Chapter I

WOMAN IN WESTERN DRAMA

The portrayal of woman in western drama since the classic age of Greece to the modern era offers a varied and interesting spectrum. Many a great dramatist of the occident has concerned himself with women's plight and pathos, agony and anguish, aspirations and frustrations. No wonder, then, western drama presents a large number of striking females who compel our admiration. They reflect not only the spirit of their socio-cultural milieux but also the burning issues of their times. Though every playwright in a particular period has looked at the female with the ideological considerations of his age, sociological background of contemporary life and psychological state of his characters, yet it is possible to trace some common characteristics in the women of each important epoch of western drama.

I

Woman occupies a significant place in the ancient Greek as well as Roman drama. The Greek masters—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—who are credited with delineating first fully rounded females, saw embodied in woman "the dominant traits, the great virtues, the terrors and desires that belong to all mankind and make the unchanging pattern of human life." As writers of humanistic drama, they invested
her with such attributes as courage, loyalty, honour, jealousy and passion, that is, the attributes they thought were manifest in gods and goddesses. These Greek dramatists, particularly Sophocles and Euripides, felt concerned at the social stratification and the low status of women in society. Euripides, for instance, gives expression to the anguish of women through Medea when she exclaims:

Oh women, of all creatures that live and reflect, certainly, it is we who are most luckless. First of all, we pay a heavy price to purchase a husband, and thus submit our bodies to a perpetual tyrant. And everything depends upon whether our choice is good or bad... A man who is disgusted with what he finds at home goes forth to put an end to his boredom, and turns to a friend or companion of his own age. While we at home continue to think of him, and of him alone. And yet people say we live in security at home, while the men go forth to War. How wrong they are! Listen, I'd rather be sent three times over to the battlefront than give birth to a single child.

These dramatists believed that society would become better if women were allowed to exercise their humanizing influence. In order to present the case of womanhood, they created women who were complete persons rather than just abstract figures. In making them life-like, however, they made them capable of good as well as of evil.

A curious fact about the women in the Greek classical drama is that most of them are unhappy and a great part of their unhappiness is the result of men's selfishness, perfidy, and cruelty. In the male-dominated society they are denied
any opportunity of self-expression and fulfilment. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, Sophocles' Dejaneira and Euripides' Medea —
to name only a few — are victims of men's waywardness and perversity. Agamemnon sacrifices his maiden daughter
Iphigenia to propitiate the gods so that his ships could sail to Troy. Clytemnestra has not been able to forget that
pain when, to add insult to the injury, he brings home the
Trojan princess, Cassandra, as a concubine. Dejaneira suffers
emotional crisis when her husband, the demigod Heracles, sends
home for himself a young beauty. She seems to be speaking
for all such women as suffer because of men's infidelity
when she articulates her feelings:

...to share
my home, my husband, with her! where is the
woman that could endure it?

Penon's woes also emanate from the falsity of Jason, who
decides to desert her and marry a Corinthian princess in
order to attain power and influence.

The sufferings of these women bear ample evidence
to the fact that marriage for them is not an experience to
enjoy but rather a fate to endure. While a woman must
confine herself to her husband for her emotional fulfilment,
the man enjoys the prerogative of having sexual fulfilment
through infidelity. Not only that, the society permits the
injustice of an old man marrying a young woman. In
Euripides, for instance, Euripides dramatizes the emotional
frustration of youthful Phaedra, who is bound in a tepid and meaningless marriage to the aging king Theseus. Unrequited largely in her physical relationship with her husband, she desperately falls in love with his son, Hippolytus, who is a man of her own years. But the moral code according to which she has to live can never permit her any emotional release other than the one sanctioned by her marriage. She must smother her physical urges or perish.

Another dimension to the sufferings of the women of the Attic drama is that they are victims of the monstrosities of the rulers. Sophocles' Electra and Antigone are cases in point. Electra is the object of ill-treatment and persecution of her mother, Clytemnestra, and her paramour, Aegisthus, since she cannot reconcile herself to the murder of her father. And Antigone incurs King Creon's wrath because she defies his edict by giving burial to her brother, Polyneices. But both Electra and Antigone are invested with an unyielding and uncompromising spirit and bear heroically the atrocities unleashed on them.

Furthermore, the women in the Greek classic drama suffer on account of the impetuosity of the men. The men engage themselves in wars and concomitant bloodshed and destruction, but it is the women who suffer the aftermath. Euripides in The Trojan Women dramatizes the agony and
sufferings of the women as a result of the long war between the Greeks and the Trojans. Troy has fallen; its men are dead and its shrines have been desecrated. The women bewail their fate and await enslavement. Hecuba, her daughters, and daughter-in-law must suffer the ignominy of serving their Greek masters as mistresses, and Hector's son must be hurled from dizzy heights to prevent his growing up into an avenger of his people. Never since Suriptides has there been such an anguished cry for oppressed womanhood as is manifest in Hecuba's monologues.

The frustrations and sufferings of the females in the ancient Greek drama invariably lead to death and violence. A woman may suffer acutely on account of man's arrogance, wilfulness, and tyranny for a time, but eventually, her hysterical passion gets the better of her reason and then she avenges herself unflinchingly on those who have wronged her. Driven too hard she may well become a demon of fury and hatred and in her despair destroy as well as be destroyed.

Indeed, Medea understands the psychology of a woman when she says:

For though a woman is timid in everything else and weak, and terrified at the sight of a sword: still when things go wrong... no heart is so fearless as a woman's: no heart is so filled with the thought of blood.4

Clytemnestra and Medea, who have been grievously hurt by their husbands, steel themselves for their revenge. Clytemnestra
lays her plans and kills her haughty and egotistic husband, Agamemnon, just as he returns victorious from Troy. Coming out of the palace, she proudly proclaims:

Look: this is Agamemnon, my husband, dead, struck down by my right hand,...
Here lies the man who scorned me, me, his wife, the fool and tool of every shameless woman beneath Troy's walls.

