

principles, she tries to improve her present. The hills of Angheri also play a significant role orienting Nalli to stay rooted and focused without losing basic human qualities. It is her indigenous influence that shapes her into a humanitarian professional and a considerate human being of philanthropic personality. Nalli never forgets the sights of hills and her "steadfast guardians of her home" as she is emotionally connected to the hills, her progressive primal roots. Kavery Nambisan not only speaks of modernity but also pin points that one should never undervalue his/ her traditions, as these help to transform one's personality, reconciling with modernity. Despite being trained in medicine, Nalli remains linked to her heritage and its traditions. She derives inspiration from the hills: the primal roots. She finds scope for the expression of her life and hence the social routine never becomes bondage for her. Instead of rejecting her duties and relationships, she remains with her family till the end. Her unity with the world around her is achieved through her spontaneity of love and unselfish work. Nambisan never presents Nalli as a passive and suffering woman who fails to find a voice for herself. Nor is she presented as one who overthrows existing values and system to build a world of her own. Ultimately, she emerges as rural India's female surgeon. Indeed, Nalli is a mouthpiece of Kavery Nambisan who believes that social institutions like family, custom and attitude of male members cannot suppress a woman's thoughts, feelings, goals and achievements.

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"The responsibility of providing role models for the oppressed of their kind; of re-interpreting old myths to assert, if not their primacy, at least their co-ordinate position; of questioning the validity of those traditions and practices that have circumscribed them in narrow unflexing slot-pigeon-holed them in unchanging grooves of societal relationships, and of challenging the codes of morality which have subordinated them" (224).

Ultimately, Nalli emerges as a surgeon who is conscious and introspective and carves out a life for herself in her own village. Consequently, she decides to return to her village and starts the hospital there by which Nalli's dream converts into reality. Like Nanji of *The Scent of Pepper*, Nalli presents a woman accepting a life full of hardship and difficulties. As Anita Myles admits,

"The Indian women writers, more than their male counterparts, tend to be greatly aware of the submissive impact of colonization on the regimented colonial consciousness. The resultant percussion on the post colonial women writers has evoked in them a desire to depict truthfully the plight of the 'liberated woman' in a world still dominated by the male-oriented values when she makes frantic efforts to re-establish her self-respect by shedding off the past oppressive influences so that she is able to assert herself and thus clear the impasse" (42-43).

Kavery Nambisan admits that traditions and primal roots help one to make a balance in life as well as to grow as a progressive human being. As there is no dearth of progress, one achieves according to his/her capability. Traditions are progressive in nature which help an individual to evolve as a considerate human being. Nalli is presented as one who is caught between the conflict of tradition and modernity. But she stands out being connected to her traditions and primal roots. Without making any compromise

Her village too transforms like her own personality. The development of village and Nalli goes together. Now, she can gauge change in society of village and the ill effects of modernity on the natural settings of her village. She misses her old village. Now, even hills appear distant and gloomy. The modernity has taken away its role on rustic life. The immutable village has been transformed but Nalli declines to revert her thinking about serving the people. Nalli says, "Appa was gone and the hills, with their vigilance and strength were too distant and unconnected with living. A darkness settled in my mind and refused to go away" (Nambisan 321). In this phase of darkness and thoughtfulness when nothing seems to work, Amma guides her and says "dead persons can be respected only by the manner in which we live after they're gone" (Nambisan 323). Now Nalli looks determined and resolved, and says "I would do my work with passion" (Nambisan 323).

Nalli speaks not like a woman liberated from the burdens of either her humanity or her womanhood but a woman re-defining her existential situation in her own terms, having it out on her own premises. Antony Flew's statement clarifies her new incarnation of self, "each self-aware individual understands his own existence in terms of his experience of himself and of his own situation" (108). The post colonial Indian English writers focus on major issues relating to woman such as her awakening to the realization of her identity. Like these writers, Nambisan presents Nalli as an individual who has developed her own perception concerning the revival of herself, her urge, her needs, problems, predicaments, and her survival tactics, in view of her social conditions but with the common denominator in her life that is patriarchy and male- chauvinism. Her transformation into an assertive, self-willed woman finds relevance in the lines of Jasbir Jain and Avadesh Kumar Singh, as they admit:

in buses, for the din of filmi songs. I wanted smells and sounds that worried my senses a bit" (Nambisan 253).

Looking at the photograph of her family she considers that the photo is so much complete that it makes her disappointed. She thinks of Vishnu and their passionate encounters. Nalli feels, "the real change was in Vishnu. Each time I looked at the photo, my eyes were pulled towards him. Memories of long ago pinched and nibbled at my brain. Why, why, why did it happen? Why, why, why did it not?" (Nambisan 255). Here again the hills proved to be her solace in crisis and her grief as "dark and holy the hills stood, consoling me with their strength" (Nambisan 261). Her character and personality development right from childhood to being a surgeon is shaped by Appa who knows her well, in fact all the philosophies of life told by Appa gets transferred to Nalli with minor modifications. Nalli implies, "Appa had inspired me, steadied me, asked me to come back to Angheri and when I was all ready to get started, he went" (Nambisan 263). The tragedy and grief only makes her resolve strong to work in village in the pursuance of her father's dream.

In spite of opposition that she encounters from her family members and the villagers, Nalli visits Bombay to meet Jai to discuss the plan of constructing a hospital in the village. Jai tries to persuade her to drop her dream by saying that village will be a wrong place for surgeons like them. He proudly says he wants someone to compete with and answers Nalli, "Let the village improve, let the villagers' show that they can keep a surgeon busy. If you go and work with the quacks, they will say it is because you were not good enough for a city" (Nambisan 282). Finding a vast change in the behavior of Jai as well as in his thoughts, Nalli feels astonished and contemplates how the village can improve unless they try to keep the people healthy

her strong will in the very beginning itself. When she is deboarding the plane to land in Britain it proves that Nalli has assumed a more firm and strong personality who can survive in troublesome situations. Her change of personality and her understanding of the world show her growth from a village girl to a resolute student in England. Her own words show her evolution as a strong personality when she says, "I was no longer a foolish sixteen year old desperate to imitate others: I would speak in my accent" (Nambisan 192). Nalli is caught between Indian style of life and British way of life. She experiences alienation and nostalgia. She utilizes the opportunities to enhance her knowledge. Moving with the senior surgeons and colleagues friendly, she does many surgeries with the help of her boss and some interns. She proves herself as a good academician by presenting papers among popular surgeons. A positive transformation from innocence to be experienced is shown in the following lines, "I diagnosed with my eyes and my hands and my mind..." (Nambisan 244).

Even Nalli's relationship with her father gets an overhaul: "my years in England had brought a change in our relationship. Appa became more tolerant, I'm more honest and less afraid" (Nambisan 245). All this is a part of her development and maturity to face new challenges in professional, personal, social and intellectual arenas. During her stay in Britain, she misses the simplicity of rustic life. The nostalgia takes hold of her at times, acting as a reminder that she has had to come home and serve the people there. It is her inherent subconscious that causes her to prod and ponder over the things back home. In fact, it is all a part of her development as an adult professional. "The sameness of my life annoyed me. I wanted noise and abuse, colour and chaos. I longed for the sight of lungi-clad men with curious eyes, of saris billowing in shops, of sweaty strangers

irreversible" (Nambisan 176). Not aware of Nalli's love for Jai, he decides to marry Bela, a girl from Bombay. But Nalli does not feel disappointed at the marriage of Jai with Bela. The unexpressed love for Jai fetches another step in her career. She expresses her family members her wish to become a surgeon. Nalli's father astonishingly says, "I've never heard of a woman surgeon" (Nambisan 179). Trying to convince her father, Nalli writes letters to Jai and doctor Bansali, Nalli's professor. Receiving a positive reply from both of them Nalli's father is convinced and he allows Nalli to pursue her higher studies in England.

It is a part of her character building by 'a life in crisis' and 'troubled water' situations she faces in her life. The difficulties only make her resolve, strong and firm. Her childhood understanding with her friend and motivation Jai and premonition of Nalli's character in crisis can be seen in the childhood incident: "he was not teasing her. You are muddy and wet, your nose looks terrible; best time to take another try" (Nambisan 177).

Before leaving for England Nalli meets Jai who has settled in Bombay and discusses her plan to plant the village hospital. Nourishing her dream, she flies to England and on stepping out of the plane she affirms, "I will not let anything stop me from what I have come here to do" (Nambisan 199). She reminds the advice given by her mentor, doctor Bansali, "foreign! Do you understand the word? When you came to college from your village, was it not because of geography or not foreign, it's all in the head. It is not because of geography or religion or gender. If you can't understand that, you'll be miserable wherever you go...self-belief that is the only thing" (Nambisan 184). The comments by Dr. Bansali strengthen the resolution of a village girl and prepare her for a future full of challenges.

In the first personal narrative in the se

from you, spent more on your education than Vishnu's and you repay me with ingratitude" (Nambisan 165). This clearly portrays the attitude of society towards even the professionally educated modern girls. The people are hard bent to chain the girls in the societal norms even if they choose to tread their own paths and take their own decision to pursue their own dreams and destinies. The fight of a village girl with society, parents and her own conscience makes her confidence to shape during the times of testing. But she takes the bull by the horns and fights for her dreams with a rare courage and bravado. Her childhood inspiration and teacher that always admires and motivates her aspirations is none another than the hills of Angheri. Hills are her guide and path lights for all her life. She learns stillness and stability in her youth from them. Hills are a symbol of her own conscience, aim, chain and unconquerable will: "how restful, how contended the village, slumbering at the foot of the hills" (Namisan 173).

