commit suicide and propels her on a journey to fight, fight for self-discovery and self satisfaction.

The life of Janu can be compared to Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine (1990) where the protagonist Jasmine as a contemporary woman with all her longings, aspirations, hope and frustrations never gives up she refuses to commit suicide under adverse circumstances and makes a successful attempt to reshape her destiny and achieve happiness. Similarly when Janu braves Suresh's wrath to tell him about Arjun, she knows she has, with one fell swoop, removed a terrible burden from her husband's shoulders and transferred it squarely on to her own.

Jealousy and anger are reactions that Janu expects and is prepared for, even seeing them as mitigating factors in an otherwise weak person. But instead, her husband unleashes a complex plot of manipulation engineered by the Maraars. When they conspire to prove her insane and drug her into depression, she finds strength in two weak allies - her ageing and frail grandmother and her defeated and fatalistic mother. Finally, Janu manages to go to London with Arjun and get her diploma, with an ugly divorce with Suresh and a difficult custody battle looming - the Maraars appropriate Riya to use her as a pawn in their game. Janu believes that this is the severe punishment fate has reserved for her for the ninety eight days of happiness. She and Arjun part for the third time, without ever knowing if they will ever meet again, As she is still struggling to repay the debt she owes her daughter, who is now a hostage at the negotiating table of her future. She returns from London after experiencing a world where women take their right to be themselves for granted, as against women of her grandmother's generation, "who took what they were given with tolerance and fortitude", and for whom the concept of a better life is alien. As Misra portrays :After breaking just about every rule in the Kerala Etiquette



Handbook, Janu once again becomes grist for the gossip mill. "Soon it would have reason to sit back and rock on its heels in cruel laughter, slapping its friends on the back and wheezing with the fun of it all.(AP:237)

With her new-found awareness, Janu wonders why a state that boasts of the highest literacy rate in India, has not allowed the enlightenment and broadmindedness that education brings, to seep through the narrow and obdurate crevices of orthodoxy. She realises that education devoid of vision does not liberate the mind. But emboldened by Arjun's love, she finally fights the society's resistance to change, and hopes that she has at last paid for a debt incurred many lifetimes ago. As the open-ended story 'ends' Janu knows that "tomorrow, the next chapter would begin.

Jaishree Misra is quite different from other women novelist of Indian English, for she dares to make bold and bare statements. She does not colour superficially or any extra sentimentalities. But instead her characters are portrayed of truth felt and lived by them, nothing to do by any ideology. These components definitely single her from other writers. Thus, her response, her writing of life is devoid of any kind of over ornamentation or intellectualizing. Her novels have bare hard truths more hard-hitting and more sensitive than anybody. Ancient Promises is often seen as an indictment of the system of arranged marriage. But this is to over simplify the theme. Janu, tellingly remarks: It wasn't the arranged-marriage system for sure. I had seen enough arranged marriages metamorphose into good marriages to know that. And I had seen enough men and women in England, with all the freedom to choose their own life-partners...(AP:299)

Admittedly, the author is critical of the way girls like Janu are unwittingly pushed into 'alliances' either because of social pressures or because their parents truly believe, like Janu's parents did, that they are doing what is best for their daughters. She is told that marriage would ensure that she would have more people to love and be loved by, Janu, therefore, enters her marriage in good faith, as is evident by her statement, (AP:37). But ironically, the promise of love is not kept, and she is forced to lead a lonely and loveless life. The point of suppressing feelings and how adversely it affects one's behaviour eventually resulting in "conflict" is



corroborated by eminent psychologists, Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey in their book *Theories of Personality*(1985):The denial does not mean that the feelings cease to exist; they will still influence his behavior in various ways even though they are not conscious. A conflict will, then, exist between the interjected and spurious conscious values and the genuine unconscious ones. (TOP:289)

But despite this, when her marriage fails, Janu believes that even this has been preordained just as her marriage had been. She knows that marriages in Kerala involved whole clans, reaching back many ghostly generations. And once entered into, it was almost impossible to get out of. This leads us to the issue of patriarchal hegemony. If Janu's education is rudely cut short and she is pushed into an early marriage, while Arjun goes to England to educate himself, it is a manifestation of centuries of oppression coming into play even in the ultra-urban Delhi. But it is not only her father who is responsible for this high-handedness, but also her mother, and indeed, society as a whole. My mother had taken my happiness and converted it so easily into her pain (AP:236) Janu bitterly muses, recalling the emotional blackmail her mother uses to make her capitulate. Ironically, her mother is a school teacher in Delhi, not a helpless semi-literate small town housewife, and her in laws especially women folk who subject Janu to psychological cruelty, more than the men. Thus, the Maraar womenfolk by actively being abusive, and women in her own family by conditioning Janu into passively accepting her fate, perpetuate and perpetrate patriarchy.

All this proves the dictum - women beware women. Women are sometimes the worst enemies of women. Women also seem to endorse patriarchy as something desirable, as against Kerala's traditional matrilineal society. This leads one to wonder if *Ancient Promises* is a 'feminist' novel. 'Feminist Literature' is a value-loaded label and comes with its own baggage. But fortunately, Misra does not inflict this burden on her story. If at all Janu can be considered a 'feminist' heroine, it is only a by-product of her actions, and not central to her character. It is Arjun, with his enlightened views, who finally liberates Janu mentally. This is not to deny that Misra, through Janu's character, does acknowledge and articulate the efficacy of education



as a tool of women's empowerment. No one she knows has had a divorce. Ostracised by the community, the three women – Janu, her widowed mother and her ageing grandmother – fight to survive not just the tragedy of Janu's failed marriage, but the claustrophobic pettiness of an orthodox society slowly closing in on them. Janu knows she has to bear the whispered label – a divorcee with a child. The women lean on each other for emotional sustenance and exhibit hidden reserves of inner strength and courage. If viewed from this prism, the novel does give a courteous nod to feminism. Arundhati Roy in her major work *The God of small things* (1998) as a woman writer proclaims that.

Is there any taboo when it comes to women's marriage, it must be divorce. It is something that is unthinkable to any well mannered women- there is virtually no good reason for a woman to leave her husband and file a divorce. Women who break such a taboo are never treated well by the society and are condemned even by their families. A divorce woman has no position in her parents home, This is an euphemistic way of expressing the common belief of people. (TGOS:45).

Janu, with the advantage of hindsight, realises that it is only when she selflessly seeks to create a better life for Riya does a door open for her escape, reinforcing her belief that her child must have performed an act so utterly selfless for her in another life that she is ordained to pay the debt back in this one. The irony is not lost on Janu when she says: Riya's disability had been the blessing to free me from that circle of forced happiness. (AP:303) After longing for true love, for ten years she is still left wondering at the pointlessness of it all. But thanks her fate for allowing her desire to be fulfilled.

Janu's attempts at self-fulfilment are thwarted at every step of the way, until she almost gives up. Janu questions her fate that if Suresh was whom she was meant to marry, why were she and Arjun made to fall so deeply in love so early in life, she wonders. And if she and Arjun were promised to each other by fate and were, therefore, given a second chance to reclaim each other, why she was forced to face the emotional turmoil of longing for true love.



Misra's successful novel *Ancient Promises*(2000) published by Penguin Books which received critical and popular acclaim, works at several levels. At one level, it delineates the inexorability and inevitability with which providence plays a complex game using human pawns. At another, it is a triumph of individual will – of not resigning oneself to one's fate but to quench the thirst of true love. Misra believes that like Janu, one can try to make fate bend some ground. But she reminds the reader that Janu has not come out unscathed from the battle between two unequal forces – fate and human will. Janu's struggle is a long and exhausting one but she was patiently longing for true love. This makes her and her story more convincing. Misra deploys certain realistic ramifications into the theme i.e. Longing for true love, which prevents *Ancient Promises* from degenerating into a facile motivational, book about realising one's potential against all odds.

Misra suggests that a balance between the conventional, pre-set role of women and the contemporary issues has to be struck. Her female protagonists try to discover and rediscover meaningfulness in life through the known and the established. These characters are not normal but different from others. They do not find a proper channel of communication and thus become alienated and start brooding about their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding, which they had formerly ignored or rejected

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DEEP CUT WOUND- A REFLECTION ON ANITHA NAIR'S NOVEL  
'CUT LIKE WOUND'

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Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Indian English literature has developed over a period of time and writing in English did not start in a day. It took many years and several distinguished personalities to bring the present status and distinction to Indian English literature. Indian English literature originated as a necessary outcome of the introduction of English education in India under colonial rule. . Sunanda Mongia opines in her book *Recent Indian Fiction in English* (1997) that: Today fiction has won for itself international acclaim and distinction (RIFIE:213). Fiction, being the most powerful form of literary expression today, Indian woman novelists has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature. It is generally agreed that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of our time, and Indian English fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature. This form which was evolved more than two hundred years ago has uninterruptedly and comprehensively depicted the saga of human activities and experiences, rich and varied, unfolding thoughts and feelings, hopes and dreams, down the ages the work by the Indian women authors has always been undervalued because of some patriarchal assumptions. Indian societies gave priorities to the worth of male experiences. In those days, women used to write about a woman's perception and experiences within the enclosed domestic arena.

Modern woman novelists reflect in their work that the present age women have realized that she is not helpless and is not dependent. They feel that a woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today, a woman has also become a direct money earner and she is not only confined to



household works. The women of modern era think on different lines and that is what is depicted in the novels of the Indian women authors. These facts are incorporated by the women writers like Anita Nair

Anita Nair's latest novel, *Cut Like Wound* (HarperCollins India), fulfills the mores of a psychological thriller to quite an extent. Having never written a genre novel before, Nair surprises the reader with the ease and precision with which she gradually builds the plot and ratchets up the suspense. A motley of characters whizz by – some linger according to their need in the narrative while others are swiftly discarded after they have served their purpose.

In the underbelly of Bangalore survival matters and *Cut Like Wound* wastes neither time nor words. The story, in keeping with the basics of the noir genre, has for its protagonist Inspector Borei Gowda – a time hardened but conscientious cop with more than a serious fondness for rum and coke. He is stumbling through a mid-life crisis, alienated from his family and hurtling, helplessly, towards an extra-marital relationship with an ex-girlfriend – the enigmatic Lady Deviah.

To seal in the flavor of the genre, Nair gives Gowda an innocent rookie, Santosh, for a sidekick and puts him in pursuit of a ruthless serial murderer. But is this what *Cut Like Wound* is all about? Actually, *Cut Like Wound* is more than just another whodunit.

Nair uses *Cut Like Wound* to sneak into the underside of Bangalore and introduce us to a city that we only thought we knew. It is Bangalore – not the cosmopolitan city teeming with high end brands and plush IT offices but a city with numerous, little known, crowded lanes and bylanes. It is the curious happenings in these shady by lanes that give *Cut Like Wound* its definition and character.

The novel begins with the month of Ramzan and the discovery of a young, male prostitute's half burnt body by the highway. The body bears a strange wound in the neck. The boy has been strangled by a glass enhanced chord – a manja. What looks like a run of the mill murder turns serious when more bodies turn up bearing identical wounds. Inspector Borei Gowda



is convinced that he can deduce a pattern in the murders. A serial murderer is on the loose and if nothing is done, the death of many more is ensured. Thus begins Inspector Gowda's struggle with the red tape of police actions, his run-ins with seniors and the impending summoning of his famed 'sakaath sense'. His enemies will try to stop him at any cost and would succeed most times. Only this time, he has had enough of backing out, he has a trusted aide by his side and most importantly, the murderer he is after is no ordinary woman.

The reader is introduced to Inspector Borei Gowda at a critical juncture in his life – run down, almost alcoholic and alienated from his family to the point of indifference. Borei Gowda has not approached middle age with grace. He is, as Nair portrays him, like a broken soldier with a memory of his past bravado. After years of fighting a system he cannot change and trapped into domesticity that he does not relate to, the famed and feared Inspector Borei Gowda now lives only in the stories heard by his starry eyed junior – rookie Santosh Gowda. 'Nair weaves a fast paced, engrossing tale of suspense as Gowda and Santosh investigate. More corpses turn up, as do clues, sometimes serendipitous....Even though there is plenty of police procedure (meticulously researched, it appears), this is not an old-fashioned whodunit. And therein lies the strength of CUT LIKE WOUND. It is not just a story of another smart cop on the trail of another serial killer. It is more a story that explores the mind of a killer, even tempts the reader to sympathise.' quotes India Today review desk

Nair's effort to portray Gowda as a gritty, troubled cop is pertinent to the genre and she succeeds most of the time. Gowda's clumsy effort at mid-life romance also has its interesting moments. But Gowda oscillates too often between the tough crime fighter and the stumbling middle-aged householder stuck in a crisis. As such, the character struggles, in parts, to be taken seriously as the hardened police/rebel as Nair intends to portray him.

It is the sections devoted to the crime and the criminal itself that holds interest. Nair's murderer is sinister and the motivations are complex. The setting is Indian and easily relatable. The novel explores the realities of



the transgender community and corporation politics with great familiarity. The plot itself unfolds in systemized twists and turns. In the truest traditions of the whodunit, the reader will not only be guessing till the end but will also be left smugly surprised that his guesses were almost correct. Plot wise, therefore, *Cut Like Wound* is tight and upholds the suspense till the last pages. In *The Hindustan Times* review opies 'The plotting is tight, the setting is familiar to Indian readers and the characters are rivetting. The Trainspottiest side of Edinburgh couldn't have hosted CUT LIKE WOUND'S startling scenes of ritual worship or its lively transgenders.'

Like Inspector Gowda's belief in justice, *Cut Like Wound* also falters in places. However, in a crime thriller, it is the climax that either scores the effort or undoes it. And it is in the last pages of *Cut Like Wound* that the atmosphere of Bangalore's crime riddled underworld, the gaping abyss between assumption and reality bursts open, and Nair not only clinches the deal but takes home the trophy as well. Thrillers or police procedurals often begin with a mood-establishing prologue that describes a crime being committed, before moving on to the investigation; typically in such passages one gets some generic information about the criminal, a shadowy figure about whom nothing too important can yet be disclosed. But the opening pages of Anita Nair's *Cut Like Wound* – set in Bangalore over a little more than a month – are intriguing for the amount of detail they provide, for their almost casual build-up to an unpremeditated murder, and for the subtle creation of empathy for the murderer, who is presented as disoriented and emotionally vulnerable. Right at the beginning we learn that he is a man dressing up as a woman, but by the time the transformation is complete (and the identifying pronoun has become "she") we also know that this isn't a whim or a perversion – it is a deep internal impulse, and "Bhuvana" has a real need to be accepted and desired in her new form. And yet, the murder and its cover-up have a savagery that one might associate with male aggression. This dichotomy nicely sets up a story about a killer – and perhaps a city – with multiple personalities. We continue to encounter Bhuvana at regular intervals through the narrative (in one passage this woman in a man's body is disgusted by a hardcore porn film that "pandered to the average fantasy of the average Indian man"), but this does not dilute



the book's suspense – we still have to find out who she is, and other subsidiary discoveries will be made along the way. Much of this is done in the company of Inspector Borei Gowda – pushing 50, stockier than he should be, afflicted by melancholia but also sharp and capable of bursts of inspiration – and an earnest but wet-behind-the-ears sub-inspector named Santosh. Their investigation centres on grisly killings with a distinct modus operandi, and on the possible involvement of a shady local corporator and his goons.

Given this premise, *Cut Like Wound* is required to work first at the level of a well-paced thriller, and this it successfully does. There are stray signs of the pat, hurried writing that characterises all but the very best commercial fiction, as well as a mild tendency towards over-exposition, and a few genre clichés: the cynical officer who is letting himself go to seed but who still has a special quality (referred to here as “super sakaath sense”); the subordinate-cum-foil who has much to learn about police-work and the world in general; the smug superior officers. But Nair achieves a pleasing restraint in the key passages, and nowhere does this show more than in a tense climax, which leaves a few things unsaid and doesn't try too hard to tie up every loose strand.

This novel consistently interesting as a commentary on the lives of the sexually marginalised, on the blurring of gender expectations, and the emotional baggage carried by both men and women in a world of role-playing and self-presentation. The inhabitants of the society depicted here – one that includes posh malls as well as seedy underbellies and much in between – are, to varying degrees, struggling with gender roles and perceptions. The main characters include a short-statured man who has spent his life in the shadow of a dominating older brother and an über-macho thug tellingly named King Kong (and associated with a big SUV – described as a “villain vehicle” – that becomes a phallic thing to intimidate other people with), but hints of the larger themes can be seen in even the lives of peripheral characters such as Gowda's old friend Michael, a widower who continuously feels the lack of his wife's anchoring presence.

Also in this frame are a community of eunuchs living in the cracks between a supposedly ordered society, transsexuals living in more privileged



environments but yearning for a different life, emotionally repressed men who find succour in the worship of an angry mother goddess, and other men who are – with various consequences – in touch with their feminine sides. We get fleeting glimpses of people – young boys wearing flashy earrings in coffee shops, for instance – who flirt with the boundaries simply because they are bored or because they can. And much of this is linked to the many complications of living in an unsettling big-city environment. “One more choice. What was it about urban life that demanded you make a choice every minute, every day?” a character wonders in a relatively mundane situation (he has been asked if he wants mineral or regular water), but the question applies in broader contexts with far-reaching repercussions.

This adds up to a pattern of lives on the edge, and our “hero” is hardly exempt from it. Gowda has his own suppressed impulses, as we see in his vivid fantasies about kicking a senior officer’s face in, and given the book’s concerns one wonders how much this has to do with the absence of a stabilising relationship in his life. He falls with some trepidation into an affair with a woman who is more sophisticated and worldly-wise in many ways – UK-returned, comfortable in spaces like piazzas and malls that rarely intersect with his world – and behind his guilt about being unfaithful to his absent wife may lie a hint of a patriarchal man who needs to be in control, to be the dominating partner in a relationship. His many glum reflections (listening to the happy young couple staying above him, he wonders if he and his wife had ever laughed together so openly; there is a clear awkwardness in his relationship with his teenage son) can be viewed as standard tropes of an aging-cop story, but they also fit well into a narrative about misfits and loners. ‘In CUT LIKE WOUND, Nair retains that same earthiness, in a dramatically different genre. By the author’s own admission, she seeks to push her literary boundaries and that is evident in this new book and its unexpected ‘hero’ – one very likely to be a recurrent character in a future series. The unglamorously named Inspector Borei Gowda literally pops out of the pages at you, and by the finish, is so lifelike that you have his entire appearance and personality mentally mapped out.....The story is an honest yet uncomfortably raw exposé of the underbelly of contemporary Indian life. The title of the book definitely plays on these deep undercuts,



wounds that fester till they eat into the very core of our charmed existence.' writes Khajeej Times' CUT LIKE WOUND by Anita Nair is a remarkable departure in genre by the much-acclaimed author of books like Lessons in Forgetting, The Better Man and Ladies Coupe. This is a psycho-thriller ... Exposed here is the sleazier side of Bengaluru, in its murky back-lanes. It also offers a close look at the transgender community...Excellent, and hopefully, start of a series of novels featuring Borei Gowda.' Commets Afternoon Despatch & Courier while the Verve' opines 'A departure from her usual literary fiction, this is the author's first foray into the literary noir genre. The psychological thriller is soaked in the sights and smells of Bengaluru and introduces quite a few interesting characters, including the hero Inspector Borei Gowda. As usual, Nair's writing is lucid which makes the reading light and quick.' Plot wise, therefore, CUT LIKE WOUND is tight and upholds the suspense till the last pages....However, in a crime thriller, it is the climax that either scores the effort or undoes it. And it is in the last pages of CUT LIKE WOUND that the atmosphere of Bangalore's crime riddled underworld, the gaping abyss between assumption and reality bursts open, and Nair not only clinches the deal but takes home the trophy as well.'

