

THE LANGUAGE OF WOMEN

ASTUDY WITH REFERENCE TO THE NOVELS OF
ARUNDHATI ROY & M.T. VASUDEVAN NAIR

MENON VIMLA K.

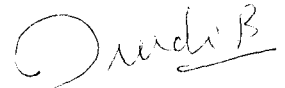
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in English Language and Linguistics*

**Department of English
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "*THE LANGUAGE OF WOMEN - A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO THE NOVELS OF ARUNDHATI ROY & M.T. VASUDEVAN NAIR*" submitted by Smt. MENON VIMLA K. is a record of the bonafide research done by her for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature under my guidance and supervision.



Dr. B. Sreedevi,
Professor,

Department of English,
University of Calicut.

Place : Calicut

Date : 27-03-2003

DECLARATION

I, MENON VIMLA K., hereby declare that this dissertation has not been previously published by me for the award of a Degree, Diploma, Title or Recognition.

Place : Calicut

Date: 27-03-2003


MENON VIMLA K

Dedicated to
the fond memory of my father

Shri. T. U. K. Menon
(who taught me to dream)

PREFACE

Even as a child I did register in my mind the exultation and reverberating joy of a young parent of a new born boy. The silent and cool reception awarded to his sister the yester year receded into the distant past. There was a difference – a world of difference. The demanding cries of the infant seemed to rend the air; a lustful lunging that asserted his existence and rights. There was no baulking, and the little girl huddled in her nurse's arms took the cue. The mind had learned its sex.

There was a social aura that set the tone more than a biological manifestation. The scene lingered in my mind and its implications were fostered by many an ensuing occasion. ...

...Decades hence, I pause to ponder: where do we stand at the juncture of cultural history? How far have we combated the inequalities that glare at us from every quarter? How distant is the 'promised land' peopled by:

Women bearing all the marvellous traits of excellence chronicled by the great philosophers: Strength, intelligence, temperance, independence, courage, principle, honour etc.

Women, beautiful and healthy in our bodies, comfortable with them, understanding them and proud of them. (Ruth 139)

What shall each of us contribute to make this a social reality? Afterall, humanity is worth working for!

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Very few can be less sympathetic to the unmotivated than Sr. Vijaya, Principal, St. Joseph's College, Irinjalakuda. I thank her and the faculty and staff of St. Joseph's who speeded up my work with their very concerned enquiries. The members of the Dept. of English deserve a special mention for their unrelenting support; and Mrs. Antio, the Head of the Department remained my ready reckoner as always. I will cherish the days when I plodded the uphill path in the company of Mrs. Ann Mary Charles. More than ever before, did I avail the prompt and timely help of Sr. Susy Maria, our librarian, and her staff.

I cannot fail to thank my husband who fills me with his incorrigible optimism and my children who bear the brunt of my familial lapses.

And in my autumnal days-

I assure myself that there is bound to be reward

in any effort to move toward the goal.

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INTRODUCTION

Humanity should apply every conceivable technique on the road to equality of man and woman, and march together and separately, infinitely valuable as each and together. Women today feel alienated by the practice of human differentiation and are confused about the meaning of femininity divorced of human quality. The very vibrancy of the socio-cultural world works against women in their diasporic existence. Feminists have wrestled with questions about generic human differentiations that saliently feature in the landscape of everyday life. They take objection to gender identity, linked to the virtually universal division of sex, that organizes female life in obvious and deeply felt ways, compromising individual authenticity. The major task of the era lies in sculpting a new respectability for women, and in its endeavour highlights specifications on gender in the multifarious spheres of human life. No wonder, the emphasis falls on gender discriminations, and language as used by men and women has not escaped a critical appraisal.

Contemporary feminists have placed language on the political agenda. They protest against a language in which their experience did not originate and whose genius is antithetical to their own expression. A 'feminist critique

of language' now exists which extends its hold on academic discourse even. Feminists question the 'otherization' that overhangs the complex cultural formations which are faithfully reflected in language and literature. There is a quest for new ways and words that will represent female lives physically and psychologically, and they have come up with novel theories and perspectives on language as a social and cultural institution, which hitherto has remained partial to man, the patriarch. Feminism has opened up debates on linguistic structures and women's perceptions of the world.

The language of women is marked by an absence of female voices and concerns from high culture. Women are repeatedly muted and repelled by long custom or tradition. They are hampered in their attempts at being unreservedly active in communicating and individualizing, and crippled by inhibitions. Their lives have been conditioned by fear of censure and attack. Dr. Johnson's famous remark about the unnaturalness of women preaching, "like a dog walking on hind legs", is illustrative of women's roles in society.

In the field of literature, the silences have been most glaring. The low literacy rates of women make the sphere inaccessible to them. Education denied, denies opportunities for creative expression and women are forced to lead a subordinate role always and everywhere. They are subjugated by their determined societal roles that make them play second fiddle to the men in the

family. Their fine-grained formations of thought, emotion and ethical sensibilities are left unrecorded and unnoticed. If at all they wrote, they wrote under male pen names to ward off derision and opprobrium. Women had remained uncomfortably feminine, and constrained in their writings, for female experiences and concerns remained outside the human values literature dealt with. Women's Liberation Movement has raised female consciousness and codified efforts to locate the binaries in their myriad relationships of life, in the course of their attempts to discuss and bear witness to experiences unspoken or unmentionable previously.

Feminists think that language creates rather than reflects social behaviour. But there exists no agreed and coherent theoretical framework which clearly and persuasively establishes how linguistic behaviour leads us to social and economic sexual inequality. Yet the idea of linguistic determinism – the idea that language determines perception and thus reality – is an important trump card in the hands of the feminists. Feminists have drawn upon the theories of Lacan, Whorf and Sapir who refute that language encodes or expresses the perceived reality, rather than acts as a medium that reflects reality. Though sex is a biological, natural factor, the same cannot be said of linguistic differences. It is the socio-cultural phase of the humans that induces, incorporates, internalizes and produces the sex-based language.

It rests on my curiosity to decipher how and how much gender has its grip on language as used by women specifically. It seems necessary sometimes to question the seemingly self-evident boundaries of language of women. How far have women resisted the boundaries? Were they naturally evolved ones? Or, were the limits acquired psychologically or self-imposed in the context of the social milieu? In the latter case, how have society and its beliefs rendered colour to the language as used by women?

Learning to speak is learning to be a member of a particular culture. The use of language is an endeavour to identify ourselves, and when we speak, we identify ourselves as male or female. This becomes evident even from childhood when one imbibes linguistic behaviour appropriate to one's sex, which becomes a part of one's identity. It is very interesting to study how an undifferentiated child acquires its language. Appropriate use of language is a part of social behaviour which one has to acquire even as a child. A knowledge of grammar, phonology and lexicon is not enough for a child to be linguistically competent. While mastering the formal rules of language, he must learn to interact according to the cultural norms of the society and his speech should be in accordance to the social order. Since men's and women's roles are distinguished in every culture, it is only natural that the children will learn the cultural roles assigned to them on the basis of

their sex. This is a two way process in becoming linguistically competent, the child learns to be a fully fledged male or female member of the speech community. Conversely, when children adopt linguistic behaviour considered appropriate to their sex, they perpetuate the social order which creates gender distinctions.

A significant area of any analysis of difference in the language of the sexes is that, linguistic variations are structured and patterned rather than scattered at random. Sociolinguistics exposes the utterances of real speech communities, and more so their speech in the vernacular which is spoken spontaneously among the familiar group. No doubt linguistic cues are found to vary systematically with the social context and class of the speaker. Women as a group or class of their own occupy a special niche in the course of the development of studies of social sciences. The Women's Movement has also focused its attention on women as a group in their own right, and this awareness of themselves as an unusual group seems to have grown through the advent of years. They have taken up cudgels against the multitudinous discriminations that keep them pinned down to their lower status. Equality has not been an accomplished fact except in very rare fields like equal pay and working conditions. In the process of their struggle women have tried to assimilate into the dominant group of the male in terms

of language as far as possible. This insurgent tendency can be noted among those in the professions or in politics to a very great extent in the following ways: women speak with deeper voices or lower pitches, they swear and use taboo language, in group interactions their style is more assertive than customary, and they abound in typical male prosodic features with few rising intonations. Women also try to familiarize themselves with areas of traditional male interest like business, politics, economics, and are found grappling with non-standard accents. But here again women are at a loss in their search for equality. They do not strike a satisfactory identity of their own but are only redefining themselves in a male's world, rather trying their hand at a dominant role. This is a strategy of changing a negative image into a positive one.

The referential function of language is its function in conveying information, facts, or content. The affective function refers to the use of language to convey feelings and reflect social relationships. Every utterance must express both functions, though one may be primary. An utterance is always embedded in a social context which influences its form.

“But she ‘sounds’ like a woman; she has to sound that way because she is” (Ozick 92), is a remark that quite often accompanies a book written by a woman. What ground is struck for such an observation? Was it the pick

of the words, their tone or nature? Did the topic chosen and its presentation signal any affiliation on gendered lines? Did not the comment 'sound' evoke a negative overtone? The quotation, surely, is an extreme but fairly typical example of the presuppositions which some phallogocentric critics have about women's writing. It is my pleasure to probe deep into the above areas of language also, and analyse the underlying causes and implications. I hope my analysis will be enlightening and fruitful.

The thrust of my thesis lies in its rendering of the language of women not necessarily indicating speech alone; but used metaphorically to include experience plus expression (Sreedevi 77). Theoretical analysis has thrown light on what women's language is and how it came to be. But the manifestation of such a language in society is traced through the experience of women; for experience is the very breath of language. It is experience that subtly reinforces a language with its constraints tempered by custom and tradition. Besides, the thesis traces the transformation in the delineation of women from different perspectives: from a female point of view as opposed to that of the male. To illustrate the difference, I wish to explore the works of two renowned writers; and it was invariably that my choice fell upon Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize Winner and M.T. Vasudevan Nair, the Janapeedam Award Winner. A conscious reading of women's writings today

will entail a deconstruction of men's writing from women's point of view. An excavation into The God of Small Things will unearth the hidden female longings authentically voiced in a woman-authored story; complementing gender consciousness and exposing the hindrances that bar the way to a faithful representation of women and their aspirations. The traditional images of women undergo a sea change in the novel of Arundhati Roy. Her writing may be classified into the genre of literature called protest writing, a writing committed to an ideology or social justice as the case herein. Arundhati, through her writing attempts to understand oneself and the world; it is in a way, a process of discovery of the self and the world around. The angst and the quest of the writer find reflection in the characters of her portrayal as well.

Elaine Showalter (338-39) in her Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness has detected a universal patterning in the representation of women in stereotyped images in literature as angels or monsters and advocates the gynocritical approach to the study of literature in relation to woman and her portrayal. She expounds (1) the biological model with its emphasis on how the female body masks itself upon the text by providing a host of literary images and a personal intimate tone, (2) the linguistic model, concerning itself with the differences between women's and men's use of language and

with the question of whether women can and do create a language peculiar to their writings; (3) the psycho analytic model, based on an analysis of the female psyche and how such an analysis affects the writing process and (4) the cultural model, investigating how the society in which female authors work and function shapes women's goals, responses and points of view. "It should be instructive to study a literature . . . with its great arching movements from the vedic age to the present day" (Iyengar 448). It is in this context that M.T.Vasudevan Nair offers interesting study. The cultural assumptions encoded into a male-authored text about the status of women and their role in society, present reality at crossroads. The transformation of images of women serves as an eye-opener to the significant connection between characters and their handling by different writers and opens up windows into different moments of cultural history. To know how far women have shrugged off the genteel tyrannies of culture, one has to observe the traditional images into which women have been carved by writers who were essentially males. M.T. Vasudevan Nair's novels are replete with the defenceless women who bow to their irrefutable destiny. Encrusted into male-oriented stories, his women win the sympathy, rather than the admiration of their readers. I have chosen Randamoozham, Naalukettu, and

Manhu for my references for they all record the heart-breakings and loneliness of women who pine for a morrow that will never dawn.

Arundhati Roy and M.T. Vasudevan Nair, for all appearances, might stand poles apart from each other since the media they have chosen for their writings are different: Arundhati writing in English and M.T. Vasudevan Nair in Malayalam. But their unity in diversity has also caught my fancy. Both writers hail from Kerala and are 'Malayalese' to the core and smack of similar sentiments. They have immortalized their remote villages, Aymanam and Koodalloor, which form the milieu of their writings; as have been the case with Malgudi and Wessex. The rivers Meenachal and Nila lend vitality to their lands and form omnipresent witnesses to the woes and joys of the people clustered around their banks. The two writers tell their tales with the poignancy of their nostalgic memories that lie enmeshed in the flora and fauna of their terrains. Their stories carry the fragrance of their land and are peopled with the familiar faces that one comes across in any part of Kerala.

Where and how Arundhati Roy and M.T. Vasudevan Nair have differed from each other show how they have gained and lost in the onrush of time. It is often argued that Indian literature is one, though written in many languages, and it is a fallacy to make unity of a literature primarily hinge upon the existence of a single language.

What ultimately gives unity to a literature is not the language in which it is written but the entire cultural context in which it grows and develops (Gupta and Gupta 21).

Arundhati is part and parcel of her land yet she can laugh at the foibles of her society; M.T. Vasudevan Nair implants himself firmly in the culture of the soil and looks at it from within.

In the first chapter of my thesis I have elaborated upon what is language, its origin, classifications and influences. For, only a grasp of the meaning or purpose of language can lead us to comprehend what a language of women can purport. Language is not a collection of mere words and words are not individual units with constricted meanings. A word is deeply embedded in its context or the social milieu. It takes its colouring from the people who use it and make it a vital source of their business of everyday life. Like all human institutions, language thus becomes a set of conventions that have grown and developed as a result of the common living of a large number of people. That is to say, language gains meaning from the culture into which it is born. The influence of culture on language and the messages conveyed by language use cannot be exaggerated. So too, language influences culture in turn. Knowing a language also means how to use it; and to be a member of a society means how to interact within its prescribed

norms. Thereby we have languages for different situations and languages used by different groups: the language of the liturgy, of the rulers, of the Blacks, of the oppressed and that of women, to name a few. The different classifications of language based on characteristics, functions and users provide valuable cues to the segmentations in society. Language also includes body language, the gestures and signs which aid effective communication. This is also influenced by the power structure in society and indicates the status and position of a group or community.

The second chapter is an analysis of the language of women. Language is an effective tool that promotes social interaction, and living in a society demands the 'knowhow' that a person must possess to operate in a manner acceptable to its members. Society has almost always been patriarchal and it is the male who has always had the upperhand. It is he who has done the 'naming' and language has been wielded to his benefit. Words are contaminated with sexist influence and it is the male generic noun or pronoun that is always the norm; the female gender being 'the other'. Also, a woman's speech is characterized by her inferior status in society. She refrains from using the sharp tones of commitment and a woman's language remains typically indirect, repetitious and unclear. Brought up to play their different roles in society, man and woman acquire their sex-differentiated

language early in childhood itself. This inculcated linguistic differentiation based on sex has deep far-reaching social consequences. It leads to differentiated competence in communication: in the class room, in the home and in the society at large. The final ambition of a woman trained to be timid, is catering to man's pleasure.

The third chapter deals with women-writing and the lack of a female sentence to express women's thoughts and yearnings. Writings by women are scoffed at and there is the need to create a tolerant and welcoming atmosphere. A woman's choice of subjects is influenced by the society she lives in and many topics and words are taboo to her. She has refrained from writing her body, her physical and biological experiences which are peculiar to herself. The woman has struggled all along before she could attain real freedom of expression. Women's writings give us an insight into the way woman perceives the world. She has to wrestle with language to meet her needs to emphasize what is most relevant and useful to her way of life.

The fourth chapter focuses on Arundhati Roy who has asserted her independence in her novel, The God of Small Things. Her individuality finds full sway in the use of her language which she wrenches to vent her sensibilities. Her style and diction display new possibilities of the medium. Also the theme of her novel is unique and in its delineation she might make

many raise their eye-brows in disapproval. There is nothing taboo for her as she plays into the intimate experiences of her characters. Yet her world too has not shaken itself free from the male paradigm. Her women characters suffer due to the men with whom they are associated. Their destinies cast elongated shadows in the world in which they live. The female experiences unravel the female psyche more than any other male writer.

The last and fifth chapter of my thesis affirms that language includes not only expression but also experience. I have dwelt upon some of the characters in M.T. Vasudevan Nair's: Randamoozham, Naalukettu and Manhu. I have restricted myself to these three among his numerous novels for I wish to furnish only a few glaring examples of the women who fit into the male scheme of things. M.T. Vasudevan Nair's novels highlight those aspects which society considered ornamental to women. Modesty was meant only for the womenfolk and ideologies were adopted, adapted and transformed to effect control over them. They lived forlorn and loveless lives in which they negotiated their subordinate roles and seasoned their minds to suffering. Their language was the language of subordination, and patriarchy yoked them down for ever.

To conclude, I have pointed out the various trends in the modern world to draw up a non-sexist language. Language is getting tuned to gender-

free words, words that in no way will exclude any sex, especially the female sex. All derogatory or negative connotations of words that may be found in female equivalences are being eradicated. But while such inventions are made, care has to be taken to avoid linguistic disruptions which involve experimentation with all parts of speech, when reconstituting morphological boundaries on semantic grounds. Linguistic reform and planning can be welcomed to eliminate the patriarchal and sexist nature of language. Gender neutral nouns and pronouns or gender specifications with feminisation can be adopted to maintain balanced representation of the sexes. A feeling of negation and subordination of women can be minimised and equality of the sexes can be expressed in language.

I do not undertake a comparative study of the two authors, Arundhati Roy and M.T. Vasudevan Nair, but I choose to take for analysis their portrayal of characters and situations so as to gather their impressions of life and the living of it. Their novels will provide a clear understanding of the discriminations prevalent against women, no matter where and when they lived. For, as Arundhati herself had declared: the only real conflict that seemed to her was between 'men and women'. And this, in a great way constitutes the 'language' of women. The subject matter of my book bristles with controversial topics. Differences of opinion are however inevitable. It is

impossible to draw a complete and synthetic picture of woman all over the world for they have never been a homogeneous group. Their situations and problems have differed from time to time and from country to country. Despite my awareness of disagreement and fragmentation, I am certain that there is much common ground. I seek to throw fresh light on many important aspects of my topic of enquiry and have tried not to gloss on the excellences nor pass over the limitations of our civilization. Yet I have tried to present a cursory view of women in the Western and Eastern situations. Anyway, it is to be always kept in mind:

One of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellences and realise its limitations is to study the history of the position and status of women in it. Civilization is to a great extent the result of a society's capacity to control some of the strongest and most selfish impulses embedded in human nature. No class of similar importance and extent as that of women was placed in the infancy of society in a position of such absolute dependence upon men, and the degree in which that dependence has been voluntarily modified and relaxed naturally serves as a rough test of the sense of justice and fair play developed in a community. The marriage

laws and customs enable us to realise whether men regarded women merely as market commodities or war prizes, or whether they had realised that the wife is after all her husband's valued partner whose co-operation was indispensable for happiness and success in family life. The rules about sex morality enable us to know the ethical tone of the society and ascertain how far men were prepared to be themselves judged by the standard they had set for women. The degree to which women were given a voice in the settlement of their marriages and the management of their households, and the extent to which their proprietary rights were recognized, illustrate man's capacity to control the natural love of self, power and possession, which is so firmly implanted in every human heart. The sense of sympathy that is developed in a community can very well be tested by the treatment it metes out to the widow. The genuineness of its appreciation of the value of education can be ascertained by finding out whether its benefits were extended to the fair sex. The progress in fine arts like music and dancing depends on a good deal on the facilities given to women for specialising in them. A study of

their dress and ornaments gives us an idea of the wealth of a community and enables us to obtain a glimpse of its progress in trade, mining and metallurgy and the skill in inlaying, tailoring and embroidery (Altekar 1-2).

Differences between man and woman must become resources for an enriched collective life and promote collaboration necessary for the good of humanity. Man and woman are not diverse people to inhabit diverse worlds. Any attempt at empowering women can become purposeful only if humanity hearkens to the voices of its own endangered species, the weaker sex that constitutes almost half of its population.

Chapter I

LANGUAGE

Power of the Word

“It may be that we understand the world in terms of our language, and this would imply that our thinking about the world, necessarily involves the use of language” (Matilal 3). Our thoughts are communicable only by means of language and our intellect is so much bewitched by language that thinking is impossible without it. Since thought cannot exist without language the study of language will unravel the thought processes that went into its use. Language is a verbal testimony of our source of knowledge like perception and inference. Most of our knowledge today is derived from reading and listening, hence we can say that it is linguistically communicated. Even in this explosive age when man is amazingly developing the machinery of self-expression and when man’s relation with the world will be largely visual, language can never be reduced to museum exhibits of linguistic archeologists and historians as long as the thought processes of man hold sway over the human mind. Even the dullest individual takes his power of language for granted, and reacts to it in the solitude of his own consciousness through

thoughts framed in unspoken words. The lunatic, too stirs his frenzy, through unspoken words, welling up in his own way in his diseased mind.

The best illustration of knowledge derived from linguistic utterance is provided by Akshapada, the author of the Nyayasutra. According to him, the word is a 'pramana', a means of knowledge, and 'Sabda' or word is what is instructed by a trustworthy person(6). The linguistic nature of the Vedas also underlines the force of the word and language that can create reverberations of meanings in the human mind.

That words betray man's preoccupation with transcendental ideas and moods, that words are conjurations rather than statements, figures of cosmic significance rather than presentation of things observed. Enigmatic and oracular, subtle, the medium becomes like a spider's web, in its seeming fragility, almost sinister in its ability to capture truth, that otherwise eludes (Church 9).

As the gospel according to St. John 1.1 testifies: "In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". So also, 'Ohm' epitomizes in itself the sound and rhythm of the universe and the very breath of existence. With all the symbolism, and the whole fabric of mythology which is woven from it, the Word lives on with an authenticity as

assured as that of any scientific knowledge. Language is the medium and the Word the tool by which man has carved for himself a niche in the human paradigm of immortality.

It cannot be denied that language constitutes a message. Also, the basic assumption is that messages, whatever they are, require a language, though every language like that of the trees and road signs may not be of equal importance or interest as the recently utilitarian language of the computers.

As Vatsyayan has remarked (*qtd in. Matilal 9*) an 'apta' must be in a position to instruct or command by having realized or perceived the dharma and be able to make a statement with a desire to communicate the objects or facts as one has perceived them. For example, knowledge derived from the statement of one's parent is unique, it is neither perceptually transmitted nor arrived at on the basis of evidence. But the words themselves coupled with one's implicit trust in him generates the required knowledge. Likewise scriptural statements about heaven and hell, impart knowledge about such otherwise unknown facts (12).

The ancients say that the meaning of a word is learnt from (a) grammar (b) analogy (c) lexicon (d) the statement of a reliable person (e) the speech behaviour of elders (f) the remaining part of the sentence

(g)explanation and (h)proximity with well-known words (13). Grammar is certainly, a simple and effective way of learning a new language. We cannot learn a language word by word, and it is true that ambiguities in word-meanings are sometimes dispelled by our knowledge of grammar, for example, if we know how to analyse it into its components and thereby obtain its meaning. Patanjali mentions that the use of incorrect words generated demerit just as the use of correct words generates merit (16). Analogy-based information is regarded as a separate source of knowledge which is generated neither through perception, nor inference, nor through the word. An unknown or unfamiliar object, may be introduced by means of comparison by someone who is familiar with it. But the real understanding takes place when we have actually seen the object and remember the analogizing description to register our knowledge. The word-generated knowledge supplies the crucial information about similarity or dissimilarity and the later perception coupled with the already gathered information generates the knowledge by which we learn to associate it.

Another obvious source of knowledge of the meanings of words is lexicon. It supplies what is meant by the primary significative power of the word without its metaphorical meanings unless they are already well-known and well-entrenched. Statement of a trusted person helps to learn a word.

When parents point to an object and call it by its name, their child learns the meaning of the word. Speech-behaviour of elders is perhaps the most important of all methods. Everybody in his or her first learning of the language depends exclusively on the speech-behaviour of the elders. When an older adult of the community commands, "Close the door", and the younger adult obeys by doing so, an onlooker child will understand the utterance and the activity of the younger adult as a whole and as connected to each other. The process involves not only both perception and inference but also something else: the child understands that a communication is taking place between two people. The child must understand that the adults' intention is shown by his bodily movements and that the command of the older adult causes activity in the younger adult who is commanded to act. The method parallels here the usual behaviouristic explanation of our language learning mechanism. Besides, the larger context of the sentences or the passage provides a special or specific meaning of a word which may be otherwise ambiguous in its use. Contextual factors undoubtedly constitute the meaning. So too words of doubtful meanings are usually explained by a definition. A commentary by a knowledgeable person can parallel word meanings supplied by definition. Such a definition may specify the meaning in such a way as would fit the context.

A common way of determining the meaning of an unfamiliar word is by its syntactic connection with words whose meanings are already known. Many words may denote the same meaning and the same word may have many meanings. This is an invariable feature of any natural language. Synonyms are co-referential words emphasizing different aspects of the identical referent. In fact, true synonyms were rare, for shades of meaning were distinguished, the exact meaning of each word being regarded as the function of the root-meaning and the significance of the suffixes and prefixes. Sometimes even words with some non-primary meaning may gain prominence through constant usage and then be regarded as another primary meaning. Lexicons give ample evidence of such acquired meanings. Shifts of meaning constitute a common feature of any natural language. The expression of any natural language is thus enhanced. Also, metaphors and metaphorical use is so pervasive in our language that sometimes we wonder whether there is any sense in our assuming that there are at all any fixed primary meanings of the words we use, the meaning of the word determined simply by our use. By the primary meaning-giving power, the word speaks, as it were, while by the secondary or indicating-meaning power, it only indicates, and a metaphor is born. There is also a third power of the word, the suggestive power, which is relevant in poetry and rhetorical speech. In great

poetry, the word excels, it is more beautiful and more charming than the ordinary meaning. This has appeal only to the appropriate hearer in poetry, it appeals only to the sensitive reader. But it may become a very subjective factor as each hearer might have the propensity to be suggestible in different ways. It is in tune with the inference by the hearer. An often cited example will make the point clear.

Consider the utterance: 'The sun has set'. It will suggest at least three different meanings to three different hearers: a thief will understand that the time to go out to steal has come; a paramour will understand that the time to meet his beloved is near; and a priest will understand that it is time to say his prayers (19).

Language and Society

The study of any language also includes most importantly its relationship to society. The social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure or behaviour. The particular ways of speaking, choice of words and even rules for conversing are guided and determined by social requirements. Likewise linguistic structure or behaviour may influence or determine social structure. Hence more attention need be paid to the interaction of language and society or for that matter, man in situations.

However, there can be no meaningful linguistics without attention to the social context. And this in turn takes us to a social psychology of language – with its traditional emphasis on perception, attitude, belief and individual action. Noam Chomsky, the most important contemporary linguist, upholds that linguistics is part of psychology and illuminates the very nature of human language, human mental competence and its functioning. Though asocial it may appear to the superficial eye, his enquiries finally land up in the world in which the speaker or user of language lives. For as Joachim du Bellay affirms:

Languages are not born of themselves after the fashion of herbs, roots, or trees: some infirm and weak in their nature; the others healthy, robust, and more fitted to carry the burden of human conception; but all their virtue is born in the world of the desire and will of mortals (*qtd.in* Edwards 8).

Edward Sapir only emphasizes the same when he defines language as:

A purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols (Sapir 8).

Sapir observed that human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity; but are very much at the

mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression of their society.

We learn that one feature of language is that it is deliberate and another equally important one is that it has no independent existence. Being deliberately designed, it becomes an inorganic parasite on human hosts. Hence the fortune of a language is destined by the users. Language is the raw material of everyday life, a universal utilitarian medium of communication, of joining individual to individual, of cementing society, of recording its transactions, in time and space.

We learn about people through what they say and how they say it; also we learn about ourselves through the ways others react or respond to what we say. The communicative interactions determine our relationships with the members of our society; hence language forms an integral part of human behaviour (Bonvillain 1).

The interaction of language and society and man in situations cannot be exaggerated. The fact is the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. It is this intimate relationship and influence between the two that made Benjamin Whorf wonder which was the first: the language patterns or the cultural norms?

“They have grown up together” he answered (Whorf 156).

Language and its communicative meaning largely depend on the culture in which it is embedded. The function of language is performed in its cultural context and hence the concept of a cultural model of a reality is created, shared and transmitted by members of a group. The ways of behaviour shared by a group are assumed to be most proper, legitimate and natural by its members. They are so accepted that they become natural to them rather than cultivated or constructed, and language use pave the way for its blind approval. When consistent usages emerge, a pattern is formed and cultural norms are needed to interpret the communicative behaviour.

“Language becomes a communal possession” (Wardhaugh 2).

So, knowledge of a language is much beyond the purview of its grammar and syntax. It is a shared knowledge possessed by all those who use it. Along with the ways of saying and doing things one will know what is in the language and what possibilities the language offers.

So too, people belonging to a speech community have norms in regard to language use. They know exactly well what to say and when to say as also how to say it. In the daily traffic of life, speech forms an important aspect of behaviour and speech communities have developed their own codes of proper and improper use of language. They share a set of social attitudes

towards language. Sociolinguistics holds the special interest in language study by discovering patterns of linguistic variation and the dynamic connection between language and social factors.

Language begins by being an emotional impulse, an outcry of a birth pang. Through many drudging centuries, it has evolved into the dialogues of Plato, the songs of Isaiah, and the vast chorus of man's self-expression still recording the wonders, the joy, the agony with which he responds to the adventure of living (Church 8).

At seminal periods of evolution man has folded its myth and vernacular within a corpus of literary art to give it an aesthetic authority that will nourish human thought in turn.

Language Origins

Theories about the origins of language are many and varied. Speaking about the contemporary enquires on language Chomsky observes in his address at the Special Convocation of the University of Calcutta, 2001:

. . .they view language in a biological setting, adopting what is sometimes called a "biolinguistic approach". From this point of view, the human faculty of language is regarded basically as an

organ of the body, mostly the brain, more or less on a par with the visual system or the system of motor organisation. . .

The language faculty is a “species property” in a dual sense. First, it is close to uniform for the species, second, it is apparently unique to humans in essentials. . .

. . . Language is like other biological systems, however, in that its basic character is genetically determined. Each person, of course, undergoes a specific course of development, shaped by individual experience, but in highly limited ways. The outcomes are largely a result of shared initial endowment. The human languages, existing or possible, are pretty much cast to the same mould. A rational Martian scientist, studying humans the way we study other animals, could reasonably conclude that there really is only one language, with only minor variations. The variations are important for our lives; the far deeper uniformities we simply take for granted, without awareness. Similarly, traditional and pedagogical grammars and dictionaries are concerned with the unpredictable and somewhat accidental variation, rightly for their special purposes. The interests of the scientific study of language are

virtually complementary; the invariant principles of sound, meaning, and structure that are rooted in our mental nature of the languages that each person comes to acquire under normal circumstances.

One basic problem, then, is to discover the invariant principles of the language faculty and the limited options of variation, and then to show that the possible human languages are determined by selecting among the options: . . . the task is to show that with fixed principles one can literally deduce the infinite array of expressions of the language: their sound, their meaning, the ways in which they can be used to express thoughts, to request information, to tell stories, and numerous others . . .

One novel question that has come to the fore in recent years, and that happens to be of particular interest to me, is the question of “optimal design”: To what extent is human language an optional solution to externally – imposed conditions that language must satisfy to be usable at all (for example, accessibility to sensorimotor systems).

. . . Human language (is), a biological system that has emerged in the last moment of evolutionary time, in the most complex

organism known, and is surely at the core of our nature and life
(Frontline 16).

Chomsky's view of linguistic theorizing is asocial, and is followed by many. Yet Chomsky has argued on many occasions that, in order to make meaningful discoveries about language, linguists must try to distinguish between what is important and linguistic behaviour. The important matters, sometimes referred to as 'language universals', concern the learnability of all languages, the characteristics they share, and the rules and principles that speakers apparently follow in constructing and interpreting sentences; the less important matters deal with the specific utterances of individual speakers, in a variety of ways and situations. Chomsky, distinguishes between what he calls 'competence' and 'performance'. He claims that it is the linguists' task to characterize what speakers know about their language, i.e., their competence, not their performance, i.e., what they do with their language. He observes in his Theory of Syntax:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random

or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. To study actual linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker-hearer is only one. In this respect, study of language is no different from empirical investigation of other complex phenomena (Chomsky 3-4).

However, the kind of competence includes much more than Chomsky wishes to include and involves much of what he describes as performance. Following Chomsky's example, many linguists maintain that one should not study a language in use, or even how the language is learned, without first acquiring an adequate knowledge of what language itself is. The linguist should concentrate on grammar that will develop our understanding of language: what it is, how it is learnable, and what it tells us about the human mind.

But this theory is contradicted by many who argue that study of language becomes purposeful only if it is studied in its use and variation. A social view of linguistics is essentially incomplete, refutes Hudson (19).

Even the variations are important for they are based on group norms and have their permitted limits.

Any meaningful investigation into a language will lead us to the history of that language, its regional and social distributions, its relationship to objects, ideas, events, and actual speakers and listeners. There is no doubt, a variety of possible relationships between language and society and a correlational study will reveal how the two influence each other. Wardhaugh (10-11) dwells on the different views on the matter. One view is that social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure or behaviour. The age-grading phenomenon, whereby children speak differently from adults; and studies that reveal that language reflects regional, social, ethnic origin or even the sex of the speaker provide evidence to the same. Besides, 'power' is a linguistic concept that explains the considerable influence on the choice of language of people (11).

A second possible relationship is directly opposed to the first: linguistic structure and/or behaviour may either influence or determine social structure. This view is based on the Whorfian hypothesis and claims of Bernstein and many others who hold that language rather than speakers of these languages can be 'sexist'.

A third possible relationship is that the influence is bi-directional; language and society may influence each other. One variant of this approach is that this influence is dialectical in nature. A Marxian view argues that ‘speech behaviour and social behaviour are in a state of constant interaction’ and that ‘material living conditions’ are important factors in the relationship.

A fourth possibility contends against any relationship between linguistic structure and social structure and argues that each is independent of the other. This view is inline with Chomsky’s and discourages any attempt to characterize the relationship as essentially premature considering our knowledge both about language and society.

David Crystal speaks of observations on children left uninfluenced by social contacts; they are said to reveal informative results. Mogul emperor Akbar conducted experiments by isolating children from human speech confining them for four years in a ‘Gung Mahal’ (dumb house) and it was observed:

No cry came from that house of silence, nor was any speech heard there. In spite of their four years, they had no part of the talisman of speech, and nothing came out except the noise of the dumb (*qtd. in* Edwards 16).

Much fruitless, speculative and wasteful linguistic scholarship has been applied to the area of origins of language, but not to much avail. The theories also prove not too exhaustive and language origins and development have now been positioned in an evolutionary picture. It is believed, like the Darwinian revelations, that speech developed because it had survival value, making allowances for the evolutionary alterations especially in the human speech organs. A very recent theory holds that the survival value of language was originally linked to social bonding and language is the lubricant that effects social grooming by mutual exchange of experiences. Everyday talk or gossip plays a very central role in the individual's moorings in society. It touches more lives more intimately.

Language As A Unifying Force

The attachments and interactions that language provides lead to interrelationships, of a peculiar kind and identity, with the language emerging as the main link in the social context. The intertwining of language with group identity creates a powerful bond within the society, of ethnicity or even nationality at an extended level. Most importantly, a sense of 'groupness' or 'people-hood' is created by the use of a similar language. The language develops a special culture among its people and the role of language in holding together its people in bonds of unity cannot be over-

emphasised. National belonging and national urge are cemented by the use of a language, which underlies its culture and the lives of its people. The implications beneath the quotations cannot be ignored:

The international misunderstandings that lead to perpetual suspicion and wars are not only due to economic and racial differences. They have persisted since the building of the Tower of Babel. Language has also become the tool of political dominance. Identification with one's own language has always been a marker of nationalism. National languages have become huge systems of vested interests. (Mandelbaum 118). In fact the desire for nationalism nurtured its associated longings for sovereignty and autonomy forcing upon its people a sense of abject loyalty. The ancient Greeks were fiercely proud of their language, a unifying factor; the Romans, though refrained from imposing Latin on their ruled, considered its acquisition a privilege to be sought, like citizenship. One's language was considered as one's inheritance. William Stewart outlines the classifications language takes on, according to the wide area of its influence:

1. group language, used for communication within a specific speech community;
2. official language, used at the national level;
3. provincial language, official only in given regions;

4. capital languages, communicatively dominant in the area of the national capital (other than an official or provincial variety);
5. language of wider communication across language boundaries within the state (other than an official or provincial variety);
6. language of wider international communication (other than an official or provincial variety);
7. language used for educational purposes, at primary or secondary level (again, not to overlap with official or provincial variety);
8. language used for religious purposes;
9. language used primarily for literary or scholarly purposes;
10. language widely taught as a school subject (other than an official or provincial variety).

