CHAPTER - V

**Emotional penetration in the novels written between 1966 and 1980**

Every artist looks at life from either of two angles – roseate or dark. The contemporaries of Eudora Welty described their characters in the back-drop of the violence engulfing the region during those days. Welty took the same raw material and provided a picture where life has not been shunned but to be enjoyed despite its vicissitudes. The novels written in this period like ‘Losing Battles’ and the ‘The Optimist’s Daughter’ confirm to this pattern. There is miscarriage of justice and multifarious problems, but the characters don’t lose hope and fight up to the end. In the ‘Losing Battles’, the protagonist, Jack, despite being sent to jail remains optimistic about the joys of life and family values. He gets more pleasure in joint family rather than in nuclear family as was suggested by his wife Gloria. The celebration of 90th birth day of Granny, the grandmother, gives the idea to all family members numbering about hundred to ponder over the benefits of cohesiveness for facing the tribulations of life. As hope and despair are the part and parcel of
life so the same are described in the novel but the painful incidents are pointed out for learning the harsh facts of life which always result in pleasures of life. The system of justice has come in criticism as was done by John Galsworthy. Judge Moody does not give significance to the cause of conflict between Curly and Jack and punishes the latter without applying the complete Canons of Justice.

Another novel ‘The Optimist’s Daughter’ brings moral before the reader by describing the devotion of Laurel to her bed ridden father Judge Mckelva. The novel describes the evil consequences of those marriages where the age of both partners is unequal. Fay as a second wife of judge Mckelva becomes responsible for his death. It is her carelessness which leads to second operation of her husband and subsequent death. By this, the novelist also hints at the changing pattern of relationships. The reactions of the people who come to attend the funeral ceremony of Judge Mckelva are shown to highlight the falseness of these kinds of descriptions. Similarly, Fay’s marriage with the Judge is also based on false premises. The last part of the novel is given to fantasizing on the part of Laurel. This is described by the novelist to point out the fact that one starts imagining when one finds real
life too stultifying as is the case of Laurel, who lost her husband, her mother and at last her father. Everything of the house was making her nostalgic about the past.

**Losing Battles**

The novel ‘Losing Battles’ is about celebration of life. The main character, Jack, in the novel is depicted as a simple minded person who in spite of problems remains optimistic about the joys of life and family values. He is the character who not only opposes any injustice to him but also any indignity to any human being. He is opposed to meanness in life. He enjoys his family life with his wife, Gloria and his daughter, Lady Mary, and lives in a combined family which consisted of Granny, his mother, Beulah, father, Renfro, his three sisters and one younger brother. In addition he is an instant help to anybody in distress in the neighbourhood.

The story is of a summer in 1930s at the hill country of northeast Mississippi, USA. Setting of story is a tin roof house on the ridge in hill countryside. In the house is a very old lady (Granny) whose one of the grand daughters, Beulah is in her late forties. Beulah’s husband is Ralph Renfro and they have three
daughters and two sons. The eldest son is Jack and younger Vaughn. Three daughters are Ella Fay, Etoyle and Elvie. Granny’s son and daughter in-law are no more. Granny and her husband have raised the family. After sometime, Granny’s husband also dies in old age. The story develops in the context of Granny’s 90th birthday. On this occasion, family reunion takes place. Other grandchildren of Granny such as Nathan Beecham, Curtis Beecham, Noah Webster along with their wives and children arrived to take part in the reunion. The eldest son of Beulah who has married a school teacher, Gloria, is also expected to reach and join reunion. He is expected to return from Ludlow where he is undergoing a term in the pen. Two sisters of Mr. Renfro, Lexie Renfro and Aunty Fay and her husband Homer Champion also join the reunion. Cleo, wife of Noah Webster, who is coming for the first time, takes the story forward through her queries.

Jack is a young man who works at the family farm, goes to school while he drives the school bus also. He carries children as well as school teacher, Gloria, to the school. He attends the school and brings back children and teacher back. In front of school gate there is a store whose owner is one Curly Stovall.
Curly Stovall is portrayed as a greedy character in whose mind money is always the central point.