"Once I've created a character, I step into their shoes," says Nair who admits to an element of wish fulfillment in her identification with Gowda. "Here's a character who can do all the things I can't. He rides a Bullet and can get piss drunk - all those things that one part of me won't allow me to be or do," she says revealing that another Borei Gowda novel is already underway. "He is probably the most interesting character I've created, I can't let him go," says Nair who worked on Cut Like Wound for two years

In his own way, he is nearly as marginalised as some of the more extreme cases he encounters, and if this book leads to a full-fledged series (as the "Introducing Inspector Gowda" on the cover implies it will) much of its pleasure should come from watching this man patrol the mean streets of his city, dealing with his own urban alienation as well as those of his quarries - and perhaps in wondering how thin that line between mild unrest



and full-blown psychosis really is.

**REFERENCE:**

Anita Nair's Cut Like Wound ( HarperCollins India)



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**ASSERTION OF THE SELF - A FEMINISTIC APPROACH OF THE  
PROTAGONISTS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S AND ANITA  
NAIR'S SELECT NOVELS**

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Indian Writing in English has attained an independent status in the realm of Indian Literature. Wide-ranging themes are dealt with in Indian Writing in English. While this literature continues to reflect Indian culture and tradition, social values, and even Indian history through the depiction of life in India and Indians living elsewhere, recent Indian English fiction has been trying to give expression to the Indian experience of the modern predicaments

Indian Writing in English by women is a distinct phenomenon today. The creative output of the Indian women writers, especially novelists, is marked by the choice of English, the medium of expression and expression of a woman's reaction to the varied situation in which tradition and modernity clash as well as synthesize. Indian women writers are dynamic witnesses to the peculiar socio-cultural historic, political conflicts faced by women especially Indian

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary writing in Indian English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women writers' eyes one can see a different world and with their assistance one can realize the potential of human achievement. Every appraisal of the Indian English Literature will certainly result in an appreciation of the writing of women. As Anitha Nair comments on the status of Indian writing "I don't think it is simple to be a writer anywhere in the world. Even more so in India when you are writing in English. On the one hand you are not



aware of who your reader is. On the other hand, you come under so much scrutiny and it is almost as if everyone is out to catch you when you make that first mistake. Fortunately, what used to be once an urban readership is now expanding to small towns and as more people read this will be a readership that will sustain the Indian writer writing in English.”

Further she writes ‘It seems to me that on the one hand Indian writing in English has certainly come of age. Indian writers writing in English are being recognized and even revered. However, it is also weighed down by mediocrity. A mediocrity that stems itself from the fact that anyone who can string a pretty phrase believes that is all is required to write a book.

The self is the distinct characteristic individuality of a person. The human self is a self-organizing, interactive system of thoughts, feelings and motives that characterizes an individual. Carl Rogers, the famous psychologist, defined the self or self concept as “an organized, consistent, conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of the ‘I’ and ‘me’ to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions.”

Self, the result of human’s awareness of the individual as a separate entity in the social environment, enables humans to regard their emotionally experience and their own integrity and identity in relation to their past, present and future. Self and society are interconnected and this is a kind of web, the construction of which is partly under guidance from self and partly under the guidance from the prevailing social pattern.

The subtle by-play between society and the individual by which the individual develops a sense of self through participation in social interaction, and yet possess a feeling of separation from others, is a fundamental social process which perpetuates culture and society. Literatures of all ethnic groups around the world deal with the issue of relationship between self and society in many ways. This becomes part of the socialization process. Indian Writing in English is no exception to this situation.

One of the reasons why women have in such large number taken



up their pen is that it has allowed them to create their own world and set the conditions of their existence completely free from the direct interference of men. Similarly, so many women have taken to reading women's writing because it provides them with a "safe place" from which they not only explore a wide range of experience of women of the world but also identify themselves with a range of women characters and variety of their existence. These women writers have given literary work in India an unmistakable edge. They are able to sensitively portray a world that has in it to say that "women are rich in substance". Their women are real flesh-and-blood protagonists who make the readers look at them with awe with their relationships to their surroundings, society, men, children, families, mental make-ups and themselves. If I was a feminist writer, my work would dwell almost exclusively on women's issues. However my concerns and interests straddle several areas and all of these make an appearance in my novels.

If Sashi Deshpande is a contemporary Indo-English novelist who has presented the plight of middleclass Indian women, who are oscillating between traditional and modern roles. Anita Nair is a popular Indian-English writer. She is considered as a bold and straightforward writer with her roots at her home state Kerala... ' I have very strong roots in Kerala. My family goes back at least by 400 years in the village where my parents still live. When I am away from there, there is a strange yearning I feel for the place. Yet I wouldn't really call it nostalgia as much as trying to put into words that uniquely composite feeling that Kerala evokes in me... I wish I could tell you why Kerala inspires me as it does. All I do know is it does again and again. It is maddening to know that whatever it is defies description... perhaps it is the sum total of the colours, the scents, the landscape, the people, their cussedness and humour, the petty politics and the larger than life ideals...just when you think you have understood some facet of Kerala, it contradicts itself. Perhaps that is what makes it so exciting for me as a writer...she further writes... I began writing at a very young age. However it was while working at an advertising agency that I decided to become a full time writer. My forays into creative writing began with short stories, and slowly I moved on to writing novels. I think writing was initially an interest for me, but later it became a serious compulsion. My



stint in advertising helped immensely. It helped me craft my writing to the extent that I learnt to edit the flab out. Apart from which advertising is a great apprenticeship for a writer. First, I got used to rejection. Out of every ten brilliant campaigns, one sees the light of the day. So what are a few rejection slips? Secondly, I learnt to curb my temper when someone mauled my precious lines. Just about everyone in an ad agency from the tea boy to the CEO; and outside it, from the client's grandmother to his daughter's dance teacher have a point of view about the campaign and specifically the copy. So one accepts editing more easily than perhaps a writer who has been a dog trainer. And finally, as an advertising writer has concocted enough rhetorical overstatements for middling products he or she will seldom be a victim of any hype...

Her novels depict the real life of her characters without hiding anything from her readers. The other point that her novels reveal is the effect of social conditioning on women. Society uses many different means to propagate beliefs. Literature is one of the means to carry these ideas further surrounded by such messages. While Shashi Deshpande's works are based on purely Indian setting and she has illustrated the subordinate position of women in the orthodox tradition-bound Indian society. She aptly points out that:

'Though no writer in India can get away from the idea of social commitment or social responsibility, committed writing has always seemed to me to have dubious literary values. However, after 25 years of writing, I cannot close my eyes to the fact that my own writing comes out of a deep involvement with the society I live in, especially with women. My novels are about women trying to understand themselves, their history, their roles and their place in this society, and above all their relationships with others. To me, my novels are always explorations; each time in the process of writing, I find myself confronted by discoveries which make me rethink the ideas I started off with. In all my novels, from *Roots and Shadows* to *The Binding Vine*, I have rejected stereotypes and questioned the myths which have so shaped the image of women, even the self-image of women, in this country. In a way, through my writing, I have tried to break the long silence of women in our



country.'

Traditions condition women's roles in the society even girls are reared in a conventional way which teaches them to self evident truths or wisdom. This is the process of conditioning. Anita Nair has very beautifully, portrayed this concept in her novels. Especially through Akhila in ladies Coupe. The characters of Anita Nair's novels commit adultery and sacrilege as depicted in *Mistress*. They break the leash of social norms and do not confine themselves to the boundaries of women. Her female characters are bold and confident enough to fulfil their desires by going against the society. Many of character experience sex before entering the social institute of marriage or indulge in extra marital affairs that is strictly against the Indian society. So one can say that she break the chains of the society in portraying her women character which can lead to its fragmentation. She never hesitates to tell the truth however bitter it is and simultaneously she forces the readers to think on the importance of removing adultery to save family life. Anita Nair has portrayed some of her protagonists as economically independent women but still they don't have control over their own life even major decisions of their life are taken by others, she has very clearly brought this concept in light that women in modern Indian may be educated and financially independent but ,still the rope of their life is in the hands of others. Here one can find some similarity between the protagonists 'learn' to resists against such social atrocities by going beyond the family boundaries. In the *Mistress* the character of Radha is bold and dominating. Being dissatisfied with her husband she opts for an extra marital affair with Chris her husband's friend. Shyam tries his level best to bring her back to him, he is ready to forgive her for all her mistakes, he is ready to accept her at any cost " I think of the other Radha. ...to go back to him" (*Mistress* 247)

In many of her novels, Anita Nair has depicted husband-wife relationship. Her female characters are bold enough of fulfil their desires by negating family bond the go upto the extent of establishing physical gratification with other men. "Shyam's call leaves me angrier than ever..." (*Mistress* 206) in an interview she says' To me, feminism in the Indian context is about recognizing the importance of the female self and to be able to



nurture it. Very often, we Indian women tend to negate ourselves as something that is expected of us. In fact, there may be no pressure at all from extraneous sources for us to do so. Perhaps it is conditioning or perhaps it is lack of self esteem, we do not consider ourselves important enough and so we tend to put our needs and desires on the back burner. This is what needs to be addressed. And this to me is what feminism ought to tackle

The writer admits that in spite of being married some women are not satisfied with their marital life and they indulge in extra marital affairs. The faithfulness in husband-wife relationships lost which puts a big question on the existence of such relationship. Anita Nair's feminism does not suit the Indian social system as it advocates that all human relationship should be restored.) she opines that ' I don't believe a woman's emancipation is tied to the roles she has to play in life. In fact a wife/ mother represents only a facet of a woman in a relationship. However even as a single woman she is still sister, daughter, aunt etc. Hence it would be almost impossible for a woman, or for that matter, a man to be completely isolated from relationships

These existing norms axe the rights of women and mostly sideline their existence as human beings. Shashi despande also advocates women empowerment and has taken up the issues of gender discrimination and social conditioning of the girl-child, husband - wife relationship: the aggressor and the suppressed, and the sexual exploitation of women within and outside the marital frame. Even since Ladies Coupe, I have been referred to as a feminist writer and I have vehemently opposed this for these reasons. One, I do not set out to write what I write with the notion of ushering in change. The creative process begins for me when certain aspects of life trouble me. I then try and explore why it the way it is. But in doing so I merely hold up a mirror to the society we live in. At no point do I delude myself that by doing so I will help start a social revolution. It isn't my intention in the first place.

Shashi Deshpande has assertively exhibited the plight of the girl-child who has to endure the trauma of gender-discrimination and social conditioning and is made to feel inferior to the progeny since her childhood.

Social conditioning restricts the flowering of a girl's personality as it



lays stress on the inculcation of predefined feminine traits-self-abnegation, servility, endurance, patience and forgiveness. Marriage is set as an ultimate goal for girls. Women have to mould and transform themselves to suit the interests of their male counterparts and in this process suppress their self identity. She states in an interview given to Lakshmi Holmstrom:

“I am different from other Indians who write in English, my background is very firmly here. I was never educated abroad. My novels don’t have any westerners, for example. They are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives. Our inner lives and our outer lives and the reconciliation between them” (248-249).

Dark Holds No Terrors (DHNT) exhibits the cruelty of undue gender discrimination of mothers inflicted on their girl-child. The protagonist of the novel, Saru, is acutely aware of her mother’s preference for her brother, Dhruva, even as a child. Saru cannot tolerate the preference which her mother gives to her brother, Dhruva, simply because he is a boy. Saru recalls that there was “always a puja on Dhruva’s birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an aarti in the evening My birthdays were almost the same – but there was no puja” (DHNT 168-69). Saru finds her mother’s inclination towards her brother Dhruva and a nonchalant attitude towards her as humiliating because they were nullifying her existence as a human being in the family. Dhruva dies by drowning in water. Though Saru tried her best to save him yet all her effort went in vain. She recalls, “Dhruva was swiftly, silently going away from me” (DHNT 145). Saru was deprived of all the rights of a child after the death of Dhruva, her brother. Mourning envelops the family and Saru’s existence was not noticed. The reminiscence of her girlhood reminds Saru of her fifteenth birthday which was special to her as she received a pair of earrings as a gift from her friend, Smita. After adoring the earrings secretively, Saru feels a sense of superiority and importance. However, Saru resents the gift given to her by her mother because she becomes aware that the gift was to give her a flamboyant appearance as a young girl and was not a gesture of love. She decides, “So that was it! It was not for me, not to please me and make me happy, but because I should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear...I don’t want them, I don’t



want to eat, I don't want anything" (DHNT 171). Saru is never forgiven by her mother for the death of her brother, Dhruva. Anitha on the other hand writes that 'while several women's issues are close to my heart, I find I am unable to agree with everything that feminist theories propound. And hence to identify myself with something that I do not completely endorse would be wrong and unethical' And finally as a writer what may interest me with one book may not matter to me when I am working on another book. Hence to bind myself to a particular ideology or writing would mean gagging my thoughts and limiting my boundaries. While I may return to female centric storylines, I am not sure that this is all I would ever write. Perhaps by my failing to identify as a feminist, I am playing safe. But I believe that I owe it to the writer in me to be unfettered.

Shashi Deshpande and Anitha Nair not only communicate with their own society but also with the global readers. Their primary task is to attempt an imaginative mediation between the traditional forces of Indian patriarchal joint family system and the new demands of modernity. They further seek to reconstruct the socio-cultural values from a woman's viewpoint.

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## AFRICAN WOMEN INKING ARROWS OF TRANSITION

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The status of women in pre-colonial Africa is a bit different from that of women in post-colonial Africa. The beginning of colonial rule has brought to Africa the European notion that women belong to the home alone, nurturing their family. At the same time the societies have expected women to work - work which the society considered equal to that of men. Furthermore, child-rearing was not considered to be a mother's job alone as the other members of the family also helped in rearing the children

The colonization of Africa has brought it into the world economic system for being exploited. Males have begun to dominate the international market that has brought better returns while women were confined to raising food crops that received lower returns and with this the economic status of women has been brought down, and this resulted in their degeneration in other spheres also. Like-wise colonial administrators and Christian Missionaries have introduced the customs of European patriarchy into Nigerian society. Their idea of the appropriate social role to be played by has women differed greatly from the traditional role of women in indigenous Nigerian societies. According to the colonizers, women belong to home and so must be engaged in child rearing - an exclusive female responsibility, and other domestic chores. They felt that if a woman got financial independence, she would not give her husband and his family their entitled respect. In the same manner, the colonial governments also imposed many restrictions on the Africans, especially the Nigerian women. Some of these violent measures on women have inspired many Nigerian women to hold a series of protests throughout the colonial period against some colonial policies and against colonialism itself. Many women writers have also made this discrimination their main forte of writing and have



basically reflected and exposed the predicament of women in a sensitive manner, in their literature. However, African literature so far has been understood as literature by men, for their interest in African literature has, with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers. The contributions of women to African literature has not been limited to the modern period alone.

The position of women in pre- colonial Nigeria was obviously different due to the vast number of tribes in Nigeria. A woman's position varied according to the kinship structure of the tribe, and the role of women within the economic structure of the society. Women in pre-colonial societies have held a complementary position to men although matrilineal and patriarchal kinship structures have pre dominated Nigerian societies. The kinship group has expected married women in a Yoruba or Igbo tribe to give birth only to male children for ensuring the future of the group. Furthermore, the station of a young wife improved as she grew older, bore children, and earned approval from the older members. She was given assistance by the younger wives as she grew older, so as to enable\* her to spend less time at home and more time in outside activities such as arming, craft making etc., which allow her to provide material resources needed for taking care of her family. Women believed that providing such resources only meant that they are discharging their responsibility as women and citizens of the tribe. Like the family and the economic structures, the religions of many Nigerian tribal societies conceived the position of women as complementary to that of men and not subordinate to men and so were respected on the basis of their seniority rather than their gender. However, the fact remains that the societies of pre-colonial Nigeria have believed that were men superior to women. Butchi Emecheta has said in an interview to Julie Holmes that :

Many other areas of traditional culture, including personal dress and adornment, religious ceremonials, and intra-gender patterns of comportment, suggest that Africans often de-emphasize gender in relation to seniority and other insignia of status {Butchi Emecheta, Interview by Julie Holmes, The Voice, 9th July 1996}



However, an analytical study of the role played by women in the traditional African society has provided a brilliant insight into the role of woman and the rapid changes that have taken place in her personality both in the traditional as well as modern African societies. This further accounts for the place of women in pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa

African women writers were positioned in the margin and also more specifically on the edge. They were not just marginal, but were rather luminal figures. This luminosity has resulted due to their position in an ambiguous space that is neither "here" nor "there". Being on edge, has created conditions analogous to the "nervous conditions" attributed to the precarious position of the so-called "natives". However, sitting "on the edge", African women writers have nevertheless sustained a fear of living on the precipice. The cultural schizophrenia often associated with the alienated and colonized has, further complicated and intensified the social politics of their environment. One of the factors that has accounted for these "nervous conditions" is the African women writers' awareness of the powerful gaze of the reader or critic (usually male); this gaze has circumscribed them and completed them to "negotiate" the creation of their fictional characters. As these women writers assumed their marginal position in a masculine's literary culture, they have deployed different strategies for representing the specificity of their position. The works of two second-generation African women writers - Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba graphically illustrate the nature of these negotiations. The centrality of women in African oral tradition is undisputed. The claim of the modern African women writers as descendents of great female story tellers of the oral tradition, where strong, radical women and symbols of womanhood are visibly recognized, is often at stake as a dearth of similar materials still exists in written literature. In such a case, the pervasive marginality and subalterity of radical women characters who symbolize change appear to be difficult to explain. As a result of such complexity, the protagonists consistently remain to be "characters of reaffirmation" in the sense that they reaffirm the commonly accepted notions of women and women's reality.

The root cause for all economic and social problems was lack of



education and this has given men a reason for refusing political rights to women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote the 'Declaration' for the `1848 Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, U. S. A., in which she has described the injustices done to women by men: 'He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise... He has made her, if married, civilly dead... He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women.( Louise Michele Newman:192-193 )

The historian Amaury de Rein court in *Women and Power in History* has ruled out strange masculine aberrations that required women to be idle and \*. She said: the historical record shows that women, one way or another, always have to be at the centre of things and will not for long stand being made idle or put on the shelf. (Amaury de Reincourt: 306.)

Women started questioning this enforced inactivity and their economic and social dependency on men. Women have been subjected to all kinds of restrictions as in the West, While men enjoyed several rights in the society. After ages of endless waiting and submission women in the West raised their voices for breaking the silence under the leadership of Mary Wollstonecraft, before the close of the eighteenth century. She commenced her feminist critique, *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), with antagonism at the 'baneful lurking gangrene' of 'the tyranny of man over woman'. *regarding the demands for education, for work and for equal companionship, Mary Wollstonecraft's French disciple of Wollstonecraft, it resembled a handbook on feminist struggle which insisted upon 'the right to juridical equality between men and women as 'the only means of achieving the unity of humanity.'* contribution is of great importance in the history of women's movement. For Tristan, a Flora Tristan as quoted in Rosalind Miles, *The Women's History of the World*:235.) Those men, who have realized that they were enjoying several privileges at women's expense, started differing from the rest of their sex. In 1825 William Thomson, a socialist philosopher published his *Appeal of One-Half The Human Race, Women, Against The Pretentious of The Other Half, Men* which was like a prophetic document. He has linked the sexual and racial oppression of women and stated that



the women were made the involuntary breeding machines and household slaves and were reduced by the tyranny of men to the condition of Negroes in the West Indies. He has insisted upon the political equality and championed the cause of women for their right to vote:

*Women of England, awake! Women, in whatever country ye breathe degraded – Awake. Awake to the contemplation of the happiness that awaits you when all your faculties of mind and body shall be fully cultivated and developed... As your bondage has chained down Man to the ignorance and vices of despotism, so will your liberation reward him with knowledge, with freedom and with happiness. (Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson.23)*

The new women's movement expanded into a commanding political force. A new note in the voice of protest was found that gave the movement an authority and authenticity which received the attention of Anna Coate and Beatrix Campbell in their work *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation*(1982):

Women are an oppressed class... We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants and cheap labour.... Our prescribed behavior is enforced with threats of physical violence. Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political contention... (Anna Coate and Beatrix Campbell: 15)

For the first time, women started recognizing man as the enemy but not the church, or the state, or the law or the Government. The new strength of women lies in the recognition of self. Lisa Tuttle has observed in *Encyclopedia of Feminism*(1986) that, 'We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves. Our sisters and our community allow us to continue our struggle and our work...' (Lisa Tuttle: 42) Even though issues of access to male privilege and power were undeniably important for women and men in the European past, they have sought other goals as well. Moreover, the ways in which Europeans expressed their claims seemed to have differed considerably from the Anglo-



Americans. Karen Offen through her work *Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach* in *SIGNS* (1988) has commented that:

Europeans focused as much or more on elaborations of womanliness; they celebrated sexual difference rather than similarity within a framework of male/female complementarities; and, instead of seeking unqualified admission to male dominated-society, they mounted a wide-ranging critique of the society and its institutions. (Karen Offen: 124.)