Finally William Stewart in the above classifications states that language users within the state comprise 75 per cent or more of group language, used for communication within a specific speech community (*qtd. in* Edwards 142).

Influences on Languages

All the functions of language overlap with each other, more or less; Stewart's typology is very valuable for it is a pointer to the social status rooted in language.

More conceptualization of the many layered language situations is carried on by Einar Haugen in his study of the interactions between a language and its environment.

Haugen considered ten ecological applications to language to understand its meaningfulness:

1. how it is classified vis-à-vis other languages, which is a matter for historical and descriptive linguistics;
2. who uses it, concerned with linguistic demography;
3. what are its domains, including sociolinguistics;
4. what other languages are used by its speakers, ie. dialinguistics;
5. what are its internal varieties, branching on dialectology;
6. what are its written traditions or philology;
7. what is its degree of standardization or prescriptive linguistics;
8. what institutional support does it have or glotopolitics;

9. what attitudes towards it are held by its speakers or ethnolinguistics;
10. where do all these factors place it in relation to other languages or ecological classification.

(Haugen 325).

Haugen refers generally to language status and intimacy. For him status signifies the power, prestige and influence the language possesses through the social categorization of its speakers. Intimacy refers to associations with group solidarity, friendship and bounding.

Today, the word is not on its own, the theorists of language, especially the purists pine over the changes that have come over in the use of language. They decry the looser constructions with their influx of neologisms, and coinages that hurry along to suit the violent supersonic speed to which the whole human race is subjected. The quick pace of communication effects a cut down in the vocabulary, and prose is adapted to the immediacy of the theme. The frenetic interspersions of the 'you know' and the use of slang are signs of verbal inadequacy, of a language losing its lustre, not to speak of its classical schemes of grammar and vocabulary. Speaker's pronunciation too is being prostituted to the popular taste for fear of being accused of affectation. Clear speech promotes clear thinking and creates a rapport

between the speaker and the listener. The pure word and thereby language is already manhandled, soiled by superstition and fear and preconception and so no longer an unsullied mass.

Language and Culture

Our linguistic and cultural structures are based on the complexities of heterogeneous elements situated in given socio-economic-cultural empirical fields of ideology. There are no such things as harmonious, balanced, clear-cut systems or structures. They are not dead static structures where everything holds together in perfect harmony. They are dynamic and living and so defy all formulations, all descriptive or generative rules. If every speaker of a language speaks exactly alike, behaves in the same manner, believes in every detail of his faith, all linguistic, cultural and religious structures will stop functioning. Communication is an affair of an interaction between thinking beings. Our linguistic or cultural behaviour patterns are only physical forms of what we want to convey.

The exact correspondence between thought and word varies from one person to another, from one situation to another and from one culture to another. The world within and the world without are never perfectly matched but whatever be the contours of our world within, it cannot exist without being in communication with the world without, but a consistent harmony

should be achieved between the two. The thought reflected in the words may become a sentence which will only remain in isolation if not embedded in the architectonic structures of a discourse which springs from specific human conditions. It is the human passions of love, hate or anger that charge the grammatical constraints with semiological meanings.

Language calls for two kinds of competence: the linguistic competence and the discourse competence. Linguistic competence deals with phonetic and grammatical constraints as when a child learns to pronounce the words of his language and constituents, in such grammatical categories as gender, number, past and present. The child here is only a speaking subject, who merely imitates what is spoken. When the child grows into a 'thinking subject' he begins to use these linguistic constructs effectively and intentionally. He understands the classifications and implications of a given word, that its meaning varies in different contexts according to the men who constitute different nationalities and colour, and that it has many forms etc..

The word leads to an idea, the idea to the thing and it is words that help us to classify the various objects and their concepts, for we do not create separate words for separate objects or concepts in the universe. Language thus becomes not only a means of speaking or using appellations to refer to specific objects, it is primarily a vehicle of thinking, attempting to form a

conceptual organization of the universe. Any effective use of language involves such signification.

The study of language always takes us to its users and the community in which the language is used. The language runs its roots into the society of the speakers, forming and adapting itself to the needs of the people and also in turn being influenced by their culture. There is a peculiar fascination that develops between the two: language and culture. It is claimed that there is a strong relationship between the sounds, words, and syntax of a language and the ways in which its speakers view the world. Although the structure of a language does not determine the world-view, language, no doubt, is extremely influential in predisposing its speakers toward adapting a particular world-view. It influences their culture, the know-how that a person must possess to get through the task of daily living. A society's culture, as Goodenough (1967) defines, "consists of whatever it is, one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for anyone of themselves".

An equally strong claim is that the culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ. The language is used in ways that reflect their values and their deeds. Cultural requirements though they do not determine the structure of a language, can explain why certain words or phrases are as

they come to exist. Edward Sapir acknowledged the close relationship between language and culture when he maintained that one cannot understand and appreciate the one without the knowledge of the other. As he expounds in The Status of Linguistics as a Science:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group . . . We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (Sapir 207).

But Whorf goes a step further to state that the relationship between language and culture is a deterministic one. The Whorfian hypothesis

underlines the influence that the structure of a language has on its speaker's view of the world.

The background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not nearly a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the programme and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar, and differs, from slightly to greatly, between different grammars. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. ... the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significance as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout or speech community is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its

terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees (Carroll 212).

Language thus shapes ideas, guides the individual's mental activity and helps to analyse his impressions. It may be believed that different speakers will therefore view the world differently, so far as the languages they speak differ structurally.

It is also claimed that if speakers of one language have certain words to describe things then they will find it easier to talk about those things. Astronauts can use space terms readily just as technicians of tools and navigators can use terms pertaining to their trades. Also, linguistic distinctions can draw attention to differences in one's environment and objects. The Eskimos familiar with snow that forms a part of their daily life will differentiate linguistically from those who have nothing to do with it. The Arabs likewise classify horses according to their ages corresponding to the uses they are put to. If things must be classified, as long or round, the speakers will perceive objects that way.

The strongest claim is made when we admit that the grammatical categories available in a particular language not only help the users of that language to perceive the world in a certain way but also control and limit and

mould their perception of the world. So speakers of different languages will, therefore, have different world-views. So language is used not simply to report one's experience, in truth it defines the experience. It imposes habits of both viewing and perceiving and in effect acts as a screen or filter to reality, to the natural world and to the social world. For example, both people and bulls have legs in English, but Spanish requires people to have 'piernas' and bulls to have 'patas'. Again, English has only a common term 'animal' for various kinds of creatures, but it lacks a term to cover both 'fruit' and 'nuts'; but Chinese does have such a cover term. The Garo of Assam in India have dozens of words for different types of baskets, rice and ants, for they are important items in their culture. Japanese has an extensive system of honorifics for the English 'you'. These kinds of distinctions available in their languages make it easier for the speakers to perceive the concept and convey it accordingly (Wardhaugh 222).

In analysing communication skills we notice that our speech may be wielded in many ways to obtain its goal. Variation in speech may stem from many reasons, one of the main being segmentation of the speech community into groups based on class, gender, race etc., and also difference in the contexts of speech events. A study of all explicit and implicit norms for communication, detailing aspects of verbal, nonverbal, and social parameters

of interaction will reveal the culturally relevant features of speech variation.

Hymes lists several components of communication requiring description:

- (1) participants, minimally speaker and addressee;
- (2) code used by interlocutors;
- (3) channel (e.g speaking, writing, nonverbal signals);
- (4) setting or context;
- (5) form or genre (e.g. conversation, folktale, chant, debate);
- (6) topics and attitudes (Hymes 10).

All cultures provide rules for appropriate communicative interaction, defining behaviours that should occur, that may occur, and that should not occur in given contexts. An ethnographic approach to analyzing communication stresses the cultural specificity of rules of communications and the totality of factors needing description. The most important aspects are settings, participants, topics and goals (Bonvillain 78). The settings classify occasions, demanding certain types of behaviour, formal or informal. The speech is suited to the occasion. A husband and wife working at the same office will not address each other as 'darling' in the setting of their work arena. Also, participants in a speech interaction make a language choice depending on the status and type of the other participants involved in the conversation. The form of address and tone is in tune with the listeners'

sort. The choice of topic also depends on the speaker's awareness of cultural and individual expectations. Combinations of personal interest and sensitivity to preferences of co-participants influence selection of topics. Here the speaker's goal in communication determines his interaction: avoidance of ill-feeling and embarrassment among social groups can be had with a wise choice of topic of conversation.

Institutional settings provide repeated exposure to societal inequalities. Status and authority are fostered by interaction and people are thoroughly socialized about the legitimacy of the social system that they willingly acquiesce to it. The relevance between social structure and language cannot be exaggerated. Every society has its own belief systems or ideologies which are transmitted through many social modes as religious rituals, moral and aesthetic values and political behaviour. The ways people interact with each other is conditioned by these sets of norms. And they are expressed in and through language. Words and the beliefs they express form a coherent cultural system. For example, belief about the inherent superiority and inferiority of one gender or class or race or age over the other is maintained and reproduced through linguistic messages and the meaning is never divorced from the society that creates it. Many words indicating women are derogatory, limiting and often have sexual meanings. People are

labelled on the basis of race also. So too superior groups are given special rights and occasion to initiate, guide and control speech in society. The supposedly inferior groups use strategies of indirection, intensifiers, hedges or hesitation, to eke out some communicative space. Their speeches are deemed as powerless and ineffectual.

Among the many institutions that exact characteristic behaviour from its members, is the institution of education. Schools have hold over an extensive period of one's life and that too in one's prime and pliable period of life. Authority of teachers in the classroom is strengthened by way of their superior status in society as educators and moulders of future citizens. The medical and legal arena also create their own hierarchical system. People with authority exert their influence through communicative strategies, whereas those at the receiving end accede to their dictates. So too, authority and control have their full play in the legal setting. The complex syntactic constructions and legalistic jargon, the frequent use of Latin words and phrases are paramount in creating a feeling of awe and mystery. The question - answer sequence is the primary linguistic mode and can control the contributions of defendants and make defence difficult.

Again linguistic exercise is best manifested in words used by the media. Sensational news is created and whipped up with great skill by shifts

on emphasis. Sentence constructions are changed to focus on different words and the recipients are always at the mercy of the seemingly innocent reporter.

The vocabulary of a language is not an arbitrary invention of titles to objects or events. The words used convey many kinds of meanings and even transform the basic senses of words. Sometimes the words are mere symbols and carry associational or extensional ideas. Speakers who encounter the array of knowledge understand the meaning according to their culture or surroundings and relevance. The speakers depend upon the knowledge of the hearer's knowledge and their shared experience which is due to their enculturation, hence a cultural presupposition. Joking and insulting speech depends much on cultural interpretations and social norms as well, because appropriate topics or targets of joking are determined by culture. The speaker has to make himself clear by choice of words, tone of voice and facial expression. Also, routinized requests like, 'How do you do?', require only a routinized answer like, 'I am fine'. That there is no reference to any particular action of any person is presupposed by the accustomed cultural background. Again, it is very essential to gain insights into a people's values to tap the real meaning of words. The word 'Turk' brought in negative connotations in Europe during the Renaissance, as do certain words in modern times. 'communal' to date is considered as being prejudiced against all other

communities. So too, calling one a 'terrorist' creates a condemnable attitude in the hearers. Our culture shapes and directs the way we perceive the world.

The world of metaphors open up a very extensive area where culture is in full play. The shared knowledge of users alone help to convey the message clothed in the images.

Cultural assumptions, values and attitudes are not a conceptual overlay that we may or may not place upon experience as we choose. It would be more correct to say that all experience is cultural ... We experience our 'world' in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself (Lakoff and Johnson 57).

It is also argued that metaphors when analysed provide insights into cultural constructions of reality because our concepts, in terms of which we understand and behave, are fundamentally metaphorical in nature. Since it is metaphorically that we view our world, our conceptual system is a store of natural images. For example, an inconceivably wide range is encompassed in motherhood metaphors. The role of giving birth and nurturance also includes in it that of protection and safeguarding against all evils. The mother is the symbol of immense love and patience. As the Goddess of prosperity and agriculture, she is worshipped in Hindu mythology. Her power is so great

that she is to be feared the utmost as Kali when on her rampage of destruction. The word 'Amma' is used as a polite address to any elderly or adult woman in Indian society which presupposes that all adult women are married and mothers.

Terminology in Language

Kinship

The nature and depth of the relationship between the members or groups is of utmost interest in our study of language and society and culture. Kinship terminology is most revealing in this area. The reference to one's various kins highlights one's attitude to them and the values that are ascribed to them. Kinship is very important in social organisation as well as in familial set up. It is difficult to note a particular system for there are many instances when one single word is used to refer to different relationships, for example, 'grandfather' is used to refer to one's mother's father and father's father as well; so also, the word 'cousin' includes, on the mother's side as well as the father's. The English 'you' finds different classifications in Hindi with 'Tu', 'Tum', 'Aap' as the Malayalam 'Ni', 'Ningal', 'Thangal'. It is strange that we should use a single term to refer to different kinds of relationship. This may be accounted by the circumstances in which we live, where knowing one's father's sister's son's son is not important. But people

not related in blood may be thrown together very often in societal needs that children cannot help but call them as 'uncles' or 'aunts'. Also it is considered impolite for a child to call an adult by his first name. So too 'father' may be used for others rather than male biological parent, e.g. in-laws, adoptive parents and priests.

As Wardhaugh (228) remarks, we can expect kinship systems to change according to new social conditions. The profound social change in Russian society in the last century produced certain changes in Russian kinship designation. At one time it was very important to identify certain in-laws. There were separate words for one's wife's brother, 'shurin' and for one's brother's wife, 'nevestka'. In modern Russian these unitary terms are no longer used. Instead, the phrases 'brat zhemy' (brother of wife) and 'zhena brata' (wife of brother) are used. Likewise, 'yatrov' (husband's brother's wife) has totally disappeared, and the term 'svoyak' is now used to refer to any male relative by marriage where previously it could be used only for one's wife's sister's husband. It is no longer necessary to refer constantly to such relatives or to be so precise as to a particular relationship. Changing family structures have removed them from daily contact. The new longer phrasal terms also indicate the current lack of importance given to certain kinship relationships in keeping with a general linguistic principle that truly

important objects and relationships tend to be expressed through single words rather than through phrases.

Taxonomy

Another evidence of the close relationship between language and society is revealed by the amazingly differentiating words developed in societies according to the peculiar situations encountered. Language comes to categorize the various aspects of their world and life and helps to develop systems known as folk taxonomies, classifying certain parts of reality so that it makes sense to those who deal with it. For example, the different kinds of skin diseases prevalent among the Subanum in the southern Philippines always calls for constant discussion of symptoms (Frake 130).

The validity of the classification of diseases, depends on finding the appropriate name for the set of symptoms, which is 'folk' name, not a scientific one. A folk taxonomy of disease is something that develops with little or no conscious attention. Yet is an indicator of how speakers use their languages to organize the world around them. Taxonomies are devised for buildings, meals, drinks, flowers, music, etc..

Colour terminology

Colour terminology also throws light on language use and people's perception. All languages make use of basic colour terms. Yet the extent of

colour terminology in specific languages relate with the level of cultural and technical complexity of the societies in which these languages are spoken. As cultural and technological changes occur, it becomes more and more necessary for people to differentiate within the colour spectrum. Combinations like grayish-brown, variations like scarlet and magenta, modifications like fire engine red, and combinations favoured by interior decorators and fashion writers list themselves in the language. It is interesting to note Loveday's observation:

The Kwaio of Solomon Islands label fresh water as one substance, salt water as another; they place birds and bats in one category in contrast to moths, butterflies and the like; they class fish and marine mammals together, and they label within a single term colours westerners call blue and black

(Loveday 39).

It is believed that in English at least, males usually display less ability than females in dealing with matters having to do with colour, including the actual use of colour terminology.

Another approach to understanding how people use language is the prototype theory. Concepts and classifications are generally formed from sets of features. There is an alternative to the view. A variety of experiments has

shown that people do in fact classify quite consistently objects of various kinds according to what they regard as being typical instances; for example, (1) furniture, so that, whereas a chair is a typical item of furniture, an ashtray is not; (2) fruit, so that, whereas apples and plums are typical, coconuts and olives are not; and (3) clothing, so that, whereas coats and trousers are typical items, things like bracelets and purses are not (Clark and Clark 464).

Prototype theory can be applied very effectively to social situations. It explains how we achieve our social competence in the use of language, shaping it appropriate to the situations.

Taboo and Euphemism

One linguistic universal is that no social group uses language quite uninhibitedly. Each social group is different from every other in its linguistic constraints. All of us probably have a few things we refuse to talk about, i.e., linguistic taboo and still others we do not talk about directly, although we know the words pertaining to it, i.e. euphemism. Society disapproves of certain types of behaviour either because it is harmful to its members, or is supposed to violate a moral code. It follows that certain things are not to be said or certain objects can be referred to only through deliberate circumlocutions, i.e. euphemistically. Death and dying are still a heavily tabooed area in Western life. 'Passed away' is often preferred and even the

more far-fetched 'kicked the bucket' is used. Lady Macbeth thinks of Duncan's murder when she says, "he must be provided for". Words on sex, excretion and bodily functions are most tabooed. Use of the name of God, Mother of God was taboo on the Shakespearean stage, and 'by Mary' was referred to "by Marry". Shaw's use of 'bloody' in the Pygmalion provoked much criticism. Euphemism helps us to express unpleasant things in a not too disagreeable manner. It is in a way renaming of reality to suit our needs and desires.

Race

Linguistic variations can be conspicuously found among races and classes who use the same language. Societal segmentation creates special social identities and language use displays the differences among the various segments or groups. Two of the most stable of all classifications are race and class. In societies in India the people who segmented themselves into strong caste systems were found to use different speech sounds. The members of the higher castes used standard sounds and they termed as 'ignorant' or 'backward' the non-standard sounds used by their lower castes. In the United States the Blacks form a group of their own and use their language with great variance from that of an average educated American. Despite this, the notion of class also promotes linguistic differences. Social and economic

differences among members of a community are reflected in many aspects of their lives. Education and occupation and access to political power influence their life- styles and behaviour patterns including their speech and language use. Language in all the above mentioned situations only enhances and reinforces the differences.

Body Language

A very interesting mode of communication besides the spoken word is body language or the language of gestures and signs. Living in the twenty-first century it is difficult to accept that human beings are still biologically animals, Homo sapiens. Although man possesses an advanced brain, he is basically controlled by biological rules that influence his actions, reactions and gestures - his body language. Curiously, man is rarely aware of these postures and gestures that faithfully and truthfully communicate his message in the raw in its totality.

Research done by Professor Ray Birdwhistell at the University of Louisville, showed that more human communication took place by the use of gestures, postures, position and distances than by any other method. 'Body Language' as this mode may be called emphasises the non-verbal aspects or implications of facial expressions and face-to-face encounters. It is interesting to be aware of one's own non-verbal cues and signals and to note

how people communicate with each other using this medium. Non-verbal communication is, however, a complex process involving people, words, tone of voice and body movements.

Charles Darwin's The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals published in 1872 offers an authoritative technical study on body language. Research on the area by Albert Mehrabian found that the total impact of a message is about 7 percent verbal (words only) and 38 percent vocal (including tone of voice, inflection and other sounds) and 55 percent non-verbal. Studies by Professor Birdwhistell established that the average person actually speaks words for a total of about ten or eleven minutes a day and that the average sentence takes only about 2.5 seconds. He found that the verbal component of a face-to-face conversation is less than 35 percent and that over 65 percent of communication is done non-verbally.

The verbal channel is used primarily for conveying information while the non-verbal channel is used for negotiating interpersonal attitudes, and in some cases is used as a substitute for verbal messages. For example, a woman can give a very clear message by giving a man 'a look to kill' and remain purse-lipped.

According to Birdwhistell, words and movements occur with such predictability that a well-trained person can tell what movements or gestures a man is making simply by listening to his speech.

The power to read another person's non-verbal cues and compare it with his verbal cues is known as the 'perceptive' or 'intuitive' power. When the two do not agree we know the person is lying. To be convincing a person's body language should fall in line with his verbal signals.

It is said that women have the power of intuition to a greater degree than their male counterparts. They have an accurate eye even for the minute non-verbal cues. The maternal instinct too is ever vigilant to pick up the non-verbal cues of the child and it is on this channel that the mother relies to communicate with the child during its early stages of infancy.

Gestures may be inborn or genetic as the ability of a child to suck or the smiling expressions of deaf and dumb born children. But much of our basic non-verbal behaviour is acquired and the meaning is determined by the culture of a community.

Just as verbal language differs from culture to culture, so the non-verbal language may also differ. Whereas one gesture may be common in a particular culture and have a clear interpretation, it may be meaningless in another culture or even have a completely opposite meaning.

So too, like any other language, body language consists of words, sentences and punctuation. Each gesture is like a single word and a word may have several different meanings. To gain the exact meaning, the word must be put into a sentence with other words. It is true, that gestures, are put into sentences of their own kind with other gestures in accompaniment and express meanings more truthfully.

Research in the field of linguistics shows that there is a direct relationship between the status, power or prestige a person commands and that person's range of vocabulary. The higher in the social ladder the person is, the better able he is to communicate in words and phrases. A person's power or status is related to the number of gestures or body movements he uses. It is observed that the less educated or unskilled person will depend on gestures than words to communicate. The use of gestures also vary according to the age of the speaker.

Women maintain a great distance from strangers. They may not even give eye contact to a stranger. And when they speak they might lower their eyes or look away. It implies a lack of confidence or timidity to assert what one is saying. Also the mind can be somewhere else with a vacant look on one's face. American anthropologist, Edward T. Hall, was one of the pioneers in the study of man's spatial needs which throws light on our

relationships with our fellow humans. Like animals and birds guarding their territories, man also has an area or space that he claims as his own, as if it were an extension of his body, a defined air space around his body. He reacts differently when this space is invaded and the reaction is determined by or as to the person who invades it. This personal zone distance is also culturally determined. Where some cultures, such as the Japanese, are accustomed to crowding, others prefer the wide open spaces and like to keep their distance. Status can also have an effect on the distance that a person maintains from the other. Lowering the height of one's body in front of another person or bending in front of him, is an indicator of one's position of inferiority.

According to culturally prescribed codes, we use eye movement and contact to manage conversations and to regulate interactions; we follow rigid rules governing intra and inter personal touch, our bodies synchronously join in the rhythm of others in a group, and gestures modulate our speech. We must internalize all of this in order to become and remain fully functioning and socially appropriate members of any culture (Ramsey 111).

Non-verbal behaviour may have both universal and cultural-specific patterns. And though non-verbal actions that look the same in different

systems may have different meanings because the meanings are culturally constructed and assigned, some gestures, facial movements and body postures may have universal or widespread significance. Within a given society, patterns of non-verbal behaviour often function to signal differences in status. Gestures, eye movements, smiles and other facial expressions, touching, and defining personal space are used in display of status. Dominant people tend to use broad expansive gestures, look or even stare at others, maintain serious, unsmiling faces, and attempt to enlarge the appearance of their bodies, and inhabit wide areas of personal space, whereas subordinates limit themselves to restricted gestures, arrest their eyes when looked at, avoid being unpleasant, keep their heads lowered and their arms close to their bodies in plaintive gestures. Patterns of bowing in Japan are signs of respect and deference, reciprocal bowing shows equality, whereas the dominant one may acknowledge with a nod of the head. Gender inequalities are directly signalled by these nonverbal gestures: Women use nonverbal markers of subordination when in the company of men. They refuse to look men in the eyes, condense their bodies as to avoid encroaching on others' space and allow intrusions into their own space. Interesting observations have been made by Nancy Henley (115) who reported that in mixed-sex interactions, men touched women twice as often as women did with men,

and women returned smiles of men nearly all the time, whereas men returned only two-thirds of the smiles given by women.

Chapter II

LANGUAGE OF WOMEN - AN ANALYSIS

Language in the phrase 'Language of Women' is used metaphorically to include experience plus expression (Sreedevi 77). Speech is not the exclusive parameter, for many factors go into the making of the language in its varying contexts. Sociolinguists and anthropologists point out that sex strongly affects and guides speech. Sex-preferred differentiation is widespread among almost all the various communities. The language of women suggests the female role in our society rather than the language that is used only by women. Crosby and Nyquist (314) suggest the term 'female register' to qualify the language of women: the expectations of a woman and what is expected of her.

Feminists believe that society is essentially patriarchal, with women always playing a subordinate role. Women complement and contribute and never master the show. They form a vast majority, quite unimaginable in their dimensions and usefulness to society, but pitifully ignored and considered of secondary consequence only. Feminists confirm that women as a group are oppressed and discriminated against. Needless to say that history

can give umpteen examples of eminent women who have risen to create history rather than be passive witnesses to the events around them. Barring the few exceptions, one can say, society is essentially patriarchal and so language has evolved the men's way. According to Sara Mills (47-57) women are treated differently from men in society as a whole, and there is a marked difference in the way that they view themselves and others view them, as gendered beings.

Women as a whole do not form a homogeneous group but are divided among themselves by differences of class, race, age, education and wealth. The differences are so divergent and numerous that they cannot be categorized under the simple title 'woman'. Feminists do not ignore these differences but uphold that women are discriminated against as a group in a variety of ways. Feminism is committed to making the social structure less oppressive to women, and more accessible, so as to enable and equip them with the skill and knowledge they need to lead responsible and independent lives.

Variations in social order and roles signal the norms and expectations that come into play to guide behaviour and interpretation. Feminist stylistics is concerned with the general emphasis outlined by Short and Leech (13).

The development of social sciences and the growth of the Women's Movement focus on the social problems that women find peculiar to their lot. They delve deep into the history of societies and cultures that has caused a compartmentalization of women. The social sciences trace the evolution of a woman culture and describe how it was nurtured through the ages. The Women's Movement, on the other hand, is conscious of the injustice of the situation and is up at arms to abolish the discriminations and establish for women equal status with men.

The Historical Background

There are two major disciplines whose works touch upon sex differences in language – Anthropology and Dialectology. Anthropology since the seventeenth century has clearly pointed out the differences between the language of men and women. Societies demarcated between men's language and women's language. There are phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical contrasts where the sex of the speaker determines which form is chosen. Anthropologists explain taboo and contact with speakers of other languages as the two main reasons for difference in the languages of men and women. Taboo occurs in all societies and certain forms of behaviour are advised or prescribed, including linguistic behaviour. Taboos are part of the social structure and maintain social order. Topics referring to

excretion or sexual activity seem to rob the female of decorum and decency. They are too sensitive to be handled by women and bring her under threat of exposure of her privacy deemed very essential to her modesty which in turn is her birth-mark. Men with their supposedly hard exterior, it is believed, can handle any rough subject and need fear no exposure and this totally confirms their claims to frankness. Caroline Humphrey's (89–108) investigations upon women in Mangolia, as to what was incorrect or improper behaviour, establish that most linguistic taboos are concerned with names. Names of dead people and predatory animals were taboo in their society. Names of all elder male relatives by marriage: the husband, his elder brothers, grandfathers, father, were not to be used. For example, where the name 'shar' is taboo, the women must not use either the name 'shar' or the word 'shar' which means yellow, but have to substitute 'angir', a word which refers to a yellow coloured duck. Or if the tabooed name is 'Xarguu' derived from 'xarax' which means to look at, the women must avoid the word 'Xar' which means black and has to use instead 'bargaam', which means darkish or obscure. Curiously each woman will have different linguistic problems, depending on the name of her male relative by marriage.

The second explanation cited by anthropologists for the difference of language in men and women is contact with speakers of other languages,

which happens when men marry women from outside their village or tribe only, as is the custom among some societies. In times of invasions too there is intimate interaction between the various communities which too leads to new developments in linguistic variations. In his account of the people of 'lesser Antilles' written in 1665, Rochefort claimed that the men and women spoke different languages:

The savage natives of Dominica say that the reason for this is that when the Caribs came to occupy the islands, these were inhabited by an Arawak tribe which they exterminated completely, with the exception of the women, whom they married in order to populate the country. Now, these women kept their own language and taught it to their daughters... It is asserted that there is some similarity between the speech of the continental Arawaks and that of the Carib women (*qtd. in* Jespersen 237).

Dialectologists unlike anthropologists have always been sensitive to sex differences in their own languages. They believe that as far as language is concerned women are more conservative than men. They hardly leave their village, unlike men; but stay at home and interact with each other more, and conserve the language of their forbears more faithfully.

Do Women and Men Talk Differently?

Anthropology, Dialectology, Sociolinguistics and Social Psychology prove that the language of women and men does differ. They also endeavour to show it differs, and go deeper to analyse why the sexes talk differently.

It is of particular interest to study the sociolinguistic variation associated with the sex of the speaker. Sociolinguistics being primarily the study of language in its social context critically studies the linguistic variation found adopted in individuals in separate social contexts. Difference in terms of age, sex, social class, ethnic group will also tell upon their speech even though in the same context. Sociolinguistic studies throw light upon both stylistic and social variation.

The Japanese is often cited as having a true women's language which can be traced back into the history of the Japanese. The study of Nyobokotoba, the language of the ladies of the court from the mid Kamakura period to the early Nuromachu reveal the sex based differences in speech between men and women. Women's concerns, that is, food, clothing, and other domestic concerns were found to have special lexical terms. These terms were initially used as secret jargons among court women, and later went down among maids and then to women of other classes and finally were widely accepted as female language. Having come down from the court

it was haloed with elegance and refinement, the most desirable of feminine traits. Japanese women's language is characterized as verbose, repetitive, conservative, concrete, trivial, soft, polite, pure and vague. Miller provides the following sample dialogue which displays a prominent sex-differentiated form:

Female Version

Maa, go-rippa na o-niwa de gozaamasu wa nee. Shibafu ga hirobiro to shite ite, kekkoo de gozaamasu wa nee.

My, what a splendid garden you have here. The lawn is so nice and big, it's certainly wonderful, isn't it!

Iie, nan desu ka, chitto mo teire ga yukitodokimasen mono de gozaimasu kara, moo, nakanaka itsumo kirei ni shite oku wake ni wa mairimasen no de gozaamasu yo.

Oh no, not at all, we don't take care of it at all anymore, so it simply doesn't look as nice as we would like it to.

Aa, sai de gozaimashoo nee. Kore dake o-hiroi-n de gozaimasu kara, hitotoori o-teire asobasu no ni date taihen de gozaimashoo nee. Demo maa, sore de mo itsumo yoku o-teire ga yukitodoite iras-shaimasu wa. Itsumo honto ni o-kirei de kekkoo de gozaamasu wa.

Oh, I don't think so at all – but since it's such a big garden, of course it must be quite a tremendous task to take care of it all by yourself; but even so, you certainly do manage to make it look nice all the time; it certainly is nice and pretty any time one sees it.

Iie, chittomo sonna koto goza-amasen wa.

No, I'm afraid not, not at all

Male Version

Ii niwa da naa.

It's a nice garden, isn't it.

Un.

Un.

(Miller 289).

Miller concludes:

The differences between men's and women's speech are too far-reaching and too closely interdependent upon content and style to admit of any simple summary. Put most briefly, women in Japanese society traditionally talk about different things than men do, or at the very least, they say different things even when they talk about the same topics (289).

Yana, a language spoken in California is described as a language having different usages for male and female. In Yana the gender of the speaker is identified based on the choice of the verb stem.

Eg. nii – nii ‘a male goes’

 a – ‘a female goes’

It is also stated that the majority of the Yana words have two forms, the full or the male forms and the reduced or female forms. The male forms are used only by males in speaking to males, while female forms are chosen when the speaker or addressee is a female.

Eg. Male : bona ‘deer’ ; yaa-na ‘person’

 Female : ba ‘deer; yaa ‘person’

(Sreedevi 67)

It is widely made known that women traditionally talk about different things and at the very least they say different things even when they talk about the same topics. Men and women talk about their problems in different ways. Men tend to have circumstantial descriptions while the women highlight the personal and sensitive areas. While describing an accident the

men would like to know how the accident was caused and why it happened, what were the reasons that led to it, the mechanical and technical faults involved if any, etc.. But women would be more concerned about the persons who fell victims, their personal background and personal tragedies that ensue.

Characteristics of Women's Speech

While exclusive differentiation between male and female language may appear to be a non-existent phenomenon, sex-preferred differentiation is widespread among a number of languages and language families (Bodine 124). Our society is often portrayed as one in which males are valued more than females. In particular, recent studies indicate that intonation, pronunciation and syntax in spoken English all vary in function according to the sex of the speaker. Robin Lakoff (55) argues that language gives concrete expression to implicit social norms, reflecting social order and subtly reinforcing it. The separate terms used to refer to them and their language styles remind the sexes of their divergent roles. Actually they denote the unequal roles or status that is existing between them, to an extent insisting on maintaining them.

The inferior status of women in society as a whole, argues Lakoff, is echoed by observable differences between men's language and women's language. Men's language, according to Lakoff's thesis, is assertive, adult, and direct. Women's language is immature, hyperformal or hyperpolite, and non-assertive. In short, 'speaking like a lady' helps keep females 'in their place'.

What specifically does it mean to 'speak like a lady'? Lakoff discusses six characteristics of women's speech in our culture. The first is lexical choice. Certain words (eg. 'mauve') are used almost solely by females. Second is the use of 'empty adjectives' such as 'divine' and 'cute'. Not only are these adjectives meaningless but, in contrast to male adjectives (eg. 'great', 'terrific'), they are noticeably devoid of any connotation of power. Third is the use of the question intonation in conjunction with declaratives. Tag questions (e.g. 'It's a nice day, isn't it?') allow women to make a statement without making an assertion. In addition to using tag questions, women often pronounce declarative statements with a rising

intonation. These statements are most frequently made in response to a direct question, as in the interchange: 'when will dinner be ready?' 'oh, about eight o'clock?' Fourth is the frequent use of modifiers or hedges (e.g. 'sort of', 'kind of', 'I guess') which, again, decrease the assertiveness of the commitment involved in any statement. Intensive use of the word 'so' is the fifth characteristic. Finally, 'speaking like a lady' means using hyper-correct and polite grammar. Females adhere to the rules of politeness while males adhere to the rules of direct discourse. As a result, female speech is typically indirect, repetitious, and unclear while male speech is typically direct, clear, and precise.

(qtd. in Crosby and Niquist 313-14)

The six characteristics outlined above as aspects of 'women's language' by Lakoff may for clarity of exposition be termed 'the female register' (314), the distinguishing feature being that it embodies the stereotyped female role in our society. That men and women in our culture play different roles is widely recognized. The male role is characterized as instrumental and the female role as expressive. The contrast between male assertiveness and commitment and female non-assertiveness and lack of

commitment adds an important dimension to the analysis of sex roles. These stereotyped roles of the male and the female indicate that our society is a sexist society. This sexism deprives women of the option of asserting in demanding situations. Sexism may prove detrimental to males also preventing them from polite and non-assertive behaviour when it is most essential. It is true, we will not build an egalitarian society by eradicating the female register or the feminine touch. But the sex differential usage of the female register should diminish as our society becomes increasingly androgynous.

Women in Homogenous Groups

The use of language in all female groups is noteworthy. 'Gossip' is a term used almost exclusively of women's talk, it usually has pejorative connotations: idle talk, tittle-tattle. It is a term describing women's talk, and can be redefined in a non-pejorative manner, as a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting. It implies that the talk and language women use among themselves is not considered serious enough for linguistic data. But men's talk is never taken lightly and is always received seriously. But 'gossip' is useful to maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups, by the use of questions and tag questions, rising intonation patterns, minimal responses

such as 'unhm', and 'yeah', paralinguistic responses (raised eyebrows, pursed lips, sighs, etc. and in general by a reciprocal pattern of interaction. The most significant observation is that where men disagree with or ignore each other's utterances, women tend to acknowledge and build on them (Jones 195). It seems that men pursue a style based on solidarity and support, Jordan mentions that female speech is less direct and precise and more emotional than male speech. Hence an emotional link to carry on the conversation smoothly is supplied by the female counterpart. The interruptions, if there are any, are subdued and non-irritating. When all the participants in a conversation are of the same sex, then the existence of a gender hierarchy or dominance is irrelevant, but when participants are of both the sexes, then dominance and oppression become exposed. When women interact with men they are evidently relating to superiors, but when they interact with other women they may feel quite equals.