One day Fay goes to the store during school time where she shows a ring which she has taken from Granny’s purse to Curly, the store owner. Curly refuses to give back the ring. Fay tells her brother, Jack, about the incident. Jack goes to store and asks Curly to give back the ring. Curly refuses to oblige. Jack thrashes him, ties him with rope and dumps him in the empty coffin box which was lying in the store. Later Curly revealed that the ring was in the safe and refuses to open it. Jack loads the safe on his back and goes with it to his house. There when he attempts to open it, it is found that safe is already opened, may be due to falling on the way. Ring is lost and could not be traced.

There in the store, Curly was shouting for help. After a while one Aycole comfort, a friend of Jack, reaches the store and frees Curly from rope and coffin box. Curly, who is the Marshal of Banner Country meets, Hammer champion, Justice of piece, who reaches the store on his egg route. Curly complains to him about the treatment meted out to him by Jack. Jack is arrested and tried for the charge of smothering, tying and robbing Mr. Curly,
the store owner. Trial takes place in Ludlow where Judge Oscar Moody punishes Jack by sending him to pen for two years.

One by one different uncles, aunts and their children of Jack are reaching the house where Granny’s birthday is being celebrated as a reunion of family. Arrival of Jack is eagerly awaited. Granny is waiting for the best present of all - the joy of her life is coming home. The expression “joy of your life’s coming home!”\textsuperscript{58} is used for Jack who is returning from pen after more than one and a half years. He missed the previous reunion. Jack’s mother Beulah is a proud mother of Jack. He is a solution to all their problems and is always bold, right and strong. She is sure and affirms, “Doing the Lord’s work along his way he will never fail us though”\textsuperscript{59}. His uncles and aunts are all praise for Jack. They see all virtues in Jack, especially family values. Before leaving for pen, Jack had married Gloria who is now mother to Lady May. Gloria is also waiting for Jack to join the family. She is waiting for the moment Jack reaches home.

Jack comes home as per the expectations of all who had gathered for the reunion. The same day there is a burial of one Miss. Julia Mortimer who earlier taught at Banner School. She

\textsuperscript{58} Welty, Eudora, \textit{Loosing Battles}, Random House, 1970, p. 4
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 7
was the person behind the successful life of Gloria. Gloria was raised as orphan and Miss. Julia arranged for her studies and her teacher’s training. She advised Gloria to teach throughout her life and never to marry. However, Gloria chose the other course. Shortly after becoming teacher she got married to Jack. The Story takes a slight turn here. Judge Moody and his wife happen to pass through Banner country and their car gets stuck in an attempt to save Gloria who was standing on the road. Jack was also there. In fact, on the way back to home from pen Jack helped out the same car to come out of ditch on the road. At that time he did not recognize Judge Moody. Jack was not comfortable with the feeling of helping a person who sent him to Pen. But now he provided was all help to Judge Moody as the car got stuck on the road side in an attempt to save Jack’s wife. When Jack’s attempts failed to bring out the car, he invites Judge Moody and Mrs. Moody to the reunion where they spend the night. In the morning, again, there was an attempt to bring back the car from bushes on the road side. Curly also joins with his truck according to the promise he made on previous day while he was passing by the spot. Curly’s character is shown that of a greedy person who always helps on counting and increasing his money. He settles
the deal for three dollars. Jack works for free considering it as his moral duty to help out anybody in genuine need of it.

The central theme of the novel is celebration of life. Jack who is the protagonist is depicted as a person who is full of hope in life in spite of problems which come along. Gloria, the main female protagonist also believes in a life full of colours and variety. In the face of difficulties she is always looking forward to a time when she, her husband and her daughter will start a life of their own. She defies the advice of her mentor Julia, to continue teaching and never to marry, for she believes in celebration of life rather that wasting it on some principles of austerity. Granny, above all is the oldest living example of celebration of life in the family. At the age of ninety, she is so full of life that like a child she is waiting for her great grandchild, Jack, who is reaching home on her birthday. Beulah, mother of Jack is another example of a character who values celebration of life. Rather than grieving for her eldest son who is in Pen, she is jubilant for his arrival. She is vividly aware of good qualities of her son. Her emotions are best expressed when she shouts “My boy’s coming! My boy’s coming! He’s coming to surprise Granny – we just somehow know it”\(^\text{60}\).

