CHAPTER-VII

FEMALE BONDING:

SUMMING UP
Patriarchy prevails in almost all the societies around the world. The norms and practices that define women as inferior to men, impose control on them is present everywhere in the families, social relations, religion, law, work places and politics. Thus, patriarchy is a kind of male domination. In this ideology, men are considered to be superior to women and women are part of men’s property, so women should be controlled by men which results in women’s subordination in the society. Women’s voluntary acceptance of subordinate status in exchange of protection and privilege, a condition which characterizes the historical experience of women. This is questioned by women in all the five novels taken up for the study.

The women in the novels selected for the study are equipped with feminine consciousness. They dare to step beyond the prescriptive boundaries to realize their presence despite the constant scrutiny of society to chastise them on the slightest pretext of failure. They are far ahead in feminine consciousness than their predecessors who are the subdued and submissive women within the threshold of patriarchy. Their heightened sense of self-respect and justice persuade them to carve out their own path amidst the wilderness of their chaotic life situations. There is a remarkable shift in these women’s approach to traditions, social customs and personal priorities. Instead of being in conflict with the male for a long time, they march ahead to actualize their potential and women-power to create their own choices. Casting aside their invisibility and voicelessness; psychological and spatial boundaries, they venture out to contend in the open world with their male counterparts, not as adversaries but as equal partners. Deconstructing the image of
submissive, repressed and self-effacing women, they emerge out to be self-reliant, emancipated and confident women who are uninhibited, intelligent and definite about their rights and goals in life.

Education and employment though play an essential role in their evolution, yet a sense of self-respect, refusal to allow the perpetuation of prejudices against them and the will to avenge the wrongs done to them add to their motivation further. In addition to it the roots of their behavioural patterns sometimes lay in their childhood dismay, physical and mental suffocation at adolescence due to patriarchal notches as well as irreversible dogmatic forces of traditional marriage system in the lives of these emergent women.

A subtle and smooth progress can be mapped in the ideology of the present novelists Edith Wharton, Buchi Emecheta, Rama Mehta, Alice Walker and Bapsi Sidhwa corresponding with that of their protagonists. Celie shows her individuality by refusing her reunion with her husband. Ayah protects her self-respect by refusing Ice-candy-man’ love. Aku-nna shows her rebellion against traditional ways of her society by refusing the forced marriage and by marrying Chike an outcast. Lilly gets her eternal freedom through the death. Geetha carves out her niche within the four walls of her home.

One of the perennial concerns of the novelists under study has also been to locate and expose the core of women’s issues at the grass root level. All the characters who finally rebel and position themselves beyond the patriarchal thresholds have been conformists in the early phase of their life. No one was initially inclined to disturb or disrupt the broad social concerns and have also
adapted various negotiation patterns. However, after an extent, unlike their predecessors, they deny to yield meekly to the clamping forces. These women can be categorized as distinct individuals, appearing to fly towards freedom, waiting with hope, converting the circumstances into favour or just dreaming of the next leap forward.

The emergence of contemporary fiction by women as a genre in itself in the English Literature and its contribution towards feminine sensibilities and consciousness therefore has been a landmark in providing an immediate reflection of the ever changing familial and social norms. The patriarchal norms have been viewed not as a chronology of the social events but as a tradition that continually interferes with the present and would probably impinge on the future as well. It is against the dormancy of the supremacy of ‘social hierarchy’ that the selected women novelists of the present study rebel and become the mouth piece of their characters to caution against the revivalist tendencies. The boundaries and checks of wider patriarchal constructs and their import appear not only to regulate their writing but they have also been conscious of their own social acceptance. Nevertheless the women novelists certainly have shown substantial growth in their language and expressions.

Education whether formal or informal does not stir these women from their position of compliance and supplication where they stand firmly grounded. It seems to have played no vital role in the individual growth of these women and fails to wake them up from their slumber as the fear of rejection and retribution is so deep rooted in their psyche that they are completely oblivious of any other way of life except the one shown by their conservative ancestors.
A comprehensive attempt has been made in locating and analyzing varying shades and contours of feminine consciousness and the goals they have achieved with the negotiation patterns adopted by women characters in the selected novels by Buchi Emecheta, Edith Wharton, Rama Mehta, Alice Walker and Bapsi Sidhwa. Against the backdrop of the socio-cultural paradigms of the novelists concerned, societies and discriminatory gender issues ingrained in women are presented in their suppressed worlds. The feminine responses against the male-dominated world through their consciousness and the different levels of awareness of a number of women characters are thus bound to emerge.