Gossip

Women at times form a speech community of their own, with language skills of their own. Deborah Jones defines gossip:

... as a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the

restrictions of the female role, but also gives comfort of validation.

.....

Gossip is necessarily serial and, like the knitting which often accompanies it, can be taken up and put down as opportunities permit (Jones 243,244).

Kramer (14) terms gossip as a 'genderlect' to specify its use by a special gender, the female. Anthropologists assign special social functions to it; such as maintaining "the unity, morals and values of social groups" (Gluckman 308) with general interest in the doings, the virtues and vices of others. Gossip is studied in a sociolinguistic framework as verbal behaviour in terms of the relations between the settings, the participants, the topic and their functions of interactions.

Setting includes the physical aspects of time and place and the cultural, characterized by the restraints on women's life. The setting may be the house or the market: places associated with the female role both at home and outside it. The time has to be snatched from work.

Gossip is a staple of women's lives, and the study of gossip is an eye-opener to women's concerns and values, a subculture in the larger context of life. Indulged in by women, only in the company of women, it leads to an

intimacy, which also decides on its special topics of discussion. Being a language of female secrets it is trivialized by men but feared also because of its inherent secret nature. At times women were prohibited from such inclusive meetings for the subversive power of gossip was associated with witchcraft, which again was a desecration of womanhood.

The topics of gossip project the female subculture, for they almost always revolve round cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, personal appearance, and personal or private matters of others which in turn created a peculiar perspective of the world.

The important feature of gossip is that it is allusive; its characteristics being the rising inflection, implicit references to common knowledge, common values or group values. Women not only share but also gather information and indulge in paralinguistic forms: the raised eyebrows, the pursed lips, the sigh or the silence.

Women respond minimally with 'mm-hmm' as feedback to other women's speech. Males tend to dispute the other person's utterance or ignore it, while females acknowledge it, or often build on it (Hirschman 249).

She divides gossip into four functional categories: house-talk, scandal, bitching and chatting. She notes that as function varies, there are some

accompanying variations in topic and formal features. House-talk is in keeping with the function of the shop-talk of men, and is characterized by information about the household chores and personal relationships on an intimate level. So it in effect meets the emotional needs for support and recognition. When gossip becomes malicious and destructive to others and when it indulges in personal criticism of the behaviour of others, it can be termed as scandal. The misbehaviour of other women, especially their sexual behaviour and morality, is discussed to the utter denigration of the victims. Sexist modes are thus enforced among women by women themselves. A cultural medium is born along with the vicarious enjoyment of a range of experiences beyond the small sphere of the individual woman. Bitching in its political form is found in the conscientization in the Women's Movement. Bitching hovers on personal complaints and is more specific than general and it provides an excellent cathartic effect on the participants.

Gossip takes on a most intimate form in chatting when the skills that women have acquired in their occupational needs are discussed. A very amusing description is offered by Chesler:

... women share their feelings by alternating the retelling of the entire experience in which their feelings are embedded and from which they cannot be 'abstracted' or 'summarized'. Their

theme, method and goal are non-verbal and/or non-verbalized. Facial expressions, pauses, sighs and seemingly unrelated (or 'non-abstract') responses to statements are crucial to such dialogue. A very special prescience is at work here. On its most ordinary level, it affords women a measure of emotional reality and a kind of comfort that they cannot find with men. On its highest level, it constitutes the basic tools of art and psychic awareness (Chesler 268).

Women and Politeness

Women tend to be more polite than men and express positive politeness or friendliness in the way they use language. Women's utterances show positive concern for others. Being polite means expressing respect towards the person one is talking to and avoiding offending them. In other words, politeness may take the form of an expression of good-will or camaraderie, as well as the more familiar non-intrusive behaviour which is labelled 'polite' in everyday usage. Politeness is described as showing concern for people's 'face', Brown and Levinson (13). The term 'face' here is a technical term that can be traced to the usages: 'losing face' and 'saving face'; and functions in treating every action as a potential threat to somebody's face.

Everybody has face needs or basic wants, and people generally cooperate in maintaining each others' face, and partially satisfying each others' face needs. Politeness involves showing concern for two different kinds of face needs: first, negative face needs or the need not to be imposed upon, and secondly, positive face needs, the need to be liked and admired. Behaviour which avoids imposing on others or threatening their face, is described as expressing warmth towards a person and is positive politeness. Women are much more likely than men to express positive politeness or friendliness in the way they use language.

Special linguistic features as to what is considered polite differ from one culture to another. Americans using Indian languages may be considered overly effusive because of their expressions which are not used by Indians, whereas an Indian may be thought of as rude or uncivilized because of the lack of such expressions. An understanding of the values of the society is important in all transactions. Japanese value empathy and sensitivity to the needs of others and consider confrontation and directness as childish and immature.

Japanese linguistic politeness is more extensively expressed through the morphology of the language than in English linguistic politeness.

The Effects of Politeness

Being polite is not simply an interpersonal matter. Besides, affecting one's relationship with others, it provides inferences about one's education and socialization. It tells upon one's character as being friendly, considerate and respectful or disdainful. Negative polite behaviour may be used to establish a particular degree of social distance by expressing consideration and respect; whereas positive politeness contributes to goodwill among persons. The implications of such behaviour among men and women relationships are very obvious especially in personal relationships. Linguistic interaction which follows women's norms can result in better working relationships, better understanding of complex issues and better decision-making. What many dismiss as mere politeness, is in fact a set of valuable interactional skills which can be used very productively and beneficially to great dimensions.

Silence

Another very important form of communication though non-verbal, indulged in by women, is silence. Silence can be more eloquent than utterance and can speak volumes depending upon the context. Silence may be the absence of speech, but it is not a lack for it has a purpose and significance. Emphasizing the use of silence Bonvillain (44) focuses on the

fact that “silence does not simply exist but is actively created by participants”.

Situational and interactional functions of silence are varied according to cultural contexts. Yet they are most often status-related for people of lower status in unequal company tend to be more silent than their powerful participants. Use of talk might be a breach to social hierarchies. Silence is demanded of people on several occasions especially in ceremonial or formalized situations, governmental or legal proceedings when speech is unwarranted. It becomes most appropriate when handling unpredictable and unfamiliar people or situations. It would be good to observe strangers rather than speak to them for one can pick up clues from their behaviour and anticipate their actions or character. Silence operates as a form of social control. Wrongdoers are punished by group silence when all villagers refuse to speak to the culprit or criminal.

Among the Igbo of Nigeria, talk and social gregariousness are highly valued so that silence stands out as unusual behaviour. It is mandated in ritual or ritualized situations. For example, four days after a death in a household, villagers show sympathy by entering the house, standing in silence in front of bereaved family members, sitting silently for a period, and again presenting themselves to mourners before departing (Nwoye 186).

Silence is the norm in other ritual sacrifices also. Silence is also a universal activity, but its display and contextual meaning are affected by cultural modes. It is a form of communication most often taken recourse to by women to stand their grounds in embarrassing situations.

Speech Variants in Men and Women

The interrelationship between language and gender can be approached by both sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic perspectives. Sociolinguistics enlightens us on women's and men's styles of speaking, including differences in pronunciation, use of prosodic cues (intonation, velocity, volume), grammatical forms and choices of vocabulary. Gender differences can be found in conversational interaction such as modes of topic introduction, topic control, and supportive or non-supportive mechanisms used by speakers and listeners. Ethnolinguistics points to the categories in a language itself and the ways in which cultural attitudes towards people are both expressed and reinforced in grammar and vocabulary.

In English, and in many other languages, speech styles of women and men vary in the frequencies with which they employ particular sounds, grammatical features, or words. Although there seems to be no exclusive patterns for either gender, they have culturally associated styles applicable to

each. These associations become stereotypes and reinforce themselves with conformity.

Phonological Variants

Speakers of English, except for some regional variations, make use of the same inventory of sounds. However, there are differences in the frequencies with which men and women use particular sounds. Researches on children's speech by Fischer found gender-related patterns in pronunciation of *-ing*, the progressive suffix on verbs. Relevant variants are *-ɪŋ* (*-ing*) and *-ɪn* (*-in*), as in *rʌnɪŋ* (running) or *rʌnɪn* (runnin). Selected 12 boys and 12 girls and divided them into two groups, aged 3 to 6 and 7 to 10. He found that gender and context played the most significant role in the frequent usages of *-ɪŋ*/*-ɪn*. The following table is the result of the verbal Thematic Apperception Test interviews:

	<i>Prefer -ɪŋ</i>	<i>Prefer -ɪn</i>
Boys	5	7
Girls	10	2

(Fischer 48).

Of the 12 boys, 5 used *-ɪ* more frequently than *-ɪn*. For girls the discrepancy is more obvious, only 2 using *-ɪn* while 10 used *-ɪ*. Fischer concludes that in that particular community, *-ing* is regarded as symbolizing female speakers and *-in* as symbolizing males". For, no significant differences were reported between the two age groups. This also indicates that children learn this gender-appropriate behaviour very early.

Fischer (50) further demonstrates that a 10 year old boy spoke differently on three observational contexts. The table below shows the number of times the boy used the two variants.

	<i>-ɪ</i>	<i>-ɪn</i>
TAT	38	1
Formal interview	33	35
Informal interview	24	41
Number	194	70

These figures emphasise a strong correlation between *-ɪ* and formal situations and *-ɪn* and informal situations. The variant *-ɪ*, then, underlines social and contextual formality; it as well symbolizes female speakers. The data also suggests cultural meanings, including formality, politeness and

compliances on the part of women speakers. Women employed standard features at greater frequencies than did men.

William Labov (89) has also conducted studies on speech differences in gender and confirms the view of women's greater use of standard pronunciations and quick marked style shifting to the standard in increasingly formal speech contexts. Labov analysed the speech of men and women in New York city focusing on the phonological variable known as *postvocalic /-r/*, the pronunciation of /r/ following a vowel – for example, *car*, *card*. The presence of /-r/ in this context is a marker of standard American English; its absence is generally stigmatized. Labov obtained data through rapid, anonymous observations by asking the question: “Excuse me, where are the women's shoes?”, and got the answer as “fourth floor”. He observed the occurrences of /-r/ in both words (*fourth floor*) as the following table reveals:

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
All /-r/	30%	22%
Some /-r/	17	22
No /-r/	54	57
Number	194	70

Though researches have been conducted on different categories of people, irrelevant of race or class or region, the studies have come to identical conclusions: females use standard and prestige pronunciations at a higher rate than do males. Whereas women claim to produce pronunciations having “overt prestige”, men model their behaviour purposely, although unconsciously, toward non-standard forms having ‘covert prestige’ (Trudgill 185).

Intonational Patterns

Intonational patterns also provide interesting cues to male/female differences in speech. Intonation may be described as a complex combination of rhythm, volume and pitch that overlays the whole utterance or speech. In general, women are found to use more dynamic intonational contours than men do. They resort to a more rapid and marked shift in volume and velocity in their utterances. When interpreted culturally, intonational ranges denote temperamental differences, in that dynamic patterns are interpreted as indicating emotionality and natural impulses, whereas use of narrow intonational ranges imply restraint (McConnell-Ginnet 76). The monotonic styles used by men mark them as being controlled in their emotions as opposed to women who are more expressive.

“Masculine speech melodies can be heard as metaphors for control and feminine speech melodies as uncontrolled” (82). Women here are evaluated negatively and considered as unstable and unpredictable. The different patterns of speech also indicate the sentence contours used in distinctive ways. For example, women may raise pitch levels at the end of declarative sentences, whereas men use a steady or lowering pitch. The rising pitch is a regular indicator of a question and it pictures women as hesitant, uncertain, and lacking assertiveness, while some linguists suggest that this style is used by women in order to secure a response from their listeners (Fishman 97). The style is also helpful in societal interaction for it serves the important function of attracting the hearer’s attention and retaining it. The relative powerlessness of women urges her to employ it. Also, in the constant contact with children who cannot respond to verbal signal, women can use this style as a very effective device.

Grammatical Variants

Relevant research on the relationship between gender and grammar is highly revealing of the difference in male/female speeches. Cheshire offers interesting data related to adolescents’ adherence to standard forms of grammar. He focused on the following linguistic usages found in the Reading community of England:

1. Present tense – *s* with non-singular subjects:

“We goes shopping on Saturdays.”

2. *Has* with first – and second – person subjects:

“We *has* a little fire keeps us warm.”

3. *Was* with plural subjects and singular “you”:

“You *was* outside”.

4. Multiple negation:

“I’m *not* going *nowhere*”.

5. Past tense *never*, replacing standard “didn’t”:

“I *never* done it, it was him”.

6. *What* replacing “Who, whom, which, that”:

“Are you the boy *what*’s just come?”

7. Auxiliary *do* with third person singular subjects:

“How much *do* he want for it?”

8. Past tense *come*:

“I *come* down here yesterday”.

9. *Ain’t* used for negative auxiliary “have”:

“I *ain’t* got any”.

10. *Ain’t* used for negative auxiliary “be”:

“I *ain’t* going to help”.

11. *Ain't* used for negative copula:

“It’s her proper name, *ain't* it?”

(Cheshire 153-54).

It was found that boys consistently resorted to non-standard grammatical constructions while the girls abided by standard and prestige features. The following table presents the scores for use of non-standard forms:

Gender Differences in Non-standard features

Frequency Scores		
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Non-standard <i>-s</i>	53.16	52.04
Non-standard <i>has</i>	54.76	51.61
Multiple negation	88.15	73.58
Non-standard <i>never</i>	46.84	40.00
Non-standard <i>what</i>	36.36	14.58
Non-standard <i>do</i>	57.69	78.95
Non-standard <i>come</i>	100.00	75.33
<i>Ain't</i> = aux “ <i>have</i> ”	92.00	64.58
<i>Ain't</i> = aux “ <i>be</i> ”	74.19	42.11
<i>Ain't</i> = copula	85.83	61.18

(163).

Evidence shows that a number of grammatical patterns appear in women's speech more frequently than in men's. One that captures the most attention is the use of the tag questions by women.

Use of Tag Questions

For instance, modal tags are used to request information from the addressee or request that the addressee confirm a statement about which the speaker is unsure. Janet Holmes calls these tags 'speaker-oriented' because they function to supplement the speaker's knowledge, as in:

She's leaving for London tomorrow, isn't she?

Affective tags are addressee-oriented and show the speaker's interest in the addressee. Affective tags function as 'softeners' to reduce the force of a command or criticism.

You are speaking too loudly, aren't you?

Pass the salt for me, could you?

Affective tags can be facilitative tags which find full play in interactions and indicate the speaker's desire to engage the addressee in carrying on with a conversation (55).

Still studying hard for your exams, are you?

The weather is fine, isn't it?

These tags invite the addressee to build on a topic which is introduced by the speaker. They serve as mechanisms to establish speaker turns.

Studies by Holmes arrived at conclusions that men more often used tags for speaker-oriented goals, to obtain or confirm information for themselves, whereas women more often use tags for addressee-oriented goals, particularly to engage people in conversation. Holmes also provides the following data:

Number of Tag Questions

<i>Type of Meaning</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Modal	18(35%)	24(61%)
Affective		
Facilitative	30(59%)	10(25%)
Softening	3(6%)	5(13%)
Total	51	39

(Holmes 54)

It is found that in asymmetrical status interactions, 'power' seemed to influence the kind of tag employed. Yet powerful men were more likely than powerful women to employ modal tags.

Androcentric Attitudes

Androcentric (male-as-norm) attitudes were conspicuous in early pronouncements on language and they formed the basis for prescriptive rules of grammar.

The notion of correctness and order in grammar and rhetoric was the greatest concern of earlier writers. The idea of a natural order and the superiority of the male is unabashedly prescribed for linguistic usage: “The Masculine gender is more worthy than the feminine” (Poole 21). This idea is found in the sex-indefinite *he* rule which proscribes the use of *they* or *she* where the sex of the antecedent is unknown:

1. *Everyone* should bring the book but *they* have not brought it.
2. *Everyone* should bring the book but *he* or *she* has not brought it.
3. *Everyone* should bring the book but *he* has not brought it.

The first sentence is deemed incorrect and the second clumsy by prescriptive grammarians; only the third one is considered correct.

The Masculine Person answers to the general Name, which comprehends both Male and Female; as Any Person, who knows what he says (Kirkby 117).

The rule was imposed upon language by male grammarians and is an example of linguistic favouritism found especially in the eighteenth century and is now displaced by *they* especially in tag questions although the subject is singular.

Focus on the meaning of *Man* also has given cause for protest. Feminists have argued that *Man* does not mean *human being* but *male human being*; such claims are backed by sentences like:

1. *Man's* vital interests are food, shelter, and access to females.

2. *Man* is the only primate that commits rape.

If *Man* is genuinely inclusive, 1 and 2 ought to be semantically anomalous, or at least have the same status as:

3. *Man*, unlike other mammals, has difficulties in giving birth.

4. *Man* is a mammal that breast feeds its young.

Besides, *Man* there are words like *human*, or *people* to refer exclusively to males, sometimes to both females and males, but rarely to female alone.

1. People will give up their wives but not power.

2. Americans of higher status have less chance of having a fat wife.

3. People don't like being ill, but women put up with it better than men.

4. I met several Americans this summer and the most interesting of them were a journalist and her daughter.

It would be interesting to note the systematic patterning of masculine and feminine referents in relation to general categories of humanity. It cannot be ignored that gendered meaning is produced in particular utterances. For example:

The tourists consisted of five people and a woman.

The difference in acceptability may be felt when sentence reads:

The tourists consisted of five people and a man.

Jespersen also provides relevant observations on male/ female differences in the field of grammar. He believed that women often produce half-finished sentences, as a result of not thinking before speaking. He claims that this happens especially with exclamatory sentences. He gives examples:

Mrs.Eversleigh; I must say! (but words fail her)

(Hankin *qtd. in* Jespersen 251)

“The trouble you must have taken”, Hilda exclaimed.

(Compton-MacKenzie *qtd. in* Jespersen 251).

This observation does not find much evidence to support; but the second claim is more valid and focuses on the use of *parataxis* and *hypotaxis*. Parataxis is the term used to describe a sequence of clauses where there are no links at all (the clauses are simply juxtaposed).

Clause, Clause

eg. He ate his dinner, he went to sleep.

Not always included in the term *parataxis*, but similar is *co-ordination*, where the clauses are linked by co-ordinating conjunctions: *and*, *but*, or *etc.*

Clause and Clause

eg. He ate his dinner and he went to sleep

Hypotaxis is the term used to describe a sequence of clauses where subordinating clauses function as links between the two clauses: *after*, *because*, *before* etc..

After clause, clause/clause after clause

eg. After he ate his dinner, he went to sleep /

he went to sleep after he ate his dinner).

The logical connections between the clauses are made explicit in a hypotactic style, but left implicit in a paratactic style. The main difference between the two styles is that parataxis involves a series of main clauses,

each clause being of equal value, while hypotaxis consists of a main clause with one or more subordinate clauses dependent and lack logical connectives and henceforth are constructions universally admired.

Jespersen's analysis of male/female differences in syntax makes use of this distinction:

If we compare long periods (sentences) as constructed by men and women, we shall in the former find many more instances of intricate or involute structures with clauses within clauses, a relative clause in the middle of a conditional clause or vice versa, with subordination and sub-subordination, while the typical form of long feminine periods is that of co-ordination, one sentence or clause being added to another on the same plane and the gradation between the respective ideas being marked not grammatically, but emotionally, by stress and intonation, and in writing by underlining. In learned terminology we may say that men are fond of hypotaxis and women of parataxis (251).

Jespersen finds the hypotactic style superior. Although he fails to distinguish between the two words *grammatically* and *emotionally*, it is

obvious that emotionally is used in a pejorative way. He continues with two famous similes.

A male period is often like a set of Chinese boxes, one within another, while a feminine period is like a set of pearls joined together on a string of *ands* and similar words (252).

Jespersen's findings on women's syntax is based on the difference between written and spoken language. Written language, especially printed matter, was produced by men who had more access to education and knowledge.

Linguistic Differentiation

Linguistic differentiation based on sex has deep, far-reaching social consequences. There is considerable evidence that the patterns of behaviour typical of all women groups differ from those typical of all-men groups. In all-women groups conversation is marked by a great sharing of one's feelings and relationships along with information. The discussions are long and invariably centred around one or a few topics. On the other hand in all men groups conversation takes on a sharper turn. Shifting from one topic to another quite frequently, men in company vie with each other to relate anecdotes that reflect superiority and aggression on the part of the speaker. They compete to prove themselves better informed about current affairs and

rarely wish to disclose their intimate feelings. And, in mixed-sex groups, the conversation establishes a stable hierarchy, with men dominating the women at almost all times, enforcing their views rather vociferously. Women on the other hand, in such a mixed company fear exposure and shrink away. Their speech is minimal and almost submissive and apologetic. Even the categorical statements they wish to make are of a subdued tone and at a low key. They prefer an interpersonal style involving one-to-one reaction in contrast to the men who love to address the whole group demanding total, absolute attention.

Besides, women have a strategy to maintain a conversation. Their speech is scattered all over with mild interjections and not very meaningful questions. After all, they are employed as speech acts which will elicit a subsequent speech act or response. Mild questions, especially, are an indirect mode that ensures a conversation continues. Such questions are in no way the type put forward by men requesting information.

A woman in conversation, by nature acknowledges the contribution of the previous speaker and can follow the cue quite effortlessly. But men refuse to maintain any link between the earlier speaker and are eager on making their own point. Women resent such behaviour and adhere to their sex appropriated roles.

Shifts between topics is another feature of all male conversations in opposition to that of women who progressively build on conversations and change topics gradually. Elaboration and continuity form the basis of women's talk, but are immaterial to men's talk.

Women's conversations are therapeutic. Their approach to a problem takes on a personal level, offering reassurance and advice. There is no down lecturing or condescension as in the case of men who do not consider discussion of personal problems a component of conversation. The statement of a problem then, has quite different meanings for women and men, and their linguistic responses differ accordingly.

Active listenership is part and parcel of all good conversation. Listening, as a participant's role in conversation is greatly valued by women, and they encourage the speech of others. Men would miss no opportunity to voice their opinions. They perceive women's behaviour as a failure to assert their right to speak rather than as active listening and participation. This is an area of miscommunication which may lead to clashes in interaction.

Why do women and men interact differently?

It is a universally accepted fact that women and men interact differently; yet the reasons for this differentiated behaviour bring out much difference of opinions. Some argue that innate biological differences account

for sex-differentiated rates of language acquisition, as well as for differences in psychological orientation or temperament (McKeever 270). Gender differences in orientation to others may be accounted for by the psychological differences like women being more inclined towards promoting interpersonal contacts and relationships, whereas, men favour detachment and independence and give importance to hierarchical relationships. There is always a tendency among men to exert control and such linguistic terms are devised.

Difference in socialisation is explained as another factor for the speech differences among men and women; resulting in different ways of using and interpreting language. Girls and boys remain in single-sex peer groups for a long time and hence they develop different styles of interaction. They are socialized into different cultures and interact accordingly.

Distribution of power in society is also a reason for gender-based differences. Power refers to the ability of participants to influence one another's circumstances. It has been defined as the possibility of imposing one's will upon another person (Galbraith 20). Men are always powerful and dictate terms. Women are powerless members of a community so the situation demands that they be more polite than men. It has also been suggested that those who are powerless must be polite. Hence the frequency

of the polite linguistic devices indulged in by women. A greeting, a compliment, an apology, the use of hedges, giving encouraging feedback, gentle tone of voice rising, intonations, tag questions are all infinite sources of expressing meaning with added politeness.

Though language serves many functions, there are two – the referential and effective functions – which are particularly pervasive and basic. The function of a greeting, an apology or a compliment will be predominantly affective or social. But even the form of a radio weather forecast will give us an idea of the assumed relationship between the presenter and the audience.

Most women enjoy talk and regard talking as an important means of keeping in touch, especially with friends and intimates. They use language to establish, nurture and develop personal relationships. Men tend to see language as a tool for obtaining and conveying information. They see talk as a means to an end, and the end can often be precisely defined – a decision reached, for instance, some information gained, or a problem resolved (Bell 150).

Men's reasons for talking often focus on the content of the talk or its outcome, rather than how it affects the feelings of others. It is women who

rather emphasise this aspect of talk. Men seem to have different norms from women concerning situations of polite behaviour. Men consider explicitly polite linguistic to be appropriate in a rather limited range of relationships. It is appropriate to superiors and in the limited semi-private contexts of social interaction between acquaintances and people who are friends but not intimates. Men are not gracious conversationalists in the home, as also among status equals. In formal or semi-formal occasions of meetings and conferences, polite and facilitative behaviour will have to be avoided. They become more result-oriented than caring for the feelings of others, and supportive speech acts as compliments and apologies are minimized. Politeness is used by men only when they genuinely want to develop, sustain and nurture an intimate relationship, not otherwise. But public contexts are traditionally male contexts and the rules of interaction are male rules. Most men believe that there is no need for them to play women's games or rules.

Acquisition of Sex-differentiated Language

Most children under the age of five, probably are to a great extent under the dominant influences of their mothers and other women in the family and hence their language learning begins with 'women's language'. As they grow older, boys learn to talk rough, which is entirely discouraged and ridiculed in girls. By the age of ten, children divide into their own sex

groups, and boys unlearn their original expressions and style and develop new forms whereas girls retain their original form and try to adhere more to the 'women's language'. Robin Lakoff states:

So a girl is damned if she does, damned if she doesn't. If she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human. These two choices which a woman has – to be less than a woman or less than a person – are highly painful (Lakoff 75).

It is observed that most women who get to college learn to switch on to neutral language under appropriate situations: in class, at interviews etc.. But here arises the need to use both the dialects separately and almost simultaneously, at home and outside the home. She may be able to manage neither efficiently, though both are necessary for her interactions on different planes. It can be seen that women's language, restricted in use to women and descriptive of women alone, constricts woman's special identity by incapacitating her to express herself suggestive of her ignorance and uncertainty of matters. When discussed about she will be treated as an object, sometimes merely sexual, with no individuality of her own. There is such a

systematic denigration of women that they are made to accept such treatment as their deserved lot and willingly suffer discrimination.

Children are initiated into gender differences even in their homes as well as they are acquainted with differences in age and consequent role plays. Just as they come to recognize their lack of power and assertiveness they know the balance of power existing in the family. Experimental studies have shown that fathers interrupted their children more often than did mothers and both parents interrupted daughters more often than sons. Sons are socialized by their fathers whom they take to be their models. In their competitive behaviour with other boys of the society they follow this model. Commands such as "I'll thrash you", "I'll blow you off", train them to take challenges from outside. They become so gender-sensitive that they replicate the difference in their encounter with girls and dare to interrupt them more frequently than the reverse. Also in dealing with their mothers they use less polite directives than they would with their fathers, observes Ervin-Tripp in Language and Power (Ervin - Tripp *et al* 131). Interruptions are adopted as strategies to disregard the speaker's talk and deprive the woman an opportunity to fully express herself as she had intended.

Results of studies conducted by Andersen revealed children's keen awareness of prerogatives of age and gender. It was observed that when

children were given to play the roles of fathers and mothers and babies, father-puppets came out with direct commands without any explanations whereas mother-puppets explained most of their requests. For example:

Mother-puppet : Gotta get the baby tucked into beddy bye.

She's not a sleepy.

[To baby] Go to sleep, sleep, sleep, darling. Go to sleep.

[Turns to father] Don't you think its' time to go to bed? It's midnight - we should go to bed.

(Andersen 155)

Besides the differences in issuing directives, responses to directives were also found to be patterned. Girls and boys reacted differently to directives and used contrasting modes of non-compliance. Boys in cases of disagreement, were found to reject boldly, 54 percent as against girls' rate of 35 percent, whereas girls used the strategy of ignoring them. This behaviour reveals the greater assertion of independence on the boy's part and his power to challenge the issuer of commands.

Relationships in society are affected or influenced by the status of persons in the community. The influences of status are manifested within the family as well. Children first get exposed to familial interactions and become aware of the gender and age factor. They come to observe unequal status

between father and mother and other members of the family. Inequality is found in the family between the age groups also and they have to learn their place in the hierarchy of the family. They understand later how this inequality in status spills out into the society and in socializing themselves they are careful to adhere to the segmentations. They discipline themselves in accordance with the cultural models that are enacted on a daily basis in their households. Language use is one means of transmitting this knowledge.

It is power that is displayed in the daily process of living, especially in the giving and receiving of orders or directives. The tendency or right to control others is reflected in the frequency and nature of the directives or orders. Linguistic styles and words chosen in the process are sensitive indicators of the speaker's right over the listener or receiver. In natural home settings Gleason (190) found that fathers issued stern commands twice often as did mothers. A total of 38 percent of all father's utterances were overt commands whereas mothers issued requests with polite questions and implied sternness. Between the parents themselves, while the father is out to impose his wishes on the mother, the mother in her expressions leave hints with possibilities of compliance or non-compliance with her requests.

The mother tends to be silent when interrupted by the father. Girls and boys, thus learn to belong to their separate groups and in all their interactions

adhere almost very strictly to their sex-appropriate behaviour, and this includes sex-appropriate linguistic behaviour. They acquire a gender identity by learning to behave as a 'proper' boy or a 'proper' girl.

It is generally established that girls are superior to boys in acquisition of speech, right from the first word and the number of words acquired. Also in the area of verbosity too, girls are found to be more talkative and more fluent; unhindered and untampered they go on talking ceaselessly to all around them, but this stops suddenly in childhood. Such quantitative differences suffer a reversal and while turning into adults, women talk less than men in mixed company.

Children are socialized through language and assigned culturally approved sex roles. They learn to be cultured male or female. According to Jennifer Coates (133) the socialization is achieved in four ways: Explicit comments on certain aspects of linguistic behaviour - eg. swearing, taboo language, verbosity, politeness etc., can set norms for behaviour. Adults providing different linguistic models for children to identify depending on the sex of the child, can also create sex-differentiated language, for example, adults are more likely to interrupt girls, and lisp more when talking to little girls. The preconceptions of adults regarding male and female children also

influence use of language. Adults expect female infants to be more verbally able than male infants.

The Disadvantage of Differentiated Language

Differentiated language takes its worst form when it affects the competence of children at school. Girls are found to be a very disadvantaged group even at school and the language they use and the way they use it, is tied up with this disadvantage. Disadvantage signifies a relatively enduring condition descriptive of the lifestyles of certain social groups, which contributes to the poor academic achievement of children at school, and generally lowered chances of success in the larger society.

Linguistically, girls in school differ from other disadvantaged groups. The significant aspect of their language use is not their pronunciation or grammar, but the wider area of their communicative competence. Young children acquire language appropriate to their sex. In the school setting, the different understanding of when to speak, when to remain silent, how to be polite and when is it permissible to interrupt creates different outcomes and repercussions for boys and girls. The differentiated competence in communication leads to different responses in the classroom, to boys dominating and demanding attention with girls waiting silently and patiently. The confidence that the boys gain is relatively high when compared to that of

girls. This helps them to respond actively and frankly, call out answers and boast about school tests and examinations. In such circumstances girls listen passively. Pupils themselves are aware of this discrepancy. Boys make a lot of noise, and dictate terms, and girls believe that boys are more intelligent than themselves. Girls are explicitly taught that loudness is unfeminine (Payne 14) and their sense of identity refrains them from being loud-mouthed and preserves them from arguing and challenging.

Sometimes there seems to be hard and fast rules regarding appropriate behaviour for girls at school. They are expected to be quiet children behaving 'nicely'. Girls seem to be close to the definition of how children should be, than boys from the same social background. Whether quietness can be equated with good behaviour or whether it is a desirable quality is debatable and dubious especially in the context of modern educational practices where active learning is recommended. No doubt, active participation in the process of learning is the key to fruitful education and how far can a quiet child thrive remains to be seen. A quiet child thereby makes a passive child who will find the modern methods of asking questions, offering suggestions, asserting one's opinions quite embarrassing. A girl might shy away from the class room, and the rewards of education may elude her. In short, girls are educated to suit the man-made social commitment

even in educational institutions, rather than cater to her individual development.

Differentiated competence can also be traced to teacher-student relationships. Teacher's responses to the demanding boys for their active participation in the class room is a positive reward when compared to the cool responses elicited by the quiet behaviour of the girls. Researches carried out in the United States, Britain and Sweden analysing teacher-pupil interaction patterns, have arrived at the same result: boys get more of the teacher's attention than do girls. Boys' behaviour normally receive both more disapproval and more praise while girls are blamed mostly for their lack of all skill or knowledge. This varied teacher response encourages boys to act independently but it tells heavily on girls' self-esteem. By the age of eleven or twelve even bright girls are seen to have a significantly lower self-esteem or self-image than boys of comparable ability. This is very obvious when children work in mixed sex pairs. As of right boys adopt dominant roles which the girls accept undemurely. While doing experiments, boys set up experiments and report results to the teacher while the girls help to tie up the remaining ends and clear up.

That teachers are conscious of the different communicative skills is reflected in the choice of topics for discussion in class. Teachers have

learned that boys will object loudly to topics that they consider as effeminate, whereas girls will uncomplainingly subscribe to topics of boys' domain. So the choice of topics falls according to the boys' taste.

Again, it has been discovered that girls generally do not opt for science and research or craft subjects as readily and whole-heartedly as boys do. Their interest is almost entirely in humanities. Their success too rests in such subjects which do not call for great or rigorous physical or outdoor involvement.

Made submissive and subdued by specific instructions, girls tend to play second fiddle when out of school too. Data, as to what happens to pupils after school: their employment ratio and the professions they get into, are revealing. They suffer a disadvantage at almost every turn of their lives. As employees, women are concentrated in poorly paid, low prestige jobs. Professionals as advocates, top civil servants, architects are few among their lot.

It would be sheer folly to argue that girls' disadvantage is the outcome of their use of language only. But it would be wise to note that saying girls' use of language in school is related to their disadvantaged status is not the same as saying that girls' use of language causes disadvantage. Girls do not fail to go on to University or take up brilliant careers because of their

language, but if the majority fails to do so it is because society dictates different or subordinate roles for them. Their disadvantage, then no doubt, becomes social rather than linguistic. Society has then done the job: different and unequal roles have been created for the two sexes.

The World of Our Language

Our study of language leads us to further considerations. Does language just reflect the work on hand or does language affect the way we perceive the world? The theory of linguistic determinism suggests that differences in the structures of languages actually determine the different views societies have of the world. Furthermore, the language of a culture shapes the way its speakers see the world (Sara Mills 48). Language produces our perception of the world and words are formed according to our needs, emphasizing what is most relevant to our way of life. There may be a great number of words for objects constantly used by a community and this creates a reality of its own world. No two languages however similar they be, can represent the same social reality. And, consequently, certain cultures were, in some way, lesser because their languages were, supposed to be inadequate.

Language is one of the most important means of initiating, synthesizing and reinforcing ways of thinking, feeling and

behaviour which are functionally related to the social group. It does not, of itself, prevent the expression of specific ideas or confine the individual to a given level of conceptualization, but certain ideas and generalizations are facilitated rather than others (Bernstein 43).

Recognizing the influence of language it would be worthwhile to analyse the language use. Feminists observe many lexical gaps which make women unable to express their own special experience for want of appropriate words. Besides, they have noted the inherent sexism that underlies language use. Even gender-free terms have been contaminated with sexist influence through their use. For example, the words 'chairman' and 'Spokesman' are male and gender neutral words are specially invented for the females in terms 'chairperson' and 'spokes person'. Martyna (135) has researched the extent to which women feel excluded by the use of the male pronoun 'he' as a generic to refer to both women and men. Language-use may thus ruin the environment for effective communication and social interaction. The supposedly generic pronoun 'he' is in practice often presented in a gender-specific way, i.e. as referring to males. For example, "When will the employer meet his labourers?" The question seems to alienate all women.

Gender specific pronouns are often used in a sexist way to refer to people working in stereotypically male and female professions: for example, 'If the director wants the police let him telephone to the inspector'. Scientists, doctors, engineers tend to be labelled as necessarily male while nurses, secretaries and models are thought of as females. When the gender is not known, it is common practice to assume that the person is male: for example, 'Any student can come forward with his doubts'. Sexist language presents male-oriented experience as generic or as the norm; when discussing humanity as a whole the terms 'mankind' and 'man' are often used. Also, when referring to pre-historic man it is male who represents humanity along with phrases like 'to be man enough' and 'to be the right man for the job'.