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 10
Aunt Birdie who is the wife of Jack’s uncle, Dolphus Beecham, cries in the ear of Granny, “happy birthday, Granny! Jack’s coming! Won’t that make up for every thing?” Her cry is so loud that Granny announces that her ears are perfectly good. The kind of excitement, the whole family is displaying on expected arrival of the eldest son in the family speaks for itself. Again and again, message is clear that life is for celebration and not for mourning on the sad events. Beulah elucidates the character of Jack by contrasting it with that of his younger brother, Vaughan. She says about Vaughan, “He will never be Jack, says the wrong thing, does the wrong thing, doesn’t do what I tell him. And perfectly satisfied to have you say so!” she further goes on to say that her oldest boy never unduly cared for pencil or paper but he cannot forget Granny’s birthday. When asked by Cleo how old Jack was, Miss Beulah says he is of size of his father but he is all Beacham, every inch of him.

Another characteristic of Jack which Miss. Buelah describes is that he holds family and especially all ladies in great respect. This was drummed into him right from childhood.

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61 Ibid., p. 10
62 Ibid., p. 12
Talking about the case against Jack, his uncle Curities says that Jack had acted the only way a brother and son could act and has done what any good Mississippi boy would have done in his place.

One incident about escape of Jack from Fox town Jail where he was under-trial narrates his character very well. He digs his way under a brick wall and uselessly comes to a fire station. On being questioned for reason for his jail breaking he said quite frankly that he is a farmer and further added, ‘I got my daddy’s hay to get in barn, his syrup to grind, his hog to kill, his cotton to pick and the rest of it, his seed in the ground for next year. And I got my schooling to finish. I can’t be here to sit and swing my foot while you scare up somebody to try me’. One of the jail mates told him, “we don’t keep room in the Fox Town jail for the likes of you country boys”\textsuperscript{63}. He was allowed to go on the conditions of appearing before the court when trial takes place.

Jack’s sense of duty towards his family, simplicity of character, desire to study and detestation for idle life – when he says he can’t sit and swing his foot here in the jail till his trial begins – shows that he believes in the celebration of life and not

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 44-45
in just passing it. When asked what he would like to do before court hearing comes up, Jack’s quick reply was that he would marry. This again shows that Jack is a man full of dreams and he would like to celebrate life even when he knows that most likely he may go to jail after trial.

The novelist dwells on another theme that is about the way judiciary functions. Judge Moody was not willing to listen to the root cause of fight between Jack and Curly in the Curly’s store. The bone of contention was ring and in this case Curly was the culprit as out of greed he took away the golden ring from the hand of Miss. Fay, Jack’s sister. The whole fight started on the issue of snatching of ring by Mr. Curly who is also the Marshal. Rather than coming to the point of ring Justice Moody was preoccupied with the respect which Jack lacked while dealing with the Marshal. Jack made a request to judge Moody: “Judge, if you reckon to do justice to Curly, you got to see him in Banner. The best place is his own store, and the best time is Saturday!”\footnote{Ibid., p. 57}. Judge Moody rejected the idea saying, ‘I am doing the justice around here. When I need outside help, I will ask for it, what if he is aggravating!’ The judiciary was more busy in keeping the
respect for law than using law for justice. The judge punished Jack for aggravated battering and robbery. Mr. Curly is left scot free and not punished for snatching the ring. The original act of snatching the ring by Mr. Curly was not even discussed whereas the act of retrieving the snatched ring was taken as offence. This was so because Mr. Curly was the Marshal.

Another theme which novelist highlights is the constant urge of Gloria to live separately as nuclear family with her husband and daughter. She expresses it more than once to Jack on his return from Pen. Jack tries to convince her that she should work with his mother in the kitchen. He thinks that it is his duty to take care of the elderly and old parents. Gloria thinks in terms of her devotion to Jack and bringing up of her daughter. This speaks of times in Southern America when joint families were giving place to nuclear family due to economic forces. Gloria is an example of manifestation of central qualities of human beings such as freedom, creativity constant search and transformation which was happening in society at large.