Medea, prompted by the threat of exile and furious with jealousy, kills the Corinthian princess whom Jason intends to marry and the princess's father, Creon, by means of a poisoned robe, and then she slays her own children. Dejanira, actuated by jealousy and troubled by the irreconcilable thought of sharing her marital bliss with another woman, kills her husband, though inadvertently, and then stabs herself. Phaedra takes out her feeling of dissatisfaction on Hippolytus, who has scorned her love, and makes him die a supernatural death. Shamed by her own guilty passion, she, too, commits suicide. Electra, relentless and inexorable, succeeds in putting an end to her mother and Aegisthus with the help of her brother, Orestes. Antigone, incarcerated in a cave by the king's decree to await a slow death, hangs herself.

In the Greek classic drama, therefore, suffering is the ineluctable fate of a woman, the only surcease of which is death. She is placed in a situation in which her overmastering passions make any choice impossible. Whether she lives according to the established conventions or transgresses them, the
inevitable outcome is deep anguish and agony. Her heroic struggles for justice and self-fulfilment end in violence, death, and bereavement.

The Roman dramatists of the classical age copied themes and characters from their Greek predecessors. For instance, Seneca based his dramas like Medea, Phaedra, The Trojan Women, etc., on themes borrowed from Euripides. His dramas are distinguished for their rhetorical and melodramatic situations but woefully lack the sensibility of characterization, which was the hallmark of the Greek drama. It is, however, in the dramas of Plautus and Terence that we get an original and more authentic portrayal of the female. These dramatists present a woman as a woman and her sex is never in the background of the picture. She lives strictly according to a code of honour like her Greek counterpart. "A hard and fast division of ethics into male and female received its final consummation in Rome. The double standard which has been the world's standard for all these centuries since, is formulated, complete to the last detail, in Roman comedy," Hamilton points out. The society educated her that her supreme duty was to be chaste. It is, however, surprising that she does not decry the expectations that the society has of her, but even exceeds and exalts these. The story of the Roman girl Lucretia, who kills herself after she is violated by force and the story, even more popular, of Virginia whom her father
kills with his own hand rather than have her live as the tyrant's mistress, bear eloquent testimony to the importance of chastity in the Roman world. Alcina's speech in Plautus' Amphitryon best characterizes virtues manifest in a Roman woman:

The real dowry I brought you was not gold but purity, honour, self-control and reverence for the gods, my parents too, Love to all my kin, obedience to my husband, serving him in true faithfulness.

The Roman women are set apart from their Greek counterparts in nothing so much as in their attitude to male domination. While the Greek female protagonists, like Clytemnestra, protest against the perfidy and falsity of the male, the Roman women, true to their training, overlook vices in men. The idea that men's pleasures should be curtailed never enters their mind. Similarly, unlike the Greek women such as Helen, they do not raise a voice against the dichotomy of male and female roles. They tacitly accept men's position as superior to their own in the hierarchy of nature. Their obsession with feminine purity and honour implies their acceptance of the role which society has determined for them.

II

The females of the Renaissance drama, which forms the next significant phase of western drama, are distinguished by the intensity of passion. The great dramatists of the
Renaissance Age devoted themselves to the intensities of human experience and complexities of human personality. The most remarkable feature of the Renaissance drama is the "pursuit of happiness... and ecstasy of release and passion" which finds ample expression in the females of the Italian, Spanish, and English playwrights. Genuine passion marks the heroines of the Italian playwrights. In Tassino's first classic tragedy _Sofonisba_, composed in 1515, Sofonisba, daughter of the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal, though betrothed to the East Numidian prince Masinissa, is married to the king of Western Numidia. Unable to bear frustration in love, Sofonisba ends her life by consuming poison. In Lodovico Dolce's _Mariana_, which resembles Shakespeare's _Othello_, Mariana is a passionately virtuous woman who becomes a victim of her husband Herod's inordinate jealousy. Though she is unswerving in her loyalty and devotion to Herod, he kills her, her supposed lover, his two sons by her, and her mother.

The leading playwrights of the Spanish Renaissance, viz., Lope de Vega and Calderon de la Barca portray women with characteristic Spanish attributes of passion and honour. In one of his plays _Punishment Without Revenge_, which deals with the old Hippolytus theme of Euripides' tragedy, Lope, for instance, delineates the conflict between passion and honour. The heroine, a typical Spaniard, is madly in love with the illegitimate son of her husband, the duke of Ferrara.
The illicit passion surges briefly in the self-righteous primitive society only to be smothered. Both the heroine and her paramour pay the price of transgressing the rigid moral code with their lives. In Calderon's The Wonder-Working Magician, a play which resembles Marlowe's Dr.Faustus, Justina is a virtuous maiden with a soul so pure and unspotted that the devil cannot tempt her. Finally she lays down her life for the sake of her honour. The heroines of these dramatists of the Spanish Golden Age have a long line of descendants on the stage. Even in modern drama Federico Garcia Lorca acknowledges their influence in the portrayal of such a heroine as Mariana Pineda who dies for the sake of her honour and love. Lorca's other heroines like Yemai and the Bride in Elogi Wedding, who manifest a conflict between passion and honour, have been inspired by the heroines of Lope and Calderon.

Although the English Renaissance gave birth to many playwrights of renown, it is William Shakespeare who stands head and shoulders above them all in the depth and sensibility of female portrayal. While many of his contemporaries either idealize women or hold them up to ridicule, Shakespeare avoids such two-dimensional stereotyping. Though not a crusader for the cause of women, like Euripides, he draws them with a great deal of compassion and sympathy. Appreciating the pathos of women who suffer at the hands of men, he makes Emilia in Othello exclaim:
Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them; they see and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour
As husbands have.