"Man is a mammal that breastfeeds his young", is used to refer to the female most specifically. So too, it is always 'man in the street' and never 'woman in the street'; with 'craftsman', 'policeman', 'fireman', 'dustman' and 'fisherman' busily engaged in their occupations. 'Seaman', 'ombudsman' and 'workman' too have no female forms and the word 'astronaut' is used by people as if it were male only (Cameron *et al* 85). Many English words are based on roots or compounds with 'man', 'master' or other male-oriented sources: brotherhood, forefather, bachelor's degree, bedfellow, freshman, manpower, mastermind, patronize, statesmanship, sportsmanship etc..

There are a number of terms which originally were male-specific and which have evolved to refer to women as well. 'Research fellow' or 'scholar' was originally a male-specific term which is now used for males and females. Same is the case with Bachelor and Master of Arts/Science. Many women hate to be referred to by male-specific terms. As Hodge and Kress(87) state: "former meanings often survive to complicate the lexicon and gesture at history".

It is found that affixes are added to male nouns to refer to women and this establishes the view of women as a deviation from a male universal form. 'Lady' and 'ess', 'effe - enme' and 'trix' are some of the affixes for the female and they have connotations which the male form does not have. Some of the connotations are generally derogatory and trivializing. The terms 'actress', 'authoress', 'hostess', 'stewardess', 'comedienne', lack a feeling of seriousness about them.

Volosinov believed that an individual thought is guided by possibilities offered by his or her language:

It is a matter not so much of expression accommodating itself to our inner world but rather of our inner world accommodating itself to the potentialities of our expression, its possible routes and directions (Volosinov 91).

Sexist language we realize does not simply give information but signals a critical attitude to the role of the sexes. Male gendered terms make females feel that they are excluded from all address. It might crush women's self-image and cause them to view themselves in a negative way and sometimes totally confuse the listeners. It cannot be said that if sexist language is replaced by gender-free language, the social systems and attitudes which determine in large measure such language-use will change. But surely minor changes in language use will have a desirable impact on females and on males too.

Language is an area where meanings are not simply imposed, but rather a site where certain meanings are negotiated over, or struggled over, and curiously enough, meanings seem to work in different ways for males and females. The prevalence of the patriarchal system seems to have erased women so totally that a separate identity is denied to them. Women's identity is always established with reference to her marital status, through the use of such terms as Miss and Mrs. whereas a male name may be unmarked. There are organizations which insist on using the husband's name on documentation, leading to the total elimination of the women's family name. The system of naming children are also influenced by the patrilineal laws of inheritance and wealth. The father's status eclipses the women in the family.

The modern form of referring to all women as Ms. in the same way as men are referred to as Mr. has picked up certain negative connotations like divorced women or feminists.

Biased Vocabulary

Feminists have discovered the tenets of male chauvinism encoded into language where the male is positive and the female negative. Gender bias and inequality are expressed in many classes of vocabulary. By continual usage of words and expressions that demean females, speakers unconsciously or consciously produce negative images. Male denigratory attitudes get reinforced by such words; labelling and covertly trivializing females and upholding males and their actions as normal. The females become deviant. The 'opposite sex' is a phrase that glaringly brings out the conflict and antagonism between the sexes. The implied polarity denies any opportunity for compromise.

It is found in pair of male and female exemplars, males precede female with the latter taking a linguistic second place. Many languages make use of this 'focus-fronting' procedure in which important words or clauses are placed in the beginning of the sentence (Bonvillain 185). The active and passive constructions in English accomplish this feature by means of shifting emphasis. Also status hierarchies require that older or higher

status individuals always come first. Gender inequality is found in the second place. The conventional pairing of male and female terms also is a pointer to the derogatory approach to women. For example, 'masculine and feminine', 'male and female', 'husband and wife', 'brother and sister', 'boys and girls', 'kings and queens' etc.. However, the semantic resources available are part of a system which produces sexism.

Variation in the usual ordering occurs in Kin-term pairs. For example, "mother and father". This change is due to individual choice based on attitudes towards relatives and the emotional bond existing in such relationships. But the marital arena gives ample proof of the subjugation of women when, "I now pronounce you man and wife" from the earlier 'bride and groom' usage. The woman is defined in relation to her man and even gives up her maiden name to take up her husband's. She might totally forgo her own name and be referred to as Mrs.Humphrey and the couple as the Humphreys. This is the common way of referring where the woman is totally a possession of her male or appendage without any independent existence.

Another symbolic reference of female's subsidiary status is the deriving of girls' names from males' sources. Feminine endings *-a*, *-e* etc., *-ine*, *-y* (or *-ie*) are thus added to male names: Roberta, Bernadette, Geraldine,

Stephanie. Any male name can thus be converted into the female by this procedure (186).

In pair words like lord/lady there is no one level of meaning equating the paired individuals. There is a semantic trivializing of meanings in the female pair, demeaning or humbling women and their activities or emphasizing their sexuality. The words 'mistress' and 'dame' take on sexual connotations, whereas 'governess' is a trivialization. 'Spinster' implies negation of sexuality, so that she becomes an undesirable mate. A 'bachelor' unmarried, all along sounds to be a covetable, potential husband.

Man/Woman also is worth noticing. 'Woman' refers specifically and only to females, whereas 'man' is used not only for males but for people in general, as in 'mankind'. The semantics of adjectives and adverbs of 'man' and 'woman' display or evince great contrasts. The cultural symbols are very revealing: 'manly', 'manful', 'mannish' mean having the traits that a culture regards as especially characteristic or ideally appropriate to adult men. 'Manly' is usually a term of approval, suggesting traits admired by society, such as determination, decisiveness, and steadiness. 'Manful', also a term of approval, stresses courage, strength, and fortitude. 'Mannish' is most often used derogatorily in reference to the traits, manners, or accoutrements of a

woman that are thought to be more appropriate or typical of a man: a mannish abruptness in her speech (187).

‘Womanly’, ‘womanlike’, ‘womanish’ mean having traits or qualities that a culture regards as especially characteristic or ideally appropriate to adult women. ‘Womanly’ is usually a term of approval, suggesting the display of traits admired by society, such as self-possession, modesty, motherliness, and calm competence. ‘Womanlike’ may be a neutral synonym, or it may suggest mild disapproval. ‘Womanish’ is usually disparaging; applied to women it suggests traits not generally socially approved. Applied to a man, it suggests traits culturally deemed inappropriate for men and to be found in women; for eg., a womanish shrillness in his speech (187).

Semantic Derogation of Women

The language used to describe women reveals male attitudes, fears and prejudices concerning the female sex. Though there may be terms to denigrate men the balance always shifts against women. Old women appear to be as worthless burdens inhabiting the surface of earth when we consider the variety of contemptuous epithets used to refer to them: ‘hag’, ‘crone’, ‘beldam’, ‘heifer’, ‘warhorse’ are only a few of the many names; whereas

parallel terms for men are very rare: 'geezer' refers to an eccentric old man and 'codger' implies affection and is derogatory only in a mild way.

Schulz (69 - 75) notes numerous words associated with females that began with positive connotations and degenerated into sexual connotations with the passage of time. The word, 'whore' was originally a polite term for 'a lover of either sex', but now has narrowed down to mean only a label for prostitutes. The words 'nymph' and 'nymphet' were first endearments referring to 'beautiful young girls' but later used for 'prostitutes', and finally meant 'sexually precocious girls', or 'loose young women'. 'Sex object' also is used to denote women degrading them to inanimate status. The actions are also trivialized and they become talkative, chatty, screechy and giggly. Physical image and behaviour make them a prey to scrutiny. Always they are disvalued with negative associations. These judgments do not originate in the language but arise linguistically to express, supplement, and justify entrenched cultural models.

Words for women, originally neutral, that have acquired debased connotation or obscene references are innumerable. 'Lady' a word once reserved for people of high positions faced a democratic levelling and in modern times has come to be applied to any woman. But 'lord' still remains

the privilege of the Englishman of the very upper class. 'Dame' has also declined from its earlier glory.

The term 'governor' still exercised some authority but 'governess', courtier and courtesan, master and mistress do not remain counterparts statuswise. Mistress often refers to a mistress of a brothel, a prostitute, and a woman with whom a man habitually fornicates. A nunnery has also gone downhill to mean a brothel when abbess became a keeper of a brothel when queen is the consort of a king or a female sovereign; quean means prostitute. Spelling has distinguished the two terms but as homonyms they have become matter for puns. King, prince, father, brother, uncle, nephew, squire have retained their pride of place. 'Hussy' derived from Old English 'huswif', 'housewife' at one time meant only 'the female head of the house', now means 'a rustic, rude woman'. Domestic and kinship terms for women were subject to pejoration more than those of men. 'Aunt' was generalized earlier to denote 'an old or elderly woman' but later acquired onto it the meaning, 'bawd' or 'prostitute'.

Strangely enough, even the terms of endearment used by men for women have fallen in esteem: 'Dolly', 'Kitty', 'Biddy', 'Gill' or 'Jill' and 'Polly', began as petnames but soon indicated 'prostitute'. 'Mouse' is a playful endearment which also has shed its love.

Other words that have accrued insult upon them are: 'doll', 'minx', 'peach', 'broad', 'floozy' etc.. 'Girl' is supposed to have stood the test of time after much trial. The word originally meant 'a child of either sex'; then specialized to mean 'a female child', later 'a serving girl or maid servant' and still further 'a prostitute', 'a mistress', or 'the female sex' or 'that part of it given to unchastity'. Today 'girl' has been saved from the mire but 'girlie' carries sexual undertones.

The animal world abounds in metaphors pejorative to women. 'Cat' and 'dog' referred to men and women carry different connotations. 'Cat' originally 'a spiteful person' is used abusively for women whereas 'dog' does not always ridicule the male. 'A sly dog' is only a half-serious reproach and 'a clever dog' none at all; so too 'puppy' and 'whelp' are playful references to naughty boys. But the use of 'bitch' for a woman can summon up any amount of disgrace. 'Pig' referred to man carries no derogatory meaning as 'sow' for 'women', which indicates a woman of loose morals. A 'cow' is 'a clumsy', obese, coarse, or otherwise unpleasant person, or a prostitute. 'Drab' originally meant 'an untidy woman', as 'slut' and 'slattern', but fell to mean 'a harlot' or a woman of loose character. Horse metaphors are also used to denote the woman of loose morals. 'Harridan', 'a worn-out horse' seems to have originally been used as a metaphor for 'a

gaunt woman', then 'a disagreeable old woman' and later 'a decayed strumpet' or 'a half-whore, half-bawd'. 'Jade' originally referred to a worthless, broken down male but later when referred to women became a 'prostitute'. A 'hackney' (or 'hack') was first 'a common riding horse, often available for hire. Its meaning derogatory in itself indicated anyone who hired himself out, but when used for women it was 'a woman who hires out as a prostitute'. A 'tit' referred either to 'a small horse' or 'a small girl' but fell to mean 'a harlot'. A further extension of the metaphor is found in 'mount' a term derogatorily 'a wife' or 'a mistress'. 'Game', 'natural', 'jay', 'plover' and 'jude' are words that proclaim their partiality when used to refer to males and females. They only mean 'simpleton' or 'dupe' when referred to men but when applied to women also mean a 'prostitute'. So also, a male 'pirate' is 'one who infringes on the rights of others or commits robbery on the high seas', whereas a female 'pirate' is an adultress who chases other women's men. Besides are words: broadtail, carrion, cleaver, cocktail, flagger, guttersnipe, mutton, moonlighter, omnibus, pinchprick, tailtrader, tickletail, twofer, and underwear (70-75).

The number of words designating women in sexual terms is overwhelming. There is nothing near in describing men.

Many reasons are found for this prejection of women. Man's fear of woman is basically sexual. According to Fry (133) it is the question of control or power. He theorizes that power becomes a question because male is biologically inferior to the female in several respects. Girls mature earlier than boys physically, sexually, intellectually and emotionally. In the first years of life, boys are biologically weaker than girls. In the later part also they are more inclined to contract degenerative diseases like gout, diabetes and are more hypertensive and prone to heart attack than their female counterparts. In most cases women outlive their men.

Even the jokes men tell about the relationships between the sexes - especially the frankly sexual jokes - reveal awareness and concern, even anxiety, about the general presence of these biological disadvantages and frailties (Fry 133).

It is this innate fear that makes men prejudiced against women and provides them reason to suspect the female's fidelity and chastity or morals. Making people aware of the implications of their language use can help to reduce the enforcement of sexist meanings. It must be remembered that meanings do not remain rigid for all time, but can be made resilient to the new demands of a changing society and its patterns in behaviour.

Women and Myth

Myths also have done considerable damage to the thrust of the female ego. Myths always have a strong hold on the mind since their arguments are based on ethics or theories of origin. In cultures, myths are transformed into ethical norms which find illustrations in the literacy texts and later scientific rationalisations strengthen the beliefs. The two leading myths of Western culture are the classical tale of Pandora's box and the Biblical story of the Fall. In both cases concepts of feminine evil have attained highly influential ethical justifications of things as they are.

The myth is one of those snares of false objectivity into which the man who depends upon ready-made valuations rushes headlong (Beauvoir 290).

Hesiod (*qtd. in* Ruth 133) in his *Theogony* ascribes to woman the introduction of sexuality which puts an end to the golden age when the races of men had been living on earth free from all evils, free from laborious work, and “free from all wearying sickness”. Pandora was the origin of “the damnable race of women, a plague which men must live with”. The doctrines as to the nature and origin of the female is an effective agent of control over the females attributing to her alone the dangers and evils imputed to sexuality. The Greeks celebrate fertility through the phallus thereby exalting

sexuality; but when denigrating sexuality they cite Pandora. Patriarchal religion and ethics tend to lump the female and sex together as if the whole burden of the onus and stigma it attaches to sex was the fault of the female alone. Thereby sex, which the medieval opinion held as unclean, sinful and debilitating pertains to the female, and the male identity is preserved as a human, rather than a sexual one. "The women whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the fruit and I did eat" is the first man's defence. Seduced by the phallic snake, Eve is blamed for Adam's participation in sex. The connection of women sex and sin constitutes the fundamental pattern of western patriarchal thought.

According to misogynist ideology, women are inferior in two ways: (1) women are morally inferior, evil, bad, sinful, dangerous, harmful, and dirty; (2) women are inferior in ability – physically, intellectually, and spiritually. The first idea has come down to us from ancient times: The beauty of women is the greatest snare, said St. John Chrysostom (133).

I have left no calamity more detrimental to mankind than woman – is an Islamic saying (133). Stories of Delilah and Salome, Medusa, the Gorgan who destroyed men, sirens who lured sailors and witches who took pleasure in evil had caught man's imagination.

Feminists retort to all these allegations: arguing that it was man who was the hunter; he created weapons and waged war; he colonized the earth and exploited it. It has been pointed out that sports and games in which males lavishly indulged provided them even with a supportive solidarity which society did not provide for females. Jane Kephart brings in the biology and psychology that separated the male from the female:

Since only males hunt, and the psychology of the species was set by hunting, we are forced to conclude that females are scarcely human, that is, do not have built-in the basic psychology of the species: to kill and hunt and ultimately to kill others of the same species. The argument implies built-in aggression in human males as well as the assumed passivity of human females and their exclusion from the mainstream of human development (*qtd. in* Ruth 196).

The concept of women's inferiority is widely accepted: Great scientists, inventors, Platos, Shakespeares, Beethovans have always been men. It is said that women do not have the intelligence, the grit, the competence as men and that even in the best of situations, even unusually intelligent women are not equal to men. It is always men who are great achievers. In the history books, women of achievement are rarely given more

than a few lines of praise. Their success is often underground. Female authors or artists often used male pen names or were co-authored or 'protected' by males. Male historians never mention the contribution of women in the field of pottery, weaving, or agriculture, though the fields were vastly areas of women occupation. Women who did work on their own initiative were burned as witches; rebellious wives and daughters were imprisoned in convents, sometimes outcast or beaten or burned alive.

According to the traditional rule the major attributes of women were beauty, fragility, domesticity and self-effacement. Women were born to be chosen by men and men contract the ideals of women in their own interests, subject to what appealed to them. Beauty, external, was a requirement that was insisted upon for women and women struggled to keep up to the norms endlessly; to be perfect in skin, complexion, teeth, hair and proportion. And so, they were called narcissistic and were ridiculed for their obsession with clothing and fashion. Fragility was next to beauty, for women were to boost the male ego, and as the weaker had to depend upon their protectors. To be fearful of strange situations, to be hesitant when decisions were called for, to learn not to defend oneself were highly appreciable in women. All these placed women at the mercy of man.

“Children, church and cooking” was the slogan of ideal womanhood in Hitler’s Germany. The household chores, repetitive, uninteresting and mundane were always unacknowledged and thankless in the extreme. It was considered as “unfeminine” to be executives or directors or to hold any responsible job outside the home limits. All doors to the transcendent and the sublime were shut to her. Even in religion the female had to be satisfied by holding a place next to man who stood next to God only. It is true no one likes an aggressive woman, not even a woman appreciates when another becomes assertive and independent. Assertiveness is often translated into aggression. A man may have all the choices but not a woman. She may never question a man’s ego but suffer all his teasing.

Of all the myths and superstitions that surround women, the most fearful are the ones pertaining to her menstruation. The fear of the menstrual blood and the taboos associated with the first occurrence is very drastic. Women as a result are branded as unclean and have to live in separate huts or in seclusion. She is feared as a tool of contamination and harbinger of evil. Such ostracism is found among many people in different parts of the world. There have been many folklores as to how there were no women at all in the world and how they were developed from the castrated male. The origin of woman is illustrated in castration myths.

Even pregnancy and childbirth carried a stigma of impurity and contagion. Among the Indians of Costa Rica, a woman pregnant for the first time is supposed to infect the whole neighbourhood, she is blamed for any deaths which may occur during the period and her husband is obliged to pay damages. Cape Town Bantu males believe that looking upon a lying-in woman will result in their being killed in battle (115). Hebrew women are purified in special bathing houses. Miscarriages are also looked upon with great apprehension. Women thus being intrinsically dangerous are not allowed to eat with their men; for women would contaminate the food and so ate only after the men had eaten. It may be done also in deference to the man.

In emotional contracts, in relationships the assumptions always fall on the women's side. Almost every woman says she is trying harder than the man to make relationships work. Whenever there is a problem, the woman has to do most of the solving, she works more to keep up the relations, planning things to do, trying to understand and hear how the other feels. Men expect much more from the women, for they have grown up with a different set of expectations for their emotional lives – that they will be served and loved.

The ancient and defined ideas of status, temperament and role carry endless implications for both the sexes. They actually make and mar the

female ego as is seen through the ages. The male's superior economic position the female's inferior one, the female burden of the guilt of sexuality produce great impediments in the way of a full-fledged ego. The tendency towards deification of the female makes her a sexual object, more than a person, denied of basic human rights. The female has to draw her sustenance from male and seek advancement only through the appeasement of the powerful male.

Patriarchal notions about women have been attested by religious and literary myths about women. The particular biological differences set her apart and consider her as essentially inferior in the male world. Under patriarchy the female herself did not develop the symbols ascribed to her but were subjected to the images created by men according to their needs. Accordingly, the male developed a sexual antipathy which led to control the lives of a large majority. The discomfort and suffering that she undergoes are rather cultural than biological and the patriarchal attitudes have poisoned the females own sense of self to the effect of crushing her ego and effectiveness. All patriarchies have hedged in virginity and defloration in elaborate rites and interdictions. On the one hand virginity is a mysterious good, a sign of 'property' received in tact. On the other, it represents an evil associated with the unknown 'otherness' of the female and the fear of defloration that is

implanted in an 'alien' sexuality. But both contribute to male's property interest and prestige.

The cultural tradition reserves the human condition for the male; persistent denigration of women is carried on directly and subtly at various levels in personal contacts by the media through social beliefs and traditional practices. The impressions that women gather about themselves are so pernicious that women despise themselves and each other. Self-hatred and self-rejection follow as a result of reiteration of her inferiority which gets ingrained in her. The double standard of approach adopted by society can also be noted in the immense notoriety and sensational publicity conferred on her sexual misconduct. Her insecurity is heightened by the affronts to her sexuality in the form of rape where the male culprit is often left unpunished for want of proper evidence. Rape thus turns out to be quite often a manifestation of man's power over the helpless woman who is universally defenceless both by her physical and emotional training. The 'shame' of the event is hers and hers alone and is overwhelming enough to deter her from resorting to justice which brings in its train public exposure and embarrassing revelations.

It is under these trying circumstances that the female psyche had to survive. Patriarchy holds its sway over woman's lives struggling to keep her

under its fold. But times have changed and femininity has assumed different colours and connotations. Repressed and oppressed the female psyche broke loose from the chains of submissiveness. The rise of the modern era saw to the ruin of the patriarchal family and hence the decline of the power of the patriarch. The advent of the industrial revolution called for urbanization and the development of nuclear families. The democratization of education made women responsible partners in the adventure of life. Women rose to build their homes rather than remain passive in their homes. The struggles of the colonies against their imperial masters demanded active participation from the women. The social and political scenario was flooded with the presence of women. Many of them rose to be eminent leaders and today there is no field which is taboo to women.

The Female Psyche and the Woman

The study of the language of women will be incomplete without probing into the psychology of the women, the psychology that constructs the female and leads her to maintain her sex-differentiated position in society. It is her special role in society that contributes to the cultivation of a set of values and norms of behaviour entirely meant for the female in society. All these have a bearing on the female culture which include her thoughts, ideas, area of activity, and her modes of communication. Her personality

thus becomes a product of her psychology which limits her possibilities. What indeed is a woman's final ambition? What is her ultimate goal which brings her total satisfaction? Which is the world of a woman's happiness? These are the questions whose answers underlie all women's activities and they are answers that guide and coax and force women to behave as they do. It is worthy to ponder whether the goals of women have undergone any solid change that has wrought significant changes in their behavioural patterns.

We must start with the realization that, as much as women want to be good scientists or engineers, they want first and foremost to be womanly companions of men and to be mothers. Young women often wonder whether they can have any identity before they know whom they will marry and for whom they will make a home. Much of a young woman's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selectivity of her search for the man by whom she wishes to be sought. Womanly fulfilment rests on the fact that a woman's semantic design harbours an 'inner space' destined to bear the offspring of the chosen man. She is inspired by biological, psychological and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy. Only when women grow up without dread of their biological functions and enter upon motherhood with a sense of fulfilment, humanity shall attain the goal of a good life and a secure world to live in.

All along, woman is seen deprived of any individuality, she exists only in terms of male likes and needs. Woman is valuable only in relation to her attractiveness to the male. Her identity that makes her win a companion and a home which she will pervade and manage is of no consequence. She is only a shadow of the male substance.

This is the social expectation of a woman inculcated into her by society from time immemorial and she has cut herself to fit into the niche. To a great extent people are what you expect them to be or at least they behave as you expect them to behave. There is always an authority, an external agency which dictates the internal, which tells them who they are and what they are supposed to do.

Kate Millet (23) goes to elaborate upon a 'Politics' that governs the human sexual relationship - a relationship of dominance and subordination. She speaks of an interior colonization in our society which is institutionalized and which ordains upon the male the "birthright to rule the female". However limited at times and in places, sexual domination remains the most persuasive ideology of our culture. The fact becomes striking if we note that all the areas of power, the military technology, industry and politics are in male hands.

Sexual politics obtains consent through socialization of both sexes to basic patriarchal norms with regard to temperament, role and status. As to status, universal assent to the male superiority guarantees superior status to the male and an inferior one to the female. Temperament involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category, based on the needs and values of the dominant group. It is dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates, aggression, intelligence, force, and efficiency in the male; passivity, ignorance and docility as virtues in the female. This is complemented by a second factor, sex role, which decrees a highly elaborate code of conduct, gesture and attitude for each sex.

The duties of women in the present society prove the above observations. Child rearing is solely a female activity due to the very feminine role of child bearing, and the task of domestication primarily rests on a woman's shoulder. This curbs her at the level of biological experience, while all achievement and ambition go to the males, empowering them as masters over women.

There have been biological theories that insist on innate differences in 'nature' of the male and the female due to the presence of different sex hormones. It is true that particular psychological aspects lead to a

multiplicity of emotional states that influence behaviour patterns. The physical superiority of muscular strength may not always be put into play but is a secondary sexual characteristic. Hence it is not ignored and is culturally encouraged through breeding, diet and exercise. Strenuous tasks are performed by the heavily muscled and are areas where the females may plead helpless and ineffective.

Women under Patriarchy

Sociological constraints are also numerous that make the women play a subordinate role to her male counterpart. Society has a long ancient history of being patriarchal, its chief institution being the family. The family is a miniature of the society. It compliments the patriarchal structure of the society establishing a link between the individual and the society at large. The family becomes an effective unit with a firm grip over the individual through its family heads who encourage all its members to conform to the demands of its larger unit, the society. And there have been societies whose women kind are ruled through the family alone having no formal relation to the state. The father is the head of the family and his relation to his children and wife is parallel to that of the ruler to the ruled.

Ancient jurisprudence, affirms that the patriarch, the eldest male parent in the family, is absolutely supreme in his household. He is the owner

of all the animate and inanimate property of wives, children, slaves, land and goods and his domain extends to matters of life and death and remains unqualified at all times.

To cultivate the paternal domain, to render worship to the manes of the father – these together constitute one and the same obligation for the heir: he assumes ancestral survival on earth and in the underworld. Man will not agree, therefore, to share with woman either his gods or his children. He will not succeed in making good his claims wholly and for ever. But at the time of patriarchal power, man wrested from woman all her rights to possess and bequeath property (Beauvoir 113).

The chief contribution of the family in patriarchy is socialization of the young into prescribed attitudes toward the categories of role, temperament and status. A general uniformity is achieved in cultural attitudes, nevertheless, the entire culture supporting masculine authority in all areas of life to the exclusion of the female at every point. The patriarch thus ensures that functions of the family, especially its reproduction are legitimized. Patriarchy insists that no child should be brought into the world without a man assuming the role of a sociological father. The status of both the child and its mother depends upon the male on whom alone rests their

social as well as economic existence. The family having acquired such a firm grip over all its members, it is foolish to hope that its women can be weaned out of its influence to have an independent existence. Any change undertaken without a thorough understanding of this socio-political institution will be hardly productive.

Besides, the large population of its youth and women find the family its citadel of property and traditional interests from which they can seldom break away. In traditional patriarchy, women as non-persons without legal standing were permitted no economic existence and could neither earn nor own anything as of right. Women were burdened with routine tasks for which they were automatically rewarded in being allowed to exist in the household. Their work is the "Woman's work" which though important for everyday's existence is unpaid for and goes off as thankless.

In modern countries women began working as a reserve labour force, enlisted in times of war and expansion and discarded in times of peace and regression. Women's independence in economic life was more readily accepted as need since it facilitated the availability of cheap labour and lower grade jobs. Since they were underpaid and the remuneration low it did not threaten the patriarchal setup. But the modern women who are employed have the double burden of their work outside home and their domestic

chores. They have to cope with discrimination in matters of hiring, maternity wages and house work. Being the underpaid, women do not directly participate in technology or in production and are totally unconscious of their role in the commodities they produce.

Traditionally, patriarchy assigned occasional nominal literacy to women while higher education was closed to them. If knowledge is power, the systematic ignorance imposed upon the women kept them as subordinates. Its educational institutions promoted a temperamental imbalance of personality traits between the sexes by limiting the education of the female. The humanities and certain social sciences fell to the lot of women students while the men students grappled with science and technology which enabled them to occupy prestigious professions. Patriarchy in a way encouraged an imbalance in human temperament while encouraging the divisions in learning on sex differentiated lines.

Chapter III

WOMEN AND CREATIVE WRITING

The Female Sentence

In the context of women's use of language, it is important to dwell on the long-standing debate whether women writers produce texts which are significantly different in terms of language from those of males. It was Virginia Woolf who observed that there was a sentence which could be termed the female sentence; the 'sentence of the feminine gender'. She found that certain women writers crafted a new type of sentence which is looser and more accretive than the male sentence. She describes the female sentence in positive terms when she states in Women and Fiction:

It is still true that before woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face. To begin with, there is the technical difficulty - so simple apparently; in reality, so baffling - that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use. Yet in a novel, it covers so wide a stretch of ground, an ordinary and usual type of

sentence has to be found to carry the reader on easily and naturally from one end of the book to the other. And this woman must make for herself, altering and adopting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it (Woolf 37).

The psychological sentence of the feminine gender Woolf finds as elastic, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes. It is different from the formal mode of male writing, implicitly described as calm, wise and apparently objective and impersonal. The challenge facing the woman today is to reinvent language free from by the phallacy of male meaning.

It may be noted that male writing and female writing are different in terms of their formal linguistic constituents. Gender becomes a determinant in textual production; and we may recognise women writers who consciously align themselves with a 'mainstream/malestream' tradition and some others who align themselves with a female minority tradition. This can consciously help to situate the texts as female - authored.

Many feminists of a more sociological turn of mind would agree with the American critic Elaine Showalter's statement in Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness:

The appropriate task for feminist criticism is to concentrate on women's access to language ...on the ideological and cultural determinant of expression (i.e., the social rather than the psychic). The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism and circumlocution (Showalter 193).

The fact remains that women's writing is judged in a different way from men's writing and this may also account for the notion of clear-cut differences between women's and men's writing. Theoretical work on female/feminine writing defines it in terms of 'lack' in relation to the male/masculine. Female sentence is discussed as if the male sentence were an implicit norm. It is absolutely phallogentric to discuss women and their associated things as only deviants from a male norm. Phallogentrism is the practice of placing the male at the centre of theoretical models, and assuming that 'male' is in fact coterminous with human. But Monique Wittig deftly argues:

There are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine; the masculine not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general (Wittig 62).

As Ann Rosalind Jones (83) remarks, the ' I ' position is reserved for man and woman occupies a negative position in language. The idea of women as platitude, turns qualities assigned to women by society, such as hesitation and irrationality, into virtues. Feminists such as Helene Cixous(48) stress the multiple physical capabilities of women: gestation, birth, lactation etc. and celebrate their experience in a specifically female writing which reflects this multiplicity. These are the feminine qualities, the subjective and the formless, which men often desire in women's writing and in women, but would not want for themselves.

Describing women's writing, Luce Irigaray (84) writes of 'his' language in which she goes off in all directions and in which 'he' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. The difference in writing can be traced to women's sexual morphology which is multiple and based on contiguity, in contrast to male sexuality which is unitary.

One must listen to her differently in order to hear an 'other meaning' which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting

them off to avoid becoming fixed and immobilized ... Her statements are never identical to anything. Their distinguishing feature is contiguity they touch upon (Irigaray 84).

Women's Concerns

The style of women's writing depends much on their aim of writing too. Mary Hiatt (24) states that "women aim to please, to be charming, witty and their writing is a manifestation of the approval-seeking behaviour of which women in general are accused". Hiatt observed that women writers in general use shorter sentences, which are structurally less complex than longer ones. A lack of variety in sentence length deprives them of a striking style. Besides, women writers frequently employ parenthesis which indicate non-essential material, evidencing that more of what they have to say, is in a sense unwanted. In effect their style becomes less authoritative than men. There is also an active quality apparent to men's fiction as opposed to the emotive equality of women's. Logical connectives such as 'however', 'because', 'so', 'really' flood their writings making it feel more moderate and consistent than that of men. Probing deep for the reason, the answer surfaces that women being a minority group, are more likely to conform than to dare. They are at times unsure that they will be believed, and hence are hesitant to offer conclusions and always desirous of a welcoming response. The

following pair of sentences is a revealing example of the difference in language use by men and women:

Male : “It is a good book, I like that book.”

Female : “I think, it is a good book and I’m sure, I like
that book.”

(qtd. in Eagleton 209)

These sentences loudly proclaim their different linguistic features. The assertion together with the cocksureness colours the first sentence by the male while the indirectness of expression and lack of assertiveness mark the second one with inherent tones of submissiveness.

Also, the use of metaphor is crucial in distinguishing women's and men's writing. Ellen Moers suggests that bird metaphors are quite commonly used to describe women characters:

My poor dove that must not coo.

My heart is like a singing bird/ whose nest is in a watered shoot

(qtd. in Eagleton 209).

The metaphor of birds creates many problematic assumptions about women themselves that they are little and weak, and can be easily victimised. It depicts women as ‘beautiful exotic creatures tortured as birds are by boys’. The late and early twentieth century women writing is marked by a

configuration of metaphors in common. There is also found a repeated use of metaphors of enclosures like room and house as well as open spaces. This entails a metaphorical pattern in itself (Horner 6).

Critical Assumptions

Categorizing female writing one cannot miss noticing how these writings are treated and judged differently from men's writing. Phallogentrism plays havoc with its presuppositions on women writing, limiting it to its deemed appropriateness. Traditionally, women's writing is also judged in a different way from men's writing. Because of the simple fact that they are written by women, their books are often reviewed together, as if they necessarily had something in common.

Critical assumptions, historical circumstances, and ideologies generally have been hostile to women's literary production and this has crippled women's writing together with an honest appreciation of their work. Even significant writing by women have gone unnoticed or censored by literary history and she lived in times and in situations where she was considered the 'Other'.

The complexities in the cultural fabric lead to the elusive nature of an identity that emerges at the margin, and call for a better understanding of the peculiar tension between public and private realities that underwrite women's

writing. Colonial administrators while citing a woman's life testified that education or intellectual achievement did not destroy the modesty or sensitivity natural to women. They could approve of only those women who demonstrated that education had in no way alienated her from her roots in society. That women writers fell victims to social ideologies and remained in their subordinate status.

Women had so far been represented in stereotypical ways. Feminist critics turned to woman authors for alternative images of women. The heroine's images are confined to what surrounds her house or to general notions. Her girlfriend or foster mother belongs to a lower class and has more ranging images for her experience since her exposure is wider. There are no limits to a man's experience and hence to his images either. So also when women's and men's bodies are described the divisions of gender become very prominent. The woman is made for love and hence she is sensuously evoked with a shapely body, her skin soft, her dark hair silky and herself glistening with ornaments. While the man is muscular and made for action with strong arms and a hefty figure.

In feminist studies in literature, scholarship on female authors is intended to enable us to see women - the writers themselves and the women they write about - as active agents rather than passive images or victims.

Efforts have been directed to bring a woman's point of view to bear on the world in which she lives. It is a forceful step against the general devaluation of female efforts and subjects. In the opinion of G.H. Lewes:

The advent of female literature promises woman's view of life, woman's experience: in other words, a new element ... the literature of women has fallen short of its functions owing to a very natural and a very explicable weakness, it has been too much a literature of imitation. To write as men write, is the aim and besetting sin of women; to write as women is the real task they have to perform (Lewes 137).

A hard and long struggle women would have to undergo before they could shed off the influence of male literary tradition and create an independent literature of their own for they were overshadowed by male cultural imperialism. They had to emancipate themselves from this and formulate their own set of models guided by their own impulses. A unifying voice in women's literature is being heard over the past two centuries. The woman writer has peculiarities that mark her off by resemblances distinctively feminine. She is at once self-conscious and didactic and her female speciality was detected in her maternal affections. Yet derogatory pictures of personal and psychological qualities of women novelists as

creatures with ink halfway up their fingers, dirty shawls, and frowsy hair; childless and hence neurotic have been popular.

Reconstructing Female Experience

Yet with the re-emergence of a Women's Liberation Movement in 1960, there has been great interest by psychologists and sociologists, to reconstruct the political, social and cultural experience of women. The daily lives, the physical experiences, the personal strategies and conflicts of ordinary women contributed to the female self-awareness. This found expression in the writings of women, and simultaneously there arose the need to consider the woman novelist against the backdrop of the women of her times. Virginia Woolf in Women and Fiction accounts for the failure or success of the extraordinary woman writer.

The extraordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman. It is only when we know what were the conditions of the average woman's life, the number of her children, whether she had money of her own, if she had a room to herself, whether she had help in bringing up her family, if she had servants, whether part of the housework was her task - it is only when we can measure the way of life and experience of life made possible to

the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or failure of the extraordinary woman (Woolf 37).

Historical reasons can be discernable in the fact that women have characteristically concerned themselves with matters more or less peripheral to male concerns. The reason can be traced to the differences between traditional female occupations and roles and male ones. Women themselves have formed a subculture and have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviours peculiar to themselves. It reveals a female sensibility specific in imagery and form and unfortunately strengthens the inevitable distinction between male and female ways of perceiving the world. Female literary tradition should result from the still evolving relationships between women writers and their society.