The novelist has brought out the life of a joint family in the countryside of Southern America along with values of those times. Family values such as respect for age, untiring and caring
mother in Beulah, ideal son who is always respectful to elders, hardworking and a dutiful brother and husband in the Jack, have been portrayed eloquently. In short the novel is an ideal expression of celebration of life. The last four lines of the novel are the strongest evidence of this,

“Bringing in the sheaves,

Bringing in the sheaves,

We shall come rejoicing

Bringing in the sheaves!”  

**The Optimist's Daughter**

The author in the novel, ‘The Optimist's Daughter’- describes the ideas and feelings which come up in the mind of Laurel, daughter of Judge McKelva, during the hospitalization of Mr. McKelva and after his death. These ideas and feelings are contrasted with those in the mind of Fay, the second wife of Mr. McKelva. Mr. McKelva who is about 70 years old and whose first wife Becky, is no more. He is led into the chamber of Dr. Courtland along with his daughter, Laurel and his wife, Fay. Dr. Courtland examines the eyes of Mr. McKelva. Mr. McKelva describes the reason of his eye problem due to the pruning of rose

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65 Ibid., p. 436
in the garden which he does every year on George Washington's birthday. On thorough examination, Dr. Courtland diagnoses it as a slipping of right retina. An operation is suggested to rectify the same. Fay, from the very beginning is not in favour of operation and suggested that nature is the great healer. Mr. McKelva takes a decision and asks the doctor how soon it can be done and said that he has full confidence in Dr. Courtland. Dr. Courtland points out that the result of the operation is, of course, not hundred percent predictable. Mr. McKelva remarked that he is optimist and that he would come for the operation. Fay remarks here that though doctor is very polite his bill may not be so. Dr. Courtland operates upon Mr. McKelva and thereafter he is brought to the room for complete rest for next few days. Fay and Laurel attend on him. He keeps on lying still without moving. According to Fay, Laurel's presence was unsolicited and there was not necessity of it. Laurel who was working in Chicago joined her father to be with him during the treatment period. Laurel used to read books for her father while he would lie still in the bed. Fay was always out when Laurel was attending on her father. After some time Mr. Dalzell who was a fellow Mississippian of Mr. McKelva comes to share the same room in the hospital. Mr.
Dalzell was obsessed with one thought and would ask his son, Archie Lee, to load the gun. After some days, Mr. Dalzell is taken away from the room.

Laurel while sitting at the bed side of her father used to wonder that at nearly seventy, how her father let a beginner walk in his life as his wife since Fay was only about forty. Right from the day one, Laurel and Fay were not in rapport. With each other during the conversation Fay told Laurel that none of her family members were living.

One day, Fay walked around Judge McKelva's bed and cried for his attention. She stood on one foot and held one shoe above his face in the air. Such behavior was totally out of place. Other day, when Laurel was about to enter her father's room she halted hearing a voice 'I tell you enough is enough, this is my birthday'. The next moment Laurel saw the nurse rushing into the room and coming back. Fay got free from the nurse and ran down the corridor, knocking Laurel down. This behaviour of Fay shocked the nurse and she wondered whether Fay wanted to ruin the eye of her husband. The nurse narrated the incident to Laurel. Laurel went inside the room and touched her father on his wrist and then passed over her hand over the eye with delicacy. Dr.
Courtland raising both his hands helped Laurel outside the door and said that there is no time to lose. He closed the door. Fay and Laurel were sent to the waiting room. Fay was crying on a woman's bosom and saying that she was fed-up attending on Mr. McKelva. Laurel told Fay that doctor is operating upon her father and that they should just wait. When Laurel and Fay supported Dr. Courtland in the doorway and reached near him he took them into the hall. He informed them that Mr. McKelva could not be saved and that he has expired. Thereafter both Fay and Laurel reached Mississippi and dead body of Mr. McKelva is sent by Dr. Courtland for burial ceremony to Mississippi. After reaching their house at Mississippi Fay, Laurel and neighbours were waiting for the dead body to be prepared by one Mr. Pitts. Miss Adele Courtland, sister of Dr. Courtland, Tish Block, Mrs. Tennyson - Tish's mother and others reached the house to console Laurel and Fay. Mr. Pitts inquires from Laurel as to where the body of her father be kept and in what way it should be displayed before it goes for the burial services.