Then let them use us well: else let them know
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.9

Of course, he does not grant them equal status with men
because, as Angela Pitt observes:

...that would have been too much at variance
with their genuine position to be credible. It
was the way in which men and women influence
each other and the whole complex sphere
of human relationships that intrigued
Shakespeare — perhaps above any other
consideration...he tacitly accepts the
conservative idea of a hierarchy in nature
with man at the top and woman second.10

It is precisely because of his belief about a woman's secondary
position that in each of his four great tragedies — Othello,
Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth — the chief role belongs to a
man. It is only when the crisis arises out of mutual
passionate love, as in Anthony and Cleopatra and Romeo and
Juliet, that the heroines get the same degree of importance
as do their male counterparts. If women leap into prominence
in his comedies, it is because "Shakespeare found their
traditional attributes of modesty, intuition, and high-
spiritedness highly suitable material for his comedies, and
in varying blends and degrees, all his comic heroines have
these characteristics."11 In his tragedies and historical
plays women generally play secondary or at best crucial
supporting roles.
Shakespeare's tragic heroines suffer a great deal on account of men's jealousy, suspicion, waywardness, and impetuosity like the heroines of the ancient classical drama. Desdemona, Ophelia, and Cordelia, for instance, undergo agony of the mind and the body not because they have any intrinsic fatal flaw of the character but because their destinies are so closely linked to those of the tragic heroes. Desdemona, for instance, is a victim of Othello's relentless jealousy; Ophelia falls a prey to Hamlet's assumed madness; and Cordelia, the gentlest of all Shakespeare's heroines, is a victim of her father's unaccountable vanity and wrath. These unhappy women, tender and humane, undergo unmerited suffering before death comes to them as a welcome release from their enshrined existence.

If there is a woman in Shakespeare's tragedies who merits the end she encounters, it is Lady Macbeth. Resolute and unwavering, like Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, she is ferocious like a wolf. Her overvaulting ambition to see her husband crowned as a monarch is her fatal flaw since it overrides all other desires and considerations. In her horrendous brutality she invokes the dark powers to take away all compassion from her and fill her with unnatural cruelty. She mocks her husband for his effeminacy and cowardice and goads him into committing Duncan's murder. She is one with Clytemnestra in her single-
minded courage and savagery — qualities which are traditionally held to be possible in the male. So too she compares in her horrifying speech with the Cretian queen exulting in the stains of her husband's blood:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you Have done to this. 12

But before long Lady Macbeth suffers for her wickedness. Wretched and pitiful, she becomes a victim of her own reaction to the murder she had planned and desired above everything else:

Here's the smell of the blood still
All the perfumes of Arabia will not
Sweeten this little hand. 13

And it is precisely here that Shakespeare differs from the Greek tragedians. Whereas Clytemnestra's inner life was no concern of Aeschylus, Shakespeare incisively probes the inner recesses of Lady Macbeth's mind. The realization of guilt leads her to insanity, the only surcease of which is death. The fate of Shakespeare's heroines, like that of the tragic heroes, shows that "on every level of life...tragedy can provoke cruel and arbitrary judgements; integrity and loyalty are not proof against a violent death. Even if evil is punished, good is not necessarily rewarded." 14

Shakespeare had a number of illustrious contemporary dramatists like Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Thomas
Heywood, Thomas Middleton, John Webster, and others who portrayed compelling females though they could not match the depth, subtlety, and complexity of Shakespeare's characterization. What marks their women is the assertion of the personal will and the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfilment for the attainment of which they brook no resistance. A pertinent case

is Luaine, the heroine of Beaumont and Fletcher's The Maid's Tragedy. To seek emotional fulfilment with her husband, Amintor, she does not desist even from slaying the king. But when Amintor, horrified at her deed, spruns her love, she is left with no alternative but to end her own life.

Beatrice in Thomas Middleton's The Changeling is another manifestation of the vertiginous heights and depths of perverse passion. Having experienced the searing sensuousness of Le Flores, she finds her husband, Alseremo, only a faint taper. But such illicit passion cannot survive long in an ordered society; both Beatrice and Le Flores meet a violent end. Likewise, intense passion is the hallmark of John Webster's well-realized Vittoria in The White Devil. She is a remarkable woman who is all fire and spirit. Bound in a tepid marriage to the fatuous Camillo, she seeks emotional release with the dashing Duke Brachiano. She unflinchingly countenances the death of Camillo and Brachiano's duchess who stand in the way of her passion. Sure of her love, she is undaunted in spirit. She faces death fearlessly, troubled only by the thought that her love had to be stained with crime.
Apart from these women, there are Thomas Heywood's Anne in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* and countless others in the English Renaissance drama who are swept by the force of passion which is too strong to be contained within the bounds of rationality and conventionalism. Their passion, however, does not yield any fruit; instead it gives rise to much of their pathos and suffering and eventually leads to violence, bloodshed, and death.

To sum up, overbearing passion distinguishes the females of the Renaissance drama. The new principle of self-realization which animated the European age finds its eloquent expression in these women some of whom like Lady Macbeth, Evadne, and Vittoria are not wary even of committing murders in a bid to realize what they cherish most. However, some like Shakespeare's gentle heroines like Cordelia and Desdemona and Webster's Duchess of Malfi are passive sufferers.

III

In the post-Renaissance period, dramatists, especially in France, became more interested in creating men and women who were expected to act in conformity with the prevailing standards of conduct and who could make individual desire subservient to duty and passion subordinate to reason. Pierre Corneille in his plays like *The Cid*, *Horace*, *Polyeucte*, etc., draws women who uphold the ideal of honour and duty and set social obligation above personal impulses and emotions.
Needless to say, they suffer acute emotional crisis on account of the moral discipline they impose on themselves. A consummate representative of such women is Chimene, the heroine of The Cid, who demands the death of her lover, Rodrique, for he has slain her father. Her emotional attachment to Rodrique notwithstanding, she insists on taking his life as her filial duty requires. It is only when the king intervenes and Rodrique vanquishes her suitor, Don Sanche, in a duel that she consents to marry him and the crisis is resolved.

Unlike Corneille, who gave masculine names to his plays, Jean Racine, who was endowed with aesthetic sensibility and a deep insight into female psyche, named his tragedies after the feminine characters — Andromache, Iphigénie, Phédre, Jerémie, and so on. His women are invested with passions and emotions which cannot be dammed up by conventional morality and victorious reason. If Corneille dramatized the struggle between personal impulse and honour, Racine exemplifies the conflict between reason and irrational passion in his female protagonists. From his women's inability to liberate themselves from obsessions arise inner conflicts which are too intense, and agonizing to bear.