It would be interesting to observe how the self-awareness of the woman writer has translated itself into a literary form in a specific place and time-span, and how this self-awareness has found expression in various ways. The individuals who took to writing had interrelated set of motives, drives and sources. Many observers have pointed out that the first professional activities of Victorian women as social reformers, nurses and novelists, were either based in the home or were extensions of the feminine role as teachers, helpers, and mother of mankind. Also a female subculture

developed through a shared and increasingly secretive and ritualized physical experience. As Showalter explains in The Female Tradition:

Puberty, menstruation, sexual initiation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause - the entire female sexual life cycle- constituted a habit of living that had to be concealed. Although these episodes could not be openly discussed or acknowledged, they were accompanied by elaborate rituals and by external codes of fashion and etiquette, and by intense feelings of female solidarity.

(qtd. in Warhol and Herndl 275)

Women writers were united by their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers; and "their awareness of each other and of their female audience showed a kind of a genteel conspiracy".

Though fiction was never made use of as revenge against a patriarchal society, women confessed to sisterly affection and maternal feeling for their readers. Meanwhile, there were women novelists who won chivalrous sympathy from male reviewers by minimizing their self-assertions. There were many who wished to publish anonymously and some took male names. They refused to have a professional role and shrank from the responsibilities

and conflicts it brought along. They did not consider their writing as a female experience or an expression of the same.

Writing in the sense of self-development or fulfilment was considered as self-centredness and cultivation of one's ego, and it was in conflict with the feminine ideal. Feminine writers like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, were overcome with a deep seated guilt about authorship. Aurora Leigh is one of the few autobiographical discussions of feminine role conflict. The dilemma of a woman is to know where the duty of obedience ends and where the duty of resistance begins. This dilemma seems to be paramount in the lives of the heroines of women novelists.

With the appearance of the feminist phase women's writing moved into confrontation with male society, and challenged the restrictions on women's self-expression and upheld the image of a wronged womanhood. Women declared independence and freedom from the obstructing female tradition. They took to writing new subjects, campaigned for prostitutes and working women. Psychologically, women's literature sought a refuge from the harsh realities imposed on them by the male world. The favourite symbols of the enclosed and secret room since the time of *Jane Eyre*, came to be identified with the womb and a flight from men and adult sexuality, with the arrival of Virginia Woolf on the literary scene.

Writing The Body

With the advent of psychoanalysis, there came the tacit refusal to accept the traditional separation of mind and body. Women associated with feminine writing celebrated woman's association with the body, thereby refusing the subordination of body to mind. "Write yourself. Your body must be heard - " since Helen Cixous (338) first issued this call in 1974 it remained to see what would the body say. Also, did the body have a language of its own? The writings of Sigmund Freud and French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan provided deep insight into the connections between mind, body and language. By writing herself, woman will return to the body for she believes "censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time".

To write. An act which will not only "realize" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the

live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman".

.....

We've been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them, with that stupid sexual modesty; we've been made victims of the old fool's game: each one will love the other sex ... But who are men who give women the body that women blindly yield to them?

(qtd. in Warhol and Herndl 338, 342).

Deprived of a language in which to describe their bodies or the events of their bodies, denied the expression of pain as well as the expression of pleasure, women writers appeared deficient in passion. And the absence of expression was taken for the absence of feeling. It was argued that woman's sexual innocence would prevent her ever writing a great novel.

Reader Responses

Writing as a woman, is only one side of the coin, for reader responses, especially the responses of a woman while reading a text is also of great importance. Women's experience will lead them to value works differently from their male counterparts, who may regard with little interest the problems encountered by women. It will lead to "a difference of view, the

difference of standard". Elaine Showalter is highly critical of the opening chapter of The Mayor of Casterbridge, where the drunken Michael Henchard sells his wife and infant daughter to a sailor for five guineas at a country fair.

Hardy's Opening:

To shake loose from one's wife; to discard the drooping rag of a woman, with her mute complaint and maddening passivity; to escape not by slinking abandonment but through the public sale of her body to a stranger, as horses are sold at a fair; and thus to wrest, through sheer amoral willfulness, a second chance out of life (*qtd. in Kramer*).

As Showalter comments the novel is transformed into "a male document".

A woman's experience of this scene must be very different; ... Hardy's novel becomes a kind of sensation-fiction, playing on the suppressed longings of its male audience, evoking sympathy for Henchard because of his crime, not in spite of it (*qtd. in Kramer 102 – 103*).

Women's experience, will make them view it differently from their male counterparts, and experience of women of their problems must become a source of authority. A woman must read as a woman. Reading as a woman appeals to a sexual identity and experiences associated with that identity.

There is always the danger of women readers led to identify with male characters, against their own interests. They share anti-female feelings which is not in the least encouraging for a woman writer. A woman reader with the proper perspective alone can provide a congenial atmosphere for a female writer.

An excerpt from Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own provides interesting reading:

The heroine, call her Mary, says Woolf, goes to the British Museum in search of information about women. There she discovers to her chagrin that woman is, "perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe?"

"Why does Samuel Butler say, "Wise men never say what they think of women?" Wise men never say anything apparently... Are they capable of education? Napoleon thought them incapable. Dr. Johnson thought the opposite. Have they souls or have they not souls? Some savages say they have none. Others, on the contrary, say women are half-divine and worship them on that account. Some sages hold that they are shallower in the brain; others that they are deeper in consciousness. Goethe

honoured them; Mussolini despises them. Whatever one looked men thought about women and thought differently.

(Woolf 29-30).

Mary turns to historians and gets a disgusting picture: Wife-beating, I read, was a recognized right of a man, and was practiced without shame by high as well as low (44). Literature gives her a very contradictory picture of heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater (45).

At last, Mary can draw but one conclusion from her reading. Male professors, male historians, and male poets cannot be relied on for the truth about women. Woman herself must undertake the study of woman. Of course, to do so, she must secure enough money to live on and a room of her own (45).

Intellectually male, sexually female, one is in effect no one, nowhere, immasculated. Women are estranged from their own experience and are expected to identify as readers with a masculine perspective, which is presented as the human one. A unique voice for the women is to be discovered which will make them think for themselves.

The Indian Scenario

Indian Languages

The nature of gender differences in Indian languages, clearly reflects the social and cultural factors prevalent in India which are very much different from western societies. Male domination in India was considered a matter of right and women were denied equal access with men in all spheres. The ideal picture of a woman was one of an uncomplaining servile wife looking after the interests of her husband, living a life of self-negation.

The inferior status of women reflected in the Dravidian languages is observed by Vasanthakumari (53-54). There are languages in which there are only two genders, the masculine and the neuter, apparently reducing their status to that of a commodity. Dravidian nouns are classified as high caste nouns and casteless nouns. High caste nouns include celestial and infernal deities and human beings or all things endowed with reason. Everything whether animate or inanimate and deficient in reason is included in the casteless variety. For eg., Telugu language is devoid of the third person feminine singular, equivalent to 'she' and uses instead the neuter singular equivalent to 'it'. The reason can be found in the fact:

Women in Telugu are spoken of as a chattel or a thing or child like, apparently on the supposition that women are destitute of

reason, or their reason like that of infants, lies dormant. Kurukh agrees with Telugu and in Kurukh feminine nouns are neuter in the singular. In Gondi, there are only two genders, the masculine and the neuter. The former is used for men and Gods, while all other nouns are neuter. Kui agrees with Gondi. It has no feminine singular but uses the neuter instead. Kui and Gondi use the neuter gender in the plural also. A few other Dravidian languages, like Malto and Kolami also behave the same (Vasanthakumari 53).

In many Indian languages the speaker-addressee system indicates the social inequality between men and women. The sex of the speaker is expressed in Kosati as well as the sex of the addressee in the Dravidian language Kurukh. In the lexical system in Telugu, the two particles *-ra* and *e* affixed to a form indicate man and woman respectively. These are used in two contexts, namely, when the speech act participants are in intimate social relation with each other, or when the speaker intends to insult the addressee. The feminine form *e* is used when addressing lower economic group or by men to degrade a woman. This is an example of verbal communication establishing man's superiority over women (Reddy 86).

With regard to the problem of reference to men and women, the process of naming and classification play an important role. People are identified by names of classes of pronouns as in the Dravidian languages. The entire nouns in Telugu, for e.g., classified into human verses non-human with the fused member division of singular and plural.

Singular :	Vadu	ame	adi
	'he'	'she'	'it'
Plural:	VallU	'They (hum)' avi	'They (non-human)'

But in the singular there are several other forms standing for 'she' namely *aVi Da*, *adi* and *Varu*. Out of these *Varu* is extremely polite and *aVi Da* is a neutral form, where *adi* is extended to a woman by outsiders in order to insult her. Similarly, Telugu has several words equivalent to woman. *ame*, *adadi*, *stri*, *mahila* and *adi*. Again the last one is used by men to indicate the male dominance and insult the woman. Here the non-human singular form is extended to 'woman' thereby accommodating the social situation of derogating inferiority and insult (86).

Grammatical gender is also a system of classification of nouns. There is no coherence between biological sex and general system. For eg. In Hindi the sex of the speaker is reflected in the grammatical usages.

Mai ata huu – man speaks

Mai ati huu - woman speaks

The distinction of speakers is morphological as in Marathi. The gender of the addressee is also taken into account when:

Tum kha sakte ho – when a man is addressed

Tum kha sakti ho – when a woman is addressed.

But irrespective of the number of women in a group, the presence of one male decides the agreement between subject and verb.

For eg. Rani, Suma, Ram and Sita ghar aye.

Rani, Suma, Ram and Sita came home.

A cursory glance will provide many such instances which all affirm the linguistic differences prevalent among men and women in India.

Tamil imposes restrictions on the ways a woman should talk; that she should speak only on a few subjects and in the limited family circle while a man is at liberty to talk about anything.

For eg: *Kilavi collin avalari kilavi*

“women should speak only known subjects.”

Kilavorkkayin uranotu kilakkum

“man should speak anything to express his knowledge”

(Vasanthakumari 54).

While men are engaged in different and roles, women are engaged in only such activities as *utal* “petty quarrels”, *kutal* “reunion”, *pirital* “getting separated”, *iruttal* “patiently waiting” and *irankal* “lamenting (so that others pity her). It is women who pass through different stages; *petai* (seven years), *petumbai* (eleven), *mankai* (thirteen), *matantai* (nineteen), *arivai* (twenty five), *terivai* (between 26 and 31), *perilampen* (40 years). Similar categorization does not apply to men (54).

Male bias is strongly displayed in the proverbial wisdoms that certify that women are by nature prone to gossip, that they are inquisitive, jealous and quarrelsome.

Pen vala pen porukamattal.

“A woman is jealous of another woman who is happily married”.

Penkal kudinal sandaikal peritidum.

“Where women gather, there fights will be multiplied”.

Urakul natacum visayam yarruku teriyum? Ulle irukum kumariku terium.

Who will know what is happening in the village? “The young maiden inside the house”.

Most pitiful of all in the saying:

Pennapirapatum pavam, penodukudi pirapatum pavam.

“To be born a woman is sinful. So it is to born with woman”.

The statements that is full of derision of the petty interests of woman.

In Malayalam too umpteen examples can be found to display discrimination against woman.

Men are defined in terms of what they do in the world, while women are defined in terms of the men with whom they are associated. Certain caste names in Malayalam, for instance, are associated with certain professions. But none of these women who are always referred to by the feminine form of these caste-names ever engage in those professions.

Eg.	Masculine	Feminine	
	<i>tattan</i>	<i>tattatti</i>	‘goldsmith’
	<i>kollan</i>	<i>kollatti</i>	‘blacksmith’
	<i>taccan</i>	<i>taccatti</i>	‘wood-cutters’
	<i>panikkan</i>	<i>panikkatti</i>	‘carpenter’
	<i>tantan</i>	<i>tantatti</i>	‘tree-climber’

(Sreedevi 73-74)

In the cultural arena too women are demarcated.

The 'pooja' is performed always by men and hence the 'poojari' language (language of the priest) will not be used by women.

Women show more religious affinity. Prayers and penance are offered more by women.

E.g. /tinkalalccavratam/ 'Monday penance';

/ 'tiruvatira noyampu' / (75).

Traditional art and entertainment is different for men and women.

Kaikottikali : for women

Purakkali : for men (74).

Women are the custodians of their husband's longevity and health and offer penance and prayers. Their *pàtivratyam* (chastity) is the fortitude of their men. They always refer with respect to their husbands as *adheham*, *avar* and refrain from addressing them by their names, but use *ninnal* (the plural) as a way of respect; whereas the wives are often called *edi*, as also by anyone elder.

Among the Muslims of North Kerala men use */nammal/* 'I' (plural) and women use */nan/*'I' (singular) to refer to themselves (72). Semantically derogatory terms to refer to men are few in comparison with that of women.

‘Veshya’ common for a prostitute, and ‘mudhevi’ are terms which have never being parallel with the male form.

It is to be remembered that it is the socialization process and cultural conditioning that affect the language behaviour in men and women in every society.

Historical Perspective of Indian Womanhood

The nature and status of woman in Indian society has always remained enigmatic. Sacred texts give them an exalted status for it is believed that Gods live where women are worshipped. Woman is manifested in mother goddess as Durga, Kali, Chandi. She is Shakti, the consort of Shiva, and evokes both fear and reverence. She is the protector of all mankind besides being the mother of the universe. Woman is the symbol of fertility - a giver of all gifts.

Yet there is an equally powerful side to her, in that she can unleash, unimaginable destruction on earth. But there is another profile of woman, also expounded by religious writings and folklore is that given to evil she can be impure and sensuous, and also a temptress, the root of all evil.

In the Vedic period women assisted men in performing the most important tasks of religious life, they chose their own husbands, had access to education, and wrote literature. The Vedic woman becomes the highest

symbol of Hindu womanhood. Women were the intellectual companions of their husbands and inseparable partners in the religious duties. Mughal histories also throw light on the importance of women. Women of the Mughal royal families had access to learning and commanded respect. They knew Persian and could read religious texts. Nur Jehan, the royal partner of Jahangir, became a legend in her days, for edicts were issued in her name and she was extolled for her diplomacy and skill in archery. Women were considered especially dangerous at certain times: while they were menstruating, after they had given birth and after the death of the husband. Under control female power was auspicious, but if it broke loose, it could wreak havoc. It is difficult to translate into familiar forms of today the concept of women as sacred, and therefore both powerful and dangerous.

A woman is fragile and fickle and need to be protected throughout her life: in childhood by father, in youth by her husband, and in old age – after her husband's death- by her sons; so goes the saying of Manu, the ancient law-giver. Restraint was exercised on her at the very outset, so that her purity may be preserved. Woman's sexuality is the prime area of control for she gives birth to generations. And before she can be defiled she is handed over in marriage to her lawful protector and this takes place before she attains

puberty; before her innocence can be contaminated. Her lawful place thus becomes her husband's home where further restrictions are imposed on her.

All opportunities that may lead to her transgression of the moral laws are shut out. 'An unmarried woman is like a fire' is a proverb which subtly and metaphorically speaks of the sexual vulnerability of a woman and the need to get her married. It also argues for the self-destructive nature of her passion.

The manner in which these controls are exercised depends to a great extent on social structure, role allocation and value premises. The interplay of historical, economic, social and political forces contribute significantly to the shaping and re-shaping of gender equations. The social scenes in India are variegated and multitudinous and highly complex. Norms may vary according to the differences in race, class, religion and region. Yet there is homogeneity in this chequered fabric of Indian womanhood.

Male dominance is the rule as is the case in many cultures in different parts of the world and the expectations on women are many. The ideal of Indian womanhood is always the chaste woman or *pativrata*. Chastity is the foremost requisite of the noble woman and adultery or immorality the greatest sin. Chastity meant purity and so the source of strength and the ideals of womanhood are the mythological chaste women.

Mahatma Gandhi after his return to India in 1915 as the hero of the South African Struggle addressed the women's organizations in Bombay and told them that the need of the hour was women leaders who were "pure, firm and self-controlled" like the heroines: Sita, Damayanti and Savitri. Sita, the heroine of the great legend Ramayana, followed the righteous Rama into exile, suffered abduction, and proved her purity in fire. Damayanti, the faithful and long-suffering wife of Nala, won renown by her implicit devotion to her husband. The notion of Pati Parameswar – the husband as the supreme God – was widely accepted and women even underwent fasts to procure for themselves a good husband early in life. They also observed penance for the health and long life of their husbands, for remaining a 'Sumangali' was the greatest boon or blessing on womanhood.

A girl was married into the family and had obligations to the family which in turn had its social ones. She was to be the shadow of her husband, though at times his guide and support. The purpose of marriage was fulfilled only when a son was born for he was the one who would save the father from hell. Besides this spiritual implication, there might be economic reasons too, but the former has taken hold of the Hindu mind. Infertility is considered to be a great curse on womanhood, the onus falling on woman alone. A divorcee too is stigmatized by society. The responsibility of an unsuccessful

marriage is also on the woman, such failure is a woman's lapse and her shame! A widow was the butt of much disapproval. Her presence at ceremonies was barred and considered an ill-omen. Even in the matter of dressing she was discriminated against in that she was not allowed to wear colourful dress but only white; her forehead remained a symbol of feminine adornment but untied hair let loose meant a revolt against womanly submissiveness. A widow's fate was to pine away in the corridors of the husband's family drudging for them endlessly. Sati was also practiced till its abolition in 1829, which a positive reform that spared women much torture.

But the glorification of self-immolation of a woman on her husband's funeral pyre still continues in some parts of India, as is evinced in the Roop Kanwar incident in Rajasthan in 1988. So too, widow remarriage was formerly prohibited and it took quite sometime for it to be sanctioned by custom and tradition.

All this is an index of the inferior position that woman held in society. She was economically a burden to the family, whether in her father's or husband's, inconsiderate of the work she did in the family. She had no property rights and depended on her protectors and was exploited to the maximum which even led to the dedication of girls as Devadasis to temples, for prostitution. The birth of a female child was a matter of sorrow and the

mother was harassed for it, when the birth of a male child was a matter of joy and pride and was an event for celebration.

Although there were some educated women, generally access to education was negligible as far as women were concerned. She was ignorant when compared to her male counterpart. The implementation of norms and values depended on the strength or weakness of control mechanisms. Intervention of social institutions was a determining force with notions of shame and honour in societal behaviour.

The Emergence of Modern Woman in Literature

It was with the nationalist movement that a powerful female emerged in Indian literature. Patriotism demanded that both men and women toil for the nation and sometimes women had to take the lead. The nationalist imagination endowed her with the Victorian ideals of domestic virtue, patience and long suffering. But the new woman was also self-confident and autonomous, conscious of her power and of the strength she could find in tradition. She also turned out to be a gentle but stern custodian of the nation's moral life. And this was the figure that dominated the literary imagination for several decades to come.

But all along there was the increasing tension of creating a self-identity, an urge to strike the balance between the home and the world. The

constant anxiety was whether education or reform of any kind would result in the Westernization of women – and the subsequent collapse of an essentially Indian identity. The image of an Indian woman trying to imitate the ways of a ‘memsahib’ was always a topic of ridicule for men and women alike. In the wake of the material pressures men were exposed to changes more than the women and so the burden of preserving the national spirituality lay on the women. The creation of a new resilient self, that could cope up with the demands of the world and at the same time maintain the familial inner world was the need of the day. It was the task with the major writers of the 1920s to the 1940s – Nirupama Devi, Mahadevi Varma, Lalithambika Antharjanam and Balamani Amma to name a few. Their novels do not tamper with the pattern of everyday lives, yet they trace the slow determined struggles of women for dignity and personhood. It is a lonely struggle and a realistic one.

The post-independence period has brought to the forefront a plethora of women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative release of women perceptions. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anitha Desai, Shashi Deshpande have opened up new horizons of female sensibilities. More recently, among those who have given the rudest shock to a prudent readership of women literature are Kamala Das and yet

lately Arundhati Roy, the women from Kerala who voice their locale and nation and continent at large. Through the eyes of these women one gets a glimpse of a world not hitherto represented in literature. They write of life, with women as the pivotal point, as seen by women and as affecting women; and their problems which were till now in the periphery have now become the focus of their writings. By their shrewd awareness to their predicament combined with their intelligence, energy and volition they bring a new balance of power between the sexes. The quest for feminine autonomy does not prompt them to shed the warm familial relationships, but in turn ushers in sympathy for the human predicament in the sensibility of the writer as well as the reader.

The methods of delineation and attempts at interpretation vary in their complexity and also in accordance with the problems and attitudes of the individual author. They let their women emerge, at the end as essentially human and Indian, inspite of the crippling and crumbling traditional norms and customs, the ever increasing economic and educational opportunities that entail personal freedom and the impact of Western culture and its values. The writers at times seem to provide through their women protagonists an intensely mystic and personal solution to the dilemma of the Indian woman.

Kamala Markandaya points out how the emancipation of the Indian woman has been seriously hampered by the distortions and imbalances in the economic and social order of the Indian context. Her Mira in Some Inner Fury rides roughshod over all social taboos, conventions and inhibitions. Her women characters in her totality of vision rise to evolve a larger and universal concept of love.

It is the transformation of the female that we witness in Anita Desai's Maya (Cry, the Peacock) who echoes Ibsen's Nora in Doll's House.

..... Our home's been nothing but a playpen, I've been your doll-wife, here, just as at home I was papa's doll child
(110).

Her novels draw violence and death and loneliness that confront women in their search for space. Whether it is the immature and psychologically alienated Maya, or the culturally alienated English girl Sarah, or the rebellious Sita, or the stoic Nanda Kaul - all are women who are stifled by male domination.

Shashi Deshpande also strikes against women's victimization yet would find fault with women themselves for their depending syndrome. She exhorts that women should offer resistance yet carve out a niche in their

social milieu rather, than flee from it. Jaya in That Long Silence waits hopefully for the day to dawn when all will be well.

They are set to voice the mute miseries of the millions torn asunder by existentialist and psychological problems and predicaments. Their serious concern is the journey 'within' their characters, the women as the pivotal point of their enquiry. The Indian woman, passive or aggressive, traditional or modern, serves as an agent for the writer's quest for psychological insight and awareness. She becomes the link between the writer's consciousness and the world outside. She is a symbol of growth, life and fertility, but also of regression and withdrawal, decay and death. The awakening of women's consciousness is characterized by intense introspection, a stasis in time and action. Through their protagonists, they may offer intensely mystic solution to the dilemma of the Indian woman; even if they cannot, the fictional shaping of the specific crisis through the mental sieve itself leads to inner enrichment, a sense of exhilaration and achievement while battling through harsh reality.

Kamala Das sweeps her readers off the ground by her honest views of man-woman relationship, her sincere appraisal of the woman's body which under 'his' touch gleams like burnished brass. She wishes that the woman would be 'honest' about her wants as 'woman'. The Radha-Krishna

relationship is realized in human terms by the poetess who cannot visualize a world without love. And in the quest for the female hungers she has remained unreservedly herself, with her fiery imagination, her mastery of language and her unique power of evoking the pathos of womankind.

While following the trail blazed by her eminent predecessor, Arundhati grapples with the deeper forces at work in society; at the same time devoting herself to understanding the deep female sensibilities. Vividly, does she harp on the trauma of existence in a hostile, male-dominated society, the political and cultural undercurrents that submerge the helpless and the defenceless. Immeasurable loneliness may be the lot of those who tread on unfamiliar grounds while others have to stagger under the load of nobility thrust upon them. Arundhati adeptly engages in unravelling the plight of the underdog, especially the women. Her novel is a structured and extended statement of reality against the backdrop of socio-cultural conventions. Her reaction is overwhelming and we can detect a bold though not defiant tone of voice in asserting the personal and the subjective. Her characters are constantly confronted with the stupendous task of defining and redefining their relation to themselves and their immediate human context. Domestic life endangers their individuality with its dissonance and lack of warmth and brings solitary confinements to the members. With a nagging

sense of insecurity, they hunt out meanings for their days on earth. Yet their actions, however silly lead them in their ways.

It can be noted that the women writers live in their own personal and subjective world and their objective functioning is the result of subjective purpose and subjective choice. They seem to agree with the observations of Adrienne Rich:

Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society (18).

As she continues, it is true that their works provide:

a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see- and therefore live – afresh” (18).

Chapter IV

ARUNDHATI ROY – WRITING THE WOMAN :

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Arundhati Roy's winning the Booker Prize, in 1997, the world's second most coveted award, for her debut novel boosted the spirit of Indian women, and timed a sure welcome to women writers to the vast expanse of world literature. The world is all praise for Arundhati's maiden attempt, yet at home the accolades were not unanimous nor very spontaneous. The veteran critic and writer Sukumar Azikode did not hesitate to remark: "Being realistic the book is full of sights especially for the Westerners. But it offers no insights. It is very satisfying. And that is the main flaw. It offers no challenge to the reader. It is Kerala for the foreign tourist, just the periphery"(Azikode 2). Shobha De called it a "freak thing that happened" (*qtd. in* Eichert 40). But Kamala Das compensates when she bursts out in full-throated praise "She is our own girl...I feel so proud of her"(40). "In the tumult of feudalism's dying pangs, in the wide swathe that the narrative cuts through Kerala's modern history, in its pungent ironies, in the nerve-tingling passions, in the overarching pathos, the novel has few modern parallels in

Indo-Anglian writing” (John 177). Arundhati is the youngest writer to win the prestigious Booker, and the first resident Indian to whisk away the enormous sum of twenty thousand pounds sterling in a clean sweep. Roy’s success is spectacular, for when only five months into print The God Of Small Things sold 3,50,000copies worldwide and was translated into twenty-seven languages outright. Though a novice in the field of novel writing Arundhati has tried her hand at script writing for The Banyan Tree, a television serial and for the Electric Moon. Her career also includes a part in the film Massey Sahib, directed her husband and the part of Radha in In Which Annie Gives It To Those Ones, which she also scripted. Arundhati was not a case of a total unknown bursting into limelight. She came into news with her single – handed tirade ,”The great Indian Rape Trick”against the Bandit Queen, the film by Shekhar Kapur in the wake of the Mandal Issue. At present, after this first novel, she has voiced an impassioned plea against nuclear weapons, striking against everything Big. In her essay, The Greater Common Good she takes up the cause of the tribals in the Narmada valley, along with Medha Patkar. Her very recent article, The Reincarnation of the Rumpelstiltskin stresses the need to be independent as she always was and wishes to be.

How much it takes to become a writer. Bent (far more common than we assume), circumstances, time, development of craft – but beyond that: how much conviction as to the importance of what one has to say, one’s right to say it. And the will, the measureless store of belief in oneself to be able to come to, cleave to, find the form for one’s own life’s comprehension. Difficult for any male not born into a class that breeds such confidence. Almost impossible for a girl, a woman (Oslen 256).

Woman-authored as The God Of Small Things is, the text belies the statement categorically. Arundhati writes surmounting forcefully all the barriers that may come in her way. She flings to the wind all the opprobrium that women writing may have gained and says what she has to say and with conviction. The God of Small Things is not a story or just a telling of a tale but as the novelist has herself claimed tells us how things that happened affected the lives of the people concerned. In the course of writing, she draws into the vortex of her story the teeming and burning issues of life. The God Of Small Things is not a mere nostalgic dallying with the past, but is deeply implanted in the present. Arundhati’s people reek of sweat and blood, and tears. Their sobs resound with the rumblings of the storm.

The novel assumes the dimension of a protest novel which is keenly alert to the social injustice that goes sanctioned by the prevalent traditional norms. The inequality meted out to women seem to be the subject primarily occupying her. But no less important is the social discrimination meted out to the low-castes and the exploitations carried out in the name of class struggle. The politics of the day also forms her agenda: the Naxalite upheavel in Palghat, the World Bank Loan, 'the river sold for more rice', the flow of Gulf money, the sorrows of the employed separated from their families, all form the texture of her story.

The snobbery of the upper castes, the alien longings of the Anglophiles, and the religiosity of the clergy covertly come up for her criticism. But above all this, what lingers in the mind is the tragedy of man's instinct: "the subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify" (TGOST 308). Like all great literature the novelist strikes an optimistic note when the novel ends with, 'Naaley'; for the word is a harbinger of hope and life, however ignorant man may be of what it unfolds. And to be sure, the didactic tone too cannot be missed: "If you want to end up there, you must aim there" (292).

The Women Characters in the Novel

Arundhati Roy celebrates the female in the diversity of female experience offered in The God of Small Things. She has no intentions of being moralistic and is pragmatic and down to earth in her creation of her women characters, some of whom sharply demarcating a novel culture different from the traditional. We are forced to recognize the cravings of the human mind illuminated against the background of their socio-political considerations. The tragedy that befalls her women is the tragedy of freedom that they grapple with.

“Things can change in a day. That a few hours can affect the outcome of whole life times (32)”, is the keynote of the novel; and it is what happened unfortunately to Arundhati’s women, which shakes them from their enforced complacency. The major women characters of the novel, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Margaret, Ammu and Rahel are repeatedly defeated and derailed either by circumstances or by themselves. They call for the reader’s sympathy and understanding which are reserved from the men in the novel. Pappachi and Chacko cast their shadows over the women’s lives. Velutha, the God of small things, is the unhappy victim who is oppressed along with the women and their social restrictions. As Rahel had noticed in the case of Paradise Pickles and Preserves, an ambiguous unclassified disorder seems to

be arbitrary in the case of human beings also. This disorder in classification prescribed different norms for different people, exercised authority on the most vulnerable and the weakest of the weak whereas the powerful ones transgressed social and moral laws as per their convenience. When Ammu says that nobody – mother, father, brother, husband, best friend, even her own son who “could grow up to be an MCP” (83) – can be trusted she is only voicing the feminine consciousness of victimisation.

Sway of Patriarchy

In the politics of power, patriarchy becomes a potent tool to affect control and conformity in the family. The grand old Ayemenem house is the fulcrum of the little cosmos of the novel and spins out its tenacious tentacles to hedge in the lives of those born into it and from it. And the absentee patriarch Rev. Ipe seems to impose its first laws laid down by him of ‘how much’ and ‘whom’. Perched high up on one side of the mounted stuffed bison head he presides over and controls the present and lays his finger on the future. While he smiled his confident ancestor smile over the threshold, Aleyooty Ammachi, his wife looked hesitant.

With her eyes she looked in the direction that her husband looked. With her heart she looked away (30).

She wore heavy, dull gold kunukku earnings which were the tokens of her husband's kindness, the Little Blessed One's Goodness (30). She lived the matriarch with all the allowances a patriarch was pleased to bestow on his beneficiary. The patriarch's hegemony unfailingly falls upon his son, Pappachi, whose double-dealing crushes the lives of the members of his family. There is no escape from his clutches and utter dependence on him makes Mammachi and her daughter bear the brunt of his calculating cruelty which settles like a moth on the family. Seventeen years older than his wife he realized with a shock that he was an old man when his wife was still in her prime. Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase, only the frequency changed. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river when her violin master complimented her on her exceptional talent. Back at Ayemenem the Imperial Entomologist, retired, slouched around the compound, jealous of the attention his wife was getting on account of her pickles. He stopped speaking to her until his death, for being reprimanded by his son on beating his mother. When Mammachi cried at Pappachi's funeral, Ammu told her twins that it was 'more because she was used to him than because she loved him' (50). She 'was used to' being beaten from time to time.

It is Chacko, the only son of Pappachi who inherits his father's kingdom, the property and proprietorship of Ayemenem house and the factory. 'Thanks to our Male Chauvinist Society', Ammu said (57). Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, he always referred to it as 'my factory, my pineapple, my pickles'. Legally, Ammu as a daughter had no claim to the property. Chacko said, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (57). Chacko told Rahel and Estha that 'Ammu had no Locusts Stand P' (57). Chacko was privileged to transgress all social and moral laws. He missed no opportunity to insult her in her own home and was heedless of the scars that were created on her self-esteem.

When viewed from a perspective encompassing the fate of women in the various institutional domains of society, the many small insults women suffer in face-to-face interaction do perhaps seem trivial. Yet, ... the gesture of power are an integral part of women's placement in the social scheme of things. These daily gestures are constant "reminders" which help constitute women's subordinate status (West and Zimmerman 110).

K.N.M. Pillai too, the aspiring politician with local supplicants and Party workers 'had the easy authority of the Man of the House' (272). His

wife, Kalyani acknowledged his overbearing presence. His S.S.L.C., B.A. and M.A. certificates were framed and hung on the wall along with the photograph of his garlanding Comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad. He took pride in his only son, Lenin, whom he expected to get a double-promotion for his brilliance in studies.

Marriage - An Instrument of Oppression

Patriarchy implants itself securely within the institution of marriage, the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is till true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being (Beauvoir 444).

“She is married, given in marriage by her parents. Boys get married, they take a wife. They took to marriage” (448 -9).

. . . marriage normally subordinates wife to husband, the problem of the mutual relation is posed most sharply to the female (480).

Women have been conditioned in patriarchy, they have internalized its values transmitted from one generation to the other. It is this that strengthens Mammachi to endure the inhuman treatment meted out by her husband. So much so, that she later becomes its vehement exponent rather than its victim. The important women in The God of Small Things establish

themselves in terms of their marital status. Alyooty Ammachi is the great grand mother who acquiesces to the bounty of her domineering husband, Rev. John Ipe, and reigns as the submissive companion of a generous husband. Mammachi too is married and lives with Pappachi. Ammu and Rahel have been married. Baby Kochamma suffers from not being married while Margaret had been married. Women revolve round their men and weave their destinies. Marriage and considerations of family alone made Mammachi go through the hell of life.

Marriage too was the only choice left for Ammu and she holds on to it like the last straw of her life and livelihood. A girl without gainful occupation can only wait for her chance of salvation. It is exactly what Ammu did when her father the Imperial Entomologist came home with no dowry for his daughter. Ammu escapes from her oppressive father and long-suffering mother into her marriage with the Bengali tea-planter who leaves her more miserable than before and sends her back to all those she had fled from and even worse.

Margaret Kochamma, early a waitress at a café in Oxford started her friendship with Chacko in laughter and ended up in marriage; Margaret without her family's consent and Chacko without his family's knowledge. But soon Chacko's irresponsible ways aggravated by penury made Margaret

break loose from him and secure for her a gainful occupation. She also found herself drawn to an old friend of her brother's, Joe, with whom she lived and who happily fathered Chacko's daughter, Sophie Mol, till his accidental death.

Rahel too, a proven problem child from her schooldays, has her tryst with marriage. She meets Larry McCaslin who finds in her 'a jazz tune' and Rahel drifted into marriage 'like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge. With a Sitting Down Sense. She returned with him to Boston (18). But Larry McCaslin soon took offence 'with her far way look' and Rahel was divorced to fend for herself.

Marriage holds a different tale for Baby Kochamma, Navomi Ipe who followed Father Mulligan from seminary to seminary. The priest succeeds in keeping Baby Kochamma's aching heart "on a leash, bumping behind him, lurching over leaves and small stones" (24). Frustrated she returns home from her convent only to earn a 'reputation' that stands in the way of her finding a husband. Bruised and almost broken she started living her life backwards (22), with suppressed, unfulfilled feminine longings.

Arundhati Roy's women have been doomed for one mistake they have earlier committed: a wrong choice, of men. But these women, victims in themselves have internalized the discriminatory values of the prevailing

patriarchal systems. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma later turn out to be the two guardians of their family, intolerant of any trespassers. Mammachi is utterly unsympathetic to her daughter and locks her up like a mad bitch. But she winks at her son's libertine relationships with the factory women. Not only has she ceased to be hurt by them but acknowledges it as 'Men's Needs' and provides him with a backdoor to the house so that he may conveniently indulge in them. Baby Kochamma a great moralist with her sense of right and wrong is the very embodiment of patriarchal authority and with her midget lieutenant Kochu Maria is set to instil order in the patriarchal world. Discarded by her husband and disowned by her family is the fate of a divorced woman. The inquisitiveness of K.N.M. Pillai regarding the marital status of Rahel is a pointer to the position of women in society. Pillai finds the Puniyan Kunju family beyond redemption because of the fate of its women, one dying pre-mature, one divorced and leading a loveless life at home.

A female body, in the patriarchal world is never a personal body but one which poses a severe threat to cultural identity. It may bring a bad name for generations if not properly harnessed by man. Ammu is a challenge that Arundhati has flung into the teeth of social laws. Instead of engaging her heroine in a romance plot that ends in marriage and a life of happiness

everafter, Arundhati highlights her as a symbol of women for whom marriage is a synonym of one form of oppression or another. Ammu rebels against her marriage with the Bengali drunkard husband who was ready to entrust her to the care of the English manager, Mr. Hollick. She returns to her unwelcome home at Ayemenem with her twins. But she is acutely aware of the injustice and refuses to resign passively to her fate. At Ayemenem, her long suppressed feminine longings break loose when she meets Velutha, the low caste. She feels that her body is her own and responds to the churning in her rather than suppress it. She follows the urge of her body and seeks fulfilment heedless of the fate that its discovery may bring. She dauntlessly flouts the social laws as to “who should be loved and how. And how much(33).