Considering all the aspects that the word feminism incorporates and realizing feminism as a rapidly developing major critical ideology, or system of ideas in its own right, Karen Offen attempts to define feminism as, 'a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society. (Karen Offen: 151)

The words 'feminine', 'feminist' and 'female' are also used by several authors with several contextual meanings. Of all the writers, Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi deserve special mention as they have tried to follow a distinct pattern in using these words. While Showalter used these words to correspond different stages of literary tradition of women, Toril Moi distinguished these words for presenting three different kinds of approaches to women's movement. Showalter has suggested the style of imitation, protest and autonomous aspects of woman's literature.

Showalter has explained that women have been historically enabled to reject the accommodative postures of femininity and have started using literature for dramatizing the ordeals of wronged womanhood. Showalter has shown that women have rejected both imitation and protest - The two forms of dependency of the past two phases and relied on writing based on specific female experience.

Toril Moi, on the other hand, has drawn out a distinction between feminism as political, femaleness as a matter of biology and femininity as a set of culturally defined characteristics. She has equated the word feminist with feminism and explained that both were political labels indicating support for the aims of new women's movement which emerged in the late



1960s. Feminist criticism is said to be a specific kind of political discourse – a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. She has recognized different political views within the feminist camp and insisted that feminist criticism studies the social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes. She has cited the work of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and explained that for Millet the essence of politics is power and the task of feminist critics and theorists is to expose the way in which male dominance over females constitutes, 'perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power' (Kate Millet: *Sexual Politics*:25).

Following Kate Millet's approach, feminists have politicized existing critical methods there by forming a ground for feminist criticism to grow into a new branch of literary studies. Moi has felt that feminists should find themselves in a position more or less similar to that of other radical critics. In doing so, the feminists have adopted several theories relevant to their goals. Toril Moi has supported and made a mention of these reflections through her work *Feminist, Female, Feminine in The Feminist Reader, Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*(1989) edited by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore and has aptly written:, 'Like socialists, feminists can in a sense afford to be tolerantly pluralistic in their choice of literary methods and theories, precisely because any approach that can be successfully appropriated to their political ends must be welcome' (Toril Moi:118.)

Toril Moi's argument that feminist criticism is pluralistic in its choice of methods and theories and that they are conveniently adopted in the feminist cause sharply differs from that of Showalter's feminist criticism. Showalter has argued that feminist criticism could be divided into two distinct kinds – woman as reader and woman as writer. The first type is concerned with woman as the consumer of male produced literature and the manner in which a female reader has changed her apprehensions of a given text, thereby awakening the reader's mind to the significance of its sexual codes. Showalter has referred to this kind of analysis as the feminist critique and its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions in women's criticism and the



exploitation and manipulation of female audience. The second type of feminist criticism is woman as writer is concerned with woman as the producer of textual meaning with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. Showalter has explained that this second type includes the psychodynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problem of a female language which she has labelled as 'Gynocritic'. Toril Moi has sharply differed with the position of the second type of literary criticism that Showalter has shown that woman as the writer or gynocritic. She has explained that there is no pure feminist or a female space, and feminists have no other option but to be pluralistic as all ideas, including feminist ones are 'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology. Appropriation, in the sense of creative transformation has always been the way by which many feminists have been able to criticise the patriarchal society. While accepting that many women have been victimized intellectually, emotionally and physically by men, Moi has highlights the fact that some women have managed efficiently to counter male power. She has advocated that there is nothing wrong in adapting some ideas as mentioned by her in her book *The Feminist Reader* stressing our right, aggressively if necessary to appropriate other people's ideas for our own political purposes. We may avoid a defeatist analysis of the situation of intellectually and culturally active women. (Toril Moi: 120) Further, Moi has supported and appreciated the work of Juliet Mitchell and many others who have turned Freudian psychoanalysis into a source of truly feminist analysis and Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray for applying the philosophy of Jacques Derrida to illuminate feminist issues and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar who have rewritten the literary theory of Herald Bloom.

The kind of patriarchal stereotyping which many women writers indulged in their earlier works prior to 1960's is what the feminists wanted to combat. she has stated that a female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a feminist one. Supporting her argument Toril Moi has brought in Rosalind Coward's discussion in her essay *Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?* (1986). She has also criticized the mistaken belief in experience as the essence of feminist politics which has later become the main political base for the new women's movement which has emphasized



the concept of consciousness rising. She has explained that the notion of representative experience in consciousness rising cannot itself be a ground to politics, since any experience is open to conflicting political interpretations and in no way guarantees a common political front. She has emphasized that feminism as a political theory cannot be reduced to a reflection or a product of that experience and supported the Marxist view that there is a dialectical relationship between theory and practice in which is applied to the relationship between female experience and feminist politics.

Among many feminists it has been a long established usage to understand feminine and masculine as representing social constructs, i.e. patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed by cultural and social norms. The terms male and female purely represent biological aspects of sexual difference and thus female is equated to nature and feminine represents nurture in this usage. Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1949) implies that a woman is not born but becomes woman through socialization as femininity is a cultural construct. Toril Moi explains that patriarchal oppression following this perspective imposes certain social standards of femininity on all biological women and makes others recognize these standards of femininity as natural. So a woman who chooses to oppose these norms can be labeled as both unfeminine and unnatural. Thus it is in the patriarchal interest, as Toril Moi argues, that these two terms femininity and femaleness, stay thoroughly confused. She contends that patriarchy makes women to believe in the essence of femaleness called femininity and the feminist's task is to disentangle this confusion and must always insist that though women undoubtedly are female, this in no way guarantees that they will be feminine.

For African or African-American women, feminist ideology reflects specificities of race, class and culture. It is for this reason that the former has failed to make any lasting appeal to Africa and its Diaspora. This is because; African women do not wish to alienate men, because African women do not wish to alienate the bulk of the tradition-based sisters, 'because many traditional African customs and mores are worth preserving. And with the intensely patriarchal nature of traditional African cultures, African



feminism cannot be considered radical. Most African Feminists espouse womanism. The aim of "African feminism" is the gamer feminism of wholeness and self-healing. The Nigerian born expatriate writer, Buchi Emecheta, along with other critics, maintains that African women were traditionally subordinated to sexist cultural mores. Feminist consciousness permeates the works of Buchi Emechata. Her novels explore the customs and traditions that have caused the most suffering to her female characters and the signs of hope for eliminating the suffering of African women. The works of Emechata endure\* in the myth that feminist issues are not that important to African women, as they already have sufficient power, as women who choose to suffer polygamy, and that whatever, misery African women suffer is due to the inroads\* made by Western culture in Africa. Most of the novels of Emechata depict the extreme suffering of woman characters, and portray some \*development in feminist consciousness, and end on opinion site moli\*that contain changes are occur. Furthermore, these novels suggest that until men establish an egalitarian relationship with woman, more and more African women might be saying no to marriage.

In the African communities depicted in Emecheta, families exert a great deal of pressure upon young people for upholding traditional taboos, customs and privileges \* to marriage. Families have had considerable say over the young and have warned them of the \* disasters if the long established customs and procedures designed for governing the behavior are disobeyed. She views in the world where birth is a passage from the spirit world to the material world. Death is a different kind of birth - implying that it is passage from the material world back to the spirit world. Accordingly, the cyclic continuity between the two worlds was perhaps most vulnerable where the issue of birth and death was involved. Children were necessary for maintaining the continuity of the cycle, and childlessness was viewed as the "worst fate" that could befall an African. Marriage was seen as inextricable form of procreation and hence sacred. Thus, the rituals surrounding childbirth, marriage and death were essentially invocations to spiritual guardians to maintain the cycle.

Pressure put on the individual, in the name of age-old traditions and taboos,



resulted in the development of protest tendency and rebellious attitude among the women writers. However, distinguishing protesting protest writers and serious artists is not that easy. Such distinctions tend to inspire all the well-known, shop worn clichés about art versus protest. This distinction between women as protest writers and other women in African literature does not discard that protest which is limited to a separate group of women whose works are considered inferior to and less significant than the writings of others. The protest elements are found in the writings of both the major as well as minor women writers of Africa. Though the artistic merit of these protest writers is limited, their frequently pervasive charges of sexual inequality offer their readers certain insights into the African women's perception of herself and her society.

These insights provide a wide range of concern from the subject of poverty to the everyday chores of motherhood and the inescapable drudgery of rural life in poorer communities. The protester's straightforwardness in reflecting such realistic aspects is especially helpful in the study of women's literature in Africa because their vehemence is in itself significant. It challenges the entrenched image of African women as already liberated persons. With all their artistic failures the protest writers have occupied a special place as they have voiced a passionate sense of grief that has drawn the attention of all those who have seriously undertaken and the examination of the ways in which African women have viewed their lives in contemporary Africa.

The protest elements are found in the writings of many women writers of different generations belonging to different parts of Africa. These are found in the writings of Mabel Dove-Danquah from Ghana, the first woman to be elected to the state assembly in Modern Africa. Her writings usually reflect a distaste for traditional sexual roles. Her short story, "Anticipation", is a sardonic account of polygamy and male arrogance. Like-wise, one finds similar implications in the writings of Grace Ogot, also a minor writer from Kenya, whose protest is subdued or indirect. This is evident in her novel *The Promised Land* (1966) and her collection of short stories *Land Without Thunder* (1968). She describes sexual roles and attitudes with little or no



narrative commentary or political judgment. The subtlety and multiple suggestiveness normally associated with this kind of narrative technique have limited Ogot as a writer.

Modern African-born women writers continued to produce sophisticated narrative art even without drawing the attention and acclaim they deserved. Rudo Gaidanwa of the University of Zimbabwe and author of *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*, pointed to the gap between the strong character of African women in real life and the passive images of womanhood in published works. Some of the materials existing do not depict anything women can identify with, she noted. Addressing the question of role models, South African writer, Sindiwe Magona, author of five books written within a ten-year period, declared, "If our children don't read about us, how they would want to be like us?".

Women in Africa have been writing for almost as long as men have, overcoming quite significantly the colonial bias that favored the education of boys. While modern African writing of the 50s and 60s began on a small scale and was mainly produced by men (anthologized in 1969 by the late Trinidadian author, Whitney Carter as *Whispers from a Continent*), women's contributions helped to animate this first wave of literary production. Further, the two dramatists from the Ghanaian theatre - Ama Ata Aidoo and Efua Sutherland who received very limited attention in spite of their creditable contribution to the Ghanaian theatre succeeded well in integrating their treatment of women with the literary forms in which they work. The roles of their theatre are deliberately modelled on prevailing sexual roles in society. Moreover, as a short story writer also, Aidoo develops her techniques in such a way that each story becomes a direct, structural reflection of the personality of the woman it describes.

Ama Ata Aidoo's play, *Dilemma of a Ghost*, performed at the University of Ghana in 1964 and published a year later, explored further the clash-of-cultures theme enunciated in Chinua Achebe's groundbreaking novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and simultaneously broke new ground by examining the complex ties between Africans and African Americans. Anticipating the cultural climate of the civil rights movement in America,



Dilemma appealed to the Pan-Africanist sentiments later articulated in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

In 1966, two English-language novels by women appeared on the scene: Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land*, published in England and Nairobi, respectively. In her novel, Nwapa attempted to find a new and independent voice to express her disenchantment with Nigerian patriarchal society, but critics were either dismissive or unimpressed. As a matter of fact, the first generation of sub-Saharan women writers writing in English – Aidoo, Nwapa, Ogot, Efua Sutherland (Ghana) and Bessie Head (South Africa) – were largely ignored in the emerging African literary criticism, prompting the African American feminist critic, Roseann P. Bell to question the invisibility of African women writers in a 1977 conference paper appropriately titled "The Absence of the African Woman Writer. In the 80s, within the framework of the international women's movement, the climate of opinion towards women writing in Africa began to change and a number of female writers rose to stardom. Buchi Emecheta, a Nigerian woman living in London, made a remarkable transformation from embattled wife and ex-colonial subject to an irrepressible writer. Energized by a sense of cultural adventure in Britain, Emecheta wrote sixteen books between 1972 and 1989, including nine novels, an autobiography – *Head above Water* (1986) – and literature for children. In terms of range and volume, Emecheta's artistic repertoire marked a breakthrough effort for women writers to create new canons of cultural experience that envision women as central to the work for social change in Africa.

For example, three of her novels *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) – have represented different arenas of women's struggle against hostile traditions and formidable obstacles to self-realization. In particular, *The Joys of Motherhood*, her most widely read novel, ironically elaborated the crippling despair of the childless woman in a culture that overvalues motherhood. A quiet devastation is discernible in Emecheta's work, but there is also a corresponding validation of ordinary women leading heroic lives. *Destination Biafra* (1983), her high-



minded narrative about the Nigerian civil war, celebrates one such woman.

Debbie Ogedemgbe, who has cast her lot with her country's fragile prospects for ethnic unity, fought valiantly to end the war and proudly proclaimed, "I am a woman and a woman of Africa. I am a daughter of Nigeria and if she is in shame, I shall stay and mourn with her in shame."

Senegalese writer Mariama Ba has also drawn the adulation of the readers around the world with the publication of *So Long a Letter* (1981), a poignant book about polygamy through women's eyes. This novel-as-letter has examined the rites of courage of a woman abandoned by a man for a much younger wife in the Islamic order. Writing to her friend, Ramatoulaye, the protagonist sets out on a journey toward self-healing, 'I am beginning this diary, my prop in my distress. Our long association has taught me that confiding in others allays pain'.

To validate this hope; Ba has forged a strong friendship between the two women. In their expanding view of African life, they challenge the social control of women and demystify the beliefs that exploit women's vulnerability. Ba's second book, *A Scarlet Song*, a novel about interracial marriage, was published in 1986 five years after her death.

The other protest writer, whose voice is more potent when compared to other writers, is Bessie Head from South Africa. She is a more imaginative and complex artist, who is quite capable of emphasizing the continuity of limited social realities, hinting at or envisioning acceptable alternatives within or outside her characters. She in fact has made an attempt to realize such alternatives. Her writings exhibit a direct protest and such presence of protest element has not compromised the complexity of her art. She is deeply suspicious of all prevailing traditions and institutions, since she has associated them with the widespread disorder encountered by her in the world.

However, both the major as well as the minor women writers have insisted that the experience and roles of women are distinguishable from men's. In their works, the woman's experience revolves around herself perception rather than the man's needs. The major figures among these writers are those who are able to communicate this kind of female self



perception in complex and intense terms in works that are often artistically imaginative and innovative. The writings of this distinguished group of women writers in contemporary African literary writing is directed at sexual inequality both in traditional and in modern Africa. This protest is usually interwoven with a frank emphasis on the woman's own need to develop and assert her own strength of will. Head \* up in the smoldering hostility of racial in South Africa, had an unsuccessful marriage and so left the country to settle in Botswana. Here she has transformed alienation into art, creating characters that chafe under domination based on race, gender or ethnicity. But her characters have been keepers of her large agenda of "world-building" across several differences. In *Maru* (1971) and *A Question of Power* (1974), her second and third novels, Head has given a vision of human interrelatedness amid haunting images of racial and gender prejudice. Her novels, including her first, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969), and countless short stories tell riveting tales of psychic trauma induced of the desire by some to dominate others. The dramatic and poetic power of her fiction has drawn critical praise and has influenced such African American literary lights as Angela Carter, Nikki Giovanni, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

In the 1980's, African women have continued to write perhaps, out of what Aidoo calls a sense of "desperation" to be heard. The distance between Lloyd Brown's pioneering text *Women Writers in Black Africa* (1981), an assessment of the work of five writers, to *Africa Woman Palava: The Nigerian Novel By Women* (1996), Chikwenye Ogunyemi's full-scale critical treatise, represents a dramatic shift in the critical attitude towards African women's literary production. The strength of the feminist dialogue among black and white American female scholars in the 80s no doubt helped in boosting critical re-appraisal of African women writers.

Leading the way is *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Grave. In Kenya, Micere Mugo, Rebecca Njau, Marjorie Macgoye and Asenath Bole Odaga laid out the concerns of women and the nation in poetry, drama and fiction. However, their male compatriot, gifted writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, leapt far ahead of them in international acclaim. In West Africa, men writers like



Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka had become international celebrities.

In South Africa, Miriam Tlali, Laurretta Ngcobo and Ellen Kuzwayo, among others, continued to write against the mounting tide of despair during the Apartheid era. In West Africa, Aminata Sow Fall (Senegal), Zaynab Alkali (Nigeria), Ken Bugul (Senegal) and (Cameroon) have contributed to the evolving history of female creativity in Africa.

By the 90s it was clear that women writers could no longer be kept on the fringe of African literary culture. To date, international recognition has been small but significant: the Noma award for Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, the Grand Prix de Litterature de l'Afrique for *The Beggars' Strike* (1979), by Aminata Sow Fall; the 1992 Commonwealth Prize for Literature for Ama Ata Aidoo's novel, *Changes* (1991); and the 1997 Regional Commonwealth Prize for Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue*. Among critics, women writers have moved away from being viewed as a collective oddity, as reflected in *Female Novelists of Africa* (1984) by the Nigerian critic Oladele Taiwo, to being more widely seen as talented individuals who inspire more in depth study of African literature.

Of all the writers Flora Nwapa, like her contemporary writers, Emecheta and others, has spoken on the matters of blackness and womanhood. The Nwapa novel is typical of the kind of African novel that resists purely western-oriented approaches to the genre. A harsh social realism pervades through Nwapa's writings, reflecting a her conspicuous effort and close involvement in public life in Nigeria. A serious protest element of is not very much seen in her writings as in those of Emecheta's writings. Her treatment of feminine or feminist themes is more indirect when compared to Emecheta and Flora Nwapa is a challenger, while Buchi Emecheta is a fighter. The writer Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa was born on January 18, 1931 in Ugwuta, Imo state, Nigeria. She was educated at Archdeacon Crowther's Memorial Girl's School and CMS Girls School in Lagos. Nwapa obtained her B.A. Degree from University College of Ibadan in 1957 and a Diploma in education from University of Edinburgh in 1958. After her return to Nigeria, she joined the Ministry of Education as Officer in Calabar. She then worked at Queen's school in Enugu where she



taught English and Geography. She continued to work in both education and Civil Services in several positions including Assistant Registrar, University of Lagos (1962-76), Minister of Health and Social Welfare, East Central Africa (1970-71) and Minister of Lands, Survey and Urban Development (1971-74). Flora Nwapa was encouraged by her contemporary, the renowned Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who read her manuscripts and got them published in Heinemann's African Writers Series. Her first novel was *Efuru* published in (1966). She published six novels *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1975) *One is Enough* (1981), *Women Are Different* (1986) and *The Lake Goddess* (1995).<sup>\*</sup> She also published short stories that include: "My Spoons Are Finished" (1967) "Idu" (1968), "This is Lagos and Other Stories" (1971), "The Campaigner" (1974), "Ada" (1976), "This is Lagos" (1983), "Wives at War and Other Stories" (1980).

After the Nigerian Civil War, Nwapa became the first woman to serve as the commissioner in the East Central State. Her contribution to the post-war policy of reconciliation is significant. She insisted in utilizing the extended family system in rehabilitating thousands of refugee children. She was successful in re-uniting all the children by tracing their relatives.

After working for five years in the Ministry of Land and Urban Development, Nwapa again went back to her first love: writing. Along with her husband Gogo Nwakuche, Flora Nwapa founded Flora Nwapa and Co and Tana Press in 1976. She became the first Nigerian woman to establish her own publishing Company. She formulated some Universalist objectives. Chuks Iloegbunam. (1931-1993) Writing about 'Flora Nwapa has said that Nwapa wished to inform and educate women all over the world, about the role of women in Nigeria, their economic independence, their relationship with their husbands and children, their traditional beliefs and their status in the community as a whole (Chuks :10)

In recognition of her contributions to the progress of society, the Nigerian government invested her with the national honor of the Officer of The Order of Niger [OON] in 1983. The University of Ibadan also presented her with its Distinguished Alumni Award for Authorship and publishing from Ife Book Fair in 1985.