Laurel is left around as her mother died few years back and Fay is no company to her. At one point when Laurel was sitting at her old place at the dining table while everybody was waiting for
her, Fay comes and asks ‘What are all these people doing in my house?’ Fay was brought to them and informed them that she has nothing to do with Laurel's mother Becky's garden club of which they were members. Laurel gets up and informs Fay that they are all father’s friends and they count on them. Even after this Fay does not join them. Fay goes to her room and she comes quite late on the next day. Fay’s father, mother and brothers also come on hearing the news of death of Mr. McKelva and Laurel is surprised to see them since Fay had told her earlier that she has nobody in her family. Many people came to pay respects to the dead body of Mr. McKelva. Laurel wanted that the face of her father be covered from the visitors. However, Fay intervened and said that it should be kept open. Fay comes very late after her mother Mrs. Chison and her family had long arrived. The coffin is taken to the church and there it is buried at a place other than where Laurel’s mother was buried few years back. Fay wanted that he should be buried at a different place. After the ceremony everybody comes back home. Fay goes to Madrid along with her family and Laurel is left alone in the house. Laurel who was married to one, Mr. Phillip, was already a widow. Now Laurel was moving from one room of the house to another and was
preoccupied with her loneliness as her husband, her mother and her father all left her. Six ladies who were flower girls of Laurel came and tried to console her and in the evening again Laurel is left alone. Laurel has to go to her job back at Jackson where she was working on drawing and painting before she came to attend her father. Fay was supposed to come back before Laurel leaves for Jackson. While moving in the house Laurel spots a bird in the house which was fluttering its wings and was moving from room to room. The bird sat on the curtain of a door and was making sounds by fluttering its wings. It wanted to escape. In the meanwhile Laurel opened a cabinet in her mother's room and reads the letter written by her father to her mother which is placed in the drawer. She recalls the lack of attention which her father had towards her mother. During those days she had the feeling that her father was really modest. She also knows that he loved her mother.

The day Laurel was to leave for Jackson, Mr. Cheek who looks after job of mending wooden fittings such as door and windows etc. came to the house and asked Laurel whether anything needed to be done. Laurel tells him that a bird came from chimney and he may help in getting it out of the house. Mr.
Cheek remarks that a bird in the house is a sign of bad luck and he starts catching the bird. After some efforts he catches it and sends it out. Mr. Cheek before leaving the house asked Laurel not to waste time and find some nice person and marry him. Laurel keeps quiet. He proposes that he is one such person. Laurel does not respond and he goes out.

Laurel found the letters her father wrote to her mother. She recollects the days when her mother was confined to bed and she used to talk to her. She hears a sound in the kitchen when she goes there she finds a bread board. Fay had come back. Laurel asks Fay how the bread board got cracks and so much dust on it. It should have been cleaned. Fay protested that. Laurel had no business to interfere in these matters. Laurel becomes emotional and tells Fay that this bread board was made by her husband who was expert in making such things. It was given as a gift to her mother and her mother liked it. Again altercation starts between Fay and Laurel. In the mean while, Mrs. Tish arrives with the car to pick up Laurel for her flight to Jackson. Laurel gets into the car and the car starts moving. The last thing which Laurel saw was Miss. Adele, one of her neighbours, and the first
graders whom she was teaching twinkling their hands to say good-bye.