The Responsibility of Motherhood

The mother-child relationship is the crux of social relationship in Indian society. The words of Smith may be applied in this context to reveal the intensity of the bond:

The time of relationship is not a segment of life's timeline but a loading of the whole drift of one's life into each of the moments devoted to being with the other. What is at stake in a relationship is the rightness of one's life-defining orientation –

so that love, . . . is always for ever. It is not an alienable “product” . . . even if it is bound to psychological and social effects and is affected in turn by other social dispositions. (Smith 265).

Any amount of bitterness, isolation and self-abnegation that is a woman’s due is nullified by her symbolic status as mother, the prime source and basis of society and its culture. Ammu puts in all her efforts to put up with her role as a responsible mother. Perhaps this and only this had driven Ammu into her misery. Her children were at times “millstones”, yet she would not give them up and took upon her shoulders the entire responsibility of their bringing up. She became their ‘Baba’ and their mother and loved them double. It is the very same weakness that is exploited by Baby Kochamma in order to wreak vengeance against Ammu who had gone to the police station and spoken against her. She manoeuvres to force Ammu out of the house and intrigues to return Estha to his almost forgotten father. Returning Estha to his father was like tearing off a limb from Ammu. Her longing to win him back plunges her into the world outside in search for a job that would help hold all of them together under the same roof.

When Ammu ‘returns’ Estha to his father, she reminds him to write and gives him envelopes with their addresses written on it so that he could

easily write and post letters. She consoles him that she would soon come and take him back.

Soon, sweetheart. As soon as I can As soon as I get a job.

As soon as I can go away from here and get a job (324).

Yet, at times she got angry with her children. They remembered being pushed like billiard balls between their Baba and Ammu who said: "Here you keep one of them. I can't look after them both" (84). She willingly suspended the years between their sad parting and the expected 'none too soon get-together'. She battles alone with life, with dreams of a happy tomorrow when she can hold her children under her own wings.

Fatherhood is free from such emotional shackles. While returning Estha to his father crushes Ammu, their Baba lives on with no qualms about separation from his children. The twins are entrusted solely to the mother's care when the parents part from each other. Anyway, it seemed very magnanimous of him to accept Estha into his new family and conveniently too did he wash his hands off the boy when later he migrated to Australia.

A home and for that matter a happy home, is the natural habitat of a woman. A miserable home drives Ammu to Bengal, her own home shattered by a broken marriage drives her children farther from each other. Ammu and the children are driven apart for lack of a home of their own. Lack of a

gainful occupation makes Ammu helpless. She is at the mercy of her brother who is the sole master of the house where she was born. She can live there only as long as he wishes. These are just a few of the problems that Arundhati raises for our consideration and to note they are most specially a woman's predicament in her society. Lack of independence makes the woman bow down to her masters. Arundhati displays the world through the microcosm at her disposal; Ayemenem and its milieu. Speaking about hapless conditions of women Arundhati remarked: "The only real conflict seemed to me between men and women" (Interview 102). The double standards of society deny justice and dignity to the women and untouchable alike. Caught in the patriarchal moorings they are not their own but victims and underdogs of a time-acknowledged power that holds its sway over them. So says Ammu, it made no difference, choosing between her husband's name and her father's name for it did not give a woman much of a choice.

Women Marginalized

As Simone de Beauvoir observes:

Women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own, and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the

proletariat ...They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, house work, economic condition, and social standing to certain men – fathers or husbands – more firmly than they are to other women (19).

Women are marginalized in The God of Small Things and Arundhati proves that the texture of her novel is the culture of Ayemenem. Ammu was not given a college education after schooling because Pappachi believed that college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with her parents to Ayemenem. She had practically nothing to do there but wait for marriage proposals; helping her mother with housework all the while. She grew desperate, and finally escaped to a distant aunt's to find a husband later. As a divorcee at Ayemenem, Chacko, her brother and Baby Kochamma, her aunt made use of every opportunity to sideline her creating an impression that she was an outsider in the house, with no "Locusts Stand I" (57).

Mammachi was always the silent sufferer under the clutches of her ill-tempered husband. Her talent for playing the piano was nipped in the bud. Her entrepreneurship in the Paradise Pickles and Preserves was envied and never appreciated.

Kalyani, K.N.M. Pillai's wife is also given no recognition as a powerful member of the family. When Chacko came to Pillai's house to discuss the business matters he smiled and nodded a greeting to Pillai. His wife and even the aged mother were of consequence. Pillai threw his soiled clothes at Kalyani, which she took as a boon bestowed on her.

Baby Kochamma joined the convent converting to Roman Catholicism. But she became unhappy for she could find no trace of Father Mulligan there. She came back home; Rev. Ipe realized that his daughter was unlikely to find a husband. So he decided that there was no harm in her having an education and sent her to the University of Rochester in America and that too for a diploma in Ornamental Gardening. She confined herself to the front garden of Ayemenem house and that occupation her father thought would "keep her from brooding" (26).

Rahel was unwelcome at Ayemenem when she came years later to pay her brother a visit. Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria eyed her with disgust and wanted that Estha being useless, be taken care of by her.

Colonization of Female Minds

The ability to bestow meanings - to "name" things, acts and ideas - is a source of power. Control of communication allows the managers of ideology to lay down categories through which

reality is to be perceived. Conversely, this entails the ability to deny existence of alternative categories, to assign them to the realm of disorder and chaos, to render them socially and symbolically invisible (Wolf 388).

The female gender is most often used to make derogatory remarks or refer to unpleasant situations. Policemen didn't take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children (8). The man with whom a woman sinned cannot be termed with an equivalent name.

Rahel's behaviour at school was criticized disapprovingly:

It was, they whispered to each other, as though she didn't know how to be a girl (17).

And, when Rahel married, Larry McCasin possessed his wife as a gift given to him in love (19). But he was offended by her eyes, the faraway look that dispossessed him of her.

When Baby Kochamma defied her father's wishes and became a Roman Catholic it was too much. "Displaying a stubborn single-mindedness (which in a young girl in those days was considered as bad as a physical deformity - a harelip perhaps, or a club foot) (24).

It was to ornamental gardening that Baby Kochamma was turned by her father, when she returned home with a 'reputation' that would not procure her a husband. It trustfully proves the claims of Ellis Havelock:

In general the feminine traits revealed are an attention to the immediate surroundings, to the finished product, to the ornamental, the individual, and the concrete; while the masculine preference is for the more remote, the constructive, the useful, the general and the abstract (Havelock 189).

Unpleasant situations also are pictured in a derogatory feminine way:

Memory was that woman on the train. Insane in the way she sifted through dark things in a closet and emerged with the most unlikely ones - a fleeting look, a feeling (72).

The city's deplorable mire drew Rahel into the New York's 'deranged womb' (72). The silence gathered its skirts and slid, like Spiderwoman, up the slippery bathroom wall (93).

Women as Objects

Mr. Hollick's desire for Ammu is expressed very subtly and unabashedly:

You're a very lucky man, you know, wonderful family, beautiful children, such an attractive wife ... An extremely attractive wife (41 - 42).

Mr.Hollick suggested that she be sent to his bungalow to be looked after when her husband is sent on a holiday. Ammu impresses him with her good-looks. Arundhati describes:

When Ammu and her husband moved to Assam, Ammu, beautiful, young and cheeky, became the toast of the Planters' Club. She wore backless blouses with her saris and carried a silver lamè purse on a chain (40).

Chacko has always eyed Kalyani with desire.

Mammachi also, destined to live a doomed life was thrown out of her own house. Rahel found herself targeted by the young men who came to the gas station, where she worked as a night clerk. She worked there for several years and found it difficult to ward off pimps who used to approach her with lucrative job offers. Inspector Thomas Mathew tapped Ammu's breasts as if he was choosing mangoes from a basket. He called her a 'Veshya' and referred to Estha and Rahel as 'illegitimate' (8).

Even Baby Kochamma was trifled with by Father Mulligan who exploited her maidenly attentions. The Irish monk was more than merely

flattered by the emotion he aroused in the attractive young girl who stood before him “with a trembling, kissable mouth and blazing coal-black eyes”(23). “The young girl and the intrepid Jesuit, stood looking at each other, quaking with un-christian passion”(24).

For Chacko, the working women of the factory were nothing more than objects of his pleasure. They were just to satisfy his ‘Men’s Needs’. His mother had a separate entrance built for Chacko’s room so that he could carry on his affairs uninterruptedly.

There is no doubt, women writers can best express what women are and what women want. Women-centred novels which are constantly billed as the voice of the liberated woman, telling it as ‘like it is’, revealing all, present their heroines as active, speaking subjects. Almost always the heroine tells her own story, in an autobiographical mode which can encourage an identification between author, characters and reader that befits the fictive nature of writing. Both the act of writing and the prevalent theme of sexual fulfilment are offered as the problem of the individual woman trying to express her ‘true self’.

Furthermore, the author’s interest in women’s sexual pleasure in these novels functions not as a radical critique of a society that has no place for women’s desire but, more often, as a confirmation of women’s position as

personal, ahistorical, sexual and non-political. The questions, she was asking, were legitimate and she was alone in asking them.

Autobiographical elements

“Writing was a fictional way of making sense of the world I lived in and the novel was the technical key with which I did it”, said the author. The God of Small Things is replete with its autobiographical element. A pale reflection of Arundhati’s childhood haunts an inextricable mix of memory and imagination. Arundhati Roy was born in Shillong to a tea-planter. Daughter of a Kerala Syrian Christian mother and a Bengali Hindu father, Arundhati Roy inherits the divergent cultural strains of her parentage. She was brought up in Aymanam (‘Ayemenem’, in the novel) when her mother Mary Roy broke up her marriage with the Bengali. A product of a broken home Arundhati had to fend for herself. Mary Roy made fame by fighting the Christian Succession Act in the Supreme Court to win Christian women an equal share with their brothers. Ayemenem house is not entirely fictional, for Arundhati Roy, the architect, recreated it. It had the folding doors and side entrances that ‘Mammachi’ built for her son’s use. Uncle Chacko is modelled on George Issac, her uncle; and Magaret in the novel is Issac’s divorced first wife, Cecilia Philipson. The Palat Pickles started by Issac after his higher education in England is near the ancestral house, and bears the

slogan “Emperor in the realm of taste”. Kari Saippu’s History House where the ‘history’s henchmen’ made ‘lessons’ was on the other side of the Meenachal river. Every tragic incident in the novel is fictional, like the drowning of Sophie Mol.

That much of the story is autobiographical is conceded. The girl twin Rahel whose narrative voice dominates the tale is Roy herself when young. Estha, the boy twin, eighteen minutes elder in the novel, smacks of her brother, Lalit Kumar Christopher Roy, who is eighteen months her elder in real life. “May be the character has 25 per cent of me but 75 per cent is somebody else ...” says Lalit Kumar (Kumar 43).

Mary Roy, Arundhati’s mother, a sufferer like Ammu in the novel says that Arundhati has written neither about people nor about the 1960s. Rather “she is talking about a situation”. Born and brought up in India, Indian and Keralite motifs constantly weave through Arundhati’s writings. The novel echoes Arundhati’s own childhood, the environment in which she grew with its caste divisions, gender discrimination and family feuds. Situated in a very South Indian locale, she lashed out against old custodians of morality and law. Meenachal forms the background and witness to life’s drama unfolded on its banks. The novel has along with its artistic representability ideological meanings. But the realism represented in the

novel conveyed artistically is the merit of the book. It is autobiographical, yet regional, historical, picturesque and satirical all at once.

Narrative Devices

Arundhati's narrative technique is to be studied primarily as an expression of the self unhindered, and unmindful of the consequences it might harbor. Her stream of consciousness is not new to literature; but she has almost perfected it, handed down to her by James Joyce, the master craftsman. The story is told mostly in the children's point of view, and this provides the convincing creation of child's world. As Ranga Rao says:

The children's "high-voltage imagination results in linguistic, stylistic exuberance in the profusion of capitals, inspired misspellings – repetitions, single sentence paras etc., in a comic strip-cartoon style (Rao 2).

Arundhati Roy is unconventional in her telling of the tale, in the structure and chronology of the narrative, 'playing with time', 'seeing the world' as if for the first time. Through 'the stream of consciousness of a small girl', the omnipresent author smashes the boundaries of time, oscillating from past to present and freely marching into the future to be back into the past again. Janus-like she visualizes the past and the future, rooted in the present and weaves the saga of a family of three generations doomed in

its destiny, yet hopefully waiting for a 'Naaley' (The God Of Small Things 240). The main action of the book revolves round then seven year old twins, Estha and Rahel, Sophie Mol's arrival and subsequent drowning and the intense but fatal love between Ammu and Velutha, the Paravan. The novel starts with returning to Ayemenem, the scene of the action, twenty-three years later, during the monsoon in June. The thirty-three pages of the first chapter give us a bird's eyeview of the canvas which is later filled in with elaborated details: Sophie Mol's funeral, the twins' birth, Baby Kochamma and her past, Velutha's death, Rahel's marriage and later divorce, Ammu's death, Margaret Kochamma's grief – all find mentioned in the opening chapter. But the novel ends in the middle of the story with Ammu and Velutha making love and promising to meet "Tomorrow". The chronological narrative has been discarded for it is difficult to pin down to order the complex and variegated experiences of life. The theme is so universal that the story began very long ago:

. . . it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch ascendancy. Before Vasco de Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purple – robed Syrian Bishops murdered by the Portugese were

found floating in the sea, with coiled sea-serpents ... it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.

That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how.

And how much (33).

Certainly Roy does not give the whole story in as many words for much is left to the imagination of the reader. Every device there is in language is exploited by the writer. Like Estha and Rahel reading *The Adventures of Susie Squirrel* reading the words by changing the order of the letters” “ehT *serutnevda fo eisus. Eno gnirps gninrom eisus lerriuqs ekow pu*” (60). The clustering of items, edible items and human beings together, the strange classifications of things and the grouping of incidents help to delineate the topsy-turvy world of morality. Arundhati Roy renders the external world as a character in itself rather than a setting or background. One cannot fail to recognize the strong emphasis on the link between an author’s makeup and his language. It has been observed by Enkvist:

A writer’s style may be regarded as an individual and creative utilization of the resources of language, which his period, his chosen dialect, his genre, and his purpose within it offer him.

To understand and to make explicit his linguistic creativity, to appreciate in full the alchemy by which he transmutes the base metal of everyday language into the gold of art, it is first necessary to recognize and where possible to specify the ranges of language within which he is working, and upon which he is able to draw. The attempt to do so in analytical detail is not to destroy the wonder of literature but to enhance it (*qtd. in* Spencer, *Preface* 49).

Arundhati Roy wields her pen hearkening to her inner self alone, her thoughts and emotions flicker up and down casting shadows, long and short. She explores the depths of feeling and sensibility and suddenly blazes forth with revelations. Her thoughts are not stemmed by any lack in her language and they find free expression with the language following the trail. The freedom that she exercises in her writing has been met with severe criticism. Arundhati's linguistic experiment is disgusting to some critics who say, "Indian writers like Arundhati even spit at correct English", her English is "Chutneyfied", they accuse. Some of her innovations are termed as useless and of no use to writers in future, yet she had the guts and the overwhelming talent to make her way. Metaphors and similes issue forth from her pen with great ease and naturalness. Her mind is a kaleidoscope with beautiful forms

and opens out onto the wide ocean of experience sucking in impressions to form gleaming images that come to stay in every reader's mind. They jostle against each other in their profusion:

Inspector Thomas Mathew's moustaches bustled like the friendly Air India, Maharajah's, but his eyes were sly and greedy (7).

.....

He tapped on Ammu's breasts with his baton as though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered (8).

.....

The death of Sophie Mol stepped softly around the Ayemenem House like a quiet thing in socks. It hid in books and food . . . (15).

.....

The Small God laughed a hollow laugh, and skipped away cheerfully. Like a rich boy in shorts (19).

.....

So too Father Mulligan had Baby Kochammu's aching heart on a leash, bumping behind him, lurching over leaves and small stones (24).

.....

Baby Kochamma locked her sad, paint-flaking fridge (29).

.....

And closed her face like a cupboard (29).

.....

And their beds were soft with Ei. Der. Doums. (105).

.....

The mouldy bison said, 'No. Absolutely Not' In Mouldy Bisonese (174).

.....

Velutha courtesied with his mundu spread like a skirt, like the English dairymaid in 'The King's Breakfast' (175).

.....

Chacko too is vividly caricatured when Arundhati describes: Chacko's ears stuck out on either side of his head like teapot handles (241).

.....

Repetitions and parentheses, one word sentences and rhymes reflect the stream of her consciousness running riot encompassing colours, sights, sounds and smells that appeal to her sensibilities. She goes on to describe: "In Rahel's heart Pappachi's moth snapped open its somber wings"

"Twins for tea

It would bea" (148)

.....

The popular device of repetition for intensification of effect is no better used when Ousa, the Bar Nowl/Watched Ambassador E. Pelvis Walk:

Past floating yellow limes in brine...

Past green mangoes, cut and stuffed ...

Past glass casks...

Past shelves of pectin...

Past trays of bitter gourd ...

Past mounds of fresh green pepper corn

Past a heap of banana peels...

Past the label cupboard ...

Past the glue...

Past the brush ... (193 – 94)

.....

Poetic licence, if one would call it, is exploited to the maximum when Arundhati coins phrases and compounds to meet her purpose:

Satin-lined.

Brass handle shined (4).

.....

Ammu's trembling hymnbook - holding hand (5).

.....

Tea-coloured minds (10).

.....

Fan-whirring, peanut –crunching darkness (98).

.....

“The Orangedrink, Lemondrink Man” (113),

.....

Thimble – drinker

Coffin – cartwheeler (135).

.....

“Viable, die-able age” (161).

.....

blue-lipped and dinner-plate eyed they watched (308).

.....

She also splits words:

And their beds were soft with Ei.Der.Downs. (105).

.....

Is he in heaven? Is he in hell?

That demmedel – usire Estha – Pen? (182).

.....

Transliteration also waits upon Arundhati as she writes:

Onner.

Runder.

Moonner (64).

Aiyyo Kashtam (177).

ickilee, ickilee, ickilee! (178).

Kandoo, Kochamma (179).

Sundarikutty (179)

Ory kaaryam parayathey? (277)

Out.

In.

And lifted its legs.

Up.

Down. (293)

.....

Almost everybody praised the novel for its stylistic innovations and the craftsmanship, the impish humour combined with its pathos. Aijaz Ahmad, an almost unsympathetic critic of Arundhati admits on this aspect:

She is the first Indian writer in English where a marvellous stylistic resource becomes available for provincial, vernacular culture without any effect of exoticism or estrangement (Ahmad 108).

The onrush of ideas brook no dearth of language. Like the Meenachal River in the monsoons they carry us on defencelessly yet willingly, our minds wondering at new revelations of the world around us. The new concepts of comparison arrive like 'Christianity in a boat' and seep into our consciousness like 'tea from a teabag'(33), there to stay.

Roy evokes the tropical splendour with a dazzling command of language and a range of literary gimmicks that leave the sympathetic reader half intoxicated (Eichert 43).

Nictitating membrane, she remembered she and Estha once spent a whole day saying. She and Estha and Sophie Mol.

Nictitating

ictitating

titating

itating

tating

ating

ting

ing (188 – 89)

Like children playing with the sounds of language, the author attempts to integrate form and language. While going through The God of Small Things one feels that the novelist is irked by the linguistic constraints and is eager to transcend the confines of ordinary language and hence invent any literary device that will make communication effective. Arundhati Roy is asserting her independence as an individual, free to think and write what she has known. We are reminded of the famous cry of Kamala Das:

. . . Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses

All mine, mine alone. (*An Introduction* 26)

And falling in line with the famous Indian writers, Arundhati too has chosen her own language to voice her thoughts and feelings and emotions. Also she delves deep down into the labrynth of the minds of her characters.

Use of Taboo Language

Helen Cixous exhorts in “The Laugh of Medusa”:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes. They must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve discourse ... (336).

Fully aware of the ideological role of language in doxifying and constructing gender and thereby marginalising the position of women, women writers have endeavoured to develop modes of writing to counter phallogocentric strategies of representation of women sexuality.

The episode with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man was disgusting and yet Arundhati deftly describes it with all its far-reaching implications on Estha and on Rahel too. Estha encountered the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man and fell into the clutches of the unfriendly ‘jewelled bear’ (102). His gold chain was almost hidden by his chest hair. His white Terylene shirt was unbuttoned to where the swell of his belly began (102). Under the pretext of offering Estha a drink he made Estha do what he wanted.

His hand closed tighter over Estha's Tight and Sweaty. And
faster still.

Fast faster fest

Never let it rest

Until the fast is faster,

And the faster's fest.

.....

... Then the gristly-bristly face contorted, and Estha's hand was
wet and hot and sticky. It had egg white. Quarter-boiled.

The lemondrink was cold and sweet. The penis was soft and
shrivelled like an empty leather change- purse. With his
dirtcoloured rag, the man wiped Estha's other hand (104).

Estha learned two things for 'Two Thoughts' came into his mind:

a) Anything can happen to Anyone

And

b) It's best to be prepared (194).

Her pornographic detailing entices us with its humourous and
interesting images. Thus Baby Kochamma carries 'melons in her
blouse'(95). Muralidharan sits on the milestone:

Muralidharan, the level-crossing lunatic, perched cross-legged and perfectly balanced on the milestone. His balls and penis dangled down, pointing towards the sign which said:

COCHIN

23

(62).

Also we find, 'everyone pissing in front of everyone in the urinal of Abhilash Talkies' (95–96). The standards prevailing in society prevented women from using technical vocabulary to express their feelings. Roy flouts this tradition and writes the body. Roy forges aesthetic vocabulary for the special nuances of female sensation and champions the female consciousness. Like her male counterparts she records every gamut of female sensation.

With all the heat of sexual passion is the union of Ammu and Velutha. There is no baulking in the pursuit of Ammu's intensity of experience:

Ammu, naked now, crouched over Velutha, her mouth on his. He drew her hair around them like a tent. *Like her children did when they wanted to exclude the outside world.* She slid further down, introducing herself to the rest of him She sipped the last of the river from the hollow of his navel. She pressed the heat of his navel. She pressed the heat of his erection against

her eyelids. She tasted him, salty in her mouth. He sat up and drew her back to him. She felt his belly tighten under her, hard as a board. She felt her wetness slipping on his skin. He took her nipple in his mouth and cradled her other breast in his calloused palm. . .

At the moment that she guided him into her, she caught a passing glimpse of his youth, his *youngness*, the wonder in his eyes at the secret he had measured and she smiled down at him as though he was her child (336).

The detailed explicit sexuality in these lines is unique in Indian English, especially that written by women and is paralleled only by Kamala Das.

Notice the perfection
 Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
 Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,
 Dropping towels, and the jerky way he
 Urinates. All the fond details that make
 Him male and your only man. Gift him all,
 Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
 Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,

The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your

Endless female hungers ...

(‘The Looking Glass’, The Descendants)

Exponent of Female Sexuality

Bereft of soul

My body shall be bare.

Bereft of body,

my soul shall be bare.

(‘The Suicide’, The Descendants)

Arundhati Roy toes the line of Kamala Das in her conviction, in her portrayal of Ammu who becomes a true representative of the awakening feminine consciousness. Ammu awakens to the rights as a female, a woman who wishes to express her feminine sexuality. With women’s claims to their rights, they have also affirmed their faith in their bodies. Besides the numerous issues, in the novel, Arundhati takes up female sexuality as the crucial focus of her literary consciousness. “it is by writing about their sexuality that women writers can begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in us” (Fetterley, *Preface* xxii). Roy describes vividly the union of Velutha and Ammu in the most intimate way, recording every gamut of female experience. Her descriptions graze in and around

subjects and words considered as taboo for women. The pornographic details form a document against the hitherto male dominated tradition. Thomas Mathew tapping Ammu's breasts with his baton, "As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket" is her brave recording of a reality. Even the incest between Rahel and Estha is delineated as an urge to realize the perfect unison of the 'We' and 'Us' of the twins. And what Rahel and Estha "shared that night was not pleasure but utter grief", an added reassurance of the consolation that can be found in each other's company alone.

Arundhati asserts female sexuality on the basis of reciprocity and naturality. She contradicts the popular endorsement by Andrea Dworkin who states:

Intercourse occurs in a context of a power relation that is pervasive and incontrovertible. The context in which the act takes place, whatever the meaning of the act in and of itself, is one in which men have social, economic, political, and physical power over women. Some men do not have all those kinds of power over all women; and most men have controlling power over what they call *their* women ... (101).

Arundhati's Ammu demonstrates that "she too is a giver of gifts" and not Velutha alone who can give gifts. It is to her ecstatic yearnings that

Velutha responds and therein he negates the principle that the phallus is the symbol of power and so sex is for the man only.

‘A story of sexual anarchy in the Latin Catholics of Kerala’ is what E. M. S. Namboodiripad called The God of Small Things. The scenes of physical intimacy between Ammu and Velutha are described deftly. Velutha had all along been considered as the God of Small Things, a giver of gifts to her children. But it is with electrifying effect that Ammu realizes that she too can be the giver of gifts. She starts “To love by night ‘the man her children loved by day’ (202). It was on a fatal night while listening to a radio that “something stirred inside her” and “a liquid ache spread under her skin, and she walked out of the world like a witch, to a better, happier place” (44). She sheds her motherhood and divorcehood to join Velutha. She gave him her gift, her own body. “Her brownness against his blackness. Her softness against his hardness. Her nut-brown breasts (that wouldn’t support a toothbrush) against his smooth ebony chest” (335).

Arundhati pictures unhesitatingly the repulsion of Mammachi at the scenes envisioned by Mammachi who writhed in anger at her daughter’s relationship. She even imagined in vivid detail:

a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast. His mouth on hers. His black hips jerking between her parted legs (257).

For D. H. Lawrence sexuality focuses on male superiority and it is never a sharing or co-operative experience of the partners. It is purely phallic and upholds the patriarchal principle that possession of phallus is the possession of power and hence sexual enjoyment is for the male. Kate Millet comments on the sexual intercourse depicted by D. H. Lawrence:

The scenes of sexual intercourse in the novel are written according to the "female is passive, male is active" directions laid down by Sigmund Freud. The phallus is all; *Connie is "cunt", the thing acted upon, gratefully accepting each manifestation of the will of the master. Mellors does not even condescend to indulge his lady in foreplay ... She enjoys an orgasm when she can, while Mellors is managing his own. If she can't, then too bad. Passive as she is, Connie fares better than the heroine of The Plumed Serpent from whose Lawrentian man, Don Cipriano, deliberately withdraws as she nears orgasm, in a calculated and sadistic denial of her pleasure*

(318 – 19). Ammu moves to Velutha, ‘to a better, happier place
(332). She is a giver of gifts not a passive receptor.

The God of Small Things asserts:

The body of a woman is one of the essential elements in her situation in the world. But that body is not enough to define her as woman; there is no true living reality except as manifested by the conscious individual through activities (Beauvoir 69).

Man and woman live in the world on terms of reciprocity.

Language : In Arundhati’s Own Words - ‘a skin on my thought’

In an interview with Alex Wibur, weeks before she won the Booker Prize, Arundhati talks about her writing craft. The following excerpts from the interview provide us with her valuable ideas on language use and the structure of her book that was developed in the course of her story-telling :

One of the things that really delighted me about the God of Small Things was the incredibly imaginative way you use language - especially as a way to illustrate how children see the world. Nap becomes “gnap”, barn owl becomes “Bar Nowl”. And just that slight rearranging of letters puts me right there in the mind of a seven-year-old. Where did these little touches come from?

Well, as a child I knew that there was such a struggle to come to terms with what the world is about to do to you. I was an unprotected child in some ways and I felt that one was always trying to anticipate the world and, therefore, was trying to be wise in some way. You sort of accurately misunderstand things and you make concepts out of things that aren't concepts and often, I think, if you have a sort of strange childhood, two things happen. As a child you grow up very quickly but obviously the part that is a child remains a child. And when you become an adult there is a part of you that remains child, so the communication between you and your childhood remains open. It isn't an effort for me to see things through that mirror. It's just all the boundaries are blurred and you make your own rules.

It seems to me that writers come in two flavours: those who are primarily interested in language and those who are primarily interested in story. This isn't to say that you can't have both interests, but that one is generally more motivated by one than the other. Which camp do you fall into?

I think that really you must do both things. For me the structure of my story, the way it reveals itself was so important. My language is mine, it's the way I think and the way I write. You know, I don't sweat the language. But I really took a lot of care in designing the structure of the story, because

for me the book is not about what happened affected people. So a little thing like a little boy making his Elvis Presley puff or a little girl looking at her plastic watch with the time painted onto it - these small things become very precious.

I'm glad you brought up structure because that was one of the most amazing things about the book. You're slipping back and forth between several different time frames for one thing; for another, you basically let us know within the first few pages how the story ends and then spend the rest of the novel showing us how and why.

But also I think that one of the most important things about the structure is that in some way the structure of the book ambushes the story. You know, it tells a different story from the story the book is telling. In the first chapter I more or less tell you the story, but the novel ends in the middle of the story, and it ends with Ammu and Velutha making love and it ends on the word "tomorrow". And though you know that what tomorrow brings is terrible, the fact that the book ends there is to say that even though it's terrible it's wonderful that it happened at all.

Love is a real minefield in your novel. Through most of the book it is misdirected, misused, misunderstood, and misguided; people die because of it, are scarred forever by it, and yet in the final pages of this essentially

tragic story, you end with two very poignant scenes in which love is redemptive - for a little while, at least.

Yeah, because for me, I have to say that my book is not about history but biology and transgression. And, therefore, the fact is that you can never understand the nature of brutality until you see what has been loved being smashed. And so the book deals with both things - it deals with our ability to be brutal as well as our ability to be so deeply intimate and so deeply loving.

Were there any big changes from draft to draft?

There were no drafts. For me language is a skin on my thought and I was thinking of a way of telling it. The only way I can explain how I wrote it was the way an architect designs a building. You know, it wasn't as if I started at the beginning and ended at the end. I would start somewhere and I'd colour in a bit and then I would deeply stretch back and then stretch forward. It was like designing an intricately balanced structure and when it was finished it was finished. There were no drafts. But that doesn't mean I just sat and spouted it out. It took a long time.

A lot of erasing?

No, not erasing much - language was never rewritten. I don't rewrite. It was just a lot of arranging.

You were trained as an architect, and I was wondering if that way of thinking about the world affected the way you approach fiction.

Absolutely. People keep asking me why I don't practise architecture and I think, what do you think this is? This is exactly that. It's really like designing a book for me.

What are you reading now? Do you have any time to read anything now?

I don't actually. One of the most beautiful things about writing is that it really enhances your reading. But after this five years of concentrating on one spot with such intensity, it's as if my concentration is just shattered, and it's a bit like being tortured this long. I find it so hard to concentrate on anything. But I think that it will pass. I hope that it will pass.

Genderization in The God of Small Things

The language of women is primarily the language of omission, a language of exclusion in a world of the language of man. It is the absence of a specific female generic that contributes to sexism in language. Stepping into the world of The God of Small Things we feel that we have entered into a world of males, peopled by the gender that alone is worth recognizing, where no other has much relevance unless otherwise specified.

Language has always been male-centred and linguistic practices involve referential genderisation that leads to the use of one gender pronoun as universal generics appropriate for signifying both the sexes. The use of masculine pronouns as generics is the most blatant example of such incorrect location. By legitimizing the ambiguity of the masculine pronoun which may mean a male or a female, referential genderization ignores the fact that for every 'he' in the language there is a reciprocal 'she'. In encouraging such usage, grammar becomes patriarchal, and instils the idea that women as individuals, and feminine pronouns as words, are inferior and limited. The following excerpts reveal areas where the male nouns encompass the female which has more separate identity.

Referring to Rahel's admission into the college of Architecture, Roy writes:

The staff were impressed by the size (enormous), rather than the skill, of her charcoal still-life sketches. The careless, reckless lines were mistaken for artistic confidence, though in truth, their *creator* was no *artist* (17).

Rahel stayed in the hostel eating in the subsidized *student* mess . . . Rarely going to class, working instead as a *draughtsman* in

gloomy architectural firms ... Even her *professors* were a little wary of her (18).

Rahel drifted into marriage like a *passenger* drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge.

On their way to receive Sophie Mol, Baby Kochamma told Estha and Rahel: "Don't forget that you are *Ambassadors* of India (139).

.....

Kochu Maria was Baby Kochamma's midget *lieutenant* (258).

.....

Sophie Mol lay in her coffin. Her face was pale and wrinkled as a *dhobi's thumb* (4).

.....

The loss of Sophie Mol had, "... Chacko and Mammachi (grown soft with sorrow, slumped in their bereavement like a pair of *drunks* in a toddy bar)" (15).

.....

So too, Ammu returned to Ayemenem "swollen with cortisone and a rattle in her chest that sounded like a *faraway man* shouting" (15).

.....

The expression on Ammu's face was like "a rogue" piece in a puzzle (72).

.....

Ammu lying dead, Arundhati describes:

A platoon of *ants* carried a dead *cockroach* sedately through the door, demonstrating what should be done with corpses. ... Ammu dead wrapped in a dirty sheet, looked like a *Roman Senator* (162).

.....

There were *Comrade* Sumathi, *Comrade* Lucykutty with *Modalalies* Chacko and Mammachi who formed interesting characters(273).

.....

Latha, K.N.M. Pillai's niece triumphantly recited her poem'. She was like the East German swimmer at the local competition' (273).

.....

The Kathakali performers are all *men*. Later they go home to beat their wives. It is the logo of a Kathakali *dancer* that

advertises the pickles: *Emperors* of the Realm of Taste - Ruchi lokathinde *Rajavu* (275).

.....

History has its *henchmen*; policemen who loom large over the horizon.

.....

Besides there is the man that *manned* the level-crossing (61); the *leper* at the car window, and the '*bourgeoise*' (61) in Ammu.

.....

To top them all is the Chappu *Thampuran*, the Lord of Rubbish who outlives Velutha, the doomed (339).

.....

The 'Bar Now'/The insects and birds and other animals that fill the novel's fabric evoke male images. There are *bats* and homing *birds*, designer *pectorals*, all gliding towards Ayemenem like skydivers making patterns in the sky (188). Pappachi's *moth* always cast its shadow on all and everything.

.....

Also, we see: a whole column of juicy *ants* on the way to church. *Ants* dressed in red. The *ants* made a faint crunchy sound as life left them. Like an *elf eating toast*", Rahel crushed them "*Antly Church, Antly Bishop*". Sweet *cousins* playing hide and seek at the well. The ants we presume are all males.

The Antly Church would be empty and the Antly Bishop would wait in his funny Antly Bishop clothes, swinging Frankincense in a silver pot. And nobody would arrive.

After he had waited for a reasonably Antly amount of time, he would get a funny Antly Bishop frown on his forehead, and shake his head sadly. He would look at the glowing Antly stained-glass windows and when he finished looking at them, he would lock the church with an enormous key and make it dark. Then he'd go home to his wife, and (if she wasn't dead) they'd have an Antly Afternoon Gnap (185 -86).

A squadron of fruit *bats* sped across the gloom. They could be found beautiful Ugly *Toads* with yearning unkissed princes (185), coiling purple earthworms for fishing, darting eels (203), crickets swelling, boat- spider floating and Malayali swimming spiders (204), disbelieving lizards', jewelled dragon flies, high stepping chickens, sudden rhinoceros, white termites on their way to work, white beetles burrowing away, white grasshoppers with

white wood violins, plumb, translucent lizards among old pictures (53). All these are out to inhabit the world of the novel with the male gender.

There is no questioning or reckoning of the female in any case, no acknowledgement of any such existence. It is to be wondered whether they can be any other word to denote the female of these above mentioned species.