Nwapa felt that the death of her voice had been a due to of Heinemann's placing her in literary backwaters. Her London publisher did not print and distribute her books as she was regarded as a Third World Writer. It was only after a decade that the American academia began to embrace her and universities such as Southern Connecticut State College and Oberlin College, Ohio, adopted some of her books into their curricula. A Kenyan-born journalist Anyiango Odhiambo has observed that Flora Nwapa had been a voice and a torchlight giving insights into African women's perspectives, not only about themselves but also the world around them. Belief in divinity and belief in ancestors have been elements of traditional religion in Africa and the figurative presence of feminine deities in creative literatures by women indicates the creative relationship of this metaphor with the culture and gender of the artist. The image of the Lake Goddess into the texture of Nwapa's works and the spiritual metaphors used in her texts have given them a cultural and woman-centered ideology

Her\* novel *Efuru*(1966) is about a beautiful woman who is admired for her qualities by her community. She does not find fulfillment in the conventional female roles of wife and mother and so determines to be independent.

Her second novel *Idu*(1970) is also set in a small Nigerian town where the individual forms a part of the community. Idu chooses her own path by arriving at crucial decisions that create an identity. She flouts the conventions that govern a woman's role as a part of the family. Her choice is very crucial and it signifies the importance of woman's identity. In both these novels Nwapa tries to explore the African women in traditional society who acquire knowledge through their experiences in relation to their communities. These experiences function as tools for gaining wisdom and in turn educate them in the process of self-development.

While the first two novels deal with traditional society, her third novel *One is Enough*(1981) deals with the contemporary society. The urban migration of the protagonist and her life in urban societies is the main focus in this novel. Nwapa depicts both the rural and urban environment.



She also portrays the Nigerian Civil War, which is explored further, in her novel *Never Again*. This novel is about the impact of Nigerian Civil War and its effects and activities on the lives of people and how women actively participate in the war activities.

Her next novel *Women Are Different* (1986) can be considered a novel about female development. The importance and impact of education on the lives of women is also a major issue in the novel. In these three novels, especially *One is Enough* and *Women Are Different*, Nwapa incorporates her female protagonists with new strength and force who believe that education gives them a new outlook to meet the challenges of contemporary urban societies. Nwapa initiated a female literary tradition rooted in resistance and raised a protest against the one-dimensional images of African women as wives, mothers and rebel girls. She made an effort to invent an African female personality and define the female subject positively. Her explorations of these subjects link her works with womanist writers like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison who do not merely present a female point of view but also subvert patriarchal authority. She made an honest portrayal of Ugwu women who has presented the complementary nature of Ugwu society. The society is depicted as mixed-gender age grade system. The *Woman of the Lake* guarantees women and men: the power, prominence and peace.

African women have acknowledged their mothers and fathers who have ensured them education in spite of the prevalent patriarchal tradition prevailing in the African society. The enlightenment provided by education helps these women writers to dismantle the myths of female inferiority and challenge the roles of faithless women. Educated African women in the modern period are occupying prominent positions, in important decision-making bodies and realizing their duties to make society an equitable place for the less privileged women. They are scaling greater heights with their education and will to survive and are proving their capabilities. African women writers – have made contributions as lecturers, ministers and directors of many institutions and are involved in various movements against forced marriages and widowhood practices.



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## SELF DETERMINATION MUFFLED IN SILENCE OVER AND OVER

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The Bride Price (1976) was Buchi Emecheta's third book written during the pivotal period in the Nigerian history, before national independence, in 1950's. It is the first bonafide novel after her two autobiographical novels, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *The Second-Class Citizen* (1975). The novel is a protest against the bride price, a deep rooted custom that degrades women's status in male chauvinistic society. Departing from her own life story, she explores the events growing in Nigeria that are formerly depicted only through the eyes and experience of male writers.

The Bride Price, the burnt manuscript in Emecheta's autobiographical novel *The Second-Class Citizen*, is the love story of Aku-nna, a young Ibo girl and Chike, the descendent of slave. Aku-nna, the protagonist of the novel, crossing traditional boundaries, marries Chike, undergoes fear due to the cause of the unpaid bride price, and ultimately dies giving birth to a girl child. The novel centers the issue - 're-critiquing the self' by the protagonist, a young Ibo girl, that results in a journey, from a vicious circle of traditional constraints to a new world of liberation with self determination but unfortunately her determined voice of rebel is silenced in her death, the self imposed price, a brutal tribute for her self determination. There are certain reasons for the protagonist to re-critique her own self and to break loose the traditions and taboos of the Ibuza land. The causes for a young woman of Ibuza society, like Aku-nna to re-critique are: lack of identity in patriarchal society, commodification of woman, woman limited to her conventional roles, treatment of woman as a non entity under patriarchal structure.

Identity Crisis is a factor that hinders the survival of woman, making her as a victim under patriarchal system leading to the re-critiquing of her



insignificant and denying role as a woman who is disadvantaged from her birth. Son preference is a historically rooted practice enshrined in the value systems of many African communities that often with concomitant daughter neglect. In African society, male children carry family lineage and preserve the family name, and hence the fear of losing them prompts families to desire for a son. Patriarchal society attaches important role for men that obliges parents to yearn for a male child.

Ezekiel Ochia, Aku-nna's father always quarrel with his wife Ma Blackie over the issue of childlessness, reminds her his double payment of the normal bride price in order to marry her, the sanctification of their marriage due to the heavy bride price paid, and is disappointed as what had he to show for it all- an only son! (TBP: 9), implying the insignificant birth and existence of Aku-nna, his girl child. Even Aku-nna knew that she was too insignificant to be regarded as a blessing to this unfortunate marriage (TBP: 9) of her parents. In Indian society also male children perpetuate the family name and are significant. Saru, the central character in Shashi Desh Pande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1990) suffers this gender discrimination when her parents do not allow her to go out in the sun for the reason that she may become darker and finds it difficult to get married. When she enquires about Dhruva, her male sibling, the parents express their high estimation on the male child: He's different. He's a boy. (Desh Pande: 45)

She is insignificant not only because she is a girl but too thin and weak for the approval of her parents and Ma begging her many a time to decide whether she is going to live or die, calls her a "living dead", an ogbanje, a prediction of the life of Aku-nna, the stereotype of a young Ibo woman who strives to survive despite the fatal conditions – lack of freedom and choice, encircled by antagonistic society. Like Ojebeta in *The Slave Girl* (1977), Aku-nna is also presented by Emecheta as Ogbanje to represent the state of her sex in a society that denies the female any measure of self-determination as opined by Florence Stratton in her "The Shallow Grave: Archetypes of Female Experience in African Fiction" (Stratton: 101).

In Ibo society, woman is treated as a possession, a commodity exchanged for good bride price. This commodification of woman degrades



her individual will, enhances the will of the possessor, the man; and urges the need to re-critique her powerless, objectified role imposed by the society. Salome C. Nnoromele in "Representing the African Woman: Subjectivity and Self in The Joys of Motherhood" states the degradation of women's status through bride price: ... bride price degrade women to the status of goods and chattel; that husbands dominate their wives and that fathers dominate their daughters, ensuring a system of perpetual subjugation of women...( Nnoromele: 178-179). In the novel, *Aku-nna* and *Ma Blackie's* treatment as commodities by *Odia* and *Okonkwo* mark the suffering of Ibo women in their commodified roles of daughter and wife respectively. At the birth of a female child, women sing maternity song in which she is referred to as a bag of money. The maternity song in *Ifi Amadiume's Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987) degrades the status of woman to mere possession: One has given birth to a bag of money. Thanks be to God. This cloth I wear is money. This meat I eat is money. This fish I eat is money. This child I have is money. (Amadiume: 78)

The protagonist's father hopes daughter's bride price as the only consolation which he can count on from her and names her as *Aku-nna* which means "father's wealth". In "Black Women's Literature", *Zainab Haruna* mentions *Aku-nna* as a woman who is valued only because of her bride price; compares her with *Ananse*, the central character in *Efua Sutherland's* play *The Marriage of Anansewa* who becomes a victim to a trickster father who tries to acquire wealth by auctioning her to wealthy chiefs; and reminds *Maya Angelo's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that demonstrates the female child as a target of displacement and sexual abuse within and outside her family. (Haruna: 61)

After her father's death, when *Aku-nna* resides in *Okonkwo's* home, *Okonkwo*, her uncle even thinks that *Aku-nna*, if allowed to go to school, fetches good bride price and can fulfil her parents expectations and lives up to her name *Aku-nna* which means father's wealth. He hopes to become an *Obi* and receive the respected *Eze* title by the bride prices fetched by *Aku-nna* and *Ogugua*, his daughter.



Bride price symbolizes women's submission to men and thus Ma Blackie is pestered and blamed due to her inability to conceive, by her first husband who attains authority on her as a possessor due to heavy bride price he pays. After the death of Odi in Lagos, Ma Blackie, according to tradition, becomes the possession of Odi's elder brother, Okonkwo. She along with her children goes to Ibuza to live with Okonkwo who claims the family as rightful legal inheritance from his dead brother. Neerja Chand in her *Beyond Feminism Gender Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta* (2005) says,

The death of her father... precludes the custom of transferring of the widow Ma Blackie and the family to the surviving brother who then can exercise his rights of inheritance – a practice which confirms a woman's status as a mere possession instead of a person and makes her feel totally helpless in a world where she has no control over the rules that shape her life and destiny. (Chand: 101)

In African society, womanhood is exclusively defined as motherhood. As Eustace Palmer states in his "A Powerful Female Voice in the African Novel: Introducing the novels of Buchi Emecheta" opines that women are used by man as ... vehicles for procreating children, thus immortalizing the husband's name and ensuring the continuity of his line... (Palmer: 22). This limited space of woman, confined to a fertilizing instrument (Rich: 100) as termed by Adrienne Rich in her *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1996) creates a need to re-critique her inexorable conventional role as a mother. In Ibuza society, not just a barren woman but a woman who bears one or two children is also a victim of dishonour. Women living in Ma's compound make songs about the childlessness of Ma Blackie. Even her husband, out of disappointment with Ma giving birth to only 'one son', quarrels with her and sends her to Ibuza to placate their Oboshi river Goddess into giving her some children.

Woman is often considered as a non entity and is subjected to the life of powerlessness leading to the re-critiquing of self. Father is the head, the important person in a family. It is so even today in Nigeria: when you have lost your father, you have lost your parents. Your mother is only a woman, and women are supposed to be boneless. A fatherless family is a



family without a head, a family without shelter, a family without parents, in fact a non-existing family. Such traditions do not change very much. (TBP: 28)

Losing of him is the same as losing of parents. He is the shelter to the family. Hence, Aku-nna cries, It is not that we have no father anymore, we have no parents anymore (TBP: 28). People tell her that she does not have father and is an orphan, who has to take care of whatever clothes she has because no one buys for her until she marries. So Aku-nna ... learn(s) to accept it (TBP: 39), the fate of igbo woman who is cared either by father or by her husband.

The night games among boys and girls also degrade woman status. Their custom allowed boys to go to mother's hut and play with girls by squeezing their breasts until they hurt so long as it was done inside the hut where an adult was near, and so long as the girl did not let the boy go too far, it was not frowned on (TBP: 97). Ernest Emenyonu, in his "Technique and Language in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price, The Slave Girl, and The Joys of Motherhood*" mentions about these digressions which portray the writer as ... the eager anthropologist anxious to unravel the intricacies of her culture to an alien world (Emenyonu: 255). Lack of freedom is another factor that creates need for woman to re-critique her self. When Aku-nna, along with her age group Obiageli, Obiajulu, Ogugua and others goes to Zik for dance practice, she is abducted by the jealous and potential suitor Okoboshi to be as prospective bride. As a young girl, Aku-nna becomes a victim in the hands of Okoboshi, who is encouraged by the traditions and taboos of the land according to which,

All the man responsible had to do was cut a curl of her hair - "isi nmo" - and she would belong to him for life. Or he could force her into sleeping with him, and if she refused his people would assist him by holding her down until she was disvirgined. And when that had been done, no other person would like to take her any more. (TBP: 132)

Aku-nna rethinks her victimhood and rebels against the traditional constraints that bounded her. When Okoboshi tries to seduce her, she says



a lie that she ... is a girl who has been taught what men taste like by a slave (TBP: 138). She knows that her lie brings dishonour on herself and her family but she willingly endure this rather than bowing to a forced marriage. In this regard, Omar Sougou in *Writing Across Cultures Gender Politics and Difference in the fiction of Buchi Emecheta* (1996) says,

The lie pertains to the trope of refusal and silence in the face of patriarchal imperiousness. The self- inflicted disgrace in order to escape the sacrificial altar of tradition is equivalent to a questioning and rejection of harmful mores. Aku-nna's act becomes a twofold sacrifice; one made on behalf of love, the other in the name of the other female members of the community.(Sougou: 68)

This is an act that indicates her rejection of the psychological fear due to traditional mores and the initiation of her journey to a new world of liberation with a spirit of rebel. Rebecca Boostrom in his "Nigerian Legal Concepts in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*" rightly says, Aku-nna's refusal to submit to a marriage against her will is actually in line with modern trends and changes in the law of her day (Boostom: 81). As "a new woman", Aku-nna attempts to reform the society and steps out from the vicious circle of traditions to the new world of her own choice. It is a journey from her role as submissive and dependent woman to independent and modern woman. Aku-nna rethinks and challenges her victimized selfless role and break loose the traditional mores in quest of identity and freedom. Chike, whistles, a potent call that breathe life into her, giving her exhausted body the energy it lacked (TBP: 145) to enter the new world. Emecheta uses scenes of Aku-nna's abduction and subsequent elopement to delineate Aku-nna's growth from an inexperienced and naive childhood into a knowing and rebellious womanhood as mentioned by Brown. (Brown: 50)

In 1956, Forbading Ibo people from inflicting social disabilities on descendents of slaves, the Eastern House of Assembly enacted a statute titled "Abolition of One System Law" in which section 6 states:

The significance of section 6 for our present purposes is that it would be a punishable offence for a parent to refuse to give his son or daughter in



marriage to a suitor (or female applicant) on the grounds that the said suitor or applicant is a person of slave descent. (Boostrom: 80)

Hence, these enacted modern laws show that she does not deserve to die. But in an interview, Emecheta comments about her heroine do not correspond with mid- century law: I feel that at sixteen she didn't know what the world was about. She was too young to choose her own husband. Although she knew the man, she was going against her tradition so she had to die. (Boostrom: 81). Sougou says, Emecheta's killing her heroine because she is too young to confront society appears to be acceptance of the idea that tradition is a giant which no single individual can challenge unharmed. (Sougou: 71)

Many critics view Aku-nna as a failed rebellion as she lacks the psychological and mental frame of mind to face and live up to her convictions (Ezeigbo: 21) and her death as a self imposed death. Despite her conscious acts of revolt, her will is dominated by the will of the community. Hence, though she moves out with her own choice, due to her mind's adherence with tradition, she fears that if the bride price is not paid, the bride will die at child birth (TBP: 154). As there is no psychic escape for Aku-nna, critics say that her death is a self fulfilling prophecy.

As the name "Aku-nna" suggests the bride price, a custom African society, her death can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it suggests the death of the epistemology of the bride price, the convention in which Igbo women are encircled. She chooses death as a redemptive force for her to escape from the psychic fear of tradition. Hence, in Sougou's point of view, The Bride Price is based on the notion of the subjection of women; as the title suggests, it radically questions this custom (Sougou: 59). She died in the process of transforming the society by paving way for the remaining Igbo women to escape from the bondage of conventions and to enter the new world of liberation. Her death in Ughelli indicates her individual will and strong determination as she accepts even death instead of moving back. Aku-nna's death is not a tragedy as it initiates the life of Joy, her daughter who sprouts a new hope of liberation to the next generation.



Secondly, the death of Aku-nna indicates the death of the manuscript *The Bride Price* in Emecheta's autobiographical novel *The Second-Class Citizen*. When Adah, Emecheta's alter ego in *The Second-Class Citizen*, nurses dada, her child, she reminds of her old dream of writing which results in the manuscript of *The Bride Price*. When Francis, her husband and the representative of tradition knows about her writing of the book, he thinks that it brings shame to his family and burns. Adah is unable to bear because the story is the starting point of her dream to become a writer. She cries, ... Bill called that story my brain child. Do you hate me so much, that you could kill my child? Because that is what you have done (SCC: 181). Similarly, As mentioned by Brown, Aku-nna has also been killed due to the function of social institutions and the shaping patterns of cultural traditions (Brown: 49). Brown further says, There is no indication that the actual novel duplicates its fictional counterpart. Infact, Adah describes her own work as a comedy but the actual novel by Emecheta is decidedly tragic (Brown: 48), Emecheta while rewriting her burnt manuscript in *The Second-Class Citizen* makes certain changes that she mentions in her autobiography, *Head Above Water* :

The original story ended with a husband and wife going home and living happily ever after, disregarding their people. But I have grown wiser since that first manuscript. I had realized that what makes all of us human is belonging to a group. And if one belongs to a group, one should try and abide by the group's law. If one could not abide by the group's law, then one was an outsider, a radical, someone different who had found a way of living and being happy outside the group. Aku-nna was too young to do all that. She had to die. (Emecheta: 166)

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## WOMEN'S STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE: WADING THROUGH TURBULENT WATERS OF WAR

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**Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo** in his "A Chat With Flora Nwapa" observes that Flora Nwapa's technique in her war fiction *Never Again*(1975), for instance, is "similar to that of the politician or rhetorician who is bent on persuading his audience to see his point of view. The similarity surfaces in the rhetorical and declamatory devices, in the unmitigated emotional involvement and the tendency to moralize issues" (Ezeigbo: 96). In *Never Again*, we have an eyewitness account of women's dynamic involvement in the Nigerian Civil War through the authentic voice of a first-person narrator, Kate. The main narration embodies her personal experience. The most prominent theme in *Never Again* and Flora Nwapa's war short stories is survival. In a way, it is valid to say that this theme is the focus of everything women pose writers have written on the war. Njoku, Ofoegbu, Buchi Emecheta and Nwapa deal with women's struggle to survive the war with their families. According to **Anaedobe** and **Ezenwaka**, women did not participate in the fighting in the wars fought in Igbo traditional society and in the era of colonization. Rather, they played supportive roles such as cooking for the fighting men, trading and providing food for their families, and taking care of the sick and the wounded.

In **Nwapa's** *Never Again*(1975) Kate's actions and responses are guided by her conviction that the war is needless and that the only reasonable thing to do is to ensure the survival of her family. Her decision is strongly conveyed in these words: *I was determined not to see my children suffer. I would sell all I had to feed them if I had to. They were not going to be hungry. They would not suffer from kwashiorkor* (NA: 27).



In *Never Again*, Nwapa emphasized the trauma of refugees in the process of fleeing from one place to the other. In an interview with **Brenda F. Berrian**, Nwapa said that:

*Never Again is about my personal experiences during the war. The book is intended to depict the evils of war and demonstrate that people should not indulge in wars. During the war I encountered many difficulties when I exposed thoughts that differed from the false propaganda. My choice was to think like the majority in order to survive. Personally, I could not swallow everything without asking questions*

Kate's determination to protect her family is shared by Ndidi Okeke in the story, *Daddy, Don't Strike the Match* in *Wives at War and Other Stories*. In spite of her husband's experiments, Ndidi knows Biafra will lose the war and *all she was interested in was the survival of her children, herself and her husband and her dear ones* (NA: 29). **Nwapa** focuses on respectable married women who are determined to survive the war. Like **Buchi Emecheta**, she is engaged in a revisionary act to commemorate women's activities in the war activities that are either trivialized or disregarded by male authors. Emecheta, in *Destination Biafra* ( ), subverts male dominance by making Debbie Ogedemgbe not only an assertive and independent woman but also a soldier. Nwapa's form of empowerment for her female characters is more feminine than Emecheta's but no less effective.

