Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

The study of gender and ethnicity are an interplay of the two crucial aspects of the broader issue of cultural puritanism and in this context, ethnic nationalism is also significant. Since both men and women are marginalized sections of the black society, the study of gender problems within the dialectics of ethnic issues then becomes fundamental because here the marginalization of women becomes symbolic of the racial issues. In this thesis through the study of four writers, two Afro-American women and two African men I have tried to establish that all of them have successfully been able to imbibe the female/feminine sensitivity and have tried through their works to drive home the point that ultimate freedom for any community can be attained only through the liberation of women, reinstating for them their rights and liberties as individuals. For all these writers the liberation of their community lies in the emancipation of women from the stereotypic roles. Thus we see that all of them focus on ethno-feminism.

The study of Alice Walker reveals that while she is a womanist, she is an ethnic perpetrator too. Her novels deal with the problems of Afro-American women who are utterly denigrated in the society. Her attempt is to raise the self-consciousness of black women, their self-esteem, self-respect and even to find their inner beauty. She empowers
them to look into themselves and recognize their self. This enables them to stand up against all odds and deliver themselves from the dual jeopardy of sexism and racism. Novels, like the ones taken up for study, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple*, show how women are doomed at the hands of both men and whites. But one woman rises as a savior who evokes these women to hatch out the inherent beauty and talents to emerge as independent women in every sense, working for not just the cause of women, but of the community at large too. The cases of Ruth, Meridian, Shug Avery and Celie are elucidations of such instances.

The works of Walker also takes up to celebrate ethnic cultural heritage. The employment of the “blues” in *The Color Purple*, the language used by Celie, the image of quilting, the weaving of folk culture and oral tradition in the text, and even Nettie’s journey to Africa where she recognizes her kindredness to the Africans, the notion of sisterhood and the communal unity we witness in *Meridian*, all show how Walker validates the importance of the rootedness in ancestor hood. Walker tours the realm of the downtrodden black women and narrates for us “herstories” which ends sanguinely with the redemption of her “sisters.” And she maintains a great passion for the African side of the Afro-Americans which show that they have a culture, a rich ancestry and heritage which makes them unique in their own way.
Toni Morrison's novels are vivid portrayals of the black female experiences. Morrison is an ardent exponent of the problematics of black women. *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* show the emergence of an optimistic feminine identity, overcoming the hazards and hurdles of racial and sexual oppression. Through Pecola of *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison has shown how detrimental it is to adopt a foreign identity against the existing ethnic identity and background. The character of Pecola is placed in contrast to that of Claudia who is able to resist these forces through her trust in herself and thereby emerges as a contented woman and recognizes the worth of herself. The novel has successfully made us aware of the destructive undercurrents that reign the black society. Sula of *Sula* also rejects the stereotypic roles of women as submissive. She wanted to create a space for herself and she succeeds in it. She re-defines the concept of self, her perception of woman and also of blackness.

The works of Morrison are rooted in the stories passed on to her by her ancestors. The feeling of community which is a carry over from the African heritage, the use of Afro-American folk tales, myth and legends from Africa, passed on to her by her grandparents, all elucidate her attempts to create a typical Afro-American literature. *Song of Solomon* is one such instance where Morrison successfully reproduces before us the ethnic background of Afro-Americans, the story itself being based on a folk myth of the African diaspora. Her employment of old songs,
children’s games and blues songs marks a return to the spirit of black culture. *Song of Solomon* is a re-vitalizing effort in the revival of Afro-centrism within Afro-American culture and heritage.