The hypothesis that the experiences of the characters mostly correspond to the lived experiences of women writers themselves stands justified as these novelists do not only draw profusely from their personal lives but also have situated their women within the familiar regional and cultural locales. For instance, Edith Wharton is familiar with American ways of living like her protagonist Lily, she too belongs to American leisure class society. Like Wharton her protagonist Lily also is not satisfied with the American ways of living. The novel is Wharton’s satire on American life. Buchi Emecheta changed the climax of the novel TBP, after experiencing male domination in her life. She realizes that when her husband destroyed the manuscript of the novel. Aku-nna’s experiences are similar to the writer’s cultural experience of patriarchal dominance. Like her protagonist Aku-nna, Emecheta married the man of her choice. Commenting on the similarities between Emecheta and her protagonist, Ernest Emenyonu (1996) observes:
In a personal way, Emecheta draws a parallel between herself and the fictional Aku-nna and contends that she feels convinced that, like Aku-nna, her own marriage broke up because she did not allow her prospective husband to pay her bride price. Aku-nna’s bride price was not paid as custom demanded; therefore she had to die (257)

Rama Mehta was married in Udaipur like her protagonist Geeta. The novelist’s own lived experiences as a Rajastani woman, stands a witness to the course and experience of the characters in the novel. Mehta is the first women recruited for Indian Foreign Service but she is forced to resign after her marriage. So she is also victim to the traditional life of haveli like her protagonist Geeta. Alice Walker also experienced African women double oppression like her protagonist celie, in one way being black and the other being woman. Walker who is an African American exposed a sense of the cultural roots of African Americans through the protagonist, Celie, a woman living in Macon Country, Georgia, and that of Nettie, a woman living in Africa, who can provide.

Bapsi Sidhwa was an eye witness of partition like her child protagonist Lenny. Sidhwa, like her protagonist Lenny, is a polio survivor and was not sent to school since because of her physical disability. Lenny is a parsee girl like the novelist. Though, in general personal and autobiographical elements get reflected in these women’s writings, yet they have the potential of universal appeal for the fair sex. It is not that they only fictionalize women’s problems or record their response: they also mirror women’s reaction to men and the patriarchal forces and vice-versa. One can identify with these characters quite often or can discover parallels in real
world defending the conviction that art reflects life rather vibrantly. These novelists have rejuvenated the realistic novel by using it to explore and share their experiences and put forward their own point of life, especially through their women characters with all their pain, agony, vulnerability and distress.

Despite the diversity of caste, class, creed, region and religion women’s subordinate status has been vouchsafed unanimously by all in the entire world for centuries. They surrender their unique identity and willingly mould themselves for the sake of role based security and confirm to the traditional role definitions prescribed by society. They rarely discover their potential as human beings and limit their life space to the narrow confines of being daughters, daughters-in-law, mothers, wives and even spinsters.

The changes that occur in the female characters can be attributed to feminine consciousness. The study of female characters in all the five novels show different levels of feminine consciousness in different ways. Western feminism is clearly not a universal concept that applies to every woman on earth. Instead feminism is relative, taking into account the culture, history of situation of each woman. Choosing novels from five different countries makes the study interesting as the circumstances in which the women live differ in each novel. Each one faces a different challenge in one’s life.

In every novel the experiences of more than one woman character is presented. There are levels of feminine consciousness represented by these women. Some fight for their existence, some succumb to the circumstances, some become
successful business owners, mothers and wives. Some of them are traditional, some are modern, but all the women represent different aspects of modern day feminism.

The commoditization of women is a general theme in all the five novels. In THM Lily commodifies herself. She equates marriage with strategy, rather than love. She wants to get a rich husband and social status by selling herself as a commodity called wife. It is a subtle irony of Wharton's that Lily treats the eligible bachelor, Percy Gryce, in the same manner she is treated by Simon Rosedale - as a commodity to be traded for power. Lily Bart employs her attractiveness to captivate, charm, please, and hopefully win a suitable and wealthy husband. Her beauty is a form of commodity that she has to use wisely and effectively to secure the desirable social status as well as to ensure financial wealth.