*Oil was also an ingredient in Nigeria's baptism of fire: the civil war and attempted secession of Biafra. The constitutional history of Nigeria before and after independence reflects concern with the feasibility of creating a unified state while balancing the regional interests of north, west and east, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo. In the run-up to independence in 1960, the emphasis was not so much on speed as on finding an appropriate*



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Nwapa's Never Again i1975 jconcentrates on the Nigerian Civil War and the trauma and paranoia experienced by the refugees fleeing federal troops. The main character, Kate feels the tension between her belief in an independent Biafran state and her belief that defeat is inevitable.

*Reconciliation failed as more riots in the north killed thousands of Ibo resident there. In July 1967 the Ibo east declared the independent state of Biafra and the Nigerian civil war began. After an initial Ibo advance through the mid-west region had been repulsed, the military outcome was never in doubt. The tragedy was that the federal forces were unable to end the affair quickly because outside powers, including France, Portugal and South Africa, sustained Biafra until it dwindled to not much more than a single airstrip. Thousands of innocent civilians died and many more suffered severely from a war that lasted two and a half years. (LL.Griffiths, Ieuan. An Atlas of African Affairs. London: Methuen&Co.Ltd, 1984:79)*

War craft, which is seen as a masculine affair, is therefore seen as being in opposition to femininity. In Never Again, Ezeama expresses the sexist cultural view of feminity and war when he says to Chudi:

*You saboteur. Before the Vandals entered Port Harcourt, you fled. Yes, my people, two weeks before they entered Port Harcourt, this spineless*



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*man fled with his wife and children and all his property . . . You are a woman. Are you going to die twice? (NA:16)*

The concept of war thus shows another avenue for masculine demeaning of womanhood, and an expression of the masculine stereotyping of femininity. It is, however, this masculine culture of war and the glorification of such destructive culture that one of the voices of the text deconstructs. The anti-war posture is portrayed as being more sensible, preserving, and not destructive. There is never a gain in such culture of warfare; rather we have strangeness, disease, hunger, death, and the collapse of interpersonal relationships. The fact that Kate, a woman, is the anti-war protagonist in the context of the novel therefore seems to suggest the moral superiority of womanhood which men have tried to alienate from war craft as a demonstration of sexual inferiorization.

However, in spite of this moral positioning of the female narrator, which is a credibility strategy, *Never Again* as a narrative modes of rhetoric does not transcend the emotional weakness of the pro-war propaganda that it seeks to undermine and demystify.

*Why, awe were all brothers, we were all colleagues, all friends, all contemporaries, then, without warning, they began to shoot, without warning, they began to plunder and to loot and to rape and to desecrate and more, to lie, to lie against one another. What was secret was proclaimed on the house tops. What was holy was desecrated and abused. NEVER AGAIN. (NA: 70)*

The most prominent theme in *Never Again* and Nwapa's war short stories is 'survival'. In a way, it is valid to say that this theme is the focus of everything women prose writers has written on the war. **Jjoku**, **Ofoegbu**, **Emecheta** and **Nwapa** deal with women's struggle to survive the war with their families. According to **Anaedobe** and **Ezenwaka**, women did not participate in the fighting in the wars fought in Igbo traditional society and



in the era of colonization. Rather, they played supportive roles such as cooking for the fighting men, trading and providing food for their families, and taking care of the sick and the wounded. From the numerous factual and historical accounts written about the civil war, especially by those who were in Biafra during their age-old role of providing support services, food, and sustenance to their families and the fighting men. It is rather disappointing that most male writers who created the events of the chose to highlight and exaggerate women's contribution but chose to highlight and exaggerate women's moral laxity, forgetting that this was insignificant in comparison with women's efforts towards winning the war, towards the survival of the family, and towards the rearing of children.

What makes Nwapa's war writing stand apart is her refusal to delineate women in the war situation as prostitutes whose personalities are crippled by malignant moral lapses. Nwapa has always seen women as independent, assertive, and economically active. Consequently, she does not perceive them as sex objects whose only means of survival is the selling of their bodies to the highest bidders. Neither does she indulge in sensational details of women's marital infidelities, as **Ekwensi** does in *Survive the Peace* (1976) and Aniebo in — — — — — *The Anonymity of Sacrifice* (1974). Nwapa is fully conscious of the fact that women played their traditional roles as providers, nurturers, and caretakers and has chosen to recreate this aspect of the war experience. By portraying female characters that are strong, independent and assertive, Nwapa writes against the female stereotyping that has been a feature of most male authored texts in Nigeria, before and after the civil war. In *Never Again*, Kate's actions and responses are guided by her conviction that the war is needless and that the only reasonable thing to do is to ensure the survival of her family. Her decision is strongly conveyed in these words: *I was determined not to see my children suffer. I would sell all I had to feed them if I had to. They were not going to be hungry. They would not suffer from kwashiorkor.* (NA: 27)

Kate's determination to protect her family is shared by Ndidi Okeke in the story,

*"Daddy, Don't Strike the Match" in Wives at War*



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*and Other Stories. In spite of her husband's experiments, Ndidi knows Biafra will lose the war and "all she was interested in was the survival of her children, herself and her husband and her dear ones" (NA: 29)*

Nwapa focused the concept of 'emerged self' through her female protagonist Kate, who survives during the Nigerian civil war. The projection of Kate's character is inspiring and practical. Nwapa focuses on respectable married women who are determined to survive the war. Like Buchi Emecheta, she is engaged in a revisionary act to commemorate women's activities in the war activities that the either trivialized or disregarded by male authors. **Emecheta**, In Destination Biafra, subverts male dominance by making Debbie Ogesdemgbe not only an assertive and independent woman but also a soldier. Nwapa's form of empowerment for her female characters is more feminine than Emecheta's but no less effective. Her women, unlike Debbie, do not carry guns but rather look after husbands and nurse babies.

Faced with psychological and physical trauma as well as imminent death from the war machinery or starvation, the women in Never Again devise various strategies of survival. Relying on the Biafran forces, as Kate discovers, is precarious. The cowardly acts of soldiers and of the civilian elite who are in leadership positions alienate the women. The threat to life is worsened by insensitive and callous men who stall the evacuation of threatened towns and cause the death of thousands of people, especially women and children. Kate has no illusions about Biafran and sees the enclave as a disaster area and a death trap. The result is that she becomes cynical and is ever ready to move at the shortest notice. The family's car is kept ready and clothes packed in case they leave to move quickly. Her accurate predictions about the war situation, particularly the fall of some towns, win her husband Chudi to her side, making him cooperate with her in practicalizing her survival strategies.

As Kate and her family move on for safety, she goes through a process of self-knowledge and self-awareness like several other women.



Significantly, she mobilizes and organizes women at every opportunity: "I remained in Enugu helping to organize the women" (2). Many women and girls are actively involved in the socio-political situation and participate in the meetings as voices of encouragement and self-assertion for the Igbo people, in diverse ways:"On this occasion, a girl civil defender mounted the rostrum. She had good news to tell up the we were very eager to listen . . . She was at the S7T that morning, and one of the officers had told her that Lagos and Ibadan were being shelled . . ." (4). Although the authenticity of the story could not be verified, her intention is positive. At another level, Kate's mother-in-law is a voice of hope based on her faith in the power of the Woman of the Lake, Uhamiri, who is believed to be the protective power of victory for Ugwuta people. She draws on myth to sustain her belief, "They will not come. It is just empty talk. Never in the history of Ugwuta did an invader come by water and go home alive . . . She has never let her people themselves involved, refusing to be pushed aside and silenced. When a meeting of all able-bodied men is called, Kate insists on following Chudi there and some other women respond to the call of "able bodied men." Women politicians like Madam Agafa are particularly prominent t such meetings: The women especially were very active, more active than the men in fact. They made uniforms for the soldiers; they cooked for the soldiers and gave expensive presents to the officers. And they organized the women who prayed every Wednesday for Biafra . . . . It was one of the prominent women who addressed the gathering of the men . . . she was so powerful then that people were very careful not to offend her. In short, she was highly respected, feared and we had no alternative but to listen to her (7)

The women stopped at nothing in their struggle for survival during this war. We are told that men who did not join the war have no work to keep them busy; in contrast, the women area involved in the attack trade that involved crossing the enemy borders to bring in essential goods.

in Nigeria legacies of the violence imbibed before the war, which Nwapa's portrait of women during the Biafran War is not an abstract romanticization of women's role, but a true-to-life reflection of Igbo women's central role in the quest for survival and in sustaining a cause they strongly



believed in, significantly, Kate and other women succeed in striking the right balance between their public commitment and their domestic duties as wives and mothers. This is reflected in Kate's sense of commitment to her children's survival. Talking about her children's welfare and a deep sense of apprehension as well as a resolute desire to make sure they do not suffer:

They had not started to suffer a grownups were suffering. If the war lasted another year, they would begin to suffer, first from hunger, discomfort and then ill health. I was determined not to see my children suffer. I would sell all I had to feed them if I had to. They were not going to be hungry. They would not suffer from Kwarshiorkor.(25)

When Kate's husband is invited to go out and join the combing, she shows unusual boldness. She is seen as a protective voice and also a voice of reason in curbing the excesses and wasteful destruction of lives:

"My husband will not go with you," I said. I was surprised at my boldness. "Tell whoever sent you that my husband will not come with you to the combing. Why are you combing?... There are no infiltrators here. Arrange evacuation of everybody including the men and the youths. Yes, the youths. Why should they die for nothing... (33)

Nwapa also presents women as sacrificial figures in the death of the pregnant woman who dies in labor along the escape road and Ona who symbolizes resistance and gets shot by soldiers because she refused to move.

In "Wives At War," we find that women's clubs, which are political arms of the struggle, proliferate. Nwapa would later criticize this proliferation as being the reason for lack of solidarity among women. In Biafra, there is the National Women's Club (N.W.C), an affiliate of the Nigerian Women's Club, which also has foreign headquarters in Europe and America. Then there is also the Women's Active Sense (W.A.S.), and the newest, born after the breakout of hostilities, the Busy Bee Club (B.B.C.). The latter is an extremely militant group under the leadership of a radical lawyer, who declares the stand of her group in the Biafran struggle as follows:

We are the indigenous group. We have been poised for action ever



since war was declared. We are independent. We are not affiliated to any redundant plan less group. We are the creation of Biafra and our aim is to win the war for Biafra. Right from the word go, we organized the women for a real fight. We asked for guns to fight the enemy. We asked to be taught how to shoot. Did not women and girls fight in Vietnam? We asked to be taught how to take cover and how to evacuate women and children. But those who did not understand mounted strong propaganda against us. They said we were upsetting the women. But we were realistic. (Nwapa 1980:14)

It is in the absence of men that women discover that they can really accomplish any task they set their minds to do. In "Daddy Don't Strike the Match," in the collection *Wives At War and Other Stories*, Mrs. Okeke single-handedly plans and executes the movement of all their household property from the North to the South of Nigeria, in 1966, in order to escape the pogrom of the Hausa against the Igbo. The aim is to request Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Head of State of Biafra, to allow women to carry guns for battle just like men. Many women believe it is a just war, which calls for their full involvement in every way possible. Then Mrs. Okeke's little daughter, Ifeoma, dreams about becoming a fighter pilot in the future! Is this Flora Nwapa's premonition-that Nigerian women, sooner or later, are going to be in the forefront of defending the nation as worthy patriots? From all indications, things augur well for even greater political involvement of women in future.

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From the numerous factual and historical accounts written about the civil war, especially by those who were in Biafra during the fighting, one could see that women remained consistent with their age-old role of providing support services, food, and sustenance to their families and the fighting men. It is rather disappointing that most male writers who recreated the events of the war in fiction neglected this aspect of women's contribution but chose to highlight and exaggerate women's moral laxity, forgetting that this was insignificant in comparison with women's efforts towards winning the war, towards the survival of the family, and towards the rearing of children.

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(LL.Griffiths, Ieuan. An Atlas of African Affairs. London: Methuen&Co.Ltd, 1984:79)

War craft, which is seen as a masculine affair, is therefore seen as being in opposition to femininity. In Never Again, Ezeama expresses the sexist cultural view of feminity and war when he says to Chudi:

*You saboteur. Before the Vandals entered Port Harcourt, you fled. Yes, my people, two weeks before they entered Port Harcourt, this spineless man fled with his wife and children and all his property . . . You are a woman. Are you going to die twice?* (NA:16)



The concept of war thus shows another avenue for masculine demeaning of womanhood, and an expression of the masculine stereotyping of femininity. It is, however, this masculine culture of war and the glorification of such destructive culture that one of the voices of the text deconstructs. The anti-war posture is portrayed as being more sensible, preserving, and not destructive. There is never a gain in such culture of warfare; rather we have strangeness, disease, hunger, death, and the collapse of interpersonal relationships. The fact that Kate, a woman, is the anti-war protagonist in the context of the novel therefore seems to suggest the moral superiority of womanhood which men have tried to alienate from war craft as a demonstration of sexual inferiorization.

However, in spite of this moral positioning of the female narrator, which is a credibility strategy, *Never Again* as a narrative mode of rhetoric does not transcend the emotional weakness of the pro-war propaganda that it seeks to undermine and demystify.

*Why, awe were all brothers, we were all colleagues, all friends, all contemporaries, then, without warning, they began to shoot, without warning, they began to plunder and to loot and to rape and to desecrate and more, to lie, to lie against one another. What was secret was proclaimed on the house tops. What was holy was desecrated and abused. NEVER AGAIN. (NA: 70)*

The most prominent theme in *Never Again* and Nwapa's war short stories is 'survival'. In a way, it is valid to say that this theme is the focus of everything women prose writers has written on the war. **Jjoku**, **Ofoegbu**, **Emecheta** and **Nwapa** deal with women's struggle to survive the war with their families. According to **Anaedobe** and **Ezenwaka**, women did not participate in the fighting in the wars fought in Igbo traditional society and in the era of colonization. Rather, they played supportive roles such as cooking for the fighting men, trading and providing food for their families, and taking care of the sick and the wounded. From the numerous factual and historical accounts written about the civil war, especially by those who were in Biafra during their age-old role of providing support services, food,



and sustenance to their families and the fighting men. It is rather disappointing that most male writers who created the events of the chose to highlight and exaggerate women's contribution but chose to highlight and exaggerate women's moral laxity, forgetting that this was insignificant in comparison with women's efforts towards winning the war, towards the survival of the family, and towards the rearing of children.

What makes Nwapa's war writing stand apart is her refusal to delineate women in the war situation as prostitutes whose personalities are crippled by malignant moral lapses. Nwapa has always seen women as independent, assertive, and economically active. Consequently, she does not perceive them as sex objects whose only means of survival is the selling of their bodies to the highest bidders. Neither does she indulge in sensational details of women's marital infidelities, as **Ekwensi** does in Survive the Peace (1976) and Aniebo in The Anonymity of Sacrifice (1974). Nwapa is fully conscious of the fact that women played their traditional roles as providers, nurturers, and caretakers and has chosen to recreate this aspect of the war experience. By portraying female characters that are strong, independent and assertive, Nwapa writes against the female stereotyping that has been a feature of most male authored texts in Nigeria, before and after the civil war. In Never Again, Kate's actions and responses are guided by her conviction that the war is needless and that the only reasonable thing to do is to ensure the survival of her family. Her decision is strongly conveyed in these words: *I was determined not to see my children suffer. I would sell all I had to feed them if I had to. They were not going to be hungry. They would not suffer from kwashiorkor.* (NA: 27)

Kate's determination to protect her family is shared by Ndidi Okeke in the story,

*"Daddy, Don't Strike the Match" in Wives at War and Other Stories. In spite of her husband's experiments, Ndidi knows Biafra will lose the war and "all she was interested in was the survival of her children, herself and her husband and her dear ones" (NA: 29)*



Nwapa focused the concept of 'emerged self' through her female protagonist Kate, who survives during the Nigerian civil war. The projection of Kate's character is inspiring and practical. Nwapa focuses on respectable married women who are determined to survive the war. Like Buchi Emecheta, she is engaged in a revisionary act to commemorate women's activities in the war activities that the either trivialized or disregarded by male authors. **Emecheta**, In Destination Biafra, subverts male dominance by making Debbie Ogesdemgbe not only an assertive and independent woman but also a soldier. Nwapa's form of empowerment for her female characters is more feminine than Emecheta's but no less effective. Her women, unlike Debbie, do not carry guns but rather look after husbands and nurse babies.

Faced with psychological and psychological and physical trauma as well as imminent death from the war machinery or starvation, the women in Never Again. Devise various strategies of survival. Relying on the Biafran forces, as Kate discovers, is precarious. The cowardly acts of soldiers and of the civilian elite who are in leadership positions alienate the women. The threat to life is worsened by insensitive and callous men who stall the evacuation of threatened towns and cause the death of thousands of people, especially women and children. Kate has no illusions about Biafran and sees the enclave as a disaster area and a death trap. The result is that she becomes cynical and is ever ready to move at the shortest notice. The family's car is kept ready and clothes packed in case they leave to move quickly. Her accurate predictions about the war situation, particularly the fall of some towns, win her husband Chudi to her side, making him cooperate with her in practicalizing her survival strategies. As Kate and her family move on for safety, she goes through a process of self-knowledge and self-awareness like several other women. Significantly, she mobilizes and organizes women at every opportunity: "I remained in Enugu helping to organize the women" (2). Many women and girls are actively involved in the socio-political situation and participate in the meetings as voices of encouragement and self-assertion for the Igbo people, in diverse ways:"On this occasion, a girl civil defender mounted the rostrum. She had good news to tell up the we



were very eager to listen . . . She was at the S7T that morning, and one of the officers had told her that Lagos and Ibadan were being shelled . . . “(4). Although the authenticity of the story could not be verified, her intention is positive. At another level, Kate’s mother-in-law is a voice of hope based on her faith in the power of the Woman of the Lake, Uhamiri, who is believed to be the protective power of victory for Ugwuta people. She draws on myth to sustain her belief, “They will not come. It is just empty talk. Never in the history of Ugwuta did an invader come by water and go home alive . . . She has never let her people themselves involved, refusing to be pushed aside and silenced. When a meeting of all able-bodied men is called, Kate insists on following Chudi there and some other women respond to the call of “able bodied men.” Women politicians like Madam Agafa are particularly prominent t such meetings: The women especially were very active, more active than the men in fact. They made uniforms for the soldiers; they cooked for the soldiers and gave expensive presents to the officers. And they organized the women who prayed every Wednesday for Biafra . . . . It was one of the prominent women who addressed the gathering of the men . . . she was so powerful then that people were very careful not to offend her. In short, she was highly respected, feared and we had no alternative but to listen to her (7)

The women stopped at nothing in their struggle for survival during this war. We are told that men who did not join the war have no work to keep them busy; in contrast, the women area involved in the attack trade that involved crossing the enemy borders to bring in essential goods.

in Nigeria legacies of the violence imbibed before the war, which Nwapa’s portrait of women during the Biafran War is not an abstract romanticization of women’s role, but a true-to-life reflection of Igbo women’s central role in the quest for survival and in sustaining a cause they strongly believed in, significantly, Kate and other women succeed in striking the right balance between their public commitment and their domestic duties as wives and mothers. This is reflected in Kate’s sense of commitment to her children’s survival. Talking about her children’s welfare and a deep sense of apprehension as well as a resolute desire to make sure they do not suffer:



They had not started to suffer a grownups were suffering. If the war lasted another year, they would begin to suffer, first from hunger, discomfort and then ill health. I was determined not to see my children suffer. I would sell all I had to feed them if I had to. They were not going to be hungry. They would not suffer from Kwarshiorkor.(25)

When Kate's husband is invited to go out and join the combing, she shows unusual boldness. She is seen as a protective voice and also a voice of reason in curbing the excesses and wasteful destruction of lives:

"My husband will not go with you," I said. I was surprised at my boldness. "Tell whoever sent you that my husband will not come with you to the combing. Why are you combing?... There are no infiltrators here. Arrange evacuation of everybody including the men and the youths. Yes, the youths. Why should they die for nothing... (33)

Nwapa also presents women as sacrificial figures in the death of the pregnant woman who dies in labor along the escape road and Ona who symbolizes resistance and gets shot by soldiers because she refused to move.