The hills of Angheri are a metaphor for the conscience, personality and dreams of Nalli. They are her friend, philosopher and guide. They inspire her to leave the village and make her yearn for the return to serve the village people. They teach her the mutual co-existence of desire and satisfaction, modernity and age. Hills are her protector as well as inspiration. Learning through troublesome situation has been an unbeatable part of the development of the protagonist. She has to learn how to walk through darkness of undulating ground by critical difficulties and emotional turmoil. She decides for her career in surgery on the very night of the wedding of her childhood love and inspiration Jai. "That night she opened the diary Appa had given her. She turned to a fresh page and but date in the top left corner, feeling self conscious. Then, two blank lines down, she wrote 'SURGERY' and so made her decision

The boy died of dysentery and it makes Nalli assure that hereafter no child will die of an ordinary illness like dynestery. She is resolute that being with Jai she will take care of everything. To become a fully qualified doctor, Nalli takes up internship in the government hospital. At the time of her three months of work in a rural area named Mandya in Mysore as a part of her internship, she makes the village people aware of soakage fit, septic tanks and infant diarrhea. She argues with the Dai (midwife) who treats a pregnant woman at the time of her delivery in her home itself. Nalli questions the Dai who uses unsterilized knife which is used for cutting vegetables, and receives an astonishing reply from her that it is a vegetable cutting knife and vegetables are not infected. This incident makes Nalli to be more stubborn in constructing the hospital of her dreams. After her MBBS, in the delusion of dream and reality, and confusion, Nalli becomes frustrated with her life but only to be more resolute later. This is a phase of her learning, the practical aspects and problems of life. The crisis in her life only makes her character strong and her mind more mature as "there was little to relax and, thankfully, less time to be with family" (Nambisan 14)

A clash of dreams and reality shapes her professional career and personal character. "medicine, she realized, was as imperfect as the doctor practiced it" (Nambisan 156). An episode of women empowerment is shown in the Seetha-Sabri fights and their mutual helpfulness. Surely, this has a perpetual impact in the feminist longings of Nalli. Her avoidance of marriage even after her MBBS and her strong will to something for the village also shows how various experiences of female assertion in the growing-up years make her resistant and earnest pursuer of dreams. Her attitude and longings do not find many takers in the patriarchal society. Even Appa is frustrated: "you are my problem child! I expected the best

The conversation at home between Appa and Ajja is educational and helps to shape the attitude and inclination of Nalli towards different life philosophies, problems, solutions and miseries. Nalli is often bored by the argumentation of Ajja and Appa because Appa was an admirer and Ajja a critic, "Appa believed in Ahimsa, austerity and the abolition of the caste system" (Nambisan 87). The menace of untouchables is clearly depicted in the school life of village, "when word got around that a Brahmin boy was to be Gandhiji and Gowramma's sister would play Kasturba, Shanku master was angry. He said it was wrong to mix castes" (Nambisan 104). Her experience in college of sickness, disease and death makes her mature and professionally apt in dealings. All the education, formal as well as informal carves a new Nalli out of the old and simple village girl. Male chauvinism is portrayed in the premises of medical college when Carol appears for the exam in short dress. The college authority considers her attire not suitable for a future doctor. She fails in the viva by eight marks. The students raise their voice against the injustice but with the stress of the exams on them they fail to do anything. Carol takes the same exams after six months in salwar kameez and gets through without a hitch.

The relationship of Ajja with gods and nature in Angheri makes a deep impact on the subconscious of Nalli which strengthens her resolve to serve village in her later life. Ajja is very conscious and concerned about her nature when there is no rain in Angheri. He cautions his gods: "this is the final warning; I'm telling you...there must be rain, and plenty of it within a month or you'll regret it" (Nambisan 137). After Ajja's most severe warning to stop praying altogether, it starts to rain which goes on ceaselessly for fourteen days. Nalli's wish to serve the people of Angheri becomes even stronger after the death of the son of Poorvi, Nalli's sister's classmate.

prays to God, "give me that thing, God. Only that thing and I won't ask for anything else. Please, God give me that thing..." (Nambisan 35). Knowing the fact that her wish is banned only for the reason that she is a woman, Nalli believes in her strength and fights a hard battle. Carrying her dream of building Angheri's own hospital, Nalli, from her village school sets off to Madras to study medicine where she confronts with the world entirely different and artificial from Angheri's hills. Grown up in village atmosphere with many restrictions, Nalli is taken aback on watching the behavior of city girls. But in course of time, she changes herself to accustom to the life in hostel and in the city. Nalli struggles not only with the strange atmosphere but also with the heavy and tiresome which are her constant companions. She keeps her dream in her mind and nourishes it throughout the course amidst lot of miseries. On the completion of her exams, she returns to her village where Vishnu, her cousin ridicules Nalli often. He is jealous of Nalli and is of the view that spending on girl's education is a futile attempt. Returning to her village she attends some cases in the village like Basawappe's wife with diabetes, Nanja with chest discomfort, Anni with a tender lump in the armpit and Maregowda with a wheezing attack. Nalli even treats Satyawati, Vaidar's wife, who had a fracture on her femur.

During the initial college days she encounters alienation deeply and misses the hills that are symbolic of perseverance, protection, tolerance, natural atmosphere which gives her a sense of belongingness and strong will like Nalli. "Nalli figured it was the smells that made the city so unlike Angheri. No scents of orange, jackfruit, hay and dung...here it was petrol and concrete, formalin and acid, and the seductive smell of cigarettes" (Nambisan 62-63). Nalli feels alienated during her study period. When her Appa asks her to visit her, she dissuades her Appa by telling about the frightful

weather, noise, food and terrible sea. She feels scared of her Appa's visit because if she invites him it would be very difficult for her to introduce Appa to her friends and campus as he was a simple rustic man. She would not be able to touch his feet as the boys would make fun of her. So, due to the peer group pressure, she hesitates to ask her Appa to visit her.

Nalli wants to have her own identity as per the requirements of the surroundings. It was her search for her new self with the city life that causes her restlessness and unhappiness. "A few girls in the college dressed like her, in half saris, and they happy being themselves. But Nalli was unhappy. She wanted to be a city girl" (Nambisan 69). But, she somehow manages to adjust with the teachings of Ajja that makes her to learn the importance of sacrifice and acceptance of fate. The perpetual development of character and temperament of Nalli continues in her after-class hours. "but all those hours of not studying were when learning happened, while they talked about boys, about restaurants and films, knowledge was setting slowly like sand in water" (Nambisan 74). Nalli feels worried. She wants to be the opposite of what she was in Angheri. She feels unlucky to be born in Angheri, her origin seems to be stuck with her like a slain. She keeps on learning, changing and adjusting until her separateness ceases to matter. In this way, her development of character keeps on going with each new day and each new experience, a new Nalli keeps getting formed. Her growth and professional education ignites her latent desire to do well for her village and people alike. With her growth and evaluation, she now compares Angheri with her own personality. Her sense of belongingness boosts up again when she is in her village: "at such times it was as if she belonged as much to the world outside the window as she did in" (Nambisan 83).

building Angheri's own hospital. The very beginning of Nalli's expression to become a doctor receives negative response from her family members. Gappu Mava, her uncle goes on to state during the discussion on her choice of career as doctor "five or six years of college and then it won't be easy to find a husband. It will be a mistake" (Nambisan 7). Her Ajja persists "she's pretty enough. She'll meet some useless sort in medical college". Male chauvinism is clearly evident in the further statement of Ajja, "if God wanted you to be a doctor you would have been a boy" (Nambisan 7). In spite of the objection of her family members, Nalli receives a favor that is made to think when Vaidyar of Angheri says, "our village needs doctors" (Nambisan 25) at the time of Budhi, Nalli's cousin.

The role of family in deciding the career of girls is depicted in Shanku master's refusal to send Vijai to a medical college. He says, "It will be a waste of time going to the medical college...you will end up getting married, anyway. And you're snatching a seat from some boy who needs it more than you" (Nambisan 27). Male chauvinism is illuminated in Appa's statement about Nalli's career choice; "Magu, six years of study and then a lifetime of hard work. You aren't strong" (Nambisan 30). Five years earlier, when Jai declares his dream to be a doctor, it was big news for Angheri people. No such enthusiasm greeted Nalli's decision to be a doctor. In all the match findings and counseling by the family, Nalli finds her assertion and will that shapes her character and her career. She thinks it is the right time to stand by the family and she feels virtuous in doing all this. "But something rebelled inside her. It said, what about that thing which you wanted? What about that?" (Nambisan 31).

A strong, resistant Nalli comes out through all odds and biases that decide the direction and drift in her future. Being firm in her wish to become a doctor and to serve the people of Angheri, she

to pursue a dream that is rather unusual for a girl in a traditional society where son is given priority over daughter. In such places, daughter is always seen as a burden for the parents. The protagonist, Nalli tries to break away from such stronghold and aspires to become a doctor. Adamantly resisting all the objections her family raises, Nalli travels to Madras and then to London to study, and experiences a world she had never imagined. She learns to keep her voice down and sit with her knees together. She is haunted by Subbu who is the first human cadaver she cuts up and encounters complicated medical cases that test her faith in the values which her Appa taught to live by and even her own skills as a surgeon. Yet, Nalli yearns constantly for a sight of Angheri's hills, for Ajja's gods and Appa's advice, and for the hospital of her dreams to become a reality. But her return to home is fraught with heartbreak and disillusion. Nalli sets off again and this time for remote Keshavganj to achieve solace and the fulfillment of her desire.