In the case of Aku-nna and her mother Ma Blackie in the novel TBP both mother and daughter are commoditized. The irony in this novel is that of the title itself that reflects the commoditization of women. Ma Blackie is often blamed by her husband for not producing desired goods for the bride price she was paid off. Aku-nna is also allowed to continue her education since her uncle is with a hope to get more bride price on her due to her education. Here the commoditization of women is not limited to Aku-nna and her mother but entire Ibuza society since it prevails in such type of culture. As per ethnic culture, the bride price is a token of appreciation given to the girl’s parents as gratitude for taking care of their daughter. It is never expected to be paid in full or all at once, but in small parts, through visits between the two families. This is done so as to make the two families visit each other, so that their bond grows stronger, since marriage does not unite not only two persons but also two families. It is viewed that if a man fails to
pay the bride price it is nothing but devaluing his wife and that he is incapable to provide a protective life to her. Before the origin of Western certification of marriage, the bride price is the only legal indication that the marriage has been sanctioned not only in the African Societies but also in many parts of the world.

In the novel **ITH** this factor can be seen in the character of Geeta’s daughter Vijay, though she is young to be married, Geeta’s in-laws want to engage her with a bridegroom of a rich haveli, it is not because of the reason they are rich but they are mightier than them. They feel that with this marriage there will not be any threat from them in the future. Lakshmi too in the novel has to resist the advances of Heeralal who wants to fulfill his lust by providing costly gifts to her. Though Lakshmi is ethical and innocent in her character, her husband and haveli people throw the blame on her. As a revenge to their attitude and to lead a life of liberty Lakshmi leaves the haveli.

In **TCP** Celie is also transacted just like an animal between Albert and Fonso. Fonso gives Celie to Albert by telling that she is fit for doing the house hold work of a widower and to look after his undisciplined children. Even Albert brings Celie not as a wife but as an animal that can do the hard word. So in this novel Celie is not married but just sold like a commodity. It is not limited to Celie alone in the novel but other characters like Shug, Sofia and Squeak are also commoditized.

In the case of Ayah in the novel **ICM**, she is abducted and made a prostitute to earn money. Here she is commoditized by Ice-candy-man who boasts himself as an admirer and lover of her. Thomas Loebel provides an insightful synopsis of
women’s place in the society that clearly reflects the lives of women as commodities:

Women are engender for marriage and the whole construction of gendered identity is about teaching women how to shape and deploy their physical assets for attraction and their public personae for promoting men, while shoring up the blinders of consciousness necessary for believing that they are powerfully acting out self-directed behavior. (111)

Another aspect of the feminine consciousness is the quest for identity. In all the novels women’s quest for identity is visible. Lily in THM shows her identity through her death. She does not want to pledge autonomy for the sake of riches which is revealed when she does not prefer marriage either with Dorset or Percy Gryce. She realises that love is more desirable than the riches. When she tries to express her love to her friend Selden it is too late. He too though has soft feelings towards her, doesn’t express her love till her death. The ending of the novel with the death of Lily is left ambiguous as Wharton doesn’t reveal whether Lily dies because of overdose of chloral or she has decided to commit suicide. Till the end of the novel she never cares the society and gives importance to her conscience.

In TBP Aku-nna shows her identity by rebelling against the norms of her Ibo society. She rejects forced marriage with Okobishi. In order to escape from him, she lies that she has lost her chastity with Chike ignoring the bad reputation on her chastity. She triumphs by getting married to Chike but unfortunately falls a victim to the superstitious beliefs of her society. Even Aku-nna’s death is also ambiguous
like Lily in the novel \textit{THM}. The novel \textit{TBS} doesn’t reveal the exact reason for Aku-nna’s death that whether it is because of lack of physical fitness to give birth or due to the superstitious belief that existed in the tradition.

Geeta in the novel \textit{ITH} wants to crave out her own space. She is educated and lives in close association with society brushing aside all narrow social conventions. She tries to discover her real self through her inner and instinctive potentiality. She pictures herself as an eminent daughter-in-law and gets her identity in the haveli by imparting education in the servant folk. Geeta rejects the marriage proposal of her daughter at a tender age by negotiating with the patriarchal norms of the haveli. Finally Geeta earns her identity by becoming the mistress of the haveli.