This is evident in two of his most famous plays, namely, Andromache and Phédre, the former dramatizes the inner conflict of two women, Andromache and Hermione. Andromache, the widow of the Trojan hero, Hector, vacillates between her deep loyalty to her dead husband's memory and her
profound concern for the safety of her son whom the Greeks are eager to destroy. Hermione is so much obsessed by an overmastering passion for Pyrrhus that she cannot bear to lose him at any cost. Eventually, when Andromache consents to marry Pyrrhus, Hermione unflinchingly employs Cretes to assassinate him and thus avenges herself on the men who had scorned her love. Unable to bear a life barren of love, she stabs herself. At the end, all those who had given way to passion are destroyed. It is only Andromache who remains because she alone has not been a passion's fool.

Phèdre, like Euripides' HIPPOLYTUS, deals with the sexual frustration of a woman. Phèdre, an emotionally starved woman married to the old king Theseus, develops an overbearing passion for her stepson HIPPOLYTUS. With remarkable psychological insight, Racine explores the recesses of Phèdre's mind and dramatizes the inner struggle between an overwhelming illicit passion and rationality. It is, however, passion which finally triumphs and Phèdre reveals her infatuation to Hippolytus, who, too honourable to succumb to temptation and shame his father, condemns her for nursing such impious emotions. In an agony of frenzied fury, she has him destroyed because she regards him as the cause of her suffering, and then she ends her own life.

Thus, "passion was the proper province of the playwright of whom it has been said that his female characters
were 'fair women full of Attic grace but lack the grace of God'....Racine, always a partial Calvinist, dramatized man's weakness, and the tragic failure of his characters in most of his plays represents the victory of passions over reason.\textsuperscript{15} But passions unrooted in an ordered society lead only to catastrophe. Not only are Racine's women, the bearers of passion, destroyed but also the men who are the objects of their infatuation.

Thus, there is a perceptible contrast between the heroines of Racine and Corneille's. Racine's heroines resemble Shakespeare's tragic heroes in their impulsive temperament and irrational passion. Corneille's women, on the other hand, take after the heroines of the playwrights of the Spanish Golden Age who give precedence to the ideals of honour and put social responsibility above personal fulfilment.

IV

The heroines of the Restoration pieces are unconventional; they are not troubled by any restraints of modesty or scruples of conscience. They are often flirtatious and scandal-mongering. They represent the moral decadence of the times as does the English Restoration drama, which mostly confined itself to the entertainment of the drinking and philandering gentry and in which affectation, rakishness, ribaldry, and obscenity became the rage. Instead of portraying memorable characters, the
Restorationists like Etherege, Wycherley, Dryden, Congreve, and others were content with presenting a vivid picture of the morally decayed upper-class sophisticated society.

While women of the English Restoration period are immodest, the heroines of the German drama of the latter half of the eighteenth century are endowed with a strong moral purpose. The Western Europe became predominantly middle-class as a result of the destruction of the last vestiges of feudalism. The end of monarchy in France was bound to have far-reaching consequences in the entire western world. Philosophers like Rousseau and iconoclasts like Voltaire struck at the roots of monarchy and established religion and acclaimed the principle of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Though Napoleon's military conquests were a severe set-back to the lofty ideals, yet the aspiration for a noble and progressive world was never given up. And it is precisely this aspiration which finds itself manifest in the heroines of the German Romantics, namely, Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe. Morally upright, these women suffer at the hands of petty despots. For instance, Lessing's middle-class Emilia, modelled upon the Roman maiden Virginia, in Emilia Galotti is caught in a hopeless situation of becoming a despot's mistress when her fiancé is assassinated. Realizing that there is no escape for her, she prevails upon her father to kill her. Through the dramatization of Emilia's tragedy, Lessing fired the first shot of romantic revolt against the ruthless despotism of
Germany. Similarly, Schiller ripped the mask off the face of corrupt aristocracy in Germany through the sufferings and travails of his heroine in the bourgeois tragedy *Intrigue and Love*. Goethe went a step further; he invested his best-realized heroine Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Tauris* with moral purpose. By appealing to the humanity of even a barbarian, like the Scythian king, she saves her brother, Orestes, and succeeds in removing the curse that rested on the house of Atreus. In Iphigenia's moral victory Goethe affirms his faith that man can gain salvation through self-renunciation.

It was thus in the latter half of the eighteenth century that middle-class women appeared on the stage for the first time. The dramatists, like Goethe, fired by the lofty ideals and aspirations of the times, talked of the practical problems of the women. In this respect they anticipated the efforts of the later playwrights, like Ibsen and Shaw, who pleaded the cause of women far more vociferously.

The portrayal of woman in modern western drama assumes many dimensions. As a result of the social, political, and economic changes brought about by the American and French Revolutions, playwrights, like Alexandre Dumas fils and Émile Aubier, showed "concern with relativistic morality, social reform, equality of sexes, and psychological problems." 16 A number of playwrights all over Europe felt concerned at the way women were
treated in society. They raised a powerful voice against the uneven scales of social morality and the double standards of society which favoured men at the expense of women and their self-realization.

Alexandra Dumas fils was one of the chief playwrights who played a pivotal role in advocating the cause of women by dramatizing their suffering and frustration. His *The Lady of the Camellias*, for instance, is the story of the pathos of a courtesan who finds herself an anachronism in society. Her suffering does not spring so much from her exclusion from society as from the vacuum and lack of compassion that she finds in the world. She is deeply troubled by the reflection that she is completely shut out from the world of action and has to live in a society where everything is false. In the despair of his heroine is apparent Dumas' loathing for the sham and deceit of the society.

Dumas fiercely attacked the notorious social injustices against women and demanded the abrogation of the sections of law which aggravated their problems. It was, perhaps, the result of his untiring efforts that divorce was legalized in France in 1834, and the community showed greater respect to unmarried mothers and illegitimate children. Martin Lama also recognizes that "in spite of the narrowness of the social interests, Dumas did undoubtedly pave the way for reforms in the status of women. He considered that existing laws, framed by men for men, weighed most unjustly against women." It
must, however, be conceded that at times in his zeal to champion women's cause, he went to the illogical extremes as in The Natural Son where he suggested that illegitimate children were more gifted and talented than the legitimate ones.