In "Wives At War," we find that women's clubs, which are political arms of the struggle, proliferate. Nwapa would later criticize this proliferation as being the reason for lack of solidarity among women. In Biafra, there is the National Women's Club (N.W.C), an affiliate of the Nigerian Women's Club, which also has foreign headquarters in Europe and America. Then there is also the Women's Active Sense (W.A.S.), and the newest, born after the breakout of hostilities, the Busy Bee Club (B.B.C.). The latter is an extremely militant group under the leadership of a radical lawyer, who declares the stand of her group in the Biafran struggle as follows:

We are the indigenous group. We have been poised for action ever since war was declared. We are independent. We are not affiliated to any redundant plan less group. We are the creation of Biafra and our aim is to win the war for Biafra. Right from the word go, we organized the women for a real fight. We asked for guns to fight the enemy. We asked to be taught how to shoot. Did not women and girls fight in Vietnam? We asked to be



taught how to take cover and how to evacuate women and children. But those who did not understand mounted strong propaganda against us. They said we were upsetting the women. But we were realistic. (Nwapa 1980:14)

It is in the absence of men that women discover that they can really accomplish any task they set their minds to do. In "Daddy Don't Strike the Match," in the collection *Wives At War and Other Stories*, Mrs. Okeke single-handedly plans and executes the movement of all their household property from the North to the South of Nigeria, in 1966, in order to escape the pogrom of the Hausa against the Igbo. The aim is to request Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Head of State of Biafra, to allow women to carry guns for battle just like men. Many women believe it is a just war, which calls for their full involvement in every way possible. Then Mrs. Okeke's little daughter, Ifeoma, dreams about becoming a fighter pilot in the future! Is this Flora Nwapa's premonition-that Nigerian women, sooner or later, are going to be in the forefront of defending the nation as worthy patriots? From all indications, things augur well for even greater political involvement of women in future.

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## EFURU THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN

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The most important attributes of Flora Nwapa's female protagonists are their strength, self-determination, and physical beauty. And to make this point glaringly clear, she deconstructs "motherhood" by giving it a secondary position to women's empowerment and economic independence. Flora Nwapa's writing interest lies in molding women and her motive for writing was to correct the disparaged image of women in male-authored novels. She started from grassroots and depicts her women characters in the village environment with its masculine supremacy and dominance where gender roles and relationships were strictly circumscribed by norms and tradition. Nwapa's vision of the traditional Igbo woman and the modern woman underscores women's relentless capacity to survive despite all odds and their determination to achieve economic independence and measures of fulfillment as human beings in their community. The strength of her heroines is a manifestation of the attributes of the mythical figure of the Woman of the Lake, the goddess who provides Nwapa's fiction with structural and thematic unity and relevance. **Obioma Nnaemeka** aptly summarizes Nwapa's achievement in these words:

*Nwapa's work is a biography, a collective biography of beautiful, strong Ugwuta women and their majestic lake. Nwapa's work captures the complexity, ambiguities and contradictions of her environment as they are embodied in the force that lies at the bottom of the lake, Uhamiri, the goddess of the crossroads. (Nnaemeka: 104)*



In the novel *Efuru*, the writer Nwapa succeeded in weaving a romantic and emotional story in the traditional setting of Nigeria. The novel discusses the emancipation of the transparent self. It is incidental to reproduce some of the assertions of **Chinweizu** in his book tellingly titled *Anatomy of Female Power*. He says “women are powerful and exercise that power over men contrary general belief and acceptance. He writes: Because every man has as boss his wife or his mother, or some other woman in his life, men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world. Thus contrary to appearances, woman is boss, the overall boss, of the world. *Efuru* prefers her Igbo culture so that she focuses the ‘bride price’ and finally she wants to make her husband to be a true man by paying the bride price to her father. Since the beginning of the novel *Efuru*, the protagonist maintains her individuality and ability in living. Though her husband is a farmer, *Efuru* prefers trade only. *Efuru* says:

*I shall be the last person to bring shame on him.  
Since my mother died five years ago, I have been  
a good daughter to him. My husband is not rich.  
In fact he is poor. But the dowry must be paid. I  
must see that this is done. (E: 9-10)*

In this novel *Efuru* is infused with beauty, intelligence, industry and economic power. *Efuru* is not a rebel. She marries Adizua and insists that he should pay bride price. *Efuru* and her husband traded in yams. *Efuru*’s trading ability is very capable and clear. *Efuru*’s mind is so clear in thing of the contemporary market values:

*When the yam trade was bad, they traded in dry  
fish and crayfish. It was in crayfish that they made  
their fortune. They were the first to discover the  
trade that year. The place where they brought the  
crayfish was three days’ journey on the Great  
River. It was a risky business. Thieves could  
waylay traders and rob them of their money (E:  
21)*



The Igbo society give priority to the ancestors, Efuru also focused her indigenous thoughts. Efuru's father could not hide his happiness. He says, *Efuru was my only source of happiness*. After a long gape Efuru comes to her father's house. Nwashike Ogene, the father of Efuru accepts Adizua as his son-in-law by getting the bride price from him. The protagonist Efuru maintains the optimistic nature throughout her life. After completion of one year wedding period she could not bear a child, simply she says, *I am still young, surely God cannot deny me the joy of mother-hood, she often said to herself.*

From the beginning of her marital life, Efuru gives importance to her beloved husband Adizua. She always supports her husband in many ways especially in the financial matter and also emotional circumstances. After Efuru and Adizua try many times to conceive a child, they seek traditional avenues to help the situation. To remedy the problem, Efuru and her father visit a Dibia who tells them Efuru will have few children. On this occasion Adizua says:

*I am happy that you went to see the man. But please don't think that it makes any difference to me whether you have a baby or not. You know I will be the last person to do anything that will hurt you, my wife. You know I cannot exchange you with a wife who would give me twenty sons.*

(E: 26)

He also gives specific instructions for her to follow, which includes making sacrifices to the ancestors on Afo Day, buying certain items at the market, then placing them in a calabash basket, and allowing the basket to float away. After obeying the instructions, she and Adizua have a baby girl. Efuru has her baby in a quiet and unobtrusive manner while her husband is sleeping in the house. Adizua named his daughter as Ogonim.

It is the custom for individuals to show their thanks to the Dibia; Adizua and Efuru visit hi and take gifts; however, when he opens several kola nuts, he sees something that bothers him, and he tells the couple to



return to him on a certain day. Unfortunately, the Dibia dies before their second visit. A connection is implied between the Dibia's earlier comment about Efuru's having few babies, the opened kola nuts, and the couple's future; and subsequent events confirm the connection. Although Ogonim acts like any normal child for two years, playing with her babysitter, Ogea and other children, the marriage begins to fail events confirm the connection. Although Efuru is blessed with a baby girl, she failed to keep the marital bond with Adizua. On this aspect **Nwapa** depicts:

*At this time Adizua was missing many meals. He would return from the market, have his bath and disappear. Efuru would wait for him and when he did not return, she would go to bed very sad. At midnight, Adizua would come back and knock, Efuru would get up quickly and open the door. 'Have you returned my husband?'*

Adizua does not prefer to spend nights with Efuru. As a traditional wife she bears his degraded behavior. The death of her daughter is a sure indicator that her marriage to Adizua is over; there is no bond between them. After a lengthy wait and an unsuccessful search for Adizua, Efuru goes back to her father's house.

*"When the pain grew worse, she went to Efuru and told her of husband's illness. 'Nwosu is ill', she told Efuru.' He is very ill and I don't know whether he will recover.' As she said this, she began to cry.*

*'Wipe your tears,' Efuru said to her. 'What is the nature of the illness?'*

Efuru is abandoned by two husbands. She returns to her father's home and devotes her life to celebrating the goddess of the lake and helping her neighbors, thus achieving a kind of spiritual and psychological fulfillment. It is Efuru who divorces both husbands. But Efuru was solely responsible for her marriage to Adizua – she chooses him herself – and feels



and considers it her responsibility to terminate it when it becomes burdensome and destructive to her. She remains self-reliant and independent in her action. By divorcing Adizua, Efuru rejects her mother-in-laws needless self-sacrifice and self-abnegation and her acceptance of abandonment and neglect, in firm and clear language:

As a worshipper of Uhamiri for example Efuru becomes one of the representatives of the beautiful woman of the lake who lives at the bottom of the lake but controls activities in and around it. However, her real power is understood by the knowledge-seeking community of elders who have the ability to see below the surface. Representing Uhamiri in her role of retrieval, Efuru mediates between the people and Difu, the western-trained medical doctor. Her bridging function between the people and Difu and the new dispensation is facilitated by the completeness of her immersion in Ogwuta ways of knowing. Viewed in this light, the answer to Efuru's question, *Why then did the women worship her?* about Uhamiri becomes obvious. The woman of the lake is worshipped because worshipping her provides a new tool that will facilitate development of new ways of seeing for Ogwuta (Igbo and African) women who otherwise will be hemmed into stagnating frames of reference should they prove unable to use or conform to prevailing norms.

According to Igbo customs, it is permissible for husbands to have several wives, but the current wife should be consulted first.

*When Adizua left the room, Efuru sat down on her bed and began to think. 'Adizua must be in the influence of some woman. And what's more this woman must be well to do. He is still pleasing to my eyes, but I am not pleasing to his own eyes any more, and I cannot explain it. How long will this last? How long will I continue to tolerate him. There is a limit to human endurance. I am a human being. I am not a piece of wood. Perhaps he wants to marry this woman; What is wrong in his marrying a second wife. It is only a bad woman who wants her husband's all to herself. I don't*



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*object to his marrying a second wife, but I do object to being relegated to the backgrounds I want to keep my position as the first wife, for it is my right.*(E :53)

One wonders why Adizua does not communicate with Efuru and resorts to secrecy when he leaves home to see another woman. He and Efuru had broken traditional customs to be together as husband and wife; she easily accepts non-traditional avenues, so the question why has Adizua chosen not to be honest with his wife? His actions are infrequent at first when he misses meals, comes home, bathes, and leaves, only to return home at midnight and refuse to eat his dinner. Eventually, he stays away from home for days at a time until he stops coming home at all. Efuru's mother-in-law encourages her to be patient and give Adizua time to mature. In a critical situation Efuru says to father:

*'For months now, father, my husband has come home very late. Some nights, he has not come home at all. Sometimes he has refused to eat my food. And now I have heard that he wants to marry a woman who has just left her husband. This woman had gone to Ndoni with him, father. And what will become of me? Oh, my God, my life is ruined.'*  
(Efu: 63)

When Efuru questions Nkoyeni whether he is a thief before she married him. Then Efuru says,

*'But, thank God my womb carried a baby for nine months. Thank God I had this baby and she was a normal baby. It would had been dreadful if I had been denied the joy of motherhood. And now when mothers talk about their experiences in childbirth, I can share their happiness with them, through Ogonim is no more.'* (Efuru: 165)

The theme of death pervades in the novels of Flora Nwapa. Death

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is not only a natural termination of life but also serves as an extrapolation of the narrative in Nwapa's novels-Efuru and Idu. She meets Gilbert, her childhood friend who marries her. Even her second marriage proves unsuccessful. She fails to bear a child which makes Gilbert to take another wife. Meanwhile Efuru loses her father who had been a source of strength for her. Efuru 'cried at his bedside' and lost her voice'. Efuru's story is told in three sections. These three sections have a male presence - one of her father and the other two of her husband's. Efuru becomes a loner in life. The three significant events in her life take place simultaneously with the dejection of her husband. Adizua, the death of her only child. Ogonim and death of her father. This failure of the emotional bonds makes her strong and makes her the worshipper of Uhamiri.

**Ernest N. Emenyonu** in his paper "Flora Nwapa: A Pioneer African Female Voice is Silenced" opines that more than the ordinary historical fact of a pioneer work; *for in this novel Flora Nwapa created female characters that were at once unique and unconventional* (Emenyonu: 41). Her mythic imagination derives its force from the spiritual being that controls this body of water - Uhamiri (variously called Ogbuide and Woman of the Lake), the powerful female deity worshipped by Ukwuta People. Judging from the complex portraiture given to Uhamiri in Nwapa's works, there is no doubt that, for the novelist, when a writer makes use of a myth from her culture, her role is to breathe life into it through the resources of her imagination. The myth of Uhamiri constitutes an important symbol in practically all Nwapa's major writing. As Simon Gikandi has put it: *To write is to claim a text of one's own; textuality is an instrument of territorial possession; because the other confers on us an identity that alienates us from ourselves, narrative is crucial to the discovery of our selfhood*

The most profound comments come from her maid Ogea's parents. They acknowledge hearing about Efuru's marital problems and state they have no intention of judging her, but they do condemn Adizua's not returning to bury his and Efuru's only child as repugnant. They conclude, *It showed that he hates (you). So you have done well in leaving him. You are young, so the day is just breaking for you, other suitors will come. Just have*



*patience*. Similarly, the concept of motherhood becomes a major concern in Efuru's second marriage, to Gilbert. Again, after two years of marriage, Efuru is not pregnant. Several women in the community represent the voice of tradition and express their feelings because Efuru and Gilbert are happy but Efuru is not pregnant. They exclaim, *We are not going to eat happy marriage. Marriage must be fruitful* (E: 137). These women represent tradition and refuse to make any exceptions.

*Ajanupu says to Ossai: 'Didn't my mother and I tell you to leave that wretched husband of yours? You would have married a better husband and had children. Instead you remained in your husband's house and shut yourself out from the world. You wanted to be called a good wife, good wife when you were eating sand, good wife when you were eating nails. That was the kind of goodness that appealed to you. How could you be suffering for a person who did not appreciate your suffering, the person who despised you. It was not virtue, it was plain stupidity. You merely wanted to suffer for the fun of it, as if there was any virtue in suffering for a worthless man.'* (E: 79-80)

The female voices in Efuru are being explored and analyzed to develop a more viable alternative to living an acceptable lifestyle in their communities whether they are mothers and married women or not. They are questioning the worth of single women or motherless women in society. Are they not humans too? Moreover, should not women have choices about their lives? The narrator seems to be suggesting that, yes, women should have choices, and they do not necessarily need to conform to traditional expectations. This is why Nwapa's major characters. His first relationship – with an unnamed woman – Later, Gilbert marries Sunday's sister, Nkoyeni. She and Efuru do not have problems, but when Gilbert's son comes to visit from Ndoni, it is Nkoyeni, the younger wife, who is very upset; it is believed she wanted to be the first wife to have a son for Gilbert, but finds that someone



else has usurped her place. Efuru welcomes the boy, but the pregnant Nkoyeni's anger is so great that Gilbert's son is sent back to his mother in Ndoni after three days. One must question why Gilbert chooses to marry Nkoyeni if he already has a child by someone else? Why not bring the mother of his first son into the marriage circle through traditional avenues? Was his son the result of a short-term rendezvous? Does he want to live a modern or a traditional lifestyle? What kind of psychological impact will his actions have on Efuru? Later, the town's gossip, Omirima, chastises Gilbert's mother, Amede, for allowing Gilbert to marry Nkoyeni. Amede responds by saying she does not want to interfere; the world is now that of the *white people*, not of the Igbo *grandparents* (E: 194). Again, Omirima questions Amede's logic and actions. After Efuru takes her father's advice—to go to Agbor, Ndoni, Akiri, and Ogwu to look for her husband—she returns to her mother-in-law to state her decision: *Mother, I cannot stay any more. . . . I cannot wait indefinitely for Adizua, you can bear witness that I have tried my best. I am still young and would wish to marry again. It will be unfair both to you and your son if I begin to encourage men who would like to marry me while still in this house* (E: 88). The words "indefinitely" and "anymore" indicate an endless period of time, for Efuru has no idea when and if her husband will ever come home again. Moreover, Efuru uses diction that suggests a future for *herself*; she talks about marrying again and encouraging men to indicate she plans to move on with her life. Efuru announces to Ossai that she is leaving her home because she cannot wait forever for Adizua; she is still young and may wish to marry again. She will not be able to entertain suitors while still living in her marital home. Her mother-in-law does not reply. The mother-in-law is saddened to know she will lose her daughter-in-law, be left alone, and lose the prestige that has come with having chief Ogene's daughter as part of her family. However, Adizua's mother knows her son has mistreated Efuru and that Efuru's *A year passed, and no child came. Efuru did not despair. 'I am still young, surely God cannot deny me the joy of motherhood,' she often said to herself.* (E: 24) Efuru ends where she begins, in her father's house. Efuru derives peace in her final situation:

*Efuru slept soundly that night. She dreamt of the*



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*woman of the lake, her beauty, her long hair and her riches. She had lived for ages at the bottom of the lake. She was as old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her? (E: 221)*

Efuru is a novel with a heroine who consciously decides to break one major rule of tradition: she decides to get married before the bride price is paid to her family, but this is the first of several customs she manipulates as a matter of choice and freedom. The novel ends with Efuru living happily among her people while helping them and worshiping Uhamiri, who gave her wealth and happiness but no children. But even in the darkest moments Efuru can make her life purposive by simply and “unselfishly” caring for humanity. Though Adizua has deserted her and Eneberi has wronged her, she will not lose her faith in man. And as Uhamiri’s chosen worshiper she is to be instrumental in alleviating the sorrows of her people and bringing them peace and prosperity. Albeit checkmated by personal sorrow, Efuru’s is after all a full life, a life of dedication.

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**GOING IN QUEST OF EMOTIONAL BONDING: UNDERSTANDING  
JAISHREE MISRA' S NOVEL ACCIDENTS LIKE LOVE AND  
MARRIAGE**

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*"Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to, in order to survive economically or psychologically and Virtually all women engage in the feminine role-playing". Anita Desai*

Jaishree Misra is an eminent writer who beautifully portrays about a woman that how she thinks and feels and behaves when it comes to love and marriage .Misra depicts in the present novel Accidents like love and marriage(2001)that *it is all about emotional accidents, accidents in one's day to day life. Accidents like falling in love or getting married or trying to fix incompatible relationships.* Most of Misra's women characters project the battles that are fought and left unfought . The psychological battle is fought against traditionally defined womanliness.She establishes the fact that there is an obvious transition that is slowly taking place in the minds of women. This transition is painful for those who do not have strong bonding with their better halves. Misra translates the frustrations of these women who are suffering from emotional accidents like love and marriage. She questions a way out of this imbroglio to the modern traditional Indian society. This appears in the form of a pack of feminist strategies in her novels.

*The present novel is about the story of three Indian woman, the various forces that are working against them, the unalterable life situations which trap their peace. The dark and foreboding nature of mental oppression used against them, the traditional value system and culture that offer psychological oppression to women are realistically portrayed by the author.*



Due to these sabotaging forces, life itself becomes so heavy for woman that her peace of mind trembles for trust and love and finally on the verge of collapse. The frightening possibilities confronted by women are innumerable fears, disillusionment and imminent defeatism. The elusive procrastination according to Misra is not a solution. She feels that by rediscovering one's emotional peace and by establishing it, one moves towards self actualization. *The most common themes in Jaishree misra's novels is human relationship particularly the man-woman relationship. Nowadays this theme is becomes more important due to rapid industrialization, growing awareness among women of their rights and individualism and the westernization of attitudes and lives of the people. D.H. Lawrence points out in Lady Chatterley's lover(1929)that:*

*The great relationship for humanity will always be the relationship between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary.(LCL:89)*

*Jaishree Misra had narrated about such relationships in her novel Accidents like love and marriage which expounds the human predicament of three women; Neena, Gayatri Menon and Swarna Sachdev, representing three different set of cultures Hindu,Keralite and Punjabi and their set of format thinking. Swarn Sachdev is married to Jagdish Sachdev a rich businessman they have two children Rohit Sachdev and Tarun Sachdev. But Swarn is not happy with Jagdish Sachdev as he is only concerned about the growth of his textile mills and merely takes care of her emotional needs.She leads her life with the base that she will be noticed as a wife of a rich businessman.Here Swarna can be compared to Kalyani in Shashe Deshapande's Matter of time (1998). As the author opines:*

*It isenough to have a husband and never mind the fact that he not looked at Your face for year ... but her kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife.(MOT: 167)*



In a traditional society marriage is the promised end, marriage restricts the movement towards a perception of herself as an independent human being and not buffeted by the circumstance or the social Prescriptions, As a wife of Jagdish, Swarn feels that though her husband has an extra marital affair, If she stays with him without filing a divorce, she will receive the honour of being a rich wife and a mother; but her conscience troubles her of being neglected by her husband. She wonders as to why she in all the way is trying to please her husband, feeling of having lost her independent identity. She pretends to be happy by performing all the time self-effacing notions and rituals.