In the novel \textit{TCP} the struggle for identity is seen at many levels by individual preference and at a level of social, cultural, historical and ethnic customs and expectations. Celie yearns for identity by leaving for Memphis with Shug inspite of Albert’s requests and threats. She proves her autonomy by starting her own business of making pants. Later in the novel even though Shug falls in love with a boy of nineteen, Celie’s strong ‘will’ is not trembled. Celie decides to live becomes independent. Squeak, wife of Harpo gets her identity in the society as a singer and wants to live as Mary Agnes but not as Squeak any longer. Sofia the other wife of Harpo leaves him due to his bad behavior and ill- treatment and shows her identity as a woman and not as a wife.

Ayah in the novel \textit{ICM} reveals quest for identity by refusing and breaking her marriage with Ice-candy-man. After her marriage with Ice-candy-man she is renamed as ‘Mumtaz’ and her religion is also changed. Despite Ice-candy-man’s
changed character she rejects to live with him and likes to live as Hindu ‘Shantha’ but not as Muslim ‘Mumtaz’. At the end of the novel she decides to leave for her native place Amritsar rather than to live in Pakistan.

The term ‘patriarchy’ literally means ‘father’s rule’. Patriarchy is a major aspect of all the five novels. In THM in the form of suitors. Selden stands for patriarchal dictates. As a man he maintains unfair relationships with other married women. But at the same time, he does not tolerate the rumours about Lily as a result he does not accept her love. The men in the novel are portrayed as the source of power and riches In TBP patriarchy is shown in the name of protagonist itself. The protagonist name Aku-nna stands for father’s wealth, it indirectly indicates that she has to abide by the rules of her father. With the death of her father, as per Igbo customs all the rights on her are given to her step-father and uncle Okonkwo. Even it is not the case of her father or her uncle alone even her husband calls her ‘Akum’ which means my wealth. It clearly indicates that a woman either before the marriage or after the marriage is controlled by the men of the family. It may be father, uncle, brother, husband or son. V.Geetha, defines patriarchy “where men are family heads, descent is reckoned through the father, men alone are priests, and all laws and norms dictated by male elders are held to be just and right.” (5)

In ITH Geeta finds the environment of haveli congenial for men as all of their wishes are fulfilled easily. Their slightest wish is a command to everyone. But she proves that patriarchal norms also can be turned into favour of women.TCP is an embodiment of patriarchy. Almost all the men characters in the novel are symbols of patriarchal culture. In the beginning of the novel, Celie and Nettie are
controlled by their step father Fonso. After wards Albert, Celie’s husband tries to get control over both Celie and Nettie. But fortunately Nettie escapes from him. Celie is bonded with the chains of patriarchy of Albert till the arrival of Shug. In the later part of the novel Harpo like his father tries to control his wives Sofia and Mary Agnes till they rebel against him.

Lenny observes patriarchal oppression in case of her mother and also Ayah Shanta in the novel ICM. Lenny becomes a witness to her mother’s interventions with her father. Lenny’s mother is figured as exercising consensual agency to shore up her access to middle class domestic security rather than intervene or displace the patriarchal and class conventions that govern her marital relation. But at the end of the novel she violates patriarchal rules of her father in order to help the ‘fallen’ women. Ayah remains independent throughout the novel. She acts in an independent way with all the admirers of hers. Ayah escapes patriarchal control by ignoring all the pleads of Ice-candy-man not to leave the country.

The emphasis in this study has been on the steps one takes to relocate oneself despite hostilities. Although traditional practices always follow these women like a shadow, through their vision they enlighten the path where they old and the new ideas flow in harmony and they succeed in enjoying a larger share of both the worlds.

In the novels chosen for the study except in the novel ICM there is a clash between tradition and modernity. In THM Lily stands for modernity where as her aunt Mrs.Peniston stands for tradition. In TBP In the novel Aku-nna’s modern views clashe with the the traditional society of Igbo where the inhabitants strongly
uphold. The background of the novel itself is based on the concept of clash between tradition and modernity. The traditional ways of Igbo society comes into clash with modern ideas that occurs with the impact of British Colonization. The entire novel of *ITH* itself based on the notion of tradition and modernity. The modern ways of the protagonist Geeta are injected into the traditional roots of the haveli. Though there is clash between these ideas in the beginning of the novel but at the end of the novel the modern values of Geeta are valued. So Geeta stands as a role model to the women who are in intricacy of tradition and modernity. In the novel *TCP* the traditional protagonist Celie awakens with the modern views of Shug, Nettie and Sofia. The women characters ignore the traditional idea of living with husbands. As modern women they start their independent lives through their economical independence.