Unfortunately, Dumas could not sustain his campaign for women with this peculiar steadfastness. On the contrary, his attitude underwent a radical change. He thought that dissolution of the family life was responsible for the defeat of France in the war of 1870 and made it the subject of his play, Claude's Wife. In this play he paints a wife who represents moral corruption which has been the cause of France's decline and ruin. In his hatred for women, he went a step further in The Fair Stranger in which the heroine, a half-negress, foreshadows Ibsen's women for her inordinate hatred of men and an inexorable desire for vengeance against them.

Friedrich Hebbel, the German playwright, was another crusader for the female cause who attacked the double standards of society and the false code of honour which exacerbated the sufferings of women. His masterpiece domestic tragedy, Maria Magdalena, anticipates the social drama of Ibsen in that it deals with some of the women's problems which are fundamental to our whole conception of society. Its heroine, Klara, a young unmarried girl, conceives with her fiance who later abandons her and she is forced to throw herself into a well lest her father
be disgraced for the "stigma" she carries. The problem, basically, in Maria Magdalena is the same as in some of Ibsen's and Lorca's social plays, namely, the inhumanity of conventional morals. Women have to suffer and sacrifice in order that men may preserve a facade of false decency and honour.

The developments in France and the dramas of ideas could not leave the English playwrights unaffected. Notably two of them – C. M. Robertson and Arthur Wing Pinero — wrote domestic dramas dealing with the problems of women. Robertson's School assaults the doll-house convention when Lord Beauchamp shocks the Victorian audience by declaring that he does not want a doll for his wife. And Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray describes the pathos of Paula, a married woman with a stained past. Her efforts to adjust herself to respectable society are admirable, but she lacks the courage of some of Ibsen's women, like Nora, to break with convention. Conventional morality wins the battle when Paula ends her life by consuming poison.

The ideas of Ducat fils and Hebbel were bound to influence playwrights elsewhere in the western world. Besides, in 1869, John Stuart Mill published his Subjection of Women, which was subsequently translated in many European languages. Mill protested against the subjugation of women in domestic life and advocated an alliance of equals on a sound basis of justice and equal opportunities. Practically throughout Europe
the movement for the emancipation of women was gaining momentum. Two contemporary Norwegian playwrights, namely, Bjornstjerne Bjornson and Henrik Ibsen, took up the feminine cause and rebelled against the double standard and conventional morals of society which prevented women from attaining self-fulfilment. Their plays delineate the suffering and pathos of women who feel oppressed and suffocated in society the values of which are determined by men.

Bjornson started a debate on the problem of marriage in his novel <i>Haeghild</i>. The heroine, frustrated in a loveless marriage, anticipates Ibsen's Nora. She despises her fatuous and disagreeable husband, abandons him, and escapes to the freedom and unconventionality of America. Like Lamartine, Bjornson raised his voice against the practice of applying a different set of morals for men and women and, like his French predecessor, he wanted that there should be a uniform moral code for both the sexes. He made his plea the subject of the feminist play, <i>Leonarda</i>. Reine divorced, Leonarda is not received at the Bishop's house but General Rosen, whose moral turpitude is no secret, is welcome at the place. As a result of the dogmatic morality, Leonarda is enslaved to her sinful husband and is constrained to bear her frustration and suffering. Bjornson, no doubt, pleaded that a woman whose marriage is not a real one should abandon it rather than continue to countenance a false situation.
The playwright who supported the cause of women far more vigorously than Lucan fils and Hobbes was Henrik Ibsen. He was convinced that no civilization could progress if half of its race lived in legal bondage and subjugation. He believed, like Euripides, that civilization could be saved only by women because "they were less directly attached to the world of venal enterprise and it was from mothers that man first received his training. Women, in short, were to become the 'pillars of society':" 18

Ibsen portrays women with a tremendous sense of revolt against a society in which economic and social functions are largely male prerogatives. His women embody a protest against subscription to dead old beliefs and conventions and cry for light. Mrs. Alving in Ghosts might be speaking for all of them when she exclaims:

...the longer I live the more convinced I am that we are all haunted...by the ghosts of innumerable old prejudices and beliefs... and we cannot get rid of them. The whole world is haunted by those ghosts of the dead past.... Oh! if we only had the courage to sweep them all out and let in the light. 19

Most of his women defy conventional morality and endeavour to find their own way in life. Ibsen attempts to project a "new woman" who is no longer subservient to man but is his equal in all walks of life: social, economic, and intellectual.

In some of his plays like A Doll's House, Ghosts, and Hedda Gabler, Ibsen challenges the outmoded social traditions
and conventional ideas of marriage according to which a woman's place is beside her husband, no matter what he is and how he treats her. Nora Helmer, Hedda Gabler, and Mrs. Alving, for example, are caught in unhappy conjugal relationships in which they feel suffocated because it does not allow them any scope for self-expression. Nora in *A Doll's House* has had no opportunity to grow in maturity and practical wisdom because before marriage her life was sheltered and protected by her father and after marriage, by her husband. She becomes conscious of the inequality of her social position when even her self-effacing gesture of helping her husband is misinterpreted by him. "His righteous indignation untainted by the awareness of the essential magnanimity of Nora's deed convinces Nora that her marriage has been built on false premises, and she departs to find her identity in the world outside."20 Her slamming the door behind her is symbolic of her repudiation of the conventional concept of marriage.

In *Ghost*, Mrs. Alving's frustration is the result of her meaningless and unnatural marriage to the wayward and syphilitic Mr. Alving. Ibsen demonstrates what happens when Mrs. Alving submits to social convention in contrast to Nora's refusal to submit in *A Doll's House*. Mrs. Alving might have escaped the horrible consequences of her marriage if she had not accepted Manders' advice to return to her conjugal duties beside her husband in the name of traditional morality and
family honour. The fatal mistake which she committed by consenting to stay with Mr. Alving brings on the final catastrophe. Her only son, Oswald, not only follows his father's footsteps in having sexual relations with a housemaid but also bears the hereditary venereal disease which precipitates the destruction of his mind.