According to Manusmriti : *Pita Rakshati Koumare, Bharta Rakshati Yauwane, Rakshanti Sthavire Putra, Na Stree Svatantra Marhati.* (Manu:140) The protection of women thus became a pressing issue for the society and the men had to shoulder this responsibility. The critical need to protect the women during the ancient period is clearly reflected in the above verse of the Manusmriti: Father protects in childhood, husband protects in youth, and sons protect in old age. A woman cannot be left unprotected. Thus, the husband became the protector of his wife. This led to social structure in which a wife was expected to cling to her husband for protection. In a male dominated society, a woman is supposed to be under man's care at every step of her life and she should build herself as an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home maker with multifarious role in the family. As a Wife and Mother, Service, Sacrifice, Submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Excessive endurance and services of adjustments, if a woman adopts these qualities she is admired for it. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. In the words of Mary Anne Fergusson Images of Women in literature (1973) she opines that : *In every age women has been seen primarily Mother, Wife, Mistress and as Sex-Object, their roles in relationship to men!* (IOWIL: 4-5)

For centuries the Hindu women idealized the mythic models from the Ramayana and other Puranas. Indian women were asked to get inspired by the archetype women like Sita, the silent sufferer. Often the Indian women



is passive and accepts the given role in shaping their destiny. At every stage of her life she is dependent of her status and survival upon Man – her Father, her Husband, and her Sons. Though Jagdish has an extramarital affair. Swarn should be with her husband but to be with the company of her husband like Jagdish was a difficult task for Swarn as the author says about Swarn: *Having to have a husband was one of life's cruel ironies for a woman like Swarn (ALLLM:3). Simon de Beauvoir observation in her book The Second Sex (1974) is valid : Marriage subjugates and enslaves woman and it leads her to aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose. (502). Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom and De Beauvoir emphasises that such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high for anyone because the kind of self-contentment, serenity and security that marriage offers woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness.*

Therefore Swarn bares with her husband only for her children. Therefore Swarn follows the mantra *Pathi swarga, pathi dhara, pathi paramaantapa . Pithri pritheema panne, printhe sarva devata (Manu:136) Husband is heaven, Husband is religion. The gods are pleased by pleasing the husband. In this relation the individual to individual relationship, sharing of experiences and understanding and accepting each other independent entities is hardly there.* For Swarn her marital life was mere a compromise and she feels that her Marriage was not only an accident but a life time punishment. *Once bound in marriage, woman has little room for escape and running away is a disgrace not only to her family but also to the whole of the society and its tradition. That's why woman never dares to come out from her marriage. Therefore, inspite of suffering she remains in marriage, and she never tries to give up her relationship with her husband. So this concept of marriage limits a woman to breeding children and looking after the home-affairs. They are expected to conform the traditional Indian concept of womanhood as a stereotyped woman.* Swarn tries to find emotional sustenance in her daughter in laws therefore she brings her new daughter in law Neena for her elder son Rohit Sachdev .

As Neena is new to their home she enjoys the life of richness and she feels that she can inherit the wing of richness in that house , as the



author says about Neena : *Sachdevs lived in a large house.and she had reasonably expected to occupy a whole wing of it(ALLLM:9)*but Neena gets worried about her future sister in law as she would be a competition to her and she would share Neena's wing of richness, therefore Neena decides to share that place with her best friend Gayatri .Neena wants to play a role of cupid . Roles are an integral or indispensable part of our life.

The concept of the role has been borrowed from theatre and consequently social life gets reduced to a series of acts involving role-playing. In society each individual is assigned certain roles. These become a deep-grained part of the person's existence. According to E.E. Jones and H.B. Gerard, in *Foundation of Social Psychology*(1965) role is *behaviour that is characteristic and expected of a person or persons who occupy a position in the group.*(FOSP:7)These roles thus impute fixed qualities and behavioural patterns to the genders. Historically speaking they are also influenced by the belief that man is superior to woman and that woman should be controlled by man. The ideal role models are placed before Indian women and they become sad victims of the steamrolling of stereotyping by the callous system. Thus'the role enactment becomes mechanical and the true self gets fragmented. The so-called ideal Indian womanhood is a very powerful instrument used by the establishment in marginalizing and suppressing women themselves. Neena is not an ideal woman but a woman with emotions she wants to play the role of cupid for her brother in law Tarun and her best friend Gayatri, in order to enjoy the company of her best friend as her sister in law. The author describes about the friendship of Neena and Gayatri :

*It was eight years ago that Neena and Gayatri met as expectant undergraduates in the hallowed,ivy-clad portals of that venerable institute,Lady Shantibai Women's College.(...)Despite their obvious differences,a tentative friendship was struck up,which gained strength in first few weeks of the term as both girls were mercilessly ragged by manic college*



*seniors,including a certain defenceless togetherness.On the day that Gayatri had to dance on top of a canteen table while Neena was told to wail like banshee,they bonded firmly.It was an accidental friendship as the too girls had in fact precious little in common,but it went an odd sort of way from strength to strength.(...)It was a friendship that not only survived its incompatibilities but seemed to thrive on them (ALLM:18)*

Gayatri Menon was a beautiful keralite girl,*she is a middle class modern Indian women who is independent, intelligent clever, logical and rational.* She was a gold medalist in her studies.Therefore She pursues her further studies in Oxford University. Neena, though she was not good in studies She was always happy for Gayatri, As the author says:*When Gayatri got the gold medal at the end of first year exams,Neena rejoiced for her but showed no shame over her own lower second-class grade.(ALLM:20)* .But after her return from abroad Gayatri seems dull and sick as her first love proves to be a fraud.Gayatri was in love with Michael,as Gayatri describes about him that:

*Michael...Michael,whose dark grey eyes had seemed so intriguing once.Eyes that had once seemed so fascinatingly to reflect the brooding uncertainty of English skies(ALLM:59)*

But Gayatri explains that he was not honest , as he cheated her by hiding the truth that he was a married man.Therefore Gayatri loses trust in men and leads a life of depression.This can be seen with the words of Neena as she describes Gayatri: *Gayatri eyes seemed listless and dull,with little shadows under them.(ALLM:60)*.But Neena makes a plan to brighten the life of Gayatri by making her sister in law.Therefore Neena observes when Gayatri murmurs:

*Life's stresses-she wonders what those might be.But she is smart enough to know that ,alongside*



*those stresses, she has probably missed out on some of life's thrills too. Ups were sort of always accompanied by downs weren't they? (ALLM:60)*

*Here Gayatri can be compared to Indu a woman protagonist in the novel Roots and Shadows (1983) by Seshi Deshpande where the novelist through the character of Indu carved out the conscious of women who wants to assert their position as human beings equal to that of men. Gayatri is suffering emotionally from the negative effects of men in her life, she lost trust in Love and Marriage. But with the advent of Tarun, her life changes its colours. On one occasion*

Tarun when he meets Gayatri, he feels that she was the one whom he wants to marry and therefore he tries to propose her:

*Gayatri, my d... darling,' he says, 'for long I have wanted to tell you... how do I put it? Please understand you donot have to tell me straightway. In fact, take as much time as you like...but what you need to know is .That I really. Think. I love you. Yes, I, do, I Know I love you. (...). And, my dearest Gayatri, I also think...no, I do not think, I know...I know...I just... want to marry you.' (ALLM:126).*

But Gayatri as she was in dilemma about love, unable to reply him but later on she believes that Tarun is a honest man and therefore she accepts his proposal. Neena rejoices at their commitment and plays her best to take their relationship at another level. Therefore she speaks about their Marriage proposal at her inlaws home but they refuse it as they donot want a girl of different community. *In our Indian society a traditional marriage cannot take place, if the caste of both man and woman is not the same. In case of Gayatri and Tarun this concept works mainly. In spite of their love to each other they couldn't get married. Gayatri is a keralite and Tarun's parents cannot accept a keralite against their Punjabi culture and he cannot marry a keralite because it would be a stigma on the head of her parents. It shows that traditional marriage is based on caste and not on love in Indian society. This can be compared to the novel A Time to be Happy (1975) by Naynatarra Sahgal where the author opines :*



*A marriage joined from top to bottom by caste, community and background works also in traditional marriage. (ATTBH:203)* Gayatri mourns that her second love was too an accident and her parents gives her courage that she is beautiful enough to get married to a rich groom. As the author portrays about Gayatri's mother as she says:

*'After all, Gayatri is still relatively young. Luckily she also has above average good looks. She will find someone who will be more suitable, both for her and for us.'* (ALLM:204-205)

Gayatri parents consoles their daughter that she is beautiful enough and there is nothing to worry about her marriage. Naynatarra Sahgal portrays this concept in her famous novel *A Time to be Happy* (1975) as the author says:

*In the traditional marriage the notion of beautiful girl works out very prominently. As men prefer beautiful girls in their marriage, so if a girl is beautiful it is considered that she will be married to a wealthy groom, which is a symbol of her complete happiness. It shows in our traditional society the male biasness in marriage so unabashedly as in the fact that the girl should be beautiful to look at, that she should on no account be given a crooked nose, uneven teeth or a double chin. In other words, she has no freedom to appear as she is. Desire for self-beautification, is a massive concession to what a man dreams and longs for. There is a tremendous preoccupation with physical appearance which works with a girl as well as her groom and his family.* (ATTBH:201)

Gayatri keeps courage and does not lose hope with the loss of emotional bonding and relationships in her life. Misra women protagonists shield themselves with their virtuousness and courage to take risks of the



unknown. In a way Misra shows the need for a new morality in which a woman is treated as man's equal. Thus Misra is a champion of individual freedom with a penchant for the feminist cause. Shyam M Asnani in his book *New Morality in Modern Indo English Novel* (1973) explores about the quest for bonding of women that:

*She pleads for mutual trust love, understanding  
consideration, generosity and absence of  
pretence, selfishness and self-centeredness in marital  
relation ship* (Shyam:66)

Gayatri feels with the failure of her second love that deep involvement of any human relationship leads nothing but to disaster. This can be compared to the lines of Anita Desai, in her fifth novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) that All human relationships are inadequate.... Basically everyone is solitary. I think involvement in human relationships in this world invariably leads to disaster. (FOM:62) Misra articulates the anguish of her (protagonist's) inner psyche and the stress and the strain they undergo which take some to the brink of insanity and suicide and makes other neurotic and very few draw strength from the inner resources. The same feelings are experienced by Gayatri who had been cheated by her first love Michael and rejected by her second love. Therefore the Novel projects the quest for bonding and its importance in human life.

Misra's protagonist are liberated women, they are educated and able to live individually they do not depend on men. Therefore when Rohit Sachdev, husband of Neena commits an affair with Tracy, during his foreign visits for business. Neena doesn't remain silent but fights for justice. Here the life of Neena can be compared to the protagonist of K. Saraswati Amma's *Vaividhyam Vende* (1985) where the husband is a womaniser, always away from home. On the few occasions he is with his wife, he justifies his actions thus : *Whatever I do, it does not matter; men have the liberty to do what they want.* (VV:76) When she dares to question him about his affairs with other women, he tries to pacify her with these words :



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*Will I give my unadulterated love to anybody else  
? That is what is called lust, that despicable  
thing. Though rice is our staple diet, there are times  
when we long to eatsweets. Yet our devoted  
preference and rea llove is for rice alone...(VV:73)*

Due to this wife, not to be outdone, provokes his suspicions by pretending interest in a man, who passes by the house. He sends her packing to his native town. There she reflects on her condition, and decides to change her attitude towards life. When she gets a letter from a former lover who wants to continue relations with her, she accepts this invitation without any hesitation. By taking recourse to such an action, she is satisfied that she can pay back her husband in the same coin. Her deliberate vengefulness is justified thus :

*Why not I quench my thirst for love by this  
unexpected shower of love ? Had not my husband's  
indifference tortured me all along ? Rather than  
an arid but virgin relationship, is it not  
better to have an immoral affair that gives  
satisfaction to the mind ? When a woman becomes  
a wife, a husband feels that he can cease to  
love her further. Actually, it is the  
concept of an ideal husband, not an individual,  
that a woman really worships. It is not love  
for him, but self pride that inspires her to  
adore her husband ... (VV:78)*

This woman's quest for recognition is satiated when she takes a lover and rejects her husband. The author seems to think it absolutely correct that such selfish husbands deserve such treatment from their wives. In the present novel Rahul too is a womanizer, therefore when Neena realizes the truth her world shatters as the writer says:

*Neena enters the room, red faced. She is  
brandishing Rohit's mobile phone in her hand. 'For  
you', she says icily. 'Some woman called*



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*Tracy.Says you stayed with her in  
London.'*(ALLM:199)

But in the present novel Neena doesn't stay with her indifferent husband nor she commits an illegal affair but files a divorce against him. Neena needed emotional support and love from her husband which she never got .She can be compared to

the protagonist Sarojini of the novel Silence of Desire(1960) by Kamala Markandaya where she portrays the secret longings of sarojini, a house wife, who like Neena is enmeshed in the decaying marital relationship.Her husband,is of the opinion that his wife is like robot-like device meant for the fulfillment of his needs,His relation with his wife is based only on conjugal bliss.and he cares for self-gratification only.

Where as Misra's protagonists can also be compared to Ruksana in the novel The Promise of Spring(1989) by Srala Barnabas,where the protagonist Ruksana is also a victim of domestic violence where her marriage to Issac has little chance to be happy.A tyrant for a mother in law,a family which regarded the eldest son's bride as everyones slave,and a husband who has no sympathy for her, sealed its fate and retaliated with small cruelties, such as keeping letters from home which were a life line to her.Inspite of all these silent sufferings and a faded marriage,Ruksana moves on with life and confides in her elder brother David: *My marriage is an empty shell Bhaijaan.Only the thought of my children has kept me going.I thought for their sake,I must carry on some house*(TPOS:56).

But Neena stands for the New woman and dares to question the injustice done to her. As K.Mirabai elobrates about New woman in her book Feminism as an extension of Existentialism:Woman in Indian English Fiction,Feminism and Literature(1995):

*The New Woman refuses to be stifled under  
oppressive restrictions.Feminism intends to rebel  
against the hostile environment in which a woman  
is forced tolive.It is the struuggle against the  
hardships,neglect and dual moral standards to*



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*which woman are subjected. The new woman's demand for her rightful place, recognition and respect due to her is prompted by an inner urge is to make her existence as a meaningful one (K. Mirabai:1351)*

The new movement gave an authority and authenticity that urged woman to make their voices heard which in turn equally demanded the attention of the world. New woman the term has come to signify the awakening of woman in to a new realization of place and position in family and society, conscious of her individuality. Ellen E. Jordan in her book *Christening of the New Women* (1983) opines that:

*The English feminists endowed the New woman with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and her belief that her education can make a woman capable of leading a financially self sufficient single and yet fulfilling life. (Ellen. E. Jordan:19)*

Neena as a New woman doesn't cry for her failed marital life but takes courage to divorce Rohit and lead an independent life. She is a modern Indian woman who is not basically a traditional rebel but she sighs at the society who forces married woman to compromise with the extra marital affairs of their husbands and face harsh realities by hardening themselves for the welfare of their societal respect. Basavaraj Naikar opines in his book *Joys and Sorrows of Womanhood in The Binding Vine* (2001) about the duty of wife that :

*Having entered a Chakravyuha from which there is no escape, they want to make the best of their given life by hardening themselves to face the harsh realities of life. (Basavaraj Naikar:126)*

*Twentieth century novelists treat this subject in a different manner from that of earlier novelists. They portray the relationship between man and woman as it is,*



whereas earlier novelists concentrated on as it should be. Anita Desai in her famous novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) opines about the concept of marriage that:

*Our society conditions young girls to believe that Real Life consists of getting married having children, promoting one's husband's career by planning huge, endless meals for overfed people, buying the latest model of this and that and so forth. (FOM:81)*

As Glibert and Gubar commented in Jimmy McGovern's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) :

*to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. But the woman who refuses to be selfless and acts on her own initiative irritates the society and is unwelcome. In the western societies, there were no grounds for which a woman can divorce her husband until Roman woman gained the right to divorce in the days of empire. However protestants took a somewhat more liberal stand on the question of divorce (TMWIA:39)*

John Milton wrote a series of pamphlets in favour of divorce in the years between 1643 and 1645 but it was only in 1857 that judicial divorce (divorce granted by a court of law) became available in England. And it was only in 1968 the divorce laws were made more liberal. The liberalization of divorce has come as a great help to save women from endless oppression, or torture in marriage. And now a part from the usual grounds of adultery, cruelty, greed etc. Divorce can be granted on the mutual consent basis, if both the partners agree and are bent upon final separation, in America this is known as no-fault divorce. Gail Putney Fullerton in her book *Survival in Marriage* (1984) remarks that: the final separation separation is bewildering. It is like pushing against a door that suddenly gives away (G.P.F:446) She also remarks about divorce in her book that:

*Luther seems to have believed that only adultery and desertion were adequate grounds of*



*divorce...However, in addition to adultery and desertion, Cruelty and refusal to conjugal duty(which meant refusal of sexual intercourse)were also considered grounds of divorce by most protestant churches(Gail Puteny Fullerton:395).*

*The modern writer is concerned with the quality of life and people, with world and value. is investigation of a number of unsatisfying lives has to its basis in the deep conviction that it is womans sacred duty to fight for a life that will express the inherent dignity and worth that, she is capable of. She is aware of that pain, pathos, and failure but sure of the values of the struggle towards fulfillment and perfection.Judith Butler in Gender Trouble points out :*

*The woman in marriage qualifies not as an identity but only as a relational term that both distinguishes and binds the various clans to a common but internally differentiated matrilineal identity.(GT:38)*

*Ironically, women do help in creating ethnic and racial boundaries by giving them names and identities but their own identities remain suspect, anonymous and insignificant to men.*

*In a traditional society where girls have no freedom of their own choice marriage proves to be another trap and woman feels like a caged animal. Making enormous sacrifices a woman begins to understand gradually that marriage obstructs her growth as an individual. She sees her marriage only in terms of the dark rooms where terror awaits her. She feels as though - She had exchanged one pair of pinching torturing shoes for another.(TSS:500)*

*Marriage in a traditional society is a continual self-sacrifice for a woman, a denial of even her selfhood as a person. Whatever she does, she actually does for*



her husband to please him as her master. Women in the novels of Jaishree Misra truly feels that love and marriage are not mere accidents but it's a trap and a cage where emotional stress haunts them through lack of care , bondage and love, this can be compared to Indu she says in Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* (1992): *It's a trap that's what marriage is. A trap? Or a cage? (RS:74) Marriage, after all is an agreement between man and woman to live together-emotionally and physically, recognized by the society and approved in the Form of 'Marriage'. After recognizing the couple association, responsibility of the society is over the rest is on the shoulders of the couple to manage. Marriage says Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1974): ... is the destiny traditionally offered by society. (TSS:502) The fact however remains that marriage is no more than one event in a man's life, but the only important event in a woman's life. The concept of marriage that is related to a delicate union of two different minds has not been properly realized in traditional bound Indian male dominated families. Woman's individual identity has not been positively and open-mindedly realized in her marriage. Woman has never been accepted as a full human being or an equal partner to man in marriage. She is taken for granted on number of fronts. This casual attitude causes her consistent suffering and miserable life.*