The novel is a story of a simple village girl Nalli, her struggles, dreams, reality, aspirations and achievements. Simultaneously it depicts themes of subjugation of women in patriarchal society, abuse of profession, male chauvinism, drug menace, crime in society, village versus city life with hints of Gandhian philosophy, alienation and the influence of all these features in shaping the personality of the protagonist is depicted. The very initial pages in the novel which describe the wedding as "The men ate first, the women next, the bride's family last of all" (Nambisan 5). The picture is evident of prejudice of village society in India. Consideration of woman as "other" and even the family of bride is given secondary preference. This sort of happening gives a shape to the personality of Nalli. She gains inspiration to become a doctor from Jai, her childhood companion who studies medicine in Mysore and has a dream

be no sunrise or rising ball of the moon at night" (Nambisan 13). The hills of Angheri are a metaphor for the conscience, personality and dreams of Nalli. Whenever she fills with any doubt she instinctively turns to them. They are her friend, philosopher and guide. They inspire her to leave the village and make her year to return to serve the village people. They teach her the mutual co-existence of desire and satisfaction, modernity and age. Hills are her inspiration as well as orientation. Learning through troublesome situation has been an integral part of the development of the protagonist. She learns how to walk through darkness of undulating ground by facing critical situations and emotional turmoil. Nalli learns stillness and stability in her youth from the hills. For her, nothing is so great, so pure and as true as the hills of Angheri. The hills inspire her to spread the wings of her imagination so that she could dream high to set her aspirations. "The rock and mud of the hills, the mist-soaked trees, the scrub and stones were quietly telling her to do, do, do. But what?" (Nambisan 174).

The roots tell about the steadfast position, old traditions, value of the primal. They orient a person to stay rooted and focused without losing basic human qualities. As in the case of the protagonist, her indigenous influence shapes her into a humanitarian professional, a considerate human being and a philanthropic personality. It is her roots that bestow Nalli the quality of steadfastness, sagacity and perseverance.

The Hills of Angheri along with the metaphorical significance of hills also traces the formative development of the protagonist. It is said to have an autobiographical touch. Nalli, the protagonist aspires to become a doctor and dreams of building a hospital in her village. But as the story progresses Nalli's emotional dream remains a dream and her life becomes a tale of satisfactions. Nalli :

Kaliswari, R. and K.M. Sumathi. "Dream v/s Reality: A Thematic Analysis of Kavery Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri*." *Literary Quest* 1.4 (2015): 7-12.

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ASPECTS OF METAPHORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HILLS IN KAVERY NAMBISAN'S *THE HILLS OF ANGHERI*

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Hills are perfect metaphor of life itself as they present a constant struggle which never gets easier but more continual. Man cannot help but live in conformity with nature. One's subconscious is more powerful than conscious mind. The same concept seems to be in tune with the protagonist of the novel *The Hills of Angheri*. Kavery Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri* is not a dramatic but a realistic realization of the worth of being unique. Those who stay rooted in their leanings and heritage but branch out variously in life always draw substance from the soil where one is born. They are simple, genuine, humanitarian and altruistic. Nambisan presents Nalli as an individual who has developed her own perception concerning the revival of her urge, needs, problems, predicaments and her survival tactics in view of her social conditions. Nalli is a simple village girl who has different aspirations than the other girls of her community. She gets inspiration from the hills of Angheri to achieve her dream of constructing a hospital for the people of the village. The hills makes Angheri special as Appa tells Nalli "Without the hills there would

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In *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, three Africana women scholars wrote:

Women's Studies...focused almost exclusively upon the lives of white women. Black Studies, which was much too often male-dominated, also ignored Black Women...Because of white women's racism and Black men's sexism, there was no room in either area for a serious consideration of the lives of Black women. And even when they have considered black women, white women usually have not had the capacity to analyse racial politics and Black culture and Black men have remained blind or resistant to the implications of sexual politics in Black women's lives. (Aldridge: 159)

Brutal behaviour against African American women is a passionate concern in the works of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara and Zora Neale Hurston. The black women have been the worst victims as they have been doubly oppressed because of their gender and race. They have tolerated the burden of their men's anger which came out as a result of the torture and insult they received from the whites. This resistance of the black and the passion to survive is the inspiration of the black women writers and they have been very well depicting it through their works. 'Like these writers engaged in condemning racial, social, and gender oppression, all, whether they call themselves Womanists, African womanists, or Feminists or Black Feminists, should embrace the legacy of black activism', and further this legacy should be utilised as an instrument for progression of egalitarianism for women.

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Zenzele also seeks to redefine God as one in her own image." (Ampadu:43)

Amy Rublin, discusses that, 'Black feminist dialogue is process of identifying self-conscious struggles that empower women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community. When we engage in dialogue, we create a collage of meaning and simultaneously spoken voices that should be interpreted as both modes of social action and knowledge that is self-proclaiming. Regardless of our viewpoint, the ultimate historical and current goal of Black feminists is to create a political movement that not only struggles against the 'racial construction of sexuality,'but that also seeks to develop institutions to protect the minds and bodies of Black women with multiple experiences (Higginbotham 1992, 263). Hence, the context and meaning of this dialogue becomes situated within systems that we urge, be broken down through the insertion of knowledge characterizing the reality of life for women of color. Black feminists have broadened the scope of coalition building beyond the context of knowledge and consciousness building. This contemporary stage of Black feminism expands notions of liberatory action. Engaging a consensus-guided form of generating social change, we absorb and disseminate education in ways that promote freedom and divert oppression for all women of color. We have exposed the system of interlocking domination and oppression, and have uncovered radical notions of superiority and white privilege that impact society as a whole. Black feminism has evolved into a more generous paradigm of thought. Rather than embellish the definitive nature of ourselves, we center our notion of collective consciousness within multiple standpoints of difference. In other words, we support the creation of new meaning that operates to generate social change. Our mission is larger than self-actualization'. (132)

for example, informs Walker's use of sisterly bonding. The intimate friendship between Celie and Nettie, as well, helped to sustain Celie through the period of abuse by her husband. It was a sisterhood that was so deep that it persevered through the long period of absence of Celie's not receiving her sister's letters in spite of the rift that Celie's husband had created to destroy the closeness of the two sisters.

Walker's womanism has implications for building community and love among women by advocating sexual love between women. The love between Celie and the blues singer Shug reveals sensualities that played a pivotal role in awakening Celie and moving her towards a greater understanding of herself. Walker introduces the global perspective by having Nettie work as a missionary in Africa. As a result, Nettie becomes grounded in Afrocentric thought and she imparts to Celie a pride in her heritage and love of self.' Black writers have sought to establish images of African Americans practicing a spirituality rooted in African cultural beliefs...Such a consciousness, grounded in African cultural traditions, has been cast in fictional literature as one that revises the image of the white patriarchal image of God and embraces spiritual revival. These revisionists, energizing spiritual practices help to move others towards a greater awareness of self. The literature created by writers of African descent has helped to establish how these perspectives can arm people of African descent with the fortitude to fight against racism and sexism. These perspectives can be examined as springboards for effecting changes in the spiritual well-being of others. In the case of Celie, after her lover Shug Avery instills in her the desire to find God for herself, she rejects the notion of God as a white old man commonly portrayed in Western society. She reenvisioned God as being within her. This redefinition begins her journey towards becoming a woman who finally musters the courage to stand up to an

American. No buts are in that identity. Now you go off and do the work to somehow broaden yourself so you understand what America is really about! because it's about me. (Bharati: 02).