Hedda Gabler, too, is a maladjusted woman whose personality has been warped by a loveless and unpromising marriage to the pedantic scholar, George Tesman. She cannot adapt herself to the dull and stolid middle-class life to which she has bound herself by this marriage because it allows her no outlet for her natural talents and individuality. Her temperament and superior intellect hardly fit her for the passive role of a housewife. Unlike the middle-class women who occupy themselves with the rearing of children, Hedda finds procreation repugnant. She might have been happy with Silert Lovborg, another brilliant mind, if her life had not been warped and frustrated by bourgeois taboos and if she had been allowed to live according to the urges of her inner being. In her frustration Hedda, like a strindbergian woman, contemplates the destruction of Silert Lovborg, her one-time admirer, and motivates him to a wild orgy of drinking and suicide. Later, to escape the ignominious consequences of her own involvement in his suicide, she shoots herself.
Thus, though Ibsen fights for the "superior woman" - the woman of intellect and imagination - "none of his heroines of this type [Nora Helmer, Mrs. Alving, Hedda Gabler] achieve happiness through their revolt or attempted revolt.... Ibsen battles to emancipate woman but fails to offer a convincing picture of her taking her place alongside man and achieving her proper intellectual and social fulfillment."21

George Bernard Shaw resembles Ibsen most in his attitude towards women. His heroines, like Ibsen's, are invested with the attributes of strong will and clear intelligence. Besides, like Ibsen, he advocates the plea for woman's uninhibited self-realization. But "Shaw was not content, as Ibsen was, to ask a question; he also wanted to give the answer. Shaw is a playwright with a strongly marked sense of purpose, even though in the interests of dramatic tension he does not always allow this purpose to become too obvious."22 Therefore, while Ibsen hesitates to provide a convincing picture of woman's place alongside man, Shaw, in a fairly facile way, explains how she can achieve her social and intellectual fulfillment. For instance, Nora suffers disillusionment and has to leave her home to find her identity while Candida, her counterpart in Shaw, discovers it without undergoing any painful process. Unlike Nora, she maintains that wifehood essentially embraces the duties of a mother and that the secret of happiness lies in being needed. Candida decides to stay with the preacher, Morel, not for
conventional male protection but because she realizes that
he needs her more than the young poet, Kerchbanks, does. Thus,
the concept of "new woman" that Ibsen propounded finds
complete realization in the figure of Candida. She is
certainly the "new woman" in the home and she is so "new"
that she is really old and eternal, and even by conformity
to convention she can achieve self-fulfilment.

Vivie in Mrs. Warren's Profession is also a well-
delineated young woman who, too, reminds one of Ibsen's
women of sharp intellect and strong will. She is shocked when
she learns that her mother's affluence is based on the sordid
business of prostitution. She resolutely declines to accept
the ill-gotten wealth, separates from her mother, and chooses
the independent career of a statistician. She is a manifestation
of Shaw's plea for harmony between one's life and one's
beliefs.

Some of Shaw's women, like Major Barbara, signify a
protest against contemporary evils and beliefs of society.
Major Barbara realizes only too well that in a corrupted
social order everything is defiled to such an extent that
there is an urgent need to cleanse society. She is honest
enough to admit that the notorious industries like distilleries
and munition-making units generate more evil than a thousand
Salvation Armies can cancel. She realizes that "the evil to
be attacked is not sin, suffering, greed, priestcraft,
kingcraft, demagogy, monopoly, ignorance, drink, war,
pestilence, nor any other of scapegoats which reformers
sacrifice, but simple poverty." Therefore, adopting a more
realistic attitude, she turns her back on the Salvation Army,
determined to attack first the evil of poverty and to let
religion take a secondary place in her plans. Shaw's Joan
of Arc, despite being a historical figure from a hoary past,
is a modern woman like any other Shawian heroine. He himself
said that he wanted to depict Joan as the first Protestant.
She is a Protestant in the same way as Shaw himself was
because she fights with conviction against every corrupt
temporal and spiritual authority and wins her victories
through her purity, self-confidence, indomitable spirit, and
unwavering will power.

August Strindberg, another Scandinavian and a
contemporary of Ibsen, took a different stance and portrayed
a negative image of the female. His women are often foolishly
emotional, unhesitatingly cruel, and sadistically ruthless
towards men. "Strindberg's attitude towards woman is virtually
the antithesis of Ibsen's feminism; he views women as a
Dionysian power of nature which attempts to stifle the freedom-
loving intellectualism and spirituality of the Apollonian
male." If Ibsen advocates the cause of emancipated women,
Strindberg is at pains to show what havoc such women could
work because, according to him, they are devoid of tenderness,
sympathy, and compassion. What characterizes such women are
the attributes of masculinity, infidelity, competitiveness and unmotherliness.

In Strindberg's works, particularly in plays like *The Father, Miss Julie, Comrades, Creditors*, and *The Dance of Death*, in which the chief role belongs to an emancipated woman, the dominant theme is the constant and consuming struggle between the man and the woman and the issue is not resolved until one of them (mostly the man) is completely vanquished. It is paradoxical, Strindberg maintains, that although man is superior intellectually and physically, he falls a prey to woman's invidious and treacherous designs.

Strindberg's women are neurotic, desperate, and frustrated because most of them, like Ibsen's women, are locked in unhappy marriages. If Ibsen's women battle for social and intellectual freedom for self-fulfilment, Strindberg's females endeavour not only to be one with their male counterparts, but also to establish their supremacy and power over them. As a result of their frustration, they become ruthless and tyrannical in their desire to acquire what they want. Laura in *The Father* is a pertinent case who does not conceal what she craves for:

Laura: Power? Yes, What has this life-and-death struggle been for if not for power.... Love between man and woman is war. And don't think I gave myself. I didn't give, I took — what I wanted to have.25

During the twenty years of her marriage she has completely worn out the Captain in the struggle for supremacy. She has
unscrupulously employed every means of unsettling him, e.g., she interferes in the management of the estate, tampers with his correspondence and even prevents him from carrying on his research in meteorology out of a fear that he might become too famous for her. She even puts the henbane of doubt in his ears about the paternity of their daughter, Bertha. Eventually, she goads him into acts of violence for which he is declared insane and put in a strait-jacket.

Berta in Comrades is a Laura recognizable in many details. Though an artist by profession, she advances herself at the expense of her husband Axel's talent and effort, but at the same time she humiliates him in every conceivable way. She scoffs at him for his artistic pursuits and gloats over his failure to win a prize in a competition. Axel, however, is saved the fate of the Captain in The Father because he realizes well in time that his marriage is based on false foundations. He, therefore, abandons Berta.