Jaishree Misra is a modern indo-English writer, widely acclaimed, not only in India but also in the world of fiction writing. she emerged on the literary horizon among the modern woman novelists, focusing on the contemporary issues. Misra has added a new dimension to the contemporary Indian English fiction. She has secured a unique and significant place due to her innovative thematic concerns and deals in her fiction with feminine sensibility. Her preoccupation is explored of deep psych of her characters. The fiction of Jaishree Misra is relevant to all times because she writes about the predicament of modern man. She digs in to man inner psych and goes beyond the skin and the flesh. Literature for her is not a means of escaping reality but an exploration and an inquiry. She prefers the private to the public world and avoid from the traditional grooves of external reality and physical world. In fact, her real concern is the exploration of human psyche, inner climate, and she unravels the mystery of the inner life of her characters. Raji Narsimhan in *Sensabilitiy Under Stress* (1976) opines that:



*Indo-English writer is constantly concerned with the problem of interaction between man and woman, between the individuals and the social world. Her main concern is to depict the psychic states of her protagonists at some crucial juncture of their lives. Therefore, the most recurrent themes in her novels are "The hazards and complexities of man- woman relationships, the founding of individuality and the establishing of individualism of her characters(SUS:23)*

*Thus, the most common themes in her novels is the complexity of human relationships, particularly the man-woman relationship who has strong quest for bondage. She writes mostly about the miserable plight of women suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands, fathers and brothers. So man-woman relationship brings characters into alienation, withdrawal, loneliness, isolation and lack of communication that frequently occurs in her novels. Most of her novel's protagonists are alienated from the world, from society, from families, from parents and even from their own selves because they are not average people but individuals. When these characters have to face alienation that is the quest for bondage, they become rebels.*

*In India where women have redesigned role, which does not allow any room for individualism, identity and assertion, Jaishree Misra talks of women who question the age old traditions and want to seek individual growth. They try to reassess the known in a new context and find a meaning in life. Misra suggests that a balance between the conventional, pre-set role of women and the contemporary issues has to be struck. Her female protagonists try to discover and rediscover meaningfulness in life through the known, the established. These characters are not normal but different from others. They do not find a proper channel of communication and thus become alienated and start brooding about their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding, which they had formerly ignored or rejected. As Jaishree Misra is a perfect artist, her novels naturally offer a wide variety of social, Cultural and psychological interpretations. However, here my concern is to show feminine*



*sensibilities and other related issues concerned to them. Misra has been widely treated many issues related to the feminine sensibility.*

*The issues which have been treated largely in Jaishree Misra novels are love, marriage, divorce, social taboos and inhibitions, cruelty and violence towards the marital issues, problem of rehabilitation after divorce, extent of liberty and freedom to the female desire for bondage, recognition to the quest for bondage and crisis of conscience and values. Misra in her novels, is deeply analyzed from the standpoint of feminine sensibility, we shall arrive at a stage where all the issue of crisis of conscience and values, this is the only one to which all other issues get connected. Other issues are automatically revealed one after another when we approach Misra's novels with the issue. In all her novels Jaishree Misra seems to be under the spell of existentialism. In this novel to the central character Neena is a rich married women but isolated individual who is solely responsible for her own actions and reactions. This way, the novel "Accidents like Love and Marriage deals with the facts of the life and explores the feminine sensibility and quest for their bonding. There is also an element of tragic pathos in her expressions varying from one moment to another according to her anxiety-ridden moods. Thus there is dreaminess in what she expresses and to what she reacts. The portrayal of Maya is projected in a sympathetic vein. Maya needs the benefit of sympathy and understanding from readers. Her life is shadowed by the three-fold effect of death; doom and destiny. Though her mind is at times highly confused and anxiety-hidden, she does not lose her discriminating sense. In this way, one is able to appreciate her womanly impulses. Maya Strives for a meaningful life throughout the novel.*

*Jaishree Misra explores in her novel about the relationship and bond between a couple and their reaction to their family and social life when they lack trust and bondage. Accidents like Love and Marriage expounds the human predicament of three women; Neena, Gayatri and Swarna Sachdev, representing three different set of cultures Hindu, Keralite and Punjabi and their set of format thinking. Besides that the novel also deals with motherhood, husband-wife relationship, mother-daughter relationship, problems of Indian joint-families, marriage, mental and physical trauma of women, alienation, etc. The novel is a fine expression of the pain rampant in the lives of the leading women, their suffering*



*at domestic and social levels and the imposed endurance in marriage. The novel voices a scathing aspect of Indian social institutions like marriage or family, orthodox expectations from Hindu wife, suffocation experienced by the women protagonists and symptomatic of the emerging New-woman who struggle to overcome her domestic plight with dignity and strength. The current novel Accidents like Love and Marriage can be compared to the novel A matter of time (1996) by Seshi Deshpande which also deals with the husband wife relationship, problems of Indian Joint Families, marriage, mental and physical trauma of women and illegal relationships etc.*

*In Misra's Accidents like Love and Marriage (2001) too there is a number of women who decide to follow their dreams and thus cross the line of what an appropriate behaviour for a woman is. Nonetheless, the novel focuses rather on the introspective of the characters than on the reactions of their social environment. Thus uniqueness of Jaishree Misra's fiction lies in her treatment of feminine sensibility. In India where women have redesigned role, which does not allow any room for individualism, identity and assertion, Jaishree Misra talks of women who question the age old traditions and want to seek individual growth. They try to reassess the known in a new context and find a meaning in life. Misra suggests that a balance between the conventional, pre-set role of women and the contemporary issues has to be struck. Her female protagonists try to discover and rediscover meaningfulness in life through the known, the established. These characters are not normal but different from others. They do not find a proper channel of communication and thus become alienated and start brooding about their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding, which they had formerly ignored or rejected. As Jaishree Misra is a perfect artist, her novels naturally offer a wide variety of social, Cultural and psychological interpretations.*

*Therefore Misra's Accidents like love and marriage is the fine expression of the pain rampant for the quest of true bonding and emotional support in the life of women Their sufferings at domestic and social levels and the imposed endurance in love and marriage are beautifully projected .*



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**THE UN-QUENCHING THIRST AT LIFE'S BAY :  
UNDERSTANDING MAYA IN JAYASREE MISRA'S NOVEL  
'AFTERWARDS'**

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Jaishree Misra is a modern Indo-English writer, widely acclaimed, not only in India but also in the world of fiction mainly focusing on the contemporary issues and has added a new dimension to the contemporary Indian English fiction. She has secured a unique and significant place due to her innovative thematic concerns and deals in her fiction with feminine sensibility. Her preoccupation is explored of deep psych of her characters.

Jaishree Misra, as a feminist writer concentrates on the tortures and sufferings of middle-class Indian, Women who are educated, sensitive and are conscious of their legal, social and conjugal rights. Misra highlights the household conflict between wife and husband operating at the emotional and intellectual levels. The fiction of Misra is relevant to all times because she writes about the Psychodynamics of modern woman. Literature for her is not a means of escaping reality but an exploration and an inquiry. She prefers the private to the public world and avoid from the traditional grooves of external reality and physical world. In fact, her real concern is the exploration of human psyche, inner climate, and she unravels the mystery of the inner life of her characters. Thus, the most common themes in her novels is the complexity of human relationships, particularly the man-woman relationship who has strong quest for bondage. She writes mostly about the miserable plight of women suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands, fathers and brothers. So man-woman relationship brings characters into alienation, withdrawal, loneliness, isolation and lack of communication that frequently occurs in her novels. Misra novels are deeply analyzed from the standpoint of feminine sensibility, one shall arrive at a stage where all the issue of crisis of conscience and values. The issues which have been treated largely in her novels are love, marriage, divorce, social



taboos and inhibitions, cruelty and violence towards the marital issues, problem of rehabilitation after divorce, extent of liberty and freedom to the female desire for bondage, recognition to the quest for bondage and crisis of conscience and values.

The novelist being fully aware of the patriarchal set-up of Indian society does not plead for any kind of confrontation or militancy between Man and women, between husband and wife. As it is often said and practiced that "Silence, tolerance, sufferance is golden" and though the novel is in the feminist framework, the novelist does not cross the limits of Indian, socio-cultural reality .

In case of arranged marriages in India the Indian parents try to arrange the marriage of their daughters as it is taken as an obligatory responsibility on them. In this marriage a girl is given off to a groom completely unknown to her. She is taken to the marriage pandal like an embellished and attired goat taken to a deity for sacrifice. She marries a man to whom she has never met and her approval is taken for granted and she moves to a land with her groom which she has never seen and forgoes all individual rights. As it is considered indecent on the part of a girl to tell her parents of her choice in marriage. That's why these decent girls obey their parents and silently bow down before them without questioning about their marriage or their groom.

The concept of marriage in the novels of Misra is related to a delicate union of two different minds has not been properly realized in traditional bound Indian male dominated families. Woman's individual identity has not been positively and open-mindedly realized in her marriage. Woman has never been accepted as a full human being or an equal partner to man in marriage. She is taken for granted on number of fronts. This casual attitude causes her consistent suffering and miserable life. Maya in *Afterwards* is also facing the same marital crisis.

Maya had decided to cut off all family ties to break out of the confining cage of subordinate womanhood. She very well knows, the fact that her female relations have undoubtedly succumbed to the dictates of male



authority and she feels, that their vision was blind folded so that they should not see the choices, and that man since generations has hampered their movement, so that the woman will be under their thumb. Due to her non – real marriage and non – real love, having trapped her in a negative situation, shatters her positive struggle to be independent for selfhood and intellectual liberation. This makes her refuse to be a mother of a child. Religious tenants, cultural ethics, family as an institution have all condemned a woman’s pursuit of sexual pleasure. It is only for the childbearing purpose, she has to be passive and submissive. A woman as a quested for sexual satisfaction is not ethically accepted. Thus Maya, having found her inner personality being suppressed strives for expression and acceptance through an extra marital affair with her neighbour, Rahul.

Jaishree Misra by presenting Maya in this manner is trying to analyze the double standards opted in our society, men are allowed to take any kind of liberties seeking sexual pleasure, even after they are married. According to Manu, *Pathi swarga, pathi dhara, pathi paramaantapa, Pithri pritheema panne, printhe sarva devata:*(Manu:) *Husband is heaven, husband is religion. The gods are pleased by pleasing the husband.* a wife must ever remain devoted her husband and please him. After his death, she should never, never think of other man. These women who accept these marriage as their fate or destiny or consider it a religious act are the blind worshippers of their husbands and to them husband is almost like God and disobedience to husband is considered a great sin. And they teach this thing to their daughter the lesson of feminine inferiority and submission.

Misra has dealt with the traditional marriage with all its traits in all of her novels. Her descriptions are so graphic realistic to.... with so much of compassion understanding and details that Misra conveys her conviction that Indian women woes are very much caused by the way women take their very personal matter in a very impersonal way. i.e. why everyone of her novels contain some marriage . Misra beautifully portrays how women are groomed for subordinate roles and how their personality are conditioned into secondary roles along the difficult lines right from their childhood in Indian traditional society. **Ramabai** wrote a book on the high caste Hindu



women in which she describes a typical arranged marriage and aptly commented on the conjugal satisfaction of the women in terms of their marriage. **Susie Tharu and K.Lalithain** *Women's writing in India* (1991) observes:

*When the conjugal relation is brightened of mutual love, the happy wife had nothing to complain except the absence of freedom of thought and action; but since wives have never known what freedom is, they are well content to remain bondage (WWII:247)*

Maya finds such mutual love and kind texture in Rahul, Therefore in such circumstances, the sexual emancipation is evidently an assertion of Maya's individuality, her newly emerged identity Maya, is quite impressed by Rahul's idea of detachment, and experiences a sense of freedom, and very openly talks about herself and her failures The newly acquired sense of freedom, she got from Rahul's friendship, makes her aware of her natural impulses. Initial she rejects his love thinking that, it is monogamous, but later quite willingly offers herself to him... Here Maya can be compared to Indu in **Deshpande's** *Roots and Shadows* (1983) where Indu is also quite impressed with the Naren's idea of detachment and experiences a sense of freedom and very openly talks about herself and her failures.

The newly acquired sense of freedom, she got from Naren's friendship, makes her aware of her natural impulses. Initially she rejects his love thinking that, it is monogamous, at point of time, she doesn't mind love—making as a sin or crime, but the next day, she is quite worried and studies each and every action in terms of situation that pushed her way towards Naren. Her mind is often burdened with sin, crime, right and wrong. Indu says.

*A part from wronging Jayant? Wronging Jayant?  
I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged  
Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving  
him a spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I*



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*had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought,  
is dishonorable, dishonest, much more than this,  
what I have done with Naren (RS:171)*

Modern, young, women like Maya are bricked a between tradition and modernity. She learns a lot about independence and liberation from Rahul and she realizes that she was suppressing her strong feelings, expectations and disappointments and suffering to negations of feelings. Rahul gives her courage, by teaching her that one need not be ashamed of their attachments and the world is made up of interdependent parts, each depending on the other. She realizes that freedom and fulfillment can be achieved through the right perception of life through some rules of life, which have dignity and grace. And that one can always find freedom without these rules.

Maya now gets a new knowledge' of life and understands the true meaning of freedom and fulfillment, now marriage appears, as a means for procreation. Here Maya can be compared to Indu in **Deshpande's** *Roots and Shadows* (1983) where Indu says: *Behind the fa-ade of romanticism, of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought together.... To meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue?* (RS:3) Maya realizes her position in Rahul's home; the responsibilities, fears and frustrations do not touch her. She is now an assertive woman with emerging new self. Through Rahul's idea of detachment, she rebuilds her lost vision. She now realizes, that she had only lacked the quality of courage . Gradually, she feels that there was nothing shameful in her feelings for Govind. She wants to project her true self to Govind by following her dreams instead of the pretentious one she had been showing all these days. Maya is highly depressed with the suspicious nature of her husband Govind, he is basically very traditional and follows old beliefs. Rahul thinks that Maya is a mismatch and her presence is unbearable. Even when Riya and women from the social service offer their hands to greet him, he avoids. Below is an observation made of Govind by Rahul:

*I could tell he was uncomfortable with this and*

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*remembered that in India women did not usually shake hands. Unless they moved in very westernized circles and met a lot of foreigners. I knew from all the things Maya told me that Govind was old-fashioned, full of conservative beliefs. (Afterwards201)*

Generally, Govind's possessive nature made Maya to rebel against the traditional role of a woman. It is the fear of suppression by the patriarchal societies that makes her fight, turn aggressive and assert herself. Unless and until the roots, the source of her fears are not uprooted, Maya cannot achieve fulfillment, she therefore destroys the roots, eliminate her fears, confront her problems with courage and what she feels is right. Thus Maya extends support to vital, an orphan living with the family. Maya seems to be grown up with better understanding of the situation than that existed earlier in the family.

Maya becomes crowned with new bonds, obligations, responsibilities, and this adds grace and dignity to life. Though the decision of leaving Govind makes her feel painful, she over comes the feelings and emotions that were associated with the house. As she over comes these feelings, she decides that these soft feelings not to come in her way of doing -Here Maya can be compared to those woman who are fighting with the wrongs in their past,As **.Bhatnagar.P**, opines in his book *Indian womanhood- fight for freedom (1991):One era ends so that the other might begin. But life will continue endless, limitless, formless and full of grace (Bhatnagar 127)* .But Maya's constant suffering for leaving her husband haunts her till she meets tragic death.This is the long and the short of her bitter struggle through conflicting trends between the age-old tradition and the emerging new ideas. She tries to asserts her position as a human being equal to that of a man and does not want to submit herself to anyone's dictations. The character of Maya has been carved out to effectively depict her own reflections on the travails of a modern Indian women passing through the contemporary transitional stage in the evolving, Social values. Maya's acceptance of western values and her search for liberty with a precondition of unfettered growth and maturity of



personality, despite the insidious conflict between tradition and modernity, ultimately results in her emergence as a human being evolving basically as a woman of determination not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society.

The whole discussion is directive towards Maya, the Protagonist of the novel, as the Architect of her own life. How, as the 'self' seen in the novel, Common theme that binds Maya with the other women is the motif of unfulfilled desires and their less than happy marriages patriarchal self. Any analysis to the novel must be informed by diverse appreciative strands. The study of culture involves the exploration of the representations and lived experience of every day life. The idea that the exploration of lived experiences of every day life forms a valid background in current appreciative paradigms can be traced back to research practices in sociology and anthropology.

When the concepts of marriage and physical pleasure are studied the readers find that, in the context of Hindu marriage, the traditional concept of superior husband and subordinate wife had been the guideline. In an Indian marriage, the wife will merge her name, personality, life style and in fact, her entire life into that of the husband. The process of industrialization, urbanization westernization has led to the breaking up of the traditional joint families. It has brought about politics—economic, cultural and socio-psychological changes in the life—patterns and attitudes of the people of India. The traditional concept of love and marriage as sacrament and sex as a taboo is fast losing its importance **Promilla Kapur**, the renowned sociologist in her study on *Love, Marriage and Sex*(1973) says that; *now women aspire for natural companionship, respect, material comforts, satisfaction of emotional and physical needs, in marriage*(LMAS:59)

Marriage and Physical pleasure as a subject of study has been left unexplored by most of the early Indo-English novelists, as it was overshadowed by the various socio—political problems that dominated the milieu. A man-woman-relationship in isolation was rarely discussed as a theme. Jaishree Misra, the eminent novelist has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the marital



relations she seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novel reveals the man—made patriarchal traditions and the uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being apart of them.

The feministic approach of the novel is that, is basically a domestic novel, and the novel strives about Maya's thirst for happiness who is a pained, sensitive wife baring with suspicious egoistic and self—centered husband. Lack of Communication between them is the real culprit. And the moment Maya decides to free herself from him she meets an accident and dies. Misra's feminism is not aggressive and tempestuous as the western writer. The French theorists of feminism like **Julia Kristiva**, **Helence Cixous**, **Luce Irigaray** and **Monique Withing** apply Derriada's method of deconstruction and look upon the language as a means of subjugation, they treat the structure of language as Phallo centric (or phallus-dominated) and hence reject all language and literature. In their over enthusiasm, they even call for a feminine language (parler femme). The Anglo-American exponents of feminism like **Showalter**, **Gilberts**, **Gubar** and **Cheri Register**, also opine in their books that woman's consciousness is much different from that of mans, and so woman writers ought to be studied by their own standards and ought not be relegated to a secondary position. **Combinedely**, the French and Anglo American feminists channelise their energy toward exposing the sexist modes of male authors and patriarchal practices in society and assigning an honourable place to the literary works of women writers.

Indian feminists do not adopt so stiff an attitude towards the males as their western counter parts do. They are equally culture oriented and gender-oriented, **Susie Tharu** in her article Articulation of the feminine voice(1997)says, An Indian feminist, is of the view that women's writing in India needs resurrection and that it should be examined in a proper perspective and in a relevant literary tradition. (Susie:3)

The Indian feminist movement came up in the form of a pointed protest against certain social customs, like Purdah system, Child marriage, Dowry, Poly gamy and Sati. (The practice of women getting burnt alive on her husband's pyre). The spirit of activism in the Indian feminists seeks



equal right and status for women. It aims at the redressal of their grievance and sufferings. It is not bothered with problems like lesbianism or single motherhood as its western counterparts, because such things have really no scope in our society. Most of Misra novel's protagonists are alienated from the world, from society, from families, from parents and even from their own selves because they are not average people but individuals. When these characters have to face alienation that is the quest for bondage, thus they become rebels. *Tension, worries, depression, disappointment, anxiety and fear become their lot and they lose their sense of sanity and mental poise, for example Janu in Ancient Promises, Maya in Afterwards And Leena & Gayatri in Accidents like Love and Marriage.* The uniqueness of Jaishree Misra's fiction lies in her treatment of feminine sensibility. In India where women have redesigned role, which does not allow any room for individualism, identity and assertion, Jaishree Misra talks of women who question the age old traditions and want to seek individual growth. They try to reassess the known in a new context and find a meaning in life. Misra suggests that a balance between the conventional, pre-set role of women and the contemporary issues has to be struck. Her female protagonists try to discover and rediscover meaningfulness in life through the known, the established. These characters are not normal but different from others. They do not find a proper channel of communication and thus become alienated and start brooding about their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding, which they had formerly ignored or rejected. As Jaishree Misra is a perfect artist, her novels naturally offer a wide variety of social, Cultural and psychological interpretations.

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