Ampadu compares *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *So Long a Letter* (an autobiographical novel) by Mariama Ba and Zenzele- *A Letter to My Daughter* by J. Nozipo Maraire "As in Zenzele, both *The Color Purple*, and *So Long a Letter* focus on women who are mothers. Both books are a woman's narrative where a woman writes to another woman as a way of emancipating herself. After assuming the role of stepmother at a very young age, Celie, *The Color Purple*'s primary character, grows from a shy young woman to one who has the confidence to stand up for herself, eventually becoming one of those women whose tongue hurls words of self-defense. When Albert, her husband insults her in the rural Georgia vernacular, "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, You ain't nothin' at all." (14) By the end of the story, she is able to stand up to her husband's insults, to retort, "I may be black, pore, ugly, but I'm here." Ramatoulaye, protagonist in *So Long a Letter*, has had to juggle the demands of mothering and teaching, while suffering the abuse of a patriarchal system. All of these women/mothers emancipate themselves through a literate tradition: they write themselves into emancipation—mental, spiritual, and physical emancipation—through letters as in *The Color Purple* and in *So Long a Letter*. Much of Walker's *The Color Purple* prominently displays women who have dared to engage in a struggle for their own self-respect and dignity, a struggle often achieved collectively through the bonding and sisterhood of women. Celie experiences a spiritual coming of age, an emancipation of the self through this bonding. A dimension of Alice Walker's theory of womanism which emphasizes women's asexual love for each other,

Naylor, Zora Neale Hurston, Angelina Davis, Anne Moody, Barbara Christian, Bell Hooks, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde etc. too, used their pen tirelessly to devise a respectful future for the black women. Since the very beginning these writers have worked tough to contribute their level best to improve the existing circumstances; and the ones through which the whole women community has suffered and has reached the present position. As Christiane Rochefort has written in *The Privilege of Consciousness*:

I consider women's literature as a specific category, not because of biology, But because it is, in a sense, the literature of the colonized. (06)

The ill-treatment which a black woman often gets from her own men continues in the works of many Afro-American authors and is also found in the subsequent stories of the living legend Gloria Naylor. With five published novels to her credit, Naylor has taken firm ground in African - American letters. Naylor explored the works of her male and female antecedents in a manner which was never even thought upon before the seventies. She chose to the center upon the details of the violence enacted upon the black women. Changing political circumstances led to greater attention to interpersonal and familial relationships. She gave her strong words to give a sturdy voice to the maltreated women. At the marginalization of Black literature by America's main stream Naylor remarked:

I am a black female writer and I have no qualms whatsoever with people saying that I am a black female writer. What I take umbrage with is the fact that some might try to use that identity - that which is 'Me' - as a way to ghettoize my material and my output. "I am female and Black and

consequences of embracing womanist agenda, which some see as a gesture of racial separatism from white feminism and a turn to Black Nationalist politics, it is also important to explore the possibilities of womanism as a practical and critical stance which does not easily blend with Black Nationalism although it relies on African American racial/ethnic solidarity. African American women, with their position at the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity politics, face a challenge of how to simultaneously maintain group solidarity and recognize heterogeneity. (Mazurek:13)

The essays in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* are rightfully labelled "womanist prose", as they are indeed an illustration and elaboration of the concept "Womanism" and the definition Walker provides of it. First and foremost, black feminism, the black woman and her specific situations and emotions are as central in the collection as they are in the definition. Secondly, the universalist stance that is so crucial in Walker's Womanism is also illustrated in several ways in the essays. The essays in addition reveal that this non-separatist attitude determines Walker's view on the race in general, which she presses to be a community in the first place, as well as on the artist, whom she attributes a social function. Lastly, the essays elaborate the mother-child relationship Walker touches on in her definition, considering the relationship both in a literal (i.e. biological) and in more symbolical sense. (Torfs: 29).

Despite of having the similar struggles and effects and the same definition of feminism for all women all over the globe the scenario regarding the existence and identity of women has always been a more difficult for the African women rather the Afro-American women and a bit more difficult for the Afro-American women than American women.

Writers such as Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, Gloria

"ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty" (48), whose art compels strangers to aesthetic contemplation. Walker's mother's "screen of blooms – sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spirea, delphiniums, verbena" (49) – becomes the artistic legacy that she has left to her daughter. In the essay Walker identifies with this legacy and pays respect to African American women's endurance, which she calls "the ability to hold on, even in very simple ways" (50). (Mazurek:11-12)

'Womanism originated then as a sign of emerging differences between those African American women who, like for example Bell Hooks, found feminist agenda sufficient and useful for addressing issues crucial for them, and those who found it too indifferent to the problems of racial and classist issues which were for them of vital importance. As a result, the new political and critical framework of womanism stemmed from the desire to take up gender issues without turning against men – as womanists believed feminism did – and to foster bonds between African American women and men in order to successfully resist racism. However, womanism does not necessarily entail a radical break from feminism, and Alice Walker's essay might be understood as tribute paid to white feminism as well; one may venture a statement that by making Woolf's text speak with a Black voice Walker emphasizes the importance of *A Room of One's Own* for herself and demonstrates that it also appeals to Black women. I choose to read Walker's essay as her assertion of affinity with the white feminist and an admiration of how capacious Woolf's room is. In the improvised kitchen table dialogue (which one can imagine taking place in Virginia Woolf's room) Walker does not treat Woolf with disdain; if she did, the conversation would not be nourishing and strengthening to the interlocutors, and the metaphor of the kitchen table would fail to operate. In the ongoing debate on the

the term 'Womanist' in her well acclaimed book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*, she wrote- "womanist is one who is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people". Walker is of the opinion that an African American woman artist has to align herself with "the living creativity some of our great-grandmothers were not allowed to know" (39), and thus to attest to African American women's artistic talents which were never recorded in letters for the simple reason that their enslavement prevented them from learning to write. In her personal account, Walker points to her mother as a source of the artistic spirit in her as follows:

[N]o song or poem will bear my mother's name. Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories.

Only recently did I fully realize this:

that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life,

I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories— like her life — must be recorded.(40).

Therefore, by echoing her mother's manner of speaking in her writing, Walker assigns to herself a role of a mediator who records in the form of the literary discourse the African American oral artistic tradition passed down to her by her mother'. ...Rather than focusing on official sites of artistic expression of an artist as writer, as Woolf does, Walker turns to African American women's everyday practices such as church singing, storytelling and taking care of gardens to trace expressions of their spirituality and art. In her mother's daily care of the garden Walker sees artistic expression of a creator,

life of an African woman. 'A further examination of womanism reveals a revised definition by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi which is similar to Walker's: "Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideas of black life...Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a 'brother' or a 'sister' or a 'father' or a 'mother' to the other." (Ampadu: 11). According to Ogunyemi, the peculiarities which are relevant for the Blacks in America and which they are not able to handle such as extreme poverty, family problems, oppression of women by women, oppression of their co-wives by women or oppression of their wives by men etc. are all neglected African-American womanism.

'Some African Women intellectuals have viewed the struggles of women of African descent in America as part of a wider struggle for human dignity and empowerment. As early as 1893, Anna Julia Cooper, in a speech to women, provided this perspective:

'We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favouritisms, whether of sex, race, country or condition...The coloured woman feels that woman's cause is one and universal and that ...not till race, color, sex and condition are seen as accidents and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won- not the white woman's not the black woman's, not the red woman's but the cause of every man and of every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong.' (Blackmon: 78)

Perhaps, this was the humanist vision which led Alice Walker to identify the black women with the term 'Womanist', and she said, "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" While defining

them strong and is the sisterhood of women. For instance the protagonist, Celie experiences an unrestrained and devout self through this bonding of sisterhood which she shares with Nettie. It is her close friendship with Nettie that helps her in surviving during the tough period when her husband maltreated her. This strong sisterly bond gave her the strength to resist her husband's effort of destroying the relationship that existed between Celie and Nettie. Walker advocates romantic love between Celie and Shug in an effort to construct a community. Her love with Shug awakens Celie and she moves towards a deeper understanding of herself as a person and a woman. This story by Walker presents a new facet of Womanism when it displays the asexual and sexual love among women, through the relationship of Celie with Nettie and the relationship of Celie with Shug.

'In the Preface to her *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: The Creativity of Black Women in the South*, Alice Walker declares her commitment to the ideology of "womanism," which may be interpreted as an "attempt to integrate black nationalism into feminism, to articulate a distinctively black feminism that shares some of the objectives of black nationalist ideology" (Dubey:107). Walker has been very much concerned about grounding her work in a matrilineal tradition of black writing, paying particular homage to Zora Neale Hurston, for whom she felt an affinity, in "Search." She also designed the first course on black women writers, which she taught at Wellesley College in 1977'. (13)

Many other African Women writers also appear to have embraced Walker's theory of the womanist tradition. The different characters created by them in their works reflect this practice. Though a few writers argue that this concept of womanism is applicable only to the African Americans, and therefore it cannot effectively fit

Womanism may be envisioned as a post-colonial discourse that allows African American women to embrace a Jesus and a God free of the imperialism of white supremacy.

(21)

Womanist theology is considered as a sacred theoretical structure which reassesses the biblical interpretation and the conventional thoughts and practices so that the African-American women can be lead towards liberation and empowerment. It is certainly different from the Feminist theology and Black theology as it incorporates the experiences of women of all colours, particularly the African-American women. It basically aims at questioning the social construction of black womanhood directly in relation to the construction of the black community and the society as a whole. In an interview given to Marianne Schnall, Alice Walker says:

Well, first of all it's feminist, but it's feminist from a culture of color. So there's no attempt to evade the name "feminism," which is honorable. It actually means womanism – I mean, it's French in its essence – la femme, so feminism would be womanism, actually. Womanism comes though from Southern African American culture because when you did something really bold and outrageous and audacious as a little girl, our parents would say, "You're acting 'womanish'." It wasn't like in white culture where that was weak – it was just the opposite. And so, womanism affirms that whole spectrum of being which includes being outrageous and angry and standing up for yourself, and speaking your word and all of that. (web)

Walker's *The Color Purple* significantly portrays women who have the courage to fight for the establishment of their individual identities with respect and dignity. During this struggle what keeps

Later, Delores Williams elaborated upon the works of Dr. Jacquelyn Grant and James Hal Cone and gave a detailed definition to this term Womanism in her work *Sisters in the Wilderness*. She wrote- "Womanist theology is a prophetic voice concerned about the well-being of the entire African American community, male and female, adults and children. Womanist theology attempts to help black women see, affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community. Womanist theology challenges all oppressive forces impeding black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women's and the family's freedom and well-being. Womanist theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical ability, and caste" (67). Hence, Womanism came up not only as a theoretical concept, instead it became a movement. It was considered indispensable for the black women who wanted to continue their existence in the academic world.