In the opening part of her article, "Women and the Literary Curriculum", (Elaine Showalter 855) imaginatively recreates the literary curriculum the average young woman entering college confronts:

An anthology of essays, perhaps such as The Responsible Man, "for the student who wants literature relevant to the world in which he lives", or Conditions of Men or Man in Crisis: Perspective on the Individual and His World, or again, Representative Men: Cult Heroes of Our Time, in which thirty-three men represent such categories of heroism as the writer, the poet, the dramatist, the artist and the guru, and the only two women included are the Actress Elizabeth Taylor and the Existential Heorine Jacqueline Onsassis. . . by the end of her freshman year, a woman student would have learned something

about intellectual neutrality; she would be learning, in fact, how to think like a man (855).

It is interesting to know that stories and myths which are called for in The God of Small Things pertain to male heroes of popular songs and novels or folklore. The twins loved to identify themselves with Christopher Plummer as Captain von Trapp (105); precocious with their reading, Rahel and Estha were familiar with Old Dog Tom, Ronald Ridont Workbooks and Kipling's Jungle Book. They listened to Shere Khan's and Tabaquis' utterances.

'...By the bull that I killed, am I to stand noising into your dog's den for my fair dues? It is I Shere Khan, who speak!'

'And it is I, Raksha [The Demon], who answer,' the twins would shout in high voices. Not together, but almost.

'The man's cub is mine Lungri – mine to me! He shall not be killed. He shall live to run with the Pack and to hunt with the Pack; and in the end, look you, hunter of little naked cubs – frog eater – fish killer – he shall hunt thee!' (59).

Rahel also played Sydney Carton being Charles Darnay. "It is a far, far, better thing I do, than I have ever done"(61), she sighed in the mirror.

Julius Caesar and Brutus (83) too were enacted by the twins and Scarlet Pimpernel was also evoked.

It was Lochinvar who had come gallantly on the scene of recital by Latha. Neil Armstrong and O. Muthachen the Malayalee acrobat, all came into the purview of the twins' world.

And supervising the drama of human lives enmeshed in its surroundings, stood Ayemenem House, aloof-looking "like an old man with rheumy eyes watching children play" (165).

The house took special care to hedge in its women by means of its purposeful construction.

The doors had not two, but four shutters of panelled teak so that in the old days, ladies could keep the bottom half closed, lean their elbows on the ledge and bargain with visiting vendors without betraying themselves below the waist. Technically, they could buy carpets, or bangles, with their breasts covered and their bottoms bare. Technically (165).

Each of the works chosen for study presents a version and an enactment of the drama of men's power over women. The final irony, and indignity, is that the woman reader has to dissociate herself from the very experience the literature engenders.

Power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else. To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one's identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness – not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male – to be universal, – is to be not female. Not only does powerlessness characterize woman's experience of reading, it also describes the content of what is read (Fetterley 563).

As she told newsmen at the Booker ceremony in London: "This prize is about my past, not about my future. I don't know if I will ever write another book..."

.....
"I'll write another book if I have a book to write".

Let us hope and pray she will do so.

Chapter V

THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE IN M.T.'S NOVELS

The emancipated woman of the most modern days, the woman who knows what she wants and how to take it, is a far cry from the earlier concept of a typical 'Malayalee' woman, the meek and docile one that abounds in the novels of the esteemed and illustrious novelist of Kerala, Shri M.T. Vasudevan Nair. Popularly known as M.T., he is adept at the portrayal of the woman of a 'Malayalee's' vision in the earlier part of the century. The lives of the women in the Nair Taravad¹ under the unrelenting patriarchal eye of the Karanavar², their sorrows and sighs that echo and re-echo in the dark corridors of the naalukettu³ are poignantly, rather wistfully too, pictured by the master artist of novel writing. M.T.'s heroines always haunt us, with their eyes reflecting their world of woes and minds frozen with abject resignation to their lot from which they know no escape. Their language is the language of the mute: for they see all, hear all, yet dare not voice the desire of their souls.

M.T. is an endearing name in Kerala not only among men of letters but also among the common man. He is the winner of the prestigious Jnanapeedam award in 1986, the highest Indian literary honour, besides other awards like the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award (1970), Vayalaar Rama Varma Award (1984) and Muttatu Varkey Award (1984). M.T. began as a gifted story-teller and turned out to be an unparalleled novelist.

Vishukaineetam is M.T.'s first short-story published in Charitrakeralam in 1948, a magazine from Madras. It was literally a boon for the novelist in the offing for it paved the way for the next prize-winning story of Valarthumrugangal (1954) which actually launched the writer as a famous and popular story teller. And then there was no looking back.

Raktham Puranda Mantarikal (1952), Veyilum Nilavum (1954), Vedanayude Pookal (1955), Ninde Ormakku (1956), Olavum Teeravum (1957), Kuttiyedathi (1956), Nashtapetta Dinangal (1960), Bandhanam (1963), Padanam (1966), Vaarikkuzhi (1967), M.T.yude Tirenjeduta Kathakal (1968), Ajnatande Uyarata Smarakam (1978), Abhayam Tedi Veendum (1978), Swargam Turakunna Samayam (1980), Vanaprastham (1982) are anthologies of his short stories.

Rooted in reality, yet on the wings of creative imagination, M.T. reveals his artistic skill in its most beautiful form in his novels. Naalukettu

(1954), Patiravum Pakalvelichavum (1958), Arabiponnu (1960—written in collaboration with N.P.), Asuravithu (1962), Manhu (1964), Kaalam (1969), Vilapayatra (1978), Randamoozham (1984) and Varanasi (2002) offer faithful pictures of man's lot of tears and smiles. M.T. was also a skilled script writer and film director. His film Nirmaalyam directed and scripted by him won the President's Gold Medal in 1973. The script for Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha won the National Award in 1989. Besides, the script of Kadavu, also won many national and international awards. Manhu, Murapennu, Oppol, Kanyakumari, Panchagni, Nakhakshathangal, Olavum Teeravum, Iruttinte Aatmavu, Aalkootathil Thaniye, Aaroodam, Perunthachan, Sukruthum have had scene scripts written by M.T..

Born in the year 1933, the youngest of the four sons of the family, M.T. was deeply attached to his mother and intimately touched by the emotional upsurgings of the family. Like his mother, he came to love anything that was Keralite. He drank in the beauty of the verdant hills and soft rich plains around Koodallur and allowed himself to be lulled by the soothing breeze that created ripples in the calm Nila that flowed caressing the village. The soil and the sky and the Nila river that laps up the winds of Vrischika and the chill of Dhanu⁴ is an experience for anyone anywhere in the world. His greatest dream as a boy, as his brother records, was to build a

house on the crest of the hill and live gazing into the river. A dreamer, a poet, he lived the lives of all the folk he encountered and recorded the undulations of their hopes and disappointments. “It is to our hearts that M.T. speaks. That is why this story-teller’s tales are dear to us ”(Parakadavu 1).

Randamoozham

From the little village of Koodallur and the banks of Nila, the usual backdrop of his novels, Vasudevan Nair steps into the wide encompassing world of mythology. When shed of the mythological halo, the characters in Randamoozham become ordinary men in flesh and blood with emotions and passions natural and human. Hence Randamoozham becomes another story, but of a larger family of very ancient times. As M.T. writes in Bhalashruti, the appendix to his novel:

ശിഥിലമായ കുടുംബബന്ധങ്ങളും അവയ്ക്കിടയിൽപ്പെട്ട മനുഷ്യരും എന്റെ ഗ്രാമത്തിന്റെ പശ്ചാത്തലത്തിൽ മുമ്പ് എനിക്ക് വിഷയമായിട്ടുണ്ട്. കുറെക്കൂടി പഴയ ഒരു കാലഘട്ടത്തിലെ കുടുംബകഥയാണ് ഞാൻ ഇവിടെ പറയുന്നത് എന്ന വ്യത്യാസമേയുള്ളൂ. (Nair 300).

(Broken family relationships and the men trapped inside, with the background of my village, have become my subjects. The only difference is that now I am relating the story of a family of very ancient times).

And M.T. enters into the world of the ancients; though awe-inspiring their personalities might be, he delves into their minds to decode them as men and women engaged in the struggle of life and existence. Randamoozham has M.T. peeping into the abodes of Gods and Goddesses, Asuras⁵ and Rakshasas⁶ into Kailas⁷, Vaikundam⁸, Patala⁹, and their interactions with the Kings and Emperors on Earth. There is no space that is not entered into; and time past and future, is brought into the compass of the present.

The rewriting of The Mahabharata involves a demythification and demystification of the epic which helps to fix the characters to a familiar plane of human comprehension, of earthly passions rather than mere larger than life characters. Moments of love and war, hope and despair ruffle all the characters and their reluctant resignation to their fate is similar to that of the mortals on earth. The Mahabharata thus is all: the tale of a prolonged war between the kings of the Solar and the Lunar races, between the sons of Pandu and Dhritarashtra, between two families; with heroes of war, with the victors and the vanquished, the widows and the orphans; of human passions and egos locking horns against each to each and clan to clan.

Because male tasks so often involve contests and bloodletting rather than gentleness and patience, and because of this

consequent win-or-lose nature, these tasks are often harshly evaluated as to performance. If women fail to collect vegetables, people may go hungry for a short period. But if they stop hunting, the tribe may well face destruction (Gilmore 120).

And in the clash of weapons and will, there are certain issues which can be explored. Questions of male authority, women subordination, patriarchal conventions, female sexuality etc. arise as in the case of all other novels.

M.T. has taken liberties, as he says in the author's note appended to his novel:

I have not changed the frame work of the story compiled by the first Vyasa, Krishnadwaipayana. But I have taken liberties on his silences, the silences left for those who follow him. I have read between his lines and built on his pregnant silences .

Male Righteousness

Randamoozham begins with the beginning of the end. The Pandavas have won the great war and later are going to undertake the 'Mahaprasthanam' (the Long Trek) which will in the end carry them bodily into Heaven. They are not to turn or look back and their thoughts are

Heavenwards. It was the final march to unload human burdens and take leave of the world of desires. War was the Kshatriya's duty and so they felt no sorrow or remorse as they waded through rivers of blood amidst the ruins of Kurukhetra after the mighty war. The Pandava brothers headed by the eldest Yudhishtira, move Northwards in the order of their seniority. The last to follow is the woman, their royal wife, Draupati. She is the first to fall on the way, and lay weak and exhausted unable to reach up to the destination. Bhima heard her stifled cry and reported the matter to Yudhishtira on the lead, requesting him to stop. Yudhishtira not bothering even to look hesitated not in his steps and replied:

അത്ഭുതമില്ല. ഉടലോടെ ദേവപദത്തിലെത്താനുള്ള ആത്മവീര്യം
അവൾ പണ്ടേ നഷ്ടപ്പെടുത്തി. ഭീമൻ അമ്പരന്നു. യുധിഷ്ഠിരൻ
ദ്രൗപദിപത്നിയെപ്പറ്റിയാണോ ഈ പറയുന്നത്? (15)

(No wonder. She has abandoned the soul's courage to attain Heaven
bodily.

Bhima was surprised to hear Yudhishtira talking so of his
Dharmapatni).

അവൾ അർജ്ജുനനെ മാത്രമേ സ്നേഹിച്ചിരുന്നുള്ളൂ. രാജസുയ
ത്തിൽ എന്തൊരിക്കലും ഇരിക്കുമ്പോഴും അവളുടെ കണ്ണുകൾ

അർജ്ജുനനിലായിരുന്നു. യാത്ര തുടരൂ, വീഴുന്നവർക്കുവേണ്ടി
കാത്തുനിൽക്കാതെ യാത്ര തുടരൂ. (15 - 16).

(She loved only Arjuna. Even while she sat beside me at the Rajasuya
her eyes were on Arjuna. Carry on. Let us not tarry for those who fall).

Even Arjuna did not hearken to the subdued sobs of the beloved lying
down on the sordid earth. The youngest one, Sahadeva also went by. It was
most heartless on his part to do so for he was the one who received from
Draupadi not only wifely obligations but also motherly love and affection
which she lavished on him as the youngest of the clan. It was a pity that the
queen lay there unattended and neglected in the course of attainment of
heaven's abode. There was no fragrance of the lotus then, only the smell of
human perspiration.

Worship of Physical Might

The men were all haloed for their might and muscular power.
Dhritarashtra was famed for his strength.

പതിനായിരം മരിച്ച ആനകളെ ഒരുക്കാൻ കഴിയുന്ന ശക്തിയുള്ള
രാജാവാണ് ധൃതരാഷ്ട്രൻ..... സാലവ്യക്ഷത്തിന്റെ വലിപ്പമുണ്ട് ആ
കൈകൾക്ക് ! എല്ലാ രാജാക്കന്മാരെയും തോൽപ്പിക്കാൻ കണ്ണുണ്ടാ
യിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ, വലിയച്ഛന് വെറും കൈ മതി. (26)

(Dhritarashtra is a king who can control ten thousand rutting elephants... His hands are as big as pine trees! He would need only his hands to defeat all the Kings, if only he had eyes!).

Yudhishtira was valued for his skill as chariot fighter. Arjuna was famed as the archer par excellence. It was sung by the nomadic Magadhas that Arjuna would conquer the world with his divine bow and quiver full of arrows, charioteered by pure white horses.

Bhima even at birth had proved his might by splitting the rock onto which he was accidentally dropped when only an infant. Dhuryodhana and his ninety-nine brothers were all powerful warriors. Karna was par excellence as an archer. Addison's words are worth pondering in this context:

The great Point of Honour in Men is courage, and in Women Chastity ... I can give no Reason for fixing the Point of Honour to these two Qualities; unless it be that each sex sets the greatest value on the Qualification which renders them the most aimable in the Eyes of the contrary sex. Had Men chosen for themselves, without Regard to the Opinions of the fair sex, I should believe the choice would have fallen on Wisdom or Virtue; or had women determined their own Point of Honour, it

is probable that Wit or Good-Nature would have carried it against Chastity (*qtd. in Smith 331*).

The concept of pàtivratiyam

The power of a 'pativrata' and her unswerving devotion to her husband is most eloquently delineated in the novel. The story of Anasuya in the Markandeyapurana, who prevents the Sun from rising to save her husband from death before sunrise, is in tune with the 'pàtivratiya', of Gandhari who blindfolds herself when she understands that her husband to be, Dhritarashtra, is blind by birth. Gandhari renounces the joys of sight and seeing for she would not have what her husband lacks. Her loyalty and fidelity in the extreme make her a source of power and dignity. It was the strength born of her purity that she imparted to her son Duryodhana, before he sets out for the duel with Bhimasena. Gandhari unveiled her eyes for the first time in years and gazed at her beloved son, who stood before her almost naked in his loin cloth, and infused him with the magnetic power so long confined in her visionless eyes. Kunti and Draupati too are the luminous examples of wives who lived in accordance with the likes and dislikes of their husbands for that was their Dharma in the supreme. The sanctity of the Gods, sages and holy places all revolve round the pativrata. The home is sanctified by her presence and her curse could obliterate anybody or

anything. Sita, Savitri and Damayanti were all pillars of strength because of their 'pàtivratyam'. The woman of the epic – Draupati though a protagonist of her times is a typical wife and daughter-in-law and a mother in her turn. She knows her place and asserts her position. She shares the afflictions of her husbands in the forest and wished to see the day when they would get back their country. The conjugal fidelity of the Hindu wife is proverbial. Savithri and Sita too voluntarily lived in exile in order to share their husbands' misfortune. Always vital for the wife's happiness is the treatment she receives from her husband and his mother. Panchali steps into the Pandava household and at once becomes the pride of their possession. The brothers are out to please her. Kunti acknowledges the significance of her position and therein willingly acquiesces to her wishes. It was out of sheer love for her and eagerness to please her that Bhima undergoes the difficult feats to fetch her the strangest of flowers, the Saugandhikam. Bhima awaits his turn to be her paramour and is all excited at the prospect of it.

Draupadi's polyandrous marriage too is in keeping with the pativrata ideal of the Vedic marriage – Surya is married to Asvins; the latter however are not two persons but a twin deity. Draupati's marriage takes on a figurative meaning: she stood for royal glory: 'rajya-lakshmi', and her marriage symbolizes the unison with which the five Pandavas reigned. Yet,

although won by Arjuna, she becomes wife to all the five brothers. Panchali is also justified in her polyandry, for it was believed to be the outcome of her prayer in her early existence when she requested five times for a husband. Yet her pàtivratyam is affirmed by her being wife by turn and solely wife to one only, at a time.

Marriage by 'levirate'

Marriage is a very important event in the life of a woman. Marriage as a social and biological necessity was given sanctity even in the Vedic age. In the epics marriage as a prelude to life was of the greatest importance i.e. domestic life, gradually became an important and obligatory sacrament (Jain73). Marriage by 'levirate' or 'niyoga' also throws light on the position that women held. The pitfalls in the path of an unmarried woman were many and so a woman got married by duty of compulsion so that she may not defile her clan or family. It was by 'niyoga' that Pandu himself, was born, as were Dhritarashtra and Vidhura. Krishnadwaipayanan husbanded Ambika and Ambalika and their dasi. The women were married not to a person but into his family. The same custom was carried on to the next generation too when Pandu's sons were born of Kunti. Kunti's sons when they arrived from the forest after Pandu's death, were introduced into Hastinapura in the following manner:

ഇതാണ് കുന്തിപുത്രൻ യുധിഷ്ഠിരൻ. പാണ്ഡുവിന് ധർമ്മരാജന്റെ അനുഗ്രഹങ്ങൾകൊണ്ടുണ്ടായ സീമന്തപുത്രൻ. (24).

(This is Kunti's son, Yudhishtira. The eldest son born to Pandu by the blessings of Dharmaraja).

Bhima was introduced as:

അഷ്ടദിക്കുകളിലൊന്നിന്റെ അധിപനായ വായുദേവന്റെ അനുഗ്രഹം കൊണ്ടുണ്ടായ രണ്ടാം പാണ്ഡവൻ. (24)

(The second Pandava born by the blessings of the Wind God, Lord of one of the eight Directions).

And then Arjuna followed as:

മധ്യപാണ്ഡവൻ. ഭദ്രദേവനായ ഇന്ദ്രനിൽനിന്നുണ്ടായ വീരകുമാരൻ. (25).

(The middle Pandava. The son born of Indra, the King of the Gods.)

Nakula and Sahadeva were the sons of the Aswini Devas.

It is this that makes Duryodhana laugh at the Pandavas asking them to cook more convincing stories about their parentage. Yet when it comes to Karna's fatherhood Duryodhana avows that it is needless to enquire into the origin of great men as of great rivers.

The treatment of female sexuality

It is male physical power that sets the background of female sexuality. It would be no exxageration to say that it was Bhima's exultation in his physical prowess evinced in his defeat of Jarasandha, and Keechaka that turns him out to be a passioate lover to Draupati who responds in the same manner. The treatment of female sexuality is vivid in the descriptions of the relationships between men and women.

ദ്രൗപദിയുടെ കിതയ്ക്കുന്ന മുഖം എന്റെ മുമ്പിൽ. അവൾ അർദ്ധ ബോധാവസ്ഥയിലാണെന്നു തോന്നി. ഒരുമയില്ലാതെ വളരുന്ന എന്റെ ശ്വശ്രുക്കളിൽ കുർത്ത പല്ലുകൾ താഴ്ന്നു. ആലസ്യം പുണ്ട് ഉദാസീനയായി കിടന്ന ദ്രൗപദി എവിടെ? എന്നെ ഒരു ചുഴലിക്കാറ്റു പോലെ അവളുടെ ശരീരം ചുറ്റുന്നു. (137).

(Draupati's face gasped beside mine. She seemed to be half-unconscious when her sharp teeth sank into my neck. Where was the Draupati who lay swooning? Her body entwined me like a hurricane.)

Bhima's meeting with Hidumbi also is very touching. Bhima finds her as an amusing object when he first beholds her:

ഞാൻ വിഷണ്ണനായി നിൽക്കുമ്പോൾ ചെടിപ്പടർപ്പിന്റെ മറവിൽനിന്ന് ഒരടക്കിപ്പിടിച്ച ചിരി കേട്ടു. നോക്കുമ്പോൾ മാന്ത്യാലുകൊണ്ട് അര മാത്രം മറച്ച ഒരു കാട്ടാളയുവതി. ഈ പരിസരത്തിൽ നോക്കി

നിൽക്കുകയായിരുന്നുവോ എന്ന് ഞാൻ സംശയിച്ചു. അടുത്തേക്കു ഭയമില്ലാതെ വന്ന അവളെ ഞാൻ ക്രോധഭാവത്തിൽ നോക്കി. കൈത്തണ്ടയിൽ പന്നിത്തോട്ടുകൾ കടഞ്ഞ കടകങ്ങൾ. കഴുത്തിൽ പുലിനഖങ്ങൾ അർദ്ധചതുരാകൃതിയിൽ വെട്ടിക്കൊർത്ത ഒറ്റയിഴമാല. അവൾ അടുത്തുനിന്നപ്പോൾ എന്നോളം ഉയരമുണ്ടെന്നു തോന്നി. കരിമരക്കാതലിന്റെ നിറം. നടക്കുമ്പോൾ കണകാലിലെവിടെയോനിന്ന് ചുള്ളികമ്പുകൾ ഒടിയുന്നപോലെ ശബ്ദം.

അവൾ എന്റെ ചുറ്റും പ്രദക്ഷിണമായി നടന്നു. പുലിനഖമാലകിലുങ്ങി. കാമരൂപവനങ്ങളിൽനിന്നു കൊമ്പനാനകളുടെ മദപിണ്ഡകങ്ങൾപോലെ തെറിച്ചുനിൽക്കുന്ന മുലകൾ.

(When I stood sorrowfully, I heard a suppressed laughter from among the creepers. I saw a young maid from the giants with only a deer skin around her loins. I wondered whether she had been watching these surroundings. I looked at her haughtily as she approached fearlessly. On her arms were bracelets made from boar horns, and around her neck were half-squared tiger nails on a single layer chain. When she stood beside me she was nearly as tall as I. Dark as ebony. The sound of breaking twigs came somewhere from under her ankles when she walked.

She walked circling me. Her tiger nails rattled. Her breasts stood out like the dung of the rutting elephants from the Kamarupa forests).

Bhima's union with Hidumbi is in as many words a pointer to female sexuality as seen through the eyes of the male:

കൈപിടിച്ചുടുപ്പിച്ചപ്പോൾ അവൾ കരിനാഗംപോലെ എന്നെ ചുറ്റിപ്പി
 ണഞ്ഞു. മൃഗക്കൊഴുപ്പിന്റെ ഗന്ധമുള്ള മുടികെട്ടഴിഞ്ഞ് എന്റെ മുഖ
 മാകെ ഇരുട്ടിലാഴ്ത്തി. ... ആചാര്യന്മാർ സ്ത്രീശരീരത്തിനു പാഠഭേദ
 ങ്ങൾ പറയണമെന്നു തോന്നിയ മുഹൂർത്തം. ഈ അഗ്നിക്ക് ഏഴല്ല
 ജ്വാലകൾ, എഴുപത്. എഴുപത്. എഴുപതല്ല അയ്യതം. ഹോതാവ്
 ദ്രവ്യവും ഹോത്രവും ചാരവുമായി മാറാൻ ഇവിടെ കൊതിക്കുന്നു
 (85).

(When I drew her near by the hand, she entwined me like a black serpent. Her hair that smelt of animal fat dropped loose to shroud my face in darkness... The moment when I thought that seers have to redefine the female body. This fire has not just seven flames, perhaps seventy. Not seventy. Ten thousand is not seventy. The sacrificer longs to be transformed into the offerings and reduced to ashes).

Were the husbands as devoted as their spouses is another question. The men all had their lawfully wedded wives and also took other wives. The Pandavas had other wives besides the royal one, Draupati. They were loyal to her to the utmost and in her they found the pursuit of their regal and royal duties. Arjuna before he joined Draupati in wedlock stole away Subhadra to

wife. Bhima had Hidumbi and Balandhara. Yudhishtira had only his dharmapatni and she remained his partner in the discharge of all his kingly duties and spiritual rites. The relations between the husband and the wife were determined by the principle that there should be an absolute identity in their aesthetic, material and moral interests. They are invariably united in the realization of their aims and ambitions. So was it, that Draupati was also the uniting link among the Pandavas and channelized their combined energies in achieving their goals and winning their kingdom back to themselves.

Draupati is described as the most beautiful woman. Her perspiration has the fragrance of lotus flower.

അതിസുന്ദരി. അവളുടെ വിയർപ്പിന് താമരപ്പൂവിന്റെ ഗന്ധമുണ്ടു
ഭൃത. (97).

Pandavas sought to win her by overcoming the hurdles fixed by her father, Drupata. One had to shoot down the wooden bird in the rotating cage by using the heavy bow offered for the purpose.

Bhima also found her a the flaming blue lotus that has just been awakened by the rising sun, as she stood radiant:

ഉദയകിരണം ഇഷ്ടാൾ തൊട്ടുണർത്തിയ ഇന്ദീവരം ജ്വലിക്കുന്ന
സുന്ദരി. പ്രഭാവതി. (100).

ദ്രൗപദി സഹോദരനെയും പിതാവിനെയും നോക്കി. പിന്നെ അവരോടൊപ്പം നടന്ന് അർജുനസ്ഥിതത്തോടെ നിൽക്കുന്ന അർജുനന്റെ മുഖിലെത്തി. അയാൾ ശിരസ്സു കുനിച്ചപ്പോൾ അവൾ പെരുവിരലുകളിൽ ഉയർന്നുനിന്ന് ഹാരമണിയിച്ചു. (103)

(Many came to try their skill but when Arjuna accomplished the feat Draupati glanced at her brother and father and moved towards Arjuna who stood half-smiling. When he bowed his head she stood on her toes and garlanded him.)

The adult life of a woman is traditionally based on her status as a wife. The traditional practice of settlement of marriage was the mutual agreement of the parents of the spouses. Marriage partners were selected by the family elders without consultation of the prospective spouses (326).

The Pandavas brought the bride home and wanted to surprise their mother. So standing outside the door they called; Bhima knocked at the closed door and beckoned:

അമ്മേ, വാതിൽ തുറക്കൂ. ഇന്നു കിട്ടിയ ഭിക്ഷ കാണേണ്ട?

അമ്മയുടെ മറുപടി കേട്ടില്ല. ഞാൻ വീണ്ടും വിളിച്ചു.

അമ്മ അകത്തുനിന്നു വിളിച്ചു പറഞ്ഞു: എല്ലാവരുംകൂടി പകിട്ട്

അനുഭവിച്ചോളൂ.

ദ്രൗപദി ചിരിയൊതുക്കി. അമ്മ വാതിൽ തുറന്നപ്പോൾ ഞാനും അർജ്ജുനനും ഉറക്കെ ചിരിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് അകത്തേക്കു കയറി. ദ്രൗപദിയെ നോക്കിനിന്നപ്പോൾ അമ്മയുടെ കണ്ണുകൾ തെളിഞ്ഞു. മുഖത്ത് വിസ്മയം കലർന്ന ചിരി.

ഇതു തന്നെ ഭിക്ഷ. ദ്രുപദരാജപുത്രി. അർജ്ജുനൻ ധനുർബ്ബലം കൊണ്ടു നേടിയ വധു.

മുട്ടുകുത്തി ദ്രൗപദി അമ്മയുടെ കാൽതൊട്ടു വന്ദിച്ചു.

അമ്മ അനുഗ്രഹിച്ചു. അപ്പോഴേക്കും യുധിഷ്ഠിരനും മാദ്രീപുത്രരും വന്നെത്തി.

ഞാൻ ഫലിതം പറഞ്ഞു: നോക്കൂ. ഞാൻ ഭിക്ഷ കിട്ടിയെന്നു പറഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ അമ്മ അറിയാതെ വിളിച്ചുപറഞ്ഞതെന്താണെന്നോ? എല്ലാവരും ചേർന്നനുഭവിക്കാൻ! നകുലനും സഹദേവനും ഉറക്കെ പൊട്ടിച്ചിരിച്ചു. അമ്മയും ദ്രൗപദിയും അകത്തേക്കു പൊയ്കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്നു. യുധിഷ്ഠിരൻ വളരെ ഗൗരവത്തിൽ പറഞ്ഞു : എന്തബദ്ധമാണമ്മ പറഞ്ഞത്! വെറുംവാക്കാണെങ്കിലും മാത്യശാസനം മാത്യശാസനം തന്നെ. തെറ്റിനടക്കരുതെന്നാണ് ധർമ്മനീതി. അതു കേട്ടുകൊണ്ടാണ് ദ്രൗപദി വന്നത്. എന്തോ പറഞ്ഞുരസിച്ചുവന്നിരുന്ന അവളുടെ മുഖത്ത് ഒരു വർഷമേഘം ഉയർന്നു. (83)

(“Mother, open the door. Don't you want to see the alms we got today?”

Mother did not reply. I called out again.

Mother replied from indoors:

“Share and partake among yourselves.”

Draupati suppressed her laughter. When mother opened the door Arjuna and myself laughed aloud and went indoors. When she beheld Draupati, mother’s eyes glowed. An astonished smile was on her face.

‘This is our alms. King Drupada’s daughter. The bride that Arjuna won by his archery,’

Draupati knelt and touched mother’s feet to pay respects. Mother blessed her. By then Yudhishtira and Madri’s sons arrived on the scene.

I joked: ‘Look, when I told mother that we got alms, you know what she called out unawaringly? Share and partake among yourselves!’

Nakula and Sahadeva laughed aloud. Mother and Draupati had retired indoors. Yudhishtira said very seriously: “What nonsense did mother say? Though unintentional, mother’s words are always law. The moral law holds that one should not trespass it.”

Draupati heard the words as she entered. Dark clouds gathered on her brows, although she had come laughing over something.)

The woman is not consulted on such an important matter and the decision to be wife is taken on her behalf. Her dreams and longings are rent apart. And there are many other justifications to boot. Tradition, precedence and mythology came to the help of the eldest Pandava, when he quoted the

example of Jadila who was the wife to the Seven Sages. Bhima wanted Arjuna to be consulted on the matter, for Draupati was his bride, won by his skill. He said that Draupati must also have her say. But he added:

ഓ, സ്ത്രീകളുടെ ഹിതാഹിതങ്ങൾ ഒന്നാക്കുന്നത് എന്നും നമ്മൾക്ക് പതിവിലില്ലല്ലോ?

അന്ധനുവേണ്ടി ഗാന്ധാരിവലിയമ്മയെ വിലയ്ക്കു വാങ്ങി. സന്തതി യുണ്ടാവില്ലെന്നറിഞ്ഞിട്ടും രണ്ടാംഭാര്യയായി ശല്യർ പൊൻകട്ടി കൾക്കും രത്നങ്ങൾക്കും പകരം മാദ്രിയെ പാണ്ഡുവിന് വിറ്റു.....(109).

(Oh! We never have the custom of considering the likes and dislikes of women.)

For the sake of the blind man aunt Gandhari was bought. Madri was also sold for gold and gems by Salyar, as second wife to Pandu inspite of the knowledge that he would be issueless.....)

ആരെങ്കിലും മാദ്രിയെ ഹിതം ചോദിച്ചുവോ ആവോ? (109)

(..... Did anyone ask aunt Madri's wish?)

Mother too later came out with her arguments in favour of polyandry. Besides the advice from a Brahmana, she added:

നിങ്ങളെല്ലാവരും പിണങ്ങിപ്പിരിയാതെ എന്നും നിന്നാലേ പാണ്ഡവരൊരു ശക്തിയാവൂ. അതിന് ആവശ്യമാണ് നീ പുച്ഛിച്ചു സംസാരിക്കുന്ന ഈ ബഹുഭർത്തൃത്വം. ശസ്ത്രം സഹായത്തിനു വരുന്നെങ്കിൽ നല്ലത്. ഇല്ലെങ്കിലും(111).

(Only if five of you stand together without separating, Pandavas will remain a force. And for that polyandry which you so much deride, is necessary. It will be good if the moral laws come to our help, even otherwise....)

ദ്രൗപദിയെ നോക്കിയ കണ്ണുകളിലൊക്കെ കാമമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. കൗമാരം വിടാത്ത സഹദേവനടക്കം ഞാൻ കണ്ടതാണ്. സ്ത്രീയായ എനിക്കേ അത് കാണാൻ കഴിയൂ. (111).

There was lust in all the eyes that fell on Draupati, including Sahadeva's, who is still in his early youth. I saw it. And the woman only in me can understand it.

And in the end she shocked Bhima:

ഭീഷ്മ ദ്രൗപദിയാണെന്നറിഞ്ഞിട്ടുതന്നെയാണ് മന്ദാ, ഞാൻ പറഞ്ഞത്, പകിടാൻ ! (112)

(I knew that your alms was Draupati, and it was knowingly that I asked you to share!)

Bhima talks about the festival in Varanavatam (71). Enchanted by some sights, he was struck by the sight of the Brahmana who had come to

receive alms from him, now in the midst of Veshyas receiving offering from them and blessing them in turn. Bhima asked his elder brother in surprise whether a Brahmana could take alms from Veshyas. Whereto Yudhishtira replied in the affirmative.

മാദ്രദേശത്തെ വേശ്യകളെപ്പറ്റി ധാരാളം പറഞ്ഞുകേട്ടിരുന്നു. ധാരാളം മദ്യപിക്കുന്നവർ. ഉറക്കെ അശ്ലീലം വിളിച്ചുപറയുന്നവർ. പൊതുസ്ഥലങ്ങളിൽവെച്ചും ഉടയാട നീക്കി നഗ്നത കാട്ടുന്നവർ. പക്ഷേ ഒരു കാര്യം വ്യക്തമായി. ദാനം കൊടുക്കാൻ തട്ടുകളിൽ പുഷ്പവും ധാന്യവും പണവുമായി നിൽക്കുന്ന ഈ സ്ത്രീകൾക്കൊക്കെ ഒരു പരക്കൻമട്ടിലുള്ള സൗന്ദര്യമുണ്ട്. (72).

(Much has been heard about the prostitutes of Magadha. They drink a lot and shout abuses and show their nakedness even in public. But it was evident that the women who stood with flowers and grains in their trays ready to offer alms had a harsh beauty about them.)

The focus of M.T.'s interpretation of the great Mahabharata myth is no doubt Bhimasenan, the second of the Pandava brothers; his glories and adventures that win fame to the Pandava lot, the inner conflicts and disappointments he has to wrestle with. But preening into the pages we confront the travails and tribulations faced by the umpteen women who have carved for themselves a special place in the epic.

Deference to motherhood

Motherhood has always had a special meaning for the Indian woman. Motherhood has been the cherished ideal of every Indian woman. A woman's status in the family and society undergoes a great change. It was said in the Mahabharata that there was no sacred lore like the Vedas, "there was no preceptor like the mother. She was mentioned first among the three 'Atigurus'. It is motherhood more than womanhood that the Hindus glorify (*qtd. in Jain 147*). The birth of a son heightens the mother's status all the more. Gandhari also is a proud mother of a hundred sons. Duryodhana among them, is the cynosure of all her devotion and the symbol of all his father's ambitious yearnings. Draupati too is enriched as a woman by the sons she had. Subhadra is glorified by Abhimanyu as Uthara by Parikshit. Hidumbi becomes blessed through Ghatolkacha. The sons are the boasts of their fathers and vice versa. Kunti has made a special niche for her as the Pandava mother. She as the royal consort of Pandu had little role to play and gave birth to her sons with the help of the mantras. Kunti's pleasure and pain lie in her motherhood, as Karna tells her she will have five sons and five sons only even after the war. Even if she loses one, Karna or Arjuna, she will still remain the mother of five. Her agony when she recognizes her eldest-born, Karna, the first time and becomes the witness to his insult as the son of Suta,

is beyond words. She swoons when she finds Karna drenched in dishonour and curses herself for being unable to own him. Her mental torture on the eve of the epic war reduces her to a bundle of helplessness – she is torn between her love for her sons and her reputation. She refrains from disclosing her maiden love till it is too late and is chided by her lawful sons for her secrecy. Yet her word is law for them. They share even their bride at her request when she asks them to partake equally the alms they have won for the day (152).

Denouncement of women

The women may be made known by their men or by the sons they gave birth to, but above all they are powerful in their personal and separate ways. Draupati is not a submissive puppet to be tossed about by her husbands. It is said of the great epic war, Mahabharata to a great extent, was instigated no less by the causes of the women involved. Draupati is insulted in the Kaurava Mahasabha by the Kauravas, and their doom is sealed by this fell act. She is in a way the uncompromising foe of the Kauravas who will not rest till she be avenged. Her tresses shall not be fastened till they have been smeared by Dushasana's blood; hair let loosened symbolized woman's revolt or aggressiveness. It is to gratify her that Bhima, the strongest, tires himself out.