Miss Julie, one of Strindberg's most well-realized female characters, is another woman whose frustration is the result of the rearing to which she has been subjected. Brought up by a rabidly feminist mother, Miss Julie alternately detests men and desires them nymphomaniacally, but, more often than not, it is her repugnance and antagonism for men that gain the victory. Jilted by her upper-class fiancé,
who refuses to be trained with a whip, she allows her libido to get the better of her repugnance and then throws herself into the arms of her father's valet, Jean, "the natural man" rising from the proletarian stock. But, eventually, her super-ego of a lady belonging to aristocracy, however anemic and effete, prevails. Faced with the question of honour and inevitable scandal, she resolutely goes out to kill herself.

Strindberg demonstrates that the inevitable conflict between the sexes is "only exacerbated by the emancipation of women, which intensifies their will to power and actually makes them stronger than man because they are more unscrupulous."

Besides, Strindberg reveals, the emancipated women cannot achieve the ideal of happiness and self-fulfilment as was envisaged by Ibsen. These women may score a dubious victory in the battle for supremacy, but they essentially remain victims of their neurosis. Happiness eludes them as it does the man whom they attempt to destroy.

Eugene O'Neill, whose ideas about women and marriage were largely influenced by Strindberg, dramatizes the sexual conflict of characters in some of his plays like _The Hairy_ and _All God's Chillun Got Wings_. His females, who mostly come from the common American folk, are passionate dreamers and romantics whose search for happiness and self-fulfilment largely remain unrealized. He presents women struggling against inherited or acquired limitations, poverty, and the deleterious effects of puritanism which pervert the spirit.
Some of O'Neill's leading female protagonists like Ruth of *Beyond the Horizon*, Anne of *Anna Christie*, Ella of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, and Nina of *Strange Interlude* are victims of emotional and psychological crises. All their passionate dreams of happiness and self-fulfilment lie shattered about them. Ruth, attracted to Robert by sexual impulses, discovers soon after the first flush of romance has receded that it is not physical love alone which can make a man happy. Robert's failure to make her as comfortable as she wishes to be gives rise to incessant wrangling between them which reminds one of the sexual battle of Strindberg's *Cliff*.

Eventually, Robert meets with a fortuitous death. Anne's dreams of happiness are destroyed by a callous and ruthless society, which has little respect for an individual's sensitivity. She becomes the object of lust of her cousins and later she is deloused by men in a house of prostitution. Even a life redeemed by marriage to Nat Burke cannot undo her traumatic experiences and the mark which has defouled her life.

Ella, unlike Ruth and Anne, is a victim of her own naivete. Prompted by jealousy and a false sense of racial superiority, she is a counterpart of Strindberg's Laura. She prevents Jim from attaining his dream of becoming a lawyer. As a result of the inner stresses, she loses her mind and experiences conflicts by regressing into childhood—the only level on which they had ever been able properly to meet.
Mina, too, fails to find the fulfilment of her dreams. Having lost Gordon, who could satisfy all her impulses, she cannot find completion in any man. She depends upon different men for realization of her impulses as a wife, mistress, and mother. By then she is middle-aged and her quest for completion in love is brought to an end by emotional exhaustion.

Thus, most of O'Neill's females lose in the end. Lacking optimism or a spirit of melancholy, they give themselves over to despair and frustration. "They", Sassner observes, "lack greatness of spirit and stamina. Their quest is too intangible, their discontent is too febrile and their desire too introverted. They coddle their frustrations and submit too supinely to their disease or defeat."

Avoiding the contradictory perspectives of Ibsen's feminism and Strindberg's misogyny, Anton Chekhov draws women with a great deal of compassion and objectivity. His women, who mostly come from the middle class of provincial Russia, are seekers and dreamers with longings for life and love. Sasha, a young girl in Ivanov, might be speaking for all Chekhov's women when she says: "A man has his work to do and so for him love is kept in background... but for us love means life." But, ironically, though they seek love, their search remains for ever unrealized; they remain forlorn and lonely. Seldom do they achieve the fruition of their dreams. Their tragedy is that their barren lives are gradually worn out and impoverished.
The leading females of his plays are unhappy because they have not been able to integrate their lives. Nina of The Sea-Gull is seduced and deserted by Trigorin, who incites her for her the ideal world for which she has been longing. Sonya in Uncle Vanya is sunk in gloom when she realizes that she has worn herself out on her father's estate in vain. She is frustrated in love when she finds her lover, Dr. Astrov, infatuated with her father's charming young wife. In The Three Sisters Olga, Masha, and Irina lead lives full of tedium in a provincial town and nostalgically long to be in Moscow. Their only hope of redemption is their brother Andrei who turns out to be a mediocrity after his marriage to a dull, nagging woman. Their lives are barren of love: Olga is tied to her dull school-teaching job; Masha is married to a fatuous pedagogue; and Irina loses her fiancé in a bloody duel.

In his last play, The Cherry Orchard, Chekhov tenderly portrays the frustration of the Russian aristocrats who must abdicate in favour of the representatives of a new class. Mme Ranevskv is sentimentally attached to her estate, comprising a house and a cherry orchard, and would not like to part with it at any cost. She nostalgically remembers her childhood which was closely associated with the orchard, but it has to go because it is not possible for her to preserve it. The orchard is sold and Mme Ranevskv is heart-broken.
Unlike the heroines of the other three aforesaid plays, Nne 
Kanevsky is largely responsible for her own doom. Given to a 
life of ease and pleasure, she spends money lavishly and 
brings calamity on herself.

The frustration of these women does not lead to 
violence, death or even introversion. Even in the face of 
unhappiness, they reveal a hidden power to exalt and ennoble 
life. They dream, they rebel, and try to achieve what they 
desire and do not submit to defeat. The final note is "of 
optimism or, if not of optimism, then at least of meliorism, 
a sense that if things are not yet all for the best in the 
best of all possible worlds, at least there is a possibility 
of things getting better in the future."  