Female bonding works as major factor in bringing consciousness among the women in the novels. In *TCP* Nettie, Celie’s sister, Shug, mistress of Albert, and Sofia her daughter-in-law make Celie to realise her situation and help in her development. Nettie teaches Celie to read and write, she even urges Celie to fight back against her abusing husband. Shug extends her help and guidance to Celie in order to develop into an individual woman and makes her to learn to love herself. When she reaches the peak of awareness she no longer considers her husband as a superior to her and addresses him as Albert, but not as Mr._____. The bonding between the women is also a reason responsible for Celie’s metamorphosis into a strong and an independent person. This female bonding is not limited to the protagonist alone. Quilting in *The Color Purple* is a symbol of female bonding, creativity and a manifestation of African American folk culture. Sofia and Celie
help each other in quilt making. The female bonding can be seen even between Sofia and Squeak. Squeak looses her chastity in her attempt to release Sofia from prison. Sofia takes care of Squeak’s little daughter when she leaves for Memphis with Shug. Shug recovers from deadly ill health with the nurturing of Celie. Nettie escapes from brutal sexual assaults of Albert and Fonso with the help of Celie and her female spirit is enlightened with the letters of Nettie. Celie learns to fight against the patriarchal power by watching Sofia in action. Inspired by one another Celie and Squeak decides to live independent lives with their art of making pants and singing.

Female bonding in all the women characters of the five novels. In the novel ICM the female bonding is shown in the recovery of Ayah. After the recovery of Ayah, and Ayah’s eventual return to India, though it may signal the end of the novel, the real resolution comes not in Ayah’s journey to Amritsar, but in Lenny’s growing awareness of the social world about her. Lenny is able to find that neither her mother nor her Godmother may be presented as unproblematic liberators somehow free and removed from all vestiges of patriarchal power, but they are, as Lenny eventually sees, able to find ways to assert resistance, and to aid women. They do not rely on their husbands or their leaders to make decisions for them, or to assure that their concerns are being met. They utilize the powers and resources they already have at hand in order to help the women around them. Although Ketu H. Katrak’s comments refer specifically to India and to Indian women’s movements, they can be seen as a fitting summation of Sidhwa’s Pakistani text:

As we dig deeper into our own history, as we discover our own feminist traditions and the contributions of women who have been
“hidden from history,” we balance our views of the origins of women’s struggles in India and Pakistan. While acknowledging Gandhi’s success in mobilizing women, we also recognize the significant work of women themselves in nationalist movements, and in the continuing struggles undertaken by Indian [and Pakistani] women’s movements today. (404)

In THM female bonding is seen between Nettie Sruther and Lily. Lily extends her help to Nettie Sruther to recover from her sorrowful conditions. Nettie on the other hand brings Lily to her house when she is filled with sorrow after returning from Selden’s house. The female bonding is limited to these two characters only.

In the novel ITH Geeta’s mother-in-law extends her help when Geeta has to face the criticisms from the other haveli’s women to impart education. Geeta’s mother-in-law supports her to adjust to the circumstances of the haveli which are new for Geeta. A new atmosphere is created in the haveli where women earn their freedom within their spaces.

It can be told that the failure of Lily and Aku-nna occurs due to the lack of female bonding. If at all these two women would have got help from their circles of women, there might have been a different ending to their stories.

It is interesting to note the evolution of consciousness in the characters from the first novel THM to the last novel ICM. Lily in the first novel, has an interesting tale to tell the readers. Like in any patriarchal society, Lily’s choice is to marry
from a wealthy family and have a good living. Her consciousness is limited to her comfortable life in the society not filled with love but with riches. Her comfort zone is with money but not love. With the progress of the novel, her consciousness makes her realise her mistake. There is a transformation in her thoughts. Her female bonding too helps her to realise her mistakes. Lily reaches the height of majesty when she ever refuses to take revenge on the people she was wronged. She shows her magnanimity not to spoil the reputation of others even though they have maligned her. Though she is as chaste as her name Lily suggests, no one is willing to accept her, moreover they try to take advantage of the situation. Selden, from whom Lily expects the love professes it only at her death bed. Wharton makes Lily meet her death towards the end of the novel not to present her as a failure but from the consciousness of Lily, she could not bear the failures in life. It was too heavy for her. In TBP too, Aku-nna is found dead towards the end of the novel.