In the context of academic theological studies 'womanism' is a very commonly used term. Many a times womanism and black feminism have been used interchangeably by authors but there is difference between the two terms. Womanism is concerned with the interests of both, black men and women. Womanism gives priority to the concerns of black men along with those of the black women because they are concerned about the black family as a unit and here exists the difference as Feminism gives priority to the concerns of women. Therefore, sometimes the Womanists also refer to Feminism as 'White Feminism' because the interests of the black women and also women who did not belong to the upper middle class, the socio-economically weaker ones, were unobserved by them particularly Patricia Anne Johnson writes:

a step behind white women when it comes to social equality, says, Diana Bocco.

Walker's theory referred to women but largely to African-American women; she described: "A Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." Walker's definition is strong enough to describe the intricacies of the Black feminists when represented by a darker shade of purple in comparison to the white feminists who are represented by a lighter shade of lavender. Alice Walker stressed on the requirement for Black women to shape out their own place within the concerns of patriarchy when she conceptualised the Black female experience by coining the term *Womanism*. With this she defined the place of Black women and Black feminists who were united through love with other women whether sexually and/or non-sexually and who also chose women's potency, their emotional suppleness and way of life, and who unswervingly were dedicated to the endurance and comprehensiveness of entire people, whether male or female.

The theology of James Hal Cone, Jacquelyn Grant, Katie G. Cannon, and Delores Williams gave rise to the concept of modern theological womanism. Cone compared the black people to God and said, "God is black". He wanted to portray the experiences of the black people and wrote a book *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant, Professor at Atlanta, Georgia, though agreed with James H. Cone's concept that 'God is black', she believed that still the experiences of the black women have not been attended to completely by him. She says that the oppression of black men cannot be compared to the oppressions that of black women. She compares the sufferings of the black women to the sufferings of Jesus Christ. What he suffered from then is faced by black women in the present times. Also, in her works *Womanist Theology* and *White Woman's Christ* *Black Women's Jesus* she said that the black women need refuse to accept their oppression based on racism and sexism.

ALICE WALKER'S WOMANISM: ASPECTS AND PROSPECTS

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Alice Malsenior Walker used the term (Womanism) for the first time in 1983, when she talked about the womanist theory in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. She coined the term "womanism" and used it to describe black feminism, to put forth the experiences and views of the black women. 'Although both terms refer to the struggle of women to obtain equality, womanism and feminism are not exactly synonyms. The womanist movement centers on the feminist efforts of black women. Womanism grew because many activists felt that the feminist movement did not fully cover the plight of black women. Rather than focusing on social change or activism, womanism (sometimes referred to as "black feminism") focuses more on celebrating womanhood and the African American woman's strength and experiences. When they push for change and attention to social issues, womanists focus on racism and class oppression. One of the reasons many prefer the term womanism is that feminism has traditionally been a middle-class white-women's movement. Feminism fought for suffrage rights for white women, but never got involved in the civil rights movement to help guarantee black women social equality. So womanism looks out not only for women but also for the rights of women of color, who are sometimes

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been time for such a word,
(MAC V.v.17-18) 211

Macbeth fights the battle till the last breath and meets his end. Therefore, it becomes the tragedy of Macbeth. Lady Macbeth for her dialogues is given the title of "fourth Witch" of the play and is despised for the same.

The irony is that despite being such a powerful, loquacious, and aggressive personality, Lady Macbeth suffers negligence by the intellectual academicians, and critics over the centuries. She is not given the title of tragic heroine but referred to as merely an antagonist who causes tragedy for hero. It is true that she is one of the responsible factors to persuade Macbeth for regicide, she has her own bewitching personality (peculiar to Elizabethan age) where women were treated as inferiors to men. She is a central character in the play as Macbeth and holds an equal share of destiny and sufferings with Macbeth gets in the play. Thus, the politics of gender in the representation underrates the character of Lady Macbeth.

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♦♦♦♦

and full of guilt thus indicating that her femininity is sustained
little water which she refers to in her earlier speech and which
about to clear her of the deed has been replaced by all the perfume
of Arabia incapable of sweetening her little hand. Her attempt
get away with her feminine instincts to achieve power and
brings her back to her real self whose feminine conscience is
to put up with the guilt which is charged with the blood of so many
lives as Doctor comments on her condition:

Foul whisprings are abroad. Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine than the physician.
(MAC VI. 65-68) 193

Thus, Lady Macbeth's dialogues/soliloquies in the first two acts
are just a short term escape from her real self and a dive into
fancy of male dominated attributes. She is only a mirror in which
Macbeth envisions his royal future. The femininity of Macbeth before
the murder of the king is just an illusion. Of course, he sounds quite
tender, bewildered, humane and 'too full of the milk of human
kindness' in his conversation with Lady Macbeth and sometimes
his soliloquies and asides also. But the politics of representation make
this entire difference. He has been harbouring the desire to become
the king since from the beginning and he admits it as well. However,
it should not be forgotten that he has won loads of praises, awards
and glory from the King and the subject of Scotland. He is not afraid
of committing regicide but he fears of losing honour and prestige
which he has received lately. In one of his conversations with Lady
Macbeth, he expresses this fear very explicitly:
We will proceed no further in this business.
He hath honour'd me of late, and I have bought

Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon. (MAC I.vii.31-35) 59
Macbeth knows that if their plan is exposed, they will be
completely ruined and lose all the fame which he has received from
people like valiant soldier and many other adjectives. Later, in the
last act of the play, he realizes that he is too old now and:

... that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.
(MAC V.iii.24-28) 201

Macbeth's dilemma does not exhibit any feminine trait but it
is a deliberate attempt to put on the mask of innocent person who
is going to be lured and influenced by external agencies. This may
be because of the realization of guilt which is yet to come - "present
fears are less than horrible imaginings" (I.iii.137-138) His reluctance
to commit the murder of the king suggests that he is too much
conscious of the consequences of such immoral act. This visionary
attitude of Macbeth can be contrasted with that of narrow and limited
outlook of Lady Macbeth. Macbeth's dialogues in the first two acts
may be feminine but they grow stronger and stronger as gets involved
in more serious action of the play. He becomes more confident and
needs no support from his wife any longer. He also avoids speculation
hereafter as he decides after meeting the witches second time:

From this moment
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand. (MAC IV.I.144-146)
The change in his behaviour just after the murder of Duncan

However, both sets of characters fail to record the relation between deliberations and action in the play. They only perceive the still and static image of Lady Macbeth which results out of her bold and masculine dialogues preparing Macbeth for regicide. One of the most important components of tragedy is action and it is this action of hero which leads him to tragedy. This action may be 'hamartia' in Aristotelian terms or led by some accident or coincidence, the tragedy is possible only when there is the presence of action in the play. Hamlet suffers because of his inability to transform thoughts into action, King Lear meets his tragedy because of his error of judgment, Othello bears with the pangs of agony due to suspicion and sexual jealousy and Macbeth, of course, is a tragedy of vaulting ambition. Thus, action plays a vital role in leading hero to the inevitable tragedy.

The politics of gender and representation stems from this very 'action' of the play. Macbeth is hero and thus involved in all types of action which develops the plot of the play. He is the man who fights in the battlefield like a valiant soldier 'disdaining Fortune' who witches greet with prophetic titles, who assassinates the king who conspires the murder of Banquo and the family of Macduff. Thus, he is entangled in all the serious action scenes of the play. While Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, is completely absent from all these so called action scenes. She smartly escapes witnessing the murder of Duncan by saying:

Had he not resembled

My father as he slept, I had done't. (MAC II.1.12-13) 71

The masculinity of Lady Macbeth and femininity of Macbeth in the first two acts of the play has also been motivated by the politics of gender. As masculine attribute refers to the action of men, loquacity

gossiping are the qualities associated with women. The dialogues of Lady Macbeth are masculine but nowhere in the play has she been shown concretizing what she thinks or claims in her fiery words. They are mere instruments or supporting ammunitions to convince a baffled man who is 'infirm of purpose' in her opinion. Her advice to Macbeth regarding putting on the villainous nature to exploit the opportunity is very persuasive and succeeds also in convincing Macbeth:

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the tune,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue; look like th' innocent
Flower,

But be the serpent under't. (MAC I.v.62-66) 51

However, this compelling speech can directly be contrasted with action which demanded equal level of sensibility and sincere adherence of what had been preached earlier. When Duncan's murder is discovered and informed by Macduff, she reacts very immaturely:

Woe, alas!

What in our house? (MAC II. iii. 86-87) 87

Banquo's blunt reply "too cruel anywhere" justifies the height of this foolish reaction. Another instance of this gap between words and action of Lady Macbeth can be seen just after the murder of Duncan when Macbeth is obsessed with whatever he has done and Lady Macbeth scolds him for being coward:

My hands are of your colour; but I shame
To wear a heart so white...