These frustrated and fumbling dreamers often join 
hands to create a better world. The three sisters realize 
that they must forget their personal misfortunes and go out 
in the world to serve those who need them. At the close of the 
play, Olga best articulates their resolve not to capitulate 
to despondency:

Our suffering will turn into joy for those who 
will live after us, happiness and peace will 
reign on earth, and people will remember with 
kindly words, and bless those who are living now... 
our life is not yet at an end. Let us live.  

Similarly, Nina, cast off by Trigorin and her father, 
becomes a third-rate provincial actress, but discovers that 
it does not matter whether she succeeds or fails so long as 
she derives inner satisfaction from her profession. Her spirit
is unbroken by her suffering and she nourishes dreams of the

time when she will win acclaim as a great actress:

I'm a real actress, I act with delight, with
rapture. I'm drunk when I'm on the stage....
Now I know, I understand...that in our work...
acting or writing...what matters is not fame,
not glory, not what I used to dream about, it's
how to endure, to bear my cross, and have faith
and it does not hurt me so much, and when I
think of my calling I'm not afraid of life.31

She, therefore, presents a contrast to her lover, Trepleff
who, lacking such faith and weary of his failures and
frustrations, shoots himself.

Sonya in Uncle Vanya also does not give way to
despair. She not only takes courage but even consoles Vanya
and urges him to continue to work with patience for, she is
confident, they will see the heavens lit with radiance.

Thus, the spirit to live in the face of all odds is
one that characterizes most of Chekhov's women. It was this
indomitable spirit to struggle which inspired Stanislavski,
one of the greatest actor-directors of all times, to remark:

The men and women of Chekhov no longer bathe
in their sorrow. They, like Chekhov himself,
seek life, joy, laughter, courage. They want
to live and not to die. They are active and
surge to overcome the hard and unbearable
impasses into which life has plunged them. 32

Many other modern playwrights have portrayed female
protagonists who are victims of the stresses and strains of
modern life. For instance, Bertolt Brecht's women coming
from the lower strata of society belong to a world of defeat,
of frustration and of isolation. His heroines like Grusha in The Caucasian Chalk Circle, Chana Je in The Good Woman of Setouan and Mother Courage suffer for their goodness in a bad society. But their "persistent vitality in a continuing destruction... and the desperate urgency of real preservation of life" makes them heroic creatures. Jean Anouilh's heroines, on the other hand, are exceptional women who are set apart from the sick world because they are both unable and unwilling to conform to the values of those around them. Their fervent search is for complete and ideal happiness which remains mostly unrealized. The heroines like Therese in The Wild One, Joan of Arc, Antigone, and others challenge the easy ways of everyday existence and reject the happy rest of the world which merely "eats and belches, regulates and sleeps." So their lives is far preferable to the sort of meaningless existence they lead.

Federico Garcia Lorca belongs to the group of dramatists like Alexandre Dumas fils and Ibsen who have supported the cause of women in the male-dominated society. Lorca's women coming from the middle-class Spanish society are passionate creatures who long for the fulfillment of their instinctual, natural urges, but the rigid and immutable code of society in which they live allow them no opportunity for self-fulfilment. Like the heroines of his Spanish predecessors, Lope de Vega and Calderón, Lorca's women are endowed with a strong sense of honour. They may well renounce and suppress
their natural desires and longings but they seldom compromise with the ideal of honour. The conflicts between their passion and honour are little short of infernal in their agony. As O'Neill demonstrated of Puritanism of the American Society, Lorca castigates cathartic bigotry of the Spanish temperament. Through dramatization of the sufferings of his heroines like the Brise in Blood Wedding, Yerma, and Rola in The House of Bernarda Alba, Lorca expresses the notorious and dissonant social norms and customs which give precedence to meaningless conventional morality over genuine, passionate fulfilment.

Tennessee Williams' women, who come from the South of America are gentle seekers and dreamers like Chekhov's heroines. They represent Williams' protest against the mercantile American society with its values of crass commercialism and cut-throat competition. Cherishing values of an idealistic Southern past which exists only in their dreams, they are pathetically out of touch with the reality of their environs. They are either too shy like Laura of The Glass Menagerie to face reality or too incompetent like Blanche Du Bois of A Streetcar Named Desire to cope with it effectively. Maladjusted in their present surroundings, they feel terribly lonely. Since the members of the Plantation owning class cannot survive in isolation, the choice before Williams' Southern women is a clear one: they must either adapt themselves to the new ways of life or perish. Women like Blanche and Ca Sandra Whitehouse, who, with their ideals of distinction and refinement, refuse to adjust are devastated.
Like O'Neill, Williams disapproves of the Southern Puritanism which warps the personality of many a heroine like Alma Vinemiller of *Summer and Smoke*. Victims of repressed sexuality and desperately seeking human compassion, Williams' women often turn to sex, but more often than not, uninhibited and loveless promiscuity brings them to complete moral and psychological ruin and precipitates their destruction.

To conclude discussion in this chapter, we can say that the delineation of the female has never been so varied and complex as in modern western drama. Each playwright has looked at the female question in his own peculiar way. To begin with, there is a marked tendency to portray the plight of women who are exploited by men with the unbalanced scales of conventional morality. Later, there is an open revolt against the male-dominated society and an effort to bring fresh air in an atmosphere of social suffocation. Alongside, there is a strong reaction against the advocacy of the female cause and woman is portrayed as an unscrupulous sadist whose sole aim is not only to undermine the worth and wisdom of her male counterpart but also to subdue him completely. The socio-economic changes such as the decay of aristocracy bring complex problems which affect women the most. Two playwrights—Garcia Lorca and Tennessee Williams—show exclusive concern for the trapped and frustrated womanhood. They dramatize the psycho-spiritual problems of woman and portray a female image with the feelings of sympathy and abiding compassion not
hitherto witnessed in modern western drama. Their singular and persistent pre-occupation with female psyche and female frustration deserves a detailed comparative study.
NOTES


11. Ibid., p.


13. Ibid., p. 1022.

14. Pitt, p. 72

15. Gassner, p. 280.

16. Ibid., p. 752


18. Gassner, pp. 588-89.

22 Lynn, p. 253.
24 Continental European Literature, p. 117.
26 Gassner, p. 390.
27 Ibid., p. 644.
29 Ibid., p. 414.
32 Clark and Fredley, pp. 413-414.