Aku-nna a tribal girl, barely educated, falls a victim to the societal norms though seemed to be victorious. She is a girl with matured thinking, and her consciousness never lets her down. Her rebellion is remarkable in the society which is staunchly rooted in its traditions. Her physical strength was not so strong to withstand the strain she takes when she elopes with Chike and gets married. Though mentally she is strong enough to rebel against men, she is physically weak to withstand the burden of bearing a child. She is barely, sixteen to bear a child. Aku-nna’s consciousness proves to be futile because of many factors like tradition, patriarchal society, superstitious beliefs etc. But her tale is read today as a triumphant tale. Her death towards the end giving birth to a child is a redeeming factor but not to be looked as failure.
In both the novels THM and TBP the protagonists face death. The novelists Edith Wharton and Buchi Emecheta make their central character meet death but in the later three novels, the protagonists live and show that they can face any situation in their life. They fight for their self-identity. They not only depend on their own consciousness but on collective female bonding which brings success in their endeavours. ITH from Rama Mehta is a story of Geeta thrown into new circumstances. Initially she is suffocated by the haveli rules and regulations. But, she progresses in her mission to transform the haveli. After her father-in-law’s death, she is the one who takes the reigns of the haveli as the ‘mistress’ of the haveli. Rama Mehta employs a subtle feminism in this novel. Geeta doesn’t totally rebel against the system to attain her freedom but slowly she succeeds to bring the change. Her education is the tool she uses to educate the women and girls of her haveli. She makes the haveli recognize her as an asset. Geeta achieves this not on her own but with the help of her mother-in-law and other women of the haveli.

Alice Walker’s TCP is the best example for female bonding and the collective consciousness which brings about the change in all the females of the novel. Celie is relieved from her bondage with the help of Shug, Sofia and Nettie and in turn Celie helps Shug and Sofia in her own way. All the women make everyone hear their voice. They shout loud that they are no longer door mats but women empowered with their respective abilities. Each one have their gifts to survive in their patriarchal world. It is a triumph of all the women in the novel. No one is left without earning their freedom. They make men in their life to recognize what they have achieved.
ICM is the story of Lenny and Ayah. Lenny makes Ayah the heroine of the novel. Ayah doesn’t succumb to her situations in the novel, she voices her decision to move out of the country which has ill-treated her. In the beginning of the novel, she is admired by one and all. She is the cynosure of all her admirers. But the political and historical conditions intervene with her personal life to throw her into the abyss of becoming a cheap dancing girl. Above all, the irony is that her own strong admirer Ice-candy-man is the root cause of all the upheaval in her life. But Ayah is not heartbroken. She stands firm in her decision to move to her native country. She is not afraid that she may have to face restrain from her own people. What she thinks is that she can set her freedom only in her place that is Amritsar. So, from the first novel to the last novel there is a sort of evolution in the consciousness of the characters. They march forward but not backward. The progress is seen in Celie, Sofia, Shug, Squeak and Ayah who show that death is not the answer but to live and show the world what they are is the right answer in the ‘dolphin-torn, gong for mented sea.’ (Second Coming, W.B. Yeats)

The women in all the five novels are defined by their back ground. The society of THM is upper class New York, for TBP, it is the traditional Ibuza community, in ITH, it is again a traditional Rajasthan haveli, in TCP it is the depiction of the typical African American life and ICM is set during the partition period of India and Pakistan. Though the setting changes, it is observed that all the novels speak about the women empowerment. The common factor which threads them together is that all the women in the novels see the need for sister-hood with their fellow women. The women characters are put in different situations and were given scope to react to them with their consciousness. The gender rooted aspects of
any tradition is uprooted. The awakening of feminine consciousness makes the
women in the novels not to passively accept and be a female receiver but to become
an active executor.

Many more cross-cultural studies like this will give a scope to study
similarities or dissimilarities in novels belonging to different countries.