A little water clears us of this deed. (MAC II. ii.64-66) 77

Later in the play, we find her suffering from somnambulism and echoing what she stated earlier though the consequence is deeper

is not sudden but well planned which even Lady Macbeth can understand. He shares everything with Lady Macbeth before committing his first crime because he needs the moral and psychological support from his better half but once he executes successfully, he sidelines his wife manipulatively in his future and more terrible plans. He grows more assertive, aggressive, and "bold, bloody and resolute" in action and his dialogues clearly demonstrate what he is. When he prepares a plot to kill Banquo and his wife, he does not tell his wife but rather keeps her engaged in his intricate net of words:

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed. (MAC III.ii.45-46)

These lines echo the earlier statement of Lady Macbeth when she advises him to "look like an innocent flower and be the serpent under it". The irony is that Lady Macbeth who utters these lines is made ignorant of the practice of the same. She comes to know of Banquo's plight at Banquet hall only when Macbeth hyper-reacts to the news of Banquo's murder.

The behaviour of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth at the Banquet hall can be considered as a preamble to what they are destined for now onwards. This is the last time we find Lady Macbeth playing an active role on the stage. She tries her best to prevent Macbeth from exposing his deeds before the crowd and succeeds partially. Her dialogues are not as potent as they used to be earlier and she is more frustrated and submissive than her earlier image of bold and fierce lady. She comments on Macbeth's condition towards the end of the scene which foreshadows her own predicament in time to come.

You lack the season of all natures, sleep. (MAC III.iv.141)

These are the last words spoken by her in the play and ironically she suffers from the same disease i.e. somnambulism. She walks even

when she is asleep and repeats all those actions which have made her guilty. The same is realized by Macbeth also when he kills Duncan: Methought I heard a voice cry 'sleep no more; Macbeth does murder sleep'- the innocent sleep, Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care, The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath, Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast. (MAC II.ii.35-40) 73

The politics of gender and representation is intense hereafter the banquet scene. Macbeth has already become the king of Scotland. The dream which he and his wife have been cherishing for a long time has been fulfilled. This is the fruit of the joint efforts ventured by both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The ambition does not belong to Macbeth only as Lady Macbeth is equally ambitious. Then why does she disappeared from the play once the struggle for the survival of power begins? Macbeth approaches witches for further prophecies and carries out the actions accordingly like the murder of the family of Macduff etc. These are the heroic deeds (though in negative sense) for which Macbeth alone is sufficient. There is no role for Lady Macbeth left out to be played for such grave actions. Because Patriarchal values do not allow women involve in heroic acts. They consider women only as assistant in the deeds of hero and once the deeds are accomplished, there is no room for women. They strongly adhere to Milton's "He for God only and she for God in him" dictum. Macbeth has no time to take care of his wife as he is struggling to retain his power. He asks the Doctor to cure her but when he tells that this is not in the hand of medical science, he rudely instructs her to "through physiqe to the dogs- I'll none of it" (MAC V.iii.47) 203. Even his reaction when he hears the news of Lady Macbeth's demise is casual:

two sets of female characters i.e. good and bad but the play becomes more a reflection of the bildungsroman of King Lear. However, the play is *Macbeth* which exhibits a female character- Lady Macbeth very strongly and powerfully. The irony is that the character of Lady Macbeth is victimized by the politics of gender and representation. The portrayal of Lady Macbeth is intriguingly discussed throughout the ages. This paper firstly will survey the traditional response to the character of Lady Macbeth and then exemplify those incidents, dialogues and action from the play which clearly prove that Lady Macbeth has been subjected to the politics of gender and representation.

Since ages, Lady Macbeth has received harsh criticism from the audience, critics and academicians from across the globe. She has been addressed as the 'Fourth Witch' and 'Anti-mother' by critics for her bold, unfeminine and fierce dialogues. The critics have held her responsible for the tragedy of *Macbeth* and treated her as the chief instrument for the predicament of *Macbeth*. A.C. Bradley rightly surveys:

'Lady Macbeth,' says Dr. Johnson, 'is merely detested, and for a long time critics generally spoke of her as though she were Malcolm's 'fiend-like queen.' In natural reaction we tend to insist, as I have been doing, on the other and less obvious side; and in the criticism of the last century there is even a tendency to sentimentalise the character.⁶ Traditional critics tend to read *Macbeth* as a sublime tragedy occurring due to the vaulting ambition of the central characters of the play. Moreover, the construction of the plot is contrived in such a way that the play opens with the conversation of the three witches who are 'manly' in their attire as Banquo states when he encounters them along with *Macbeth*:

You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so. (MAC III.45-46) 29.

Later, the entrance of Lady Macbeth replicates the image of witches with her bold and fiery dialogues in her soliloquies. She invokes the spirits to "unsex her" and "fill her from the crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty" (MAC I.v.41-42) 49. Lady Macbeth scolds her husband for being "infirm of purpose" (MAC II.ii.52) 75 and coward also and attempts all her 'valour of tongue' to seduce him for carrying out the task successfully. Her willingness to give up her feminine instincts for obtaining power results in projecting her as the "fourth witch" or "fiend-like queen" (MAC V.viii.69) 227. Some critics hold a more liberal and sympathetic attitude towards her and argue that the reason behind Lady Macbeth's fiery and hostile nature is because of the position of women in the Elizabethan period where they had not been given an equal treatment and the traits like masculinity and femininity were conservatively applied to male and female respectively. Masculinity referred to power, dominance, bravery and strength (both physical and mental), whereas femininity implied weakness, submissiveness and obedience to the opposite sex. According to such critics, Lady Macbeth is both ambitious and power hungry woman who is not capable to accommodate herself into such polarized codes of society. Therefore, she does not hesitate in breaking so called norms and emancipates herself from the clutches of social patterns. As Carolyn Asp opines:

In a society in which femininity is divorced from strength and womanliness is equated with weakness, where the humane virtues are associated with womanliness, the strong woman finds herself hemmed in psychologically; forced to reject her own womanliness, to some extent, if she is to be true to her

One of the most influential and radical literary theories of the contemporary age is feminism. It revolves round the questions of gender, sexuality and the position of woman in any given milieu. These gender issues posit certain queries like what constitutes masculine and feminine attributes and how characters are represented when found in nature/culture conflict which leads to inevitable dilemma. There has always been a contention among critics regarding Shakespeare's attitude towards the representation of women in his plays. Shakespeare has written variety of plays primarily classified as tragedies, comedies, romantic comedies, historical plays, political plays and romances. All these genres project female characters in quite different light and colours. However, it is tragedy which has always been considered the most sublime among all the genres as Aristotle has stated that tragedy idealizes the life. Many critics believe that Shakespeare has remained positive in projecting female characters especially in his romantic comedies. The characters like Rosalind, Viola and Portia have been portrayed so potently that a critic like John Ruskin goes to the extent by saying that "Shakespeare has no heroes but only heroines."

However, there is a huge dissension among critics regarding the representation of female characters as far as his tragedies are concerned. The reason behind this contention is due to the fact that Shakespeare's tragedies are diverged in two directions as pointed out by A.C. Bradley while discussing the characteristics of Shakespearean Tragedy:

It is pre-eminently the story of one person, the 'hero' or at most of two, the 'hero' and 'heroine'. Moreover, it is only in the love-tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* that the heroine is as much the centre of the action as the hero. The rest, including *Macbeth*, are single stars.⁴

Moreover, the tragedies having two central characters 'hero' and 'heroine' have been labeled as early and immature works by Bradley. It is this politics of gender and identity which feminists tend to explore in their works. They raise a strong objection as to why female characters are so much ignored in his (major) tragedies despite the fact that Shakespeare is considered too human in projecting his female characters in romantic comedies. Whether Shakespeare fails in representing a neutral and unbiased gender prototype in his tragedies has become the most debated discourse in feminist circle. Whereas feminist critics accuse Shakespeare of being biased in his representation of female characters in his tragedies, a critic like Professor Richard Levin in defense of these charges against Shakespeare argues:

The feminists ignore a great deal of contrary evidence in the plays, evidence supporting a more traditional notion of Shakespeare: that the plays are about individuals making fateful and fatal errors as they confront such immemorial issues as ambition, greed, vengeance, vanity and jealousy.⁵

However, feminists argue that these errors are not peculiar to 'hero' only. A person of any sex can be liable to such human vice which lead to sublime tragedies. All the four major tragedies of Shakespeare - *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* witness the negligence in the representation of the female characters. Ophelia suffers due to being sandwiched among three male characters- her father, brother and lover. She plays a role of puppet who is supposed to follow the advice (or rather instructions) of her well wisher. Nobody is bothered about what she thinks, feels and desires. Desdemona is subjected to the sexual jealousy of Othello and political intrigue of Iago. She suffers her destiny passively and meets her tragic end and yet it is a tragedy of Othello. *King Lear* shows

A STUDY OF LADY MACBETH IN SHAKESPEARE'S MACBETH IN RELATION TO THE POLITICS OF GENDER

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The name of William Shakespeare is reckoned in academic and literary sphere as the most celebrated, debated, quoted, and venerable writer of the world whose corpus has not only influenced the world literature over the centuries but also provided the critics and literary practitioners with multiple scope of interpretation. His dramatic works are slated to have universal aspects and themes which are relevant in all ages and they cannot be circumscribed to any one period or point of time. Be they comedies, tragedies, historical or political plays, all carry a wide range of facets pertaining to social, moral, cultural and political values. Although his ecumenical concerns like the moral conflict between good and evil, love and hate, loyalty and deceit, honesty and betrayal, power and submissiveness retain their attributes for objective perception in all ages, yet there are attempts to undergo the exhaustive practice of foregrounding those aspects in his works which have been either marginalized or wholly neglected by the traditional critics. Moreover, the emergence of literary and cultural theories in recent time and their critical practices in academic arena has given birth to many ideas and themes which were not considered as significant at that time as now.