Draupati is intelligent and discerning when she demands an answer from her husband, Yudhishtira in Kaurava Sabha: 'Whom did the king first pawn? Himself or me?' It will provide a logical answer to her status as free or slave and therein will decide whether she obey the dictates of the winners of the game of dice.

It is woman again who becomes the undoing of Karna. Kunti is blamed for suppressing her secret regarding the birth of Karna. She stupefies her sons in the end and sheds off all her timidity and reserve and commands that the Pandavas should not forget a great hero on the Kaurava side, their eldest brother. She asks them to do obsequies for their eldest brother, Karna, whom they knew as Radha's son. She confesses that he is her first born, whom she discarded in the river, fearing disgrace. Yudhishtira gloating over Karna's corpse declared:

"That woman is responsible for all this destruction." (272).

M.T. instils his characters with great practical wisdom and knowledge of Rajyatantra. After the Kauravas are slain, when Yudhishtira declines to be crowned, everyone looks up to Bhima to be the king. The pandavas urge him to accept the throne and Bhima himself is disconsolate and confused. It is Panchali who then puts an end to his dilemma in an easy way.:

എനിക്ക് വാനപ്രസ്ഥത്തിന് പ്രായമായിട്ടില്ല. മനസ്സും വന്നുകഴിഞ്ഞിട്ടില്ല. പണ്ഡിതയല്ലെങ്കിലും നിയമങ്ങളറിയാം. ഒന്നുകിൽ ഞാനഭ്യഹത്തെ അനുഗമിക്കണം, അല്ലെങ്കിൽ ബലന്ധരയുടെ ഔദാര്യത്തിൽ ഇവിടെ ഏതെങ്കിലും ഒരു കോണിൽ അന്ത പുരത്തിൽ കഴിയണം. (276).

(I am not old enough for the life of a recluse. Nor do I have the inclination for it. Even though I am not a scholar, I know the codes. I must either accompany him or spend my time in some corner of this palace, at the mercy of Balandhara.)

No one had ever thought of that: if Yudhishtira leaves for the forest Draupati will have to accompany him as his Dharmapatni and it will be Balandhara who will take her seat beside the crowned Bhima. Kunti also advised that Bhima should deny the privilege and that his elder brother himself should become king.

ആദ്യം ദ്രൗപദി ഇഷ്ടാൾ വീണ്ടുമൊരു സ്ത്രീ, അമ്മ.(276)

First Draupati, and now another woman, mother has guided his destiny, laughed Bhima.

Kunti's astute wisdom and practical knowledge is par excellence. When the Pandavas return with the alms they won and Kunti accosts them to share it equally among themselves, the Pandava mother might have had

deeper intentions and did not regret it when she saw the sly looks of her sons fall on Draupati: she knows their inclinations and wants that the brothers stay united and linked to each other by a common bond, and Draupati was the best to hold them together. She was a valiant mother who prodded on her sons to war and fame. She is a constant companion in all their victories. Her final leave-taking of her sons therefore is poignant. Although the Pandavas entreated her to remain with them, it was to no avail and Kunti held her purpose.

The women are decision-makers, honoured and respected. They are the symbols of glory. They were not mere chattels which received the royal seeds or the property of their husbands. They are free to flutter but within the limits prescribed by custom and tradition, the 'Lakshmanarekha' circumscribed by man, their lord and master.

Naalukettu

The peculiar background for M.T.'s stories and novels is provided by the matrilineal system that prevailed among the Nairs in Malabar, where the Karanavar was the sole authority in the Taravad which held in its fold the lives of many a nephew and niece. Although changes took place in other parts of Kerala, Malabar clung on to the matrilineal system with all its ills to boot. The Taravad Karanavar's word was law and he controlled the destinies

of all its inmates. But unfortunately, the selfless, responsible Karanavar was a facile dream. The sighs and stifled sobs of the women trapped in the four walls of their big *naalukettu* rend the atmosphere of the women's world. In the daily business of their lives they are wounded and helpless and have only a bleak future before them. "M.T.'s women seem to have no notion of their status in their homes or society in which they live. In the novels of M.T., it is hard to find any woman who longs for her freedom or strives to free herself from the crumbling and degenerating social conditions." (Mathai M.P. 25). The fabric of M.T.'s stories is woven by the simple annals of the rustics, homebred people who at times dare to peep into the cities outside only to return to find their world in their houses and homesteads.

The subdued woman

Parukkutty in *Naalukettu* leads a life in accordance with the deemed decorum of the famed *Vadakkepattu taravad*. "...when...women move out of their restricted place, they threaten men in a very profound sense with the need to reintegrate many of the essentials of human development," said Miller (qtd in Russ 203). Born and brought up and educated inside the four walls of her home, she was allowed to leave its interiors to see the world outside only when she went to bathe in the nearby river when the water in the family pond turned muddy. All the others bathing left the river when the

ladies of the taravad came to it. And, it was on her way to and fro that she noticed the gallant young Konthunny Nair's glances directed at her. M.T. draws Parukutty in the thralls of love:

അവളും കുഞ്ഞിക്കുട്ടിയും അത്താണിയുടെ ചുവട്ടിലെത്തിയപ്പോൾ അവരുടെ സംഭാഷണം നിലച്ചു. ആ കണ്ണുകൾ തന്റെ ദേഹത്തു വീഴുന്നുവോ? വേഗം കടന്നുപോകണമെന്നുണ്ട്. പക്ഷേ കാലുകൾ നീങ്ങേണ്ട? കടവിലേയ്ക്കിറങ്ങുമ്പോൾ കുഞ്ഞിക്കുട്ടി കാണാതെ ഒന്നു തിരിഞ്ഞുനോക്കി. അപ്പോൾ അയാൾ താഴ്ത്തിറങ്ങിയിരിക്കുന്നു. (32)

(When she and Kunhikutty came to the porter's rest, her conversation came to a halt. She wanted to slip by fast. But shouldn't her feet move? Descending the steps of the pond, she glanced back without Kunhikutty noticing. He had climbed down).

കൊന്നത്തെങ്ങുപോലെ നിവർന്നുനിൽക്കുന്ന ആ വലിയ മനുഷ്യന്റെ കണ്ണുകൾ നീങ്ങുവരുന്നു. കുളിക്കുന്നതിനിടയിൽ ജിജ്ഞാസ ഒരുക്കി സാധാരണമട്ടിൽ ചോദിച്ചു. ആരാ കുഞ്ഞിക്കുട്ടീ അത്? എത്? അത്താണീമ്മല് (32).

(The man stood towering like a coconut tree and she felt his eyes elongated in her direction. While bathing she contained her curiosity and asked quite casually.

“Who is it, Kunhikutty?”

“Who?”

“On the porter’s rest”.)

With all the reservations proper for a woman of Parukutty’s birth, she acknowledges and reciprocates his love. Parukutty is a striking contrast to the manly courage of her lover who reminds her of the king’s portrait in vallyedathi’s room. She is attracted by his laughter that exudes confidence.

എന്തോ പറഞ്ഞ് അയാൾ ചിരിച്ചപ്പോൾ ആ ചിരിയുടെ അലകൾ നദീതീരത്തു മുഴങ്ങുന്നുണ്ടെന്നു ഭതാനി. (32)

(When he said something and laughed, the ripples of his laughter seemed to echo along the river banks.)

Parukutty loses her heart to his daring prowess, his cleverness at playing dice and local games. She is glad to notice how mindful he was of her at the temple festivities and how protective of her when he stood at her back to ward off all dangers. But women are just commodities and possessions that can be best utilized economically. Women become a species that need be protected and men are enshrined in the role of protectors.

Although Parukutty's mother knows her daughter's mind, the mother can only look on when Parukutty's marriage is fixed with an elderly man, a divorcee twice. The helpless mother watches as her defenceless daughter cries out her heart:

അന്നു രാത്രി മുഴുവൻ കരഞ്ഞു. ആരോടും പറഞ്ഞില്ല. പറയാനില്ല. അമ്മയ്ക്ക് കാര്യമറിയാമായിരുന്നു. പക്ഷേ, കുഞ്ഞീഷ്ണൻ നിശ്ചയിച്ചാ, പിന്നെ ഞാനെന്താ ചെയ്യാ?(34)

(She cried the whole night and said nothing to anyone. Mother understood; but, "if Kunhikrishnan decides, then what can I do?")

Such was a woman's plight. Their lives were channelled out for the benefit of others. Difference in training, experience and expectations, produce diffidence and timidity in women. Yet they are capable of incredible courage, stamina and commitment. It is only Parukutty's blind faith in the man of her heart more than her courage, that makes her take the plunge. She finds her saviour in Konthuny Nair who whisks off his bride on the eve of her wedding day. For her disobedience to the Karanavar's wishes, she is cast off as dead by her people, and they underwent the purification bath. The Karanavar ruled unchallenged by the members of the taravad. Adored and reviled, worshipped and enslaved, the image of woman as well as her place in the family is the natural outcome of masculist values and needs. More than

a convenience, the subordination of women is a necessity. Economically, politically, biologically, psychologically, it is the foundation on which the entire structure rests.

Citadel of suffering

“Responsibility lies heavily on her life. She must meet her children’s psychological, financial, and material needs. She must work as sole earner-an alien experience- while maintaining the semblance of a stable home and at the same time dealing with her own sense of loss and anxiety”(Ruth 223). After her husband’s sudden death, darkness envelopes Parukutty, and isolated from her taravad she labours on in abject poverty. She takes up work at the nearby Namboodiri illum. Her sad situation elicits little sympathy from her society that points at her misery:

വല്ലാത്ത യോഗം വടക്കേപ്പാട്ടെ നാലുകെട്ടിലു വളർന്ന പെണ്ണാ
ഒലയ്ക്കോ വലിക്കാൻ പോണ്. മരണമെ വര നന്നാവണം, മരണമെ
വര നന്നാവണം. (20).

(A horrible fate. It is the girl born and bred in the Vadakkeppattu Taravad, who is now going to work to unhusk grains of rice. One should be born under a lucky star.)

And Parukutty also endorses it when she holds her son close to her breast and rains tears on his head.

എല്ലാം അമ്മുടെ യോഗാ ഭാഗ്യം..... (21).

(“All is your mother’s fate.”)

Parukutty stands the citadel of suffering; it seeps into her heart; gets ingrained in her. But that was the language expected of her and nothing otherwise would have been tolerated. May be, it was for the same reason that society felt scandalized when she accepts the help of Sankaran Nair. It was her dire need of the hour that made her turn to him, the one-time servant at her own taravad, to take her son Appunni to the High School to be enrolled. But even Appunni found distasteful the association of his mother with this man.

But Parukutty’s afflictions do not crush her innate pride and she proves her mettle when she remains under her dilapidated roof that threatens to be devoured by the oncoming waters of the flood. So too, she refrains from going to her son on his arrival after his long absence, and it is difficult to believe that she was the same mother who waited long into the night for her son’s return from school. But when Appunni comes to take her into the taravad that he bought, she is happy and accompanies him as the mother of her son. As Parukutty wonders at the ever gathering darkness of the naalukettu Appunni declares:

അമ്മ പേടിയ്ക്കണം. ഈ നാലുകെട്ട് പൊളിയ്ക്കാൻ ഏർപ്പാടുചെയ്യണം. ഇവിടെ കാറ്റും വെളിച്ചവും കടക്കുന്ന ഒരു ചെറിയ വീടു മതി.

(191)

(Don't worry, mother. Arrangements must be made to pull down this naalukettu. A small house that will let in air and light is enough in its stead.)

How much was her due of its light and darkness, one wonders. How long had she to wait for this?

Male Supremacy

To achieve a single standard of human freedom and one absolute standard of human dignity, the sex- class system has to be dismembered. The sex-class system has an ingrained structure, and is fundamental to the economy and culture. A double standard of human rights and freedom always boosts the male ego at the cost of human dignity. The naalukettu is peopled with other silent sufferers: Ammumma, Valliamma, Meenakshiyedathi, Thankedathi, Malu and the like. They are women of the same order, stifling their sobs and suspending their wills yet irresistibly drawn into the maze of their bleak future. Parukutty's mother once believed like everyone:

പാറുകുട്ടി, തറവാടിന്റെ മുഖത്തു കരി തേച്ചും ഓളന്റെ വയ്റ്റീലു പെറന്നുനേള്ളു. (81)

(Parukutty has smeared shame on the taravad. Only that she happened to come from my womb).

But she melts like snow when she knows of the grandson that is born to her. She makes secret enquiries and is anxious about his well-being. Years later, she waits for him on the wayside but her fear for her brother, the Karanavar, permits her no further. She recalls her helpless plight and the misery of subordination to her younger brother whom she had tenderly nursed in his infant days:

രാവിലെ ഒക്കത്ത് ഇരുത്തിയാൽ വൈകുന്നേരം ഇറക്കിക്കിടത്താനാ
യിരിക്കും താഴെ വെയ്ക്കുക. അങ്ങനെ കൊണ്ടുനടന്നു ചോറു
കൊടുത്ത്, കുളിപ്പിച്ചു, കൂടെക്കിടത്തി ഉറക്കി വളർത്തിയ അനുജ
നാണ് കുഞ്ഞികൃഷ്ണൻ. കാരണവരായപ്പോൾ സംസാരിയ്ക്കാൻ
നേരവും സൗകര്യവുമൊക്കെ നോക്കി ചെന്നിട്ടുവേണം. അവസാനം
കിട്ടിയത്, ചവിട്ടിട്ടു ഞാൻ. (82)

(I carried him from early morning and put him down only to lay him to bed. Kunjikirishnan is my younger brother whom I fed and bathed and made to sleep beside me. Now that he is the Karanavar, I have to wait upon his time and convenience to speak to him. 'I will kick you', that is what I got in return.)

It was too much for her. But she had to bow to her fate and take it in her stride, though reluctantly. When Appunni comes to see the ‘Sarpamthullal’ at the taravad, all her pent up love for her grand child breaks loose. But she stands tongued-tied when the Karanavar ‘kicks him out’

Appunni recalls later:

അമ്മയുടെ അടുത്തുചെന്നുനിന്നപ്പോൾ അകം നിറഞ്ഞുവിടുക
 യായിരുന്നു. അവന്റെ തലയും ചുമലും തൊട്ടുതടവിക്കൊണ്ടു
 അമ്മ പറഞ്ഞു:

ഇല്ലി ദിവസായി നെനെ ഒന്നു കാണണനു നിരിക്കുന്നു. (99)

(When he stood beside his grandmother his mind overflowed. Caressing his head and shoulders she lisped. “Its been many days since I wished to see you.)

M.T. Vasudevan Nair highlights those aspects society considered ornamental to women. Modesty was meant only for the female and ideologies of womanhood were adopted, adapted and transformed to effect control over the women folk. Silent suffering was mostly her lot and many of them were doomed to live loveless and forlorn lives in which they negotiated their subordinate roles and seasoned their minds to suffering. The powers to be, staked their claims over the land and over the minds of the womenfolk who could not repudiate their debilitating patriarchal prescriptions. Women

remained passive and submissive keeping away from the mainstream yet being an integral part of it. They had a narrow space in the world of men; they knew their space and lived within its boundaries. A representative of the sorrowful woman we come across in Kunjoppol:

കുഞ്ഞുടയാഴി നീക്കുകയാണ്. ചിമ്മിനിയുടെ പുക അവരുടെ കരുവാളിച്ച മുഖത്തിനുമുന്നിൽ വളഞ്ഞുപുളഞ്ഞു സഞ്ചരിക്കുന്നു. മുഖം കുനിച്ച് പാതിയടഞ്ഞ് കണ്ണുകളുടെ നീക്കുന്ന ആ സ്ത്രീരൂപം കണ്ടപ്പോൾ അയാളുടെ മനസ്സ് ഭനർത്തുഭനർത്തു വന്നു. പരത്തിയിട്ട ചകിരിനാരുപോലെ പരുകനായ മുടി. കരുവാളിച്ച ശരീരം. തിരുമ്മിത്തീരുമ്മി മഞ്ഞനിറമായ നനവുണങ്ങാത്ത മണമുള്ള ബ്ലൗസും മുണ്ടും ഇടത്തുകയ്യിലെ ഓട്ടുചിമ്മിനിയുടെ പുകപുരണ്ടു വെളിച്ചത്തിൽ ആ ചിത്രം അയാൾ വ്യക്തമായിക്കണ്ടു.

(നാലുകെട്ട്, 20)

(‘Kunjopolu’ (younger sister) in standing. The smoke from the chimney lamp swirled in front of her withered face. Seeing the woman’s form with bent face and half shut eyes, his mind melted. The hair spread out like rough coir strands. Her blouse and loin cloth that had turned yellowish with repeated washing smelt of dampness, he saw the picture clearly in the light of the lamp she held in her left hand).

Manhu

“Manhu becomes meaningful because in it is pictured the life’s sorrow of our times” (Sasidharan 57).

• The mind hearkens to the subdued and voiceless cries, ever renewed silent sobs, in Manhu. Vimala is the heroine who has won her special place among the many and variegated women created by M.T.. She is the symbol of every woman waiting for her love’s fulfilment. Sardarji, Budhoo, and watchman Amar Singh are only pawns in the game of life. Life is an eternal wait, waiting for the next season, waiting for tomorrow, maybe waiting for the next moment. Vimala keeps on waiting perennially for Sushilkumar Mishra, on the banks of Nainital, hoping against hope. The novel Manhu is not a mere attempt to relate a story but it is the rendering of a woman’s life, of the working of her mind that finds the meaning of her very sojourn in the world. •

Symbol of loneliness

Simone de Beauvoir said it:”The word love has by no means the same sense for both sexes,...it is generally agreed ;that women are monogamous, better at loving , “clinging”, more interested in (highly involved) “relationships” than in sex per se, and they confuse affection with sexual desire.

.....

Because love and service are prescribed as women's only allowable activities, they are forced out of proportion. Loving can become disproportionate in at least two ways: first, when loving and serving others is not balanced with loving and caring for oneself; and second when the interests of love are not balanced by other kinds of interests, and indeed crowd out other sources of pleasure, satisfaction, and meaning (Ruth 219).

(Manhu is a silent song of sorrow. Vimala is yet another victim resigned to her fate, waiting for her lover, ready to wait till eternity. Loneliness and solitude, is the theme of the novel yet Vimala trembled at the sentiments of a folk song, even at the age of thirty-one. Her heart strings quivered in accompaniment with the single-stringed iktar's strains. Imbibing the pain and sorrow of all womanhood, she forgot to live her life:

I am dying my own death,

And the deaths of those after me (45).

Sushilkumar Mishra would've been doing the same in some corner far away from Vimala who yearned for him and awaited his arrival year after year at the Golden Nook. Like the lake and the snow covered mountain

peaks her heart remained still and stagnant, cold and frozen at the doorstep of time. She slept with the foreboding sense of all the lonely nights to follow.)

Abject surrender to man

(Manhu reveals to ~~me~~ the sorrow of a lonely mind...

(Perumbadavam 30). The pain and pleasure of a woman yielding up herself, her guarded treasure of femininity is poignantly described in the novel. M.T. has entered into the soul and body of his character, the physical experience of the woman, the surging emotion that ends up in her utter surrender of body and mind.)

വേദന, വേദനകൊണ്ടു പുളഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ ഉയരുകയും താഴുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന കഴുത്തിൽ കൈകൾ ചുറ്റി ചുണ്ടുകൾ കടിച്ചുവർത്തി കിടന്നു.

കരയരുത്. എന്റെ എന്റെ എല്ലാം നൽകുന്ന ഈ നിമിഷത്തിൽ കരഞ്ഞുപോകരുത്.

(I should not cry, I should not weep in this moment, when I am surrendering my whole self. (39)

(It was abject surrender or offering of herself and a great moment in her life. It was the turning point that was to decide the days to come. (39).

The moment made her a creature of the past for ever, a creature waiting for a morrow that never dawned. (40)

Vimala's conception of man and woman relationship is strange. She does not want to break nor disrupt those ideas. At the same time she has acknowledged her lover as the master of her life. Yet the man who had put his impress on her is heedless of her and ruthlessly refrains from even penning her a line or letter. Every season brings in hopes and she would keep herself for him whether he wills or not. Waiting becomes not an end but a way of life for her.

Vimala turns out to be a martyr in her suffering. Her mind and body remain chaste for her man. They are more his than hers. It is this selfless offering and patient waiting that are pictured as her strength and they have never given room for self-condemnation though to moments of self-pity. Her experience fills her with understanding for her ward Rasmi Vajpayee who leaves the hostel with her 'brother'. And, Vimala lives between her 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow' with the past as her treasure. It may rightfully be believed of the many women portrayed in M.T's novels:

. . . like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, . . .
after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the

stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity." (Wollstonecraft 79).

(Men consider females rather as women than human creatures, and are anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers.)

CONCLUSION

The research has tried to present a coherent view of women's language and language as used by women, and in its attempt has lavishly drawn upon the significant trends in the feminist issues regarding language as a means of expression moulded by and reinforced by experience. It may be well to agree with Rich when she voices the female sentiment:

A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we begin to see and name – and therefore live-afresh (35).

In the light of the foregoing pages of my thesis I wish to confirm that language is not neutral and that it is not merely a vehicle which carries ideas. I can endorse that language itself is a shaper of ideas and the programme for mental activity.

Human beings, have created or constructed their world and they have reflected themselves in it. There is no such thing as impartiality or objectivity, even in the nature of the sciences. As F. Smith (82) states:

To speak metaphorically, the brain is quite blind and deaf, it has no direct contact with light or sound, but instead has to acquire all its information about the state of the outside world in the form of impulses of bio-electrical activity pumped along bundles of nerve fibres from the external surface of the body, its interface with the environment (Smith 82).

The brain too, has to interpret it, and can never know the 'real' thing, but only through symbols which are encoded and decoded by the language we employ. We thus 'see' the world around us, through the principles of our language we have formed. So each of us has 'to learn and to see', interpret the information that we receive through our senses from the material world around us. Sexism is thus one of our principles encoded in our thought and its implication makes 'reality' for us, truth as we perceive it. Once certain categories are constructed within the language, we proceed to organize the world accordingly. When sexist language and sexist theories are culturally available, the observation of reality is also likely to be sexist. And it is in this context that we study the representation of women in life and fiction and

how women writers who aim to mould a new reality are received in the world of men and letters.

And in her endeavour to make her point clear, she whisks away any obstacle that her language might create. Her English 'Chutneyfied' or no has done the work. She flouts all taboo and custom and dives into the inner recesses of her characters; their mental and physical yearnings that make them their natural selves. The characters linger in our minds and their vicissitudes lie like smouldering embers beneath ashes.

Ammu is Arundhati's mouthpiece, and the male chauvinist society has not been so critically appraised ever before as by her. She is the representative of the woman who is more sinned against than sinning. Victim of the patriarchal laws she is a stranger in the home of her birth. It makes her even suspicious of her son who could grow up to be an MCP. All the women in The God Of Small Things suffer for no reason of their own but because of the men onto whom they pegged their lives: Baby Kochamma pines for Father Mulligan, Mammachi is beaten up regularly by Pappachi, Margaret Kochamma finds herself uncomfortable with Chacko, Rahel gets divorced and Ammu, no doubt, is forced into all those she fled away from and even worse.

Arundhati raises many feminist issues when she strikes against the double standards adopted by society in its dealings with men and women. She is highly critical of Mammachi's acceptance of her son Chacko's 'Men's needs' and her intolerance of her daughter's affair with the man she loves. Mammachi believes that Ammu "had defiled generations of breeding. (The Little Blessed One, blessed personally by the patriarch of Antioch, an Imperial Entomologist, a Rhodes Scholar from Oxford) and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, for ever now . . . It was all finished now" (258).

Choosing between a husband's name and her father's name does not give a woman much of a chance in life. Comrade Pillai's response to Rahel's statement that she is divorced from her husband, reveals the ignominy of a divorcee in society. Arundhati makes us feel that he even pronounced the word as "Die-Vorced" (130) as though divorce was a form of death especially for a woman. Arundhati is also highly critical about Droupati whose angry only with the men who won her and not with the one that staked her. Kalyani, Pillai's wife is content with her subordination to her husband who flings his soiled clothes at her. He always addresses her as 'Edi', which carries no politeness, while she is mindful to refer to him as 'Addeham' which is an extremely respectful form of address. The inequality

between the sexes is acutely maintained in the home. It is also the result of the power structure routed in the world outside. Arundhati voices the problems of an unemployed woman who has to fend for herself and her children. It is only by securing a gainful occupation does Ammu hope to take her children under her care, when driven out by her brother who is the sole heir of her father's property.

Ammu represents much that a man would hate in a woman but would love to have in himself. Arundhati's portrayal of Ammu is that of a complete woman, mistress of her body and its physical passion, as with her thoughts and emotions. The 'unmixable mix' in her prompts her to answer the call of her body when drawn towards Velutha, though a low-caste. She casts aside all societal restrictions and courts the danger of going against its dictates. Arundhati is an unrelenting iconoclast who pulls down all barriers of taboo when she describes the bodily hungers of her protagonist. Very deftly and intimately she pictures the scenes of Ammu's love-making, which seem to proclaim that a woman is no longer ashamed of her body, of her feminine experience, and of writing about her body. And herein, Arundhati is the champion of the woman's cause.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair presents his women as meek and docile creatures who willingly submit to their fate that crushes them down. It is

difficult to find in M.T.'s novels any woman who wishes or strives to free herself from the crumbling social setup (Mathai 23). Parukkuty of the Naalukettu suffers for marrying the man of her heart. She and her mother have no voice to counter the decrees of the Karanavar of their taravad. Parukutty bemoans her fate when her husband dies and has to wait for salvation till her son grows up to take care of her. The Manhu is a sweet sad song that sounds pleasant to a male ear; the heroine Vimala is the victim of her desire for her lover. She is a symbol of the woman who preserves her chastity for the one man of her life, and waits for him endlessly hoping against hope. The women of Randamoozham are also not free from the travails and tribulations of M.T.'s other female characters. Their fortunes and woes are bound up with their men who are their lords and masters. Randamoozham revolves round Bhimasena, the second Pandava who is pictured as seething against his neglect, and in the course of the narration M.T. takes up a non-committal stance to the cause of women and their problems. He seems to be a casual observer of women in society and a protest against their lot is unheard. In the treatment of female sexuality, it is the male point of view that is emphasized and reinforced. The woman remains more as object of male pleasure rather than a 'giver of gifts' and one who demands in reciprocity.

Among the many cultural and social factors detrimental to women equality, language is considered a very powerful instrument that leads to suppression of women. It perpetuates the patriarchal values for it is 'manmade' as Dale Spender, the avowed feminist described the English language. In spite of her inventiveness in language use, Arundhati is subjected to the constraints of a sexist language, to the vocabulary of the language that is gendered on masculine lines. There are no effective substitutes for words that denote the all-inclusive male gender. Use of words like 'drachtsman', 'lieutenant' and phrases like 'manned the level-crossing' reveals that Arundhati too is a victim of the sexist language. So language and discourse practices are subjected to scrutiny leading to linguistic reform with an effort to eliminate the patriarchal and sexist nature of language. Reform and planning in this direction has led to linguistic disruptions which involve experimentation with all parts of speech. For example, the word 'history' which does not refer to men alone intends to be substituted by 'herstory', thereby a morphological boundary <history> has been reconstituted to <his> + <story> on semantic grounds. All this is done with an objective of creating a woman-centred language capable of expressing reality from a female perspective. Creating new women-centred meanings for words like 'witch',

'hag' and neologim such as 'femocrat' lead to creating an entirely new language.

Change in language meant to win linguistic equality is taking place gradually. The status of 'preferred' use or 'promoted' use has to be gained instead of 'tolerated' use. Masculine compound nouns containing 'man' function rarely to indicate women referent and terms like 'businesswoman', 'spokeswoman' have taken their place., although 'chairperson' seems to be used to refer to women; still another sexist way of use. An observation of Pauwels (58-69) provides a positive picture of language equality. A study of 2000 job advertisements in 10 Australian newspapers in 1996 revealed that only 5.4% of the samples of occupational titles were gender-specific and were used as such. The sample had yielded 128 different occupational terms and titles most of which could be considered gender-neutral in form (e.g. accountant, physiotherapist, secretary, welder). Only 11% of the terms (mainly – 'man' compound forms) could lend themselves to gender-specific use including 'chairman', 'draftsman', 'tradesman', 'cleaning lady' and 'waitress'. With the exception of the terms 'chairman' and 'handyman', the '-man' compounds were used substantially less than the '-person' compounds. Female-exclusive terms were also, rare... Interestingly, there are no mention of 'barman', 'barmaid', 'salesman', 'salesgirl', or 'storeman',

only 'bartender', 'salesperson' – or 'salespeople' and 'storeperson(s)'. Furthermore, reference to the desirable applicant in the body of the text was done primarily by means of the use of a gender-neutral noun (e.g. the successful applicant, the person, the individual) rather than pronouns, thus avoiding the 'pronoun question'. In the context of this investigation it could be said that non-sexist alternative job titles have moved beyond the status of tolerated to that of preferred use; yet it remains a fact that there is still a long way to go.

However, adoption of linguistic feminist alternatives has sent tremors in the 'traditional' language, use with asymmetrical gender constructions of the sort: 'driver' vs 'woman driver', 'nurse' vs 'male nurse', 'female judge', 'woman engineer', 'woman politician', 'woman publican' and a 'lady taxi-driver'.

Gender discrimination assumes gigantic proportions in the Indian scenario. Removal of gender bias in the educational curriculum is something that has to be done consciously in different ways and all the time: and not by simply changing textbooks or having an additional paper on women's issues. The Education Commission, India, 1965 (4) agreed to rewrite the text books of independent India with a view to inspire its young on a footing of equality, so that each sex will develop a proper respect towards the other

because ... it is unscientific to divide tasks and subjects on the basis of sex and to regard some of them as 'masculine' and others as 'feminine'. Similarly, the fact that the so-called psychological differences between the two sexes arise, not out of sex but out of social conditioning, will have to be widely publicized and people will have to be made to realize that stereotypes of 'masculine' and 'feminine' personalities do more harm than good.

In spite of many efforts in this direction sexism still exists in an alarming manner in Indian textbooks. It was held that the sex-defined roles still held sway in the depiction of characters in the lessons to be taught. Men characters were portrayed as heroes of many lessons and they were as usual brave and independent, out to win fame and glory for themselves and their cause. Even biographies that were taught were mostly of men of fame while lives of women had remained of little or no consequence. The women characters as depicted in the pages were of no significance and were relegated to the background in the social scene and played minor roles in the small arena of their domestic life: dish washing, house-keeping, child-rearing etc.. They were oppressed and submissive victims of their male counterparts. Also, a point to be noted most particularly was that all generalizations about humanity and society were indicated solely by male noun or pronoun with a conspicuous absence of the great majority of females that make up the entire

human race. Children or students may quite often find it difficult to include the 'woman' also in the 'man'. This explicit use of sexist language reinforces a clear demarcation between the sexes. Sexist language thus becomes a symbolic device that limits the activities of one sex, but not those of the other. Differentiated roles for the genders are sanctioned and confirmed by language purely on a biological basis.

The language of women takes its roots in the socio-cultural context of a country. As long as women are denied social equality and freedom, women will remain the 'invisible sex' in language and literature. Gender disparity is a reflection of our undemocratic ideals in the family, in the society and in the community in which we live. Any programme of elimination of gender discrimination must take into confidence all sections of society, orienting them to pursue equality in thought and deed.

The constitution of India guarantees equality of opportunity before the law for both the sexes. But what is the position defacto? Gender disparity is prevalent in our school system to a great degree. However, one cannot think of education in isolation of what is to be done for women's progress. As the theme of the Beijing conference on women's issues, we have 'to look at things through women's eyes'.

The panacea to all societal ills is education. The belief that girls do not need to be educated, that they will not be economically beneficial to the parents' families are barriers enough to girls' education. Besides poverty, lack of separate schools and women teachers for girls, restrain parents from admitting their girls in schools. Girls have to study at home after they attain puberty; they are considered as other men's property to be handed over in marriage which is deemed as the 'be-all and end-all' of womanly existence. A very deplorable plight of girls is that they constitute a high proportion of the unpaid family workers, as housemaids and helpers. This is a major reason for their exclusion from education.

Higher education is a fertile arena that cultivates culture equality among sexes. Education is both an end in itself and also a means of realizing desirable goals. Education should develop the personality of individuals and qualify them to improve their socio-economic status by fulfilling certain economic, political and cultural functions. It has been acknowledged as a major instrument which societies can use to direct the process of change and development towards desired goals. So the best method to improve the status of women is by educating women to be responsible citizens and to conscientize men on the importance of the vast majority in the process of development.

Objectives in the educational curriculum should provide ample opportunities for both the ordinary and gifted students. It should be integrally related to the student's home, social environment, and the life they would have to live and the work they would have to do in future. Fully aware of the modern roles of women, in the home and outside, objectives were modelled to facilitate education of women. The Education Commission of post-independent period, especially the Commission chaired by Dr. Radhakrishnan (298 – 305 *qtd. in Pandya*) recommended a programme of scholarships and financial assistance to girl students in colleges and universities on a liberal scale. It also requested for the provision of suitable but economical, hostel accommodation with necessary amenities, so as to enable girls even from rural areas to avail of higher education.

Lofty objectives were also adopted by the Commission:

To create right attitude in life - individual and social.

To impart useful knowledge for various aspects of life.

To give practical training for life.

To develop good personal habits.

To inculcate a sense of social awareness and a spirit of service to society.

To make a career for the future.

Taking into consideration the special roles of women as mothers and career women, to provide a proper balancing of the two, many measures were recommended like:

Development of more employment opportunities, particularly of a part-time nature.

Improvement in employment information and guidance services for women entering higher education.

Development of open university system should be expanded to extend the facility to all the girls in the rural and backward areas.

Correspondence courses and self-study programmes can be specially useful for girls desirous of continuing education but are unable to do so because of circumstances. So this system of education should be developed.

As a further step towards facilitating education for women, recommendations were made for reserving seats for girl students.

Extension programmes activating girls and women in society, addressing most specially women's issues are sure steps that will improve women's status and reduce discrimination against them. Though there has been considerable rise in the education of girls, there has been considerable dropouts also due to economic, familial, educational and social reasons.

To conclude, gendering can be interpreted as a cultural process, a cultivation of human nature determined by the vicissitudes of early childhood or the customs of one's community; or a purely conventional formation of plastic humanity. It is not the existence of a gender system's structure that disturbs the feminist language critique, but the fact of having suffered from it. That actual gender systems have functioned oppressively and still do is past doubt, largely as a result of clustering of attributes into two mutually exclusive categories, each category considered more characteristic and desirable for the different sexes. It is possible to strip away the undesirable aspects of masculinity and femininity and thus arrive at human nature. Also, if human attribute like gender is the product of historical circumstances, it is no doubt variable according to historical circumstances and so we can envisage seriously of a genderless life.

There is still much scope for language planning on feminist lines with the aim of achieving linguistic equality of the sexes. The sexist nature of language should be done away with and a non-sexist guideline is to be innovated. Strategies of gender-neutralization (sometimes gender abstractions) and/or gender-specification (feminisation) can be adopted to maintain a balanced representation of the sexes. Efforts at gender neutralization can bring about a minimization or elimination of gender-

specific expressions and constructions. It entails that any morphosyntactic and lexical features marking human agent nouns and pronouns (or other parts of speech) as masculine or feminine are to be neutralized. Linguistic equality can be achieved through gender-specification or feminisation which makes the invisible sex, in most cases women, visible in language through systematic and symmetrical marking of gender. The literary arena offers immense scope for fruitful linguistic analysis which can in turn lead to linguistic equality. In this area, further studies can be undertaken, coordinating literary and linguistic lines.

Surely changes cannot be brought about overnight, yet changes can surely and steadily take place and the world will become a happier place for women where they can feel free with their male counterparts to think and voice themselves. Their voices shall not be cries in the wilderness and they shall not waste themselves in the desert. In this endeavour towards equality men themselves can become 'feminists' when committed to the cause of women empowerment.

NOTES

1. Taravad : An ancestral home of the Nair community in Kerala. It housed many members forming a large family that lived under one roof.
2. Karanavar : The head of the family, matrilineal in the case of the Nair community. His decisions were law to its members
3. Naalukettu : A house with an open yard in the middle. There were rooms and living space leading into the yard. The word has become a symbol of the seclusion of women whose movements were restricted to their homestead.
4. Dhanu : The Malayalam month (December)
5. Asuras : Demons, enemies of the Gods
6. Rakshasas : Giants of super human strength
7. Kailas : The abode of Siva
8. Vaikundam : Heaven, the abode of Vishnu
9. Patala : The underworld

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