Nuruddin Farah’s works, as we have seen, has a feminine sensibility which places the readers in a dilemma as to the gender of the author. It is really astonishing that a male writer has been able to capture the inner turmoil of women so effectively. The study of the three novels I have dealt with has identified Farah as a feminist and also as an ethnic nationalist, which is an important aspect of ethnicity. *From a Crooked Rib* is a strong feminist novel set in the Somali context where the Somali value system and cultural codes does not offer freedom to women. Ebla recognizes that woman has an existence by herself and that she is not a slave to any man. Medina of *Sardines* is again a liberated woman who has her own visions, ideas of nationalism and also about the rights of women. She is portrayed as an individual who is as efficient as a man, may be even more. She is capable of living by herself and wants her daughter to be brought up as a liberated woman and this aura she spreads to other women around her. All of them are enstrengthened by her to be independent and also to assert themselves wherever they are. *Maps* deals with ethnic nationalism. From this novel we understand that Farah’s perception of Somaliness is not that attained by birth/blood/parentage. True Somaliness lies in the Somali sensibility, like Misra, who though an
Oromo is a Somali in all its sense and that is why she is able to bring up Askar as a Somali with all its authentic consciousness and all its sense. Drawing the example of Misra, Farah attempts to redraw the boundaries of Somali ethnicity just as the maps have to be redrawn to identify new national terrains, the criteria for Somaliness is also redrawn to encompass those who have inscribed Somali ethnic identity in their soul, in spite of their non-Somali lineage. Farah casts women in the leading roles to effectively convey points. Thus we find that Farah is a staunch feminist always foregrounding women in his novel. At the same time he is a liberal ethnic propagandist upholding Somali sensibility and the healthy culture and tradition and tries to recast the tenets of ethnic identity of a Somali.

In *Petals of Blood* Ngugi’s apposition is that only if men and women are stringed at the same grade that total emancipation can be attained. His attempt is not to show that women should or can out-power man, but to show that the creative power inherent in each is complementary and for each to be fruitful there should be a co-embeddedness of both powers. Thus it becomes evident that women too have immense potential like men, and for the total liberation to be attained, women have a vital role to play. If Ngugi’s intention in *Devil on the Cross* is, to put it in the words of Nwanko: “. . . [to] feminize the environment in order to advance the society toward the needed
restitution” (1987, 120), he has not quite reached that stage in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. Still, a focused consideration of Mumbi and Wanja reveals that Ngugi has a deep understanding of the needs of women from two previous epochs, too. Mumbi is a “liberated” Kenyan woman of the fifties and the early sixties, and Wanja meets with the requirements of a new age. Though his sympathy with the oppressed women is total, he does not make his novels a veritable battle of sexes where one triumphs at the expense of the other. On the contrary there is complementariness and a total harmony between the two.

Moreover he does not campaign a total shift to traditions in order to be a true Kenyan in all its sense. For this sensibility to be regained the main vehicle of his expression is language which is a strong weapon of the ethnic tradition. As we have seen he takes a shift to his ethnic language, Gikuyu and when he uses English he contributes ethnic touches to the colonial language. When his heroine in *The River Between* undergoes circumcision to attain her womanhood in the community, Ngugi in no way glorifies it but hints at the point that a return to traditions is necessary for the assertion of the true ethnic identity of a community with ethnic heritage. The vivid description of initiation ceremony, again in *The River Between*, the affinity of the people of the community to the tribal values and customs in almost all his novels, Wanja’s relationship to soil, all show the transcendence from the
shackles of acculturation to an indigenous culture, though he does not fail to criticize its unacceptable traits unhealthy for the present and the future generations. We can see that Ngugi is an artist of Africa, not just of Kenya, campaigning for the two marginalized tenets, namely that of ethnicity and the cause of women too. Revival of tradition and upliftment of women, are his main concerns in his works along with that of nationalism and he has succeeded in his intentions.

This study thus brings into light the inter-connectedness of ethnicity and gender issues, mainly the question of femininity. For all these writers, ethnicity and femininity are twin concepts. A serious study of ethnicity always cusps the study of gender and without this the study of ethnicity can never be complete. This brings them all under the title of ethno-feminists. All the writers in this study have fore-grounded the causes as well as the position of women in the society placing them on the platform of nationalism too. Their agenda is not a total return to the traditional culture, but to adopt the vitalizing tenets from their past history and cultural tradition and also retain some of the positive values of the colonial system, like the education system, and the religious system like that of Christianity. But their ultimate intention is to break free of acculturation and retain an entity and identity that is totally free of colonial identity thrust upon them and also to release themselves from the strangles of neo-colonialism within their community.