Tagore makes the issue of conjugality a primary one in *Jogajog* – in the portrayal of a society whose culture compels and manipulates a woman to assume her maternal role soon after her marriage which is deemed more necessary than the peripheral concept of conjugality.

The story revolves around the hostility and rivalry between two families- the Chatterjees, Kumudini's family who are aristocrats now on the decline and the Ghosals- Madhusudan's family representing the nouveau riche. Kumudini has been overprotected as a child and her gloomy world is governed by the goddesses of women's household rites. Her brother Biprodas brings her to the city where she learns how to play chess, dabble in the art of photography and pistol shooting. She becomes proficient in Sanskrit grammar. Kumudini's association with Kalidas results in virginal meditations in which she imagines that her husband-to-be appears pure and radiant in the divine light. For Kumudini, spirituality is all-pervasive and the carnal desires are to be suppressed and curbed.

Madhusudan, on the other hand, is a man of the world whose life has been spent, 'among the crowd of suppliers, buyers and bullock-cart drivers'.¹⁸ He has a provincial outlook towards women and believes in their complete subjugation. From the inception of their marriage, Kumudini is assigned the demeaning space of the 'antahpur'. "Behind the walls, shrouded by the triviality of daily chores, she would carry on with the life that women lead, a life controlled by their master's frown."¹⁹ This dichotomy that prevailed in constraining a woman to a position of complete chastity and familial domesticity on the one hand and treating her as a plaything or an object of carnal desires on the other is difficult to fathom.

Tagore, has initially used Biprodas as a mouthpiece, to voice his own opinions on the plight of the Hindu women. Biprodas comments, "The men of our times have no virtues of their own, so

they speak one-sidedly of the virtues of chaste women. They can't supply the oil, but command the lamp-wicks to burn. The parched souls keep on burning and are reduced to ashes."²⁰

The hollowness of Madhusudan and Kumudini's marriage and their incompatibility lies not in their age-difference, nor in the difference in their social status but in Kumudini's incapacity to gratify Madhusudan's sexual needs. The spiritual devotion of a chaste wife to her husband did not seem sufficient to consolidate a marital relationship. A woman was expected to satisfy the physical cravings of her husband or else she would have to accept his proximity with other women.

Kumudini's repulsion towards her husband is also revealed in this novel when Madhusudan repeatedly used to sneer at Kumudini's family by flaunting his wealth. His inborn vulgarity, the crudeness of his speech and the uncouthness of his body and mind made Kumudini feel an aversion for him. She is later subjected to emotional trauma and marital rape. A woman is expected to submit either willfully, or by coercion, to her husband and satisfy his physical needs.

A woman generally unprotected in the family or a widow often becomes a victim of male lust. A deep emotional imbalance and familial schism occurs as a result of sexual frustration of a man or even a young widow. In Kumudini's family, a beautiful widow named Shyamsundari comes forward to fulfil Madhusudan's physical needs. Their liaison is shortlived, as Shyamsundari is unable to assume a dominant position in Madhusudan's home. Her character is pitiable as she gradually fades away into oblivion.

In the end, Tagore sends Kumudini back to Madhusudan's house after her pregnancy is discovered. Even the articulate Biprodas does not accept Kumudini's pleas for liberation from her marriage. Kumudini is carrying Madhusudan's child and so he has regained

his right of ownership of his wife. Bipradas surrenders helplessly to his sister's destiny by justifying that he could not have deprived his sister's child of its father's home.

We are left to introspect about the pathetic situation that has befallen the destiny of the Hindu woman of Tagore's novels. Tagore himself firmly believed in the education and emancipation of the woman yet he has chosen to leave the issue of the woman *viz* man, in the Hindu society in Bengal, unresolved, as it is indeed a controversial issue.

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though the reasons vary. Damini's husband Sivatosh renounces the world and adopts a state of celibacy. He abstains from any physical intimacy with his wife. Finally, after his death, Sivatosh bequeaths his entire property and the custody of his young wife Damini to his religious guru, Sri Lilananda Swami. It is at the ashram that Sachish and Sribilash meet Damini. Damini and Sachish fall in love but Sachish is apprehensive to acknowledge it. He is torn between his love for her and the societal demands. Sachish begins to view Damini as a distraction and finds that her sexuality is an enticing force that is driving him away from the path of true friendship.

Tagore projects Damini as a strong, articulate and determined woman who is not hesitant to ask the swami disturbing questions. She even enquires as to why he did not ask her opinion before accepting her guardianship. Later we notice Sachish pleading with Damini to release him from the bonds of her love. Sachish is powerless before her and this also demonstrates the inner strength of Damini. She sets Sachish free from the ties of her love.

At the end, Damini accepts Sachish's friend, Sribilash's proposal and marries him. But since she is a widow, who has re-married Sribilash, she has committed a grievous crime in the eyes of the society. Tagore therefore portrays her life as blighted by the shadows of the past. Death overtakes this young widow who has dared to remarry. Therefore Damini has to pay a heavy price for going against the preconceived social norms which have been prescribed for Hindu widows in Bengal.

Tanika Sarkar, a cultural historian of the nineteenth century, writes about the nationalists' idea of the Hindu woman, "— the discipline exercised upon her body by the iron laws of absolute chastity, extending beyond the death of the husband, through an indissoluble, non-consensual infant form of marriage, through austere widowhood —."⁵

Sribilash is the only man in the novel who establishes a contact with Damini purely on a human level. She shares her memories of the past and confides in him. Although Sribilash is inexperienced in analyzing the secrets of a woman's heart yet he tried to understand the woman's psyche and her strife towards the quest for individuality and emancipation. He has a strong conviction that a 'woman is ready to give her heart away only where she receives sorrow'. He also affirms that women are neither 'toys made of clay' nor 'pure notes of the melodious veena'.⁶ One cannot compartmentalize them by pre-defining their roles in society. They are not mere puppets that move at the whims and fancies of men. Neither should they be perceived as idealistic spiritual creatures possessing no voice of their own.

Earlier in the novel, when Sachish argues with Sribilash over the true relationship between the 'woman', 'nature' and 'spirituality' he says- "It is obvious that woman is Nature's spy, which is forever trying at Nature's bidding to deceive us with her artful ways." Sribilash firmly retorts, "We must steer our boat of life. — up the stream of Nature. Our problem is not how to bypass the stream, but how to keep sailing without sinking. What we need is a rudder."⁷ Sribilash is a practical and pragmatic young man who does not allow himself to be governed by the preconceived and rigid rules of society. He believes that men are not infallible or perfect. They are prone to making mistakes just as women.

Ashish Nandy in his essay, 'Woman versus Womanliness in India' writes- "To make the issues of emancipation of woman and equality of sexes primary, one needs a culture in which conjugality is central to male-female relationships," and "if the conjugal relationship itself remains relatively peripheral, the issues of emancipation and equality must remain so too."⁸ The man and the woman must be treated on an equal footing in a marriage.

The society has a dualistic approach in its perceptions. While Mahendra by virtue of being a man, goes scot free Binodini is spat out and literally ostracized by society. But Binodini faces the society and Rajlakshmi boldly when she declares that she will not conform to the rules enforced by it on widows. She states- "I am not afraid of the society, I obey nobody." (p-255)

After her rejection by society, Binodini seeks anonymity by moving to the countryside and confining herself there. But due to the introduction of the railways, distances have been marginalized and the news about Binodini's affair spreads like wild fire. She finds no peace in her new dwelling as the urban invasion has spelled disaster on the organic community. Binodini becomes a complete misfit who is shunned by everyone. Later, the ailing Rajlakshmi compares the plight of widows of the bygone era with the modern woman of today. According to her in the olden days widows were released from the fret and fear of life by being immolated. But the modern woman is not so fortunate as she has to suffer the burden of living alone.

The issue of widow-remarriage is also condemned by society in the novel. At the end, when Bihari proposes to Binodini, she rejects his offer, as remarriage will tarnish his spotless reputation. Binodini is conscious of the violation of social norms if she marries Bihari. Binodini has the stigma of being a widow whose remarriage is considered a taboo by the society at large.

Tagore's next novella, *Chaturanga* revolves around Sachish- an educated and handsome young man, his reactions to social and religious influences exerted on him and his struggle to break free and move towards complete unrestrained freedom. His story is narrated by Sribilash, his friend and admirer. The dilemmas of Sachish are portrayed against the backdrop of the religious and reformative

movements that have occurred in the Hindu society in Bengal during the second half of the nineteenth century. The novel unfolds with the clashes between orthodox and western aesthetic humanism.

Sachish's uncle is Jagmohan- a well-educated, strict atheist, a humanist, Utilitarian and a rationalist. Jagmohan opposes every social or religious practice that denigrates human dignity. He is prepared to sacrifice his family relationships at the cost of serving the poor and underprivileged outcasts of society. Sachish is brought up by Jagmohan like his son and so he imbibes the same principles. Sribilash his friend, too comes under his influence and turns agnostic.

The Hindu society in Bengal is averse to the idea of widow remarriage. In this novella, Tagore again stirs the same issue that has been condemned by society. Sachish shocks the society by offering to marry a young pregnant widow- Nanibala, who is seduced by his cavalier brother. The young mother is not able to bear the shame caused to her as well as the separation from her lover and commits suicide. This depicts the helplessness of young widows in those times.