The main theme of the novel is the relationship of a daughter and her step mother. The step mother, Fay who is about forty years old, comes in the life of Judge McKelva when he is around seventy years old and his daughter, Laurel is in her middle forties. Laurel’s mother had died of ailment. Right from the beginning when Mr. McKelva goes to see the doctor Courtland along with his second wife, Fay and his daughter, Laurel, the relationship between Laurel and her step mother is not smooth. The behaviour of Fay with her husband and in the hospital where he is recuperating after the operation is totally out of place. She looks upon her husband as a person who should provide her company under any circumstances. She is fond of going out to the fair and Mr. McKelva being in the hospital is a hindrance in her way. Out of her frustration one day she goes to her husband who is lying on the bed and jolts him. This handling of her makes him to go in for operation again where from his dead body only comes.

Contrary to this, Laurel attends to her father like a devoted daughter. She reads books for him, takes care that he remains
fully at rest and she is always concerned about the improvement in his eye. After the death of her father she spends long time in the house by going from one room to another and recollecting the days when her mother was alive. Laurel is down to earth and honest. This was clear from her statement when some people who came to pay respect to her father near his coffin said so many good things about him and Laurel intervened that there is no necessity of saying such things. She wanted that only those things should be said for which her father stood throughout his life. It was incredible to Laurel that her father at such an old age would allow the stranger like Fay to walk in his life.

Laurel goes to the room of her mother and takes out papers from the cupboard. These were the letters her father wrote to her mother. She is nostalgic about things and feelings associated with her mother. Particularly, Laurel was highly emotional when she saw the breadboard in neglect. This breadboard was made by her husband and given as gift to her mother. At the end of the novel just before the departure of Laurel to Jackson the tiff between Laurel and Fay on the condition of this breadboard clearly illustrated the relationship between a daughter and step-mother. Fay had no consideration for the emotions and feelings of her step
daughter, Fay did not even bother about the feelings of Laurel’s mother and husband who were no more.

In the novel the author has brought out few smaller themes. One of them is about Doctors and Nurses. One of the woman characters, Tish, says that it was too bad that Judge McKelva decided to go to the hospital. Another character, Mrs. Chisom says that the things in the hospital were very funny. Another character pointed out that in maternity ward they find even curly hair. Doctors want only money for what they are doing. They only know how to charge a hefty sum of amount. Nurses should not be trusted even for a second. Such comments about doctors and nurses of the day show the kind of reputation they had in those times. The element of satire and humour is perceptible in these descriptions.

Another theme which is brought out clearly is that in the novel, people who come to see the dead body before the funeral say things that make sincere people uneasy. For example, people who came to see the dead body of Judge McKelva used words such as he was a humorist, a crusader and an angel on the face of Earth. Major Bullock, one of his neighbours, describes him as a very daring person who dares ruffians to shoot him. This
prompted Laurel to intervene and say that ‘Father really was modest’.

In this novel, Eudora Wetly brings out in a very delicate way the theme of telling a lie and on being caught offering justification for the same rather than feeling sorry. Fay tells Laurel when they met first during the marriage of Fay and her father that she has no family members any more. Laurel was surprised to see Fay’s parents and other members of her family on the occasion of her father’s funeral. When Laurel confronted Fay before her departure to Jackson and asked her, ‘What made you tell me what you did about your family? The time in the Hibiscus’. She asked her that you said you had nobody in the family and, therefore, you lied about your family. Fay replied shamelessly that what is wrong about it and added that everybody else does it. Why she should not do and added further that this lie was better than some lies she had heard around here. This episode illustrates that morals and ethics regarding telling lies were very low at least among the ladies of that time. Rather than going by the sense of right or wrong they preferred to go by the sense of convenience or inconvenience.
Laurel at one point in her introspection comes to the conclusion that basic issue between Fay and Laurel’s mother, Becky, is not of rivalry between the two; it is not between living and dead or between the old one and the new. It is, basically, between too much love and too little. And this is the bitterest rivalry. Laurel has the fond feelings about her late husband, Mr. Phillip. She realizes that she grew in a kind of shyness that takes its shelter in giving refuge. Until she knew Phillip, she thought of love as shelter. But he assured that this may not be so. She learned to work by working beside him. He always got moral satisfaction by putting things together and he always wanted to see a thing finished. Laurel is having the guilt of outliving those she loved; she thought fantasies of dying can be stronger than the fantasies of living. Surviving is probably the strongest fantasy of all.