Damini, the heroine and Nanibala, a character with a secondary role, are two widows who represent two different types of consciousness- one residual and the other emergent. Damini resembles Binodini as she refuses to be tied down to anonymity and lead an ineffectual existence, a role that the male-dominated society imposes on all women especially widows. Damini opposes this subjugation when she retorts to Sachish- "Haven't you people put chains round my feet and flung this woman without faith into the prison of devotion? - Some of you will decide this for me, some that, to suit your convenience- am I a mere pawn in your game?"¹⁹ A woman is completely suppressed and humbled to the status of a doormat and a plaything in this male-governed world.

Damini like Binodini is deprived of conjugal bliss in her youth

be worshipped and revered. She is deficient in providing him pleasures of true conjugal life. Their incompatibility is heightened due to their differences in age and education.

At this juncture, we encounter Binodini- the young, charming and educated woman- with a deadly combination of enigma and voluptuousness. Her marriage had not attained consummation as her husband was sick and incapacitated. She has just got the newly acquired status of a widow. Rajlakshmi visits her ancestral village and picks up Binodini, who in Tagore's words, "has been surviving like a solitary garden-creepers amidst the jungle, leading a joyless existence in the village."¹¹ Her existence is described as 'joyless' and 'solitary' due to the fact that a Hindu widow has to refrain from seeking any worldly pleasures.

Binodini possesses a fine sense of taste and is hospitable to Rajlakshmi and other members of the family. Her qualities distinguish her from the other village belles. She is similar to the 'emergent' class of woman who has been transformed through education into an independently thinking and emancipated woman. She alienates herself from the sham spirituality imposed on the woman by society. She craves to be recognized for her own merit. But the greatest obstacle in her mission is the fact that she is a widow and so she can never possess the contentment of marital bliss enjoyed by married couples.

Meanwhile, Mahendra disillusioned and fatigued by his crumbling marriage is now seeking a fresh companionship. So Binodini's inscrutable charm and blossoming physical appeal attracts him and then begins an illicit affair. Binodini's widowhood status also gives the impression that she needs a man to protect her and provide her security. She is initially attracted to Bihari but later responds to the advances of Mahendra who is obsessed about her

Tagore is unable to resolve the issue- whether a marriage once ruptured by a violation of trust can be repaired into a genuine marital relationship. Bihari too vacillates between his friendship with Mahendra and his unrequited love for Binodini. He is torn between the conflicting emotions of love and duty.

The feudal backdrop portrays the cruel exploitation and injustice meted out to the woman. Three widows in this novel are entangled in grim situations and complicated relationships. Rajlakshmi -the possessive mother, Annapurna -the one who exemplifies the character of a traditional Bengali widow and Binodini- who has a fatalistic destiny doomed by misfortune.

It is Bihari, Mahendra's friend who can actually identify and recognize Binodini's womanly attributes while speaking to her at a picnic. Binodini shares her personal thoughts about her life, her past and her country for the first time. So far the parochial society only considered her as an object of desire. But Bihari realizes that Binodini is not a sensual or decadent woman but a devout lady who is too engrossed in spiritual worship. She is a woman misunderstood by society.

Romantic love is also exhibited through the letters exchanged between the protagonists. Mahendra is irritated with himself for composing a letter to Ashalata. But Binodini's letters on Asha's behalf are packed with the novelistic style of writing. Her letters highlight the barrenness of Ashalata's education while at the same time act as a catalyst for the seduction of Mahendra, since they are addressed to him. Binodini craves for romantic love and these letters provide her the release to express her emotions without inhibitions. Mahendra also spots her reading a novel by Bankimchandra on extra-marital love. This precipitates their love for one another which is now exposed even to the society. But their illicit relationship does not have a societal sanction.

DEPICTION OF MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S NOVELS

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In this paper, I intend to present the diverse kinds of male and female relationships that existed in the Hindu society in Bengal during the early part of the nineteenth century, as portrayed in the novels of Tagore.

Rabindranath Tagore's novels reflected man and woman who were crushed under the yoke of foreign imperialism and poised on the threshold of the modern age. The India of Tagore was grappling with political subjugation and colonial modernity. The British rule came in an era of bourgeois capitalism and bourgeois culture. This resulted in altering the equations between the home and the world. The 'inner-outer' dichotomy, was transformed into a new binary- the home- the world- the world representing the external and material, and the home symbolized one's true spiritual identity and the inner world. The woman embodied the values of a nation and acted as a repository of its heritage and culture, while at the same time, was a pivot around which the entire family revolved. Therefore, it became necessary to eradicate the barriers that imprisoned the Indian woman by education and reinstating her so that she could preserve the spiritual and national heritage of the country. As Malavika Karlekar, the cultural

historian wrote about the new and empowered Indian woman- "Enlightened yet domesticated, by nature loving and devoted to the family's well being; her emancipation was to be viewed within the context of a family's situation."¹

The issue of formal education for women is fearful as it can make them highly westernized, inculcate disregard for traditions and encourage 'disruptive individualism'. A man acquiring higher education is motivated to opt for Science, while a woman is expected to settle for humanities. There are double standards in the educational framework and it is tinged with a gender bias. But later, women have realized that education has helped to foster female awareness of gender inequality. Education has not only equipped them with domestic skills but also generated progressive ideas that have enriched their minds. But the education imparted by the Christian missionaries has also resulted in the emergence of westernized, promiscuous and self-deluded 'memsahebs'. The educated Indian woman has evolved a new lifestyle, sometimes even flouting the stringent moral code of the society.

A new wind of change has blown over the relationship between man and woman in Tagore's novels. Married couples who possess substantial age or educational differences feel incompatible and stifled in their relationships. The anti-hegemonic struggle of Indian nationalism has been particularly fought on the issue of 'reforming women'. Numerous laws empowering women have come into practice. The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 and the Right to Property Act in 1874, gave a widow a life interest in her husband's share of the property, are some of the laws that have been implemented. The Bengali Renaissance of the nineteenth century, has ushered in an era of social transformation in literary, economic and cultural fields. The Young Bengal movement led by a group of

radical and progressive free thinkers revolted against the repressive religious and social structures prevailing in the Hindu society.

Cultural historians like Malavika Karlekar and Tanika Sarkar, stress on the rigidity of the parochial patriarchal system to confine the woman inside the restricted boundaries of 'antahpur/andarmahal' and to treat her as a subservient domestic maid, even by the educated spouse. The husband and wife are not allowed to mingle during the daytime and are frowned at for doing so. The wife is expected to strictly observe the fasts and religious rituals for preserving the life of her husband, the birth of sons and so on as a 'residual' kind of traditional mode of existence.

Tagore's female protagonists are almost always portrayed as childless. But in the Bengali society, motherhood is glorified. The woman is assigned the task of rearing a breed of men who must have the proper attributes- courage, spirit of nationalism and patriotism. The mother is expected to conform to the role of a good mother, which means she has to be the moral guide and first teacher of her child. However, the arduous responsibility of rearing is only assigned to the middle-class mother. A mother belonging to an aristocratic family is exempted from this task.

In the colonized framework of society, the insecure and offended male attempts to downplay the subversive female sexuality on one hand. Yet he cannot himself resist the temptation of extra-marital relationships with women on the other. Man is generally portrayed as spineless, fickle-minded and always vacillating between marital and extra-marital relationships.

The woman in Tagore's times is exploited immensely by the feudal society. The traditional, old-fashioned feudal customs have magnified the miseries of the woman. But, Tagore is not influenced by the patriarchal ideas of society. He generally portrays his heroines

as powerful and intelligent individuals. He depicts their spirituality, their strong practical sense and tremendous fortitude in his novels.

My focus shall be on Tagore's portrayal of relationships between man and woman in his two domestic novels- *Choker Bali* (1903) and *Jogajog* (1929) and his novella- *Chaturanga* (1916).

In *Choker Bali*, there are six main characters. Mahendra- the chief protagonist, a smart and flamboyant young man, his sensitive and modest wife Ashalata, his adoring yet over-protective mother Rajlakshmi, Mahendra's pragmatic friend Bihari, the vivacious widow Binodini and Rajlakshmi's brother-in-law's widow Annapurna. The concept of the joint family is reflected in Tagore's novels. It is accepted as an established institution in middle-class homes. Rajlakshmi and Annapurna represent the elderly widows of the bygone era.

The oedipal relationship is projected through the mother-son relationship in the novel. Rajlakshmi influences Mahendra's perceptions and his future course of action throughout. She has indubitably attained the dominant position of unchallenged superiority among the female characters of the household. Due to this, Annapurna the other elderly widow of the same family has receded into the background and never plays an active role in the family affairs. Although her love for Mahendra is as strong as his biological mother's, yet she retires herself voluntarily to the widow-quarters in Benaras. Annapurna symbolizes the 'residual' woman, who succumbs to the dictates of the society.

Ashalata, Mahendra's wife, represents the woman of the new generation. She is more a child at heart than a mature and discerning woman. Her education has been futile as it makes her visualize the incidents she reads in the modern-day novels as factual. Mahendra, her husband, seeks companionship and romance in his marriage but to no avail. Ashalata only perceives him as a god who deserves to