CHAPTER - VI
CONCLUSION
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Balzac once wrote: "I have carried an entire society in my head".¹ (Moi, J'ai Porté une société toute entière dans ma tête). Few novelists today can make such a bold statement. But about Miss Porter we may say, what Balzac said about himself. Lionel Trilling remarked once: "Today [The novel] diverges from its classic intention, which ... is the investigation of the problem of reality beginning in the social field. The fact is that American writers of genius have not turned their minds to society".² He adds that only Henry James in the nineteenth century knew that "to scale the moral and esthetic heights in the novel, one has to use the ladder of social observation". Miss Porter has very effectively made use of the ladder of social observation in her fiction. As a keen observer of human actions and relations in different situations, she has depicted through her short stories, short novels and the master piece Ship of Fools the society of her times with maximum accuracy and minimum prejudice. She has herself stated once. "I shall try to tell the truth, but the result will be fiction".³


³ Willene and Hendrick and George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter, p.131.
Miss Porter’s eminence as a conscious literary artist made her a model for many writers and critics. According to Edmund Wilson, "Miss Porter's stories lend themselves to being sorted out into three fairly distinct groups". They are a) Studies of Family life in working class or middle class households b) Stories specifically related to Foreign countries and c) Miranda stories. From these stories we come to the conclusion that the qualities that are most amiable in human life are being gradually done to death in the milieu she is presenting. ‘Maria Concepcion’, ‘The Martyr’, ‘Rope’, ‘Theft’, ‘Flowering Judas’ and other stories look at human frailties and the pathetic consequences of unfulfilled impulses of the characters. There is a galaxy of characters in these stories and their experiences form a sort of commentary on life.

*Old Mortality, Pale Horse, Pale Rider and Noon Wine* are the short novels (Miss porter did not like the expressions Novella and Novelette) which establish the point that Miss Porter does not see an individual as an island by himself, but only as an integral part of the total human society. Analysing *Ship of Fools* her only novel from different angles it is found that Miss Porter has taken immense effort to look at a multinational and multiracial crowd objectively to come to convincing conclusions.

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Self arises where the individual form has the ability to take the attitude of the group to which he belongs, then to come back upon himself, stimulate himself as he stimulates others, talk in terms of his community and lay upon himself the responsibilities that go with the community. Society is conceived by Miss Porter as an organisation of all the individuals in it. Individuals are given exclusive identity as well as continuity. The individuals in their turn interact with others in the society. Existence is the span of time which an individual spends in the society. Miss Porter maintains through her fictional works that the individual has a moral responsibility to the society and he cannot escape it. A sure way of release for the individual from isolation lies in personal communion with others.

Knowledge of oneself is pre-eminently knowledge of oneself in relation to others. So "self" should be taken as a phase in the development of social form. In Ship of Fools she elaborates this theme using innumerable characters drawn from different nations and different social groups. A clear reading of the novel reveals to us that her efforts to "understand the logic of the majestic, and terrible failure of man in the Western World", are fruitful. She makes use of her fiction to assess the individual characters in relation to society at its different levels. According to her the true human predicament is that in the most civilized houses, most horrible things are done to each other and by the time they face a major calamity they are in no position to comprehend their plight. All this happens as a result of the alienation of self from society.
From the discussions in the Second Chapter which centre round Miss Porter’s treatment of love in her fiction, it becomes clear that from the first story ‘Maria Concepcion’ she has tried to depict love as it is and how it should be. In an essay on E.M. Forster she has stated that her admiration for Forster emanates from the fact that Forster had faith in the importance of Love. In her "Miranda stories" she has portrayed the selfishness of the lovers. In ‘Maria Concepcion’ she speaks about the intensity of the feeling of love and the terrible consequence if there is any attempt at betrayal. *Old Mortality* ends in isolation and desolation. ‘Martyr’ a story of triangular love deals with the tragedy of the main character Ruben. *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* again is a tragedy of love, though it is not without some rays of hope. Practically in all her fiction there is failure in love because there is no effort from anybody to understand and appreciate the personality of others. So, love fails and fails miserably. *Ship of Fools* gives her plenty of opportunity to show the reader many love relationships from different standpoints.

For a purposeful analysis of man-woman relationship in the novel it is divided into two main categories, a) marital relationship and b) extra-marital relationship. As marital relationship forms the basis of family relationships it is to be discussed along with Family. There are two types of extra-marital relationship found in the novel. In the first type the individuals involved foolishly believe that they are in real love. The love between David and Jenny the American painters is a typical example of this. The second type is purely an affair with the aim of sex
and is extra-marital in nature. The platonic love between Dr. Schumann and La Condesa, is really an extra-marital relationship with an impure motive.

Herr Rieber and Lizzie mingle with each other only with sexual motives. Similarly Johan, who escorts his ailing uncle has an eye on Concha, a prostitute. In none of these is there any emotional involvement and real love. Miss Porter has profusely made use of animal imagery to prove that inhuman tendencies have captured the present generation and they are beastly even in a divine matter like love. Love—hate relationship is rampant and loving with a willingness to sacrifice is becoming a very rare virtue. Carnal desires terribly subdue human love and hence true love fails. Cruelty, irresponsibility and lust are all found in the love affairs in the ship. Denny's instigation of David to assault Jenny and Concha's instigation of Johann to murder his uncle to become rich himself, reveal that the minds of some of the lovers are tainted with criminality.

Miss Porter values "Family" as a positive establishment which can bring about harmony among its members. But in her stories and the novel she shows us the miserable break-down of the institution of family. To some of her characters it is a "hideous institution" to be "wiped from the face of the earth". According to Miss Porter, for good or ill, all people carry with them through out their lives the burden of family. She sets apart family from crowd and social stratification in her fiction. We can very clearly see social and political institutions adding to the evil nature of the family and the family situation becoming a secondary source for
the unhappiness of some of the characters. All the stories where Miranda appears exemplify this. The lack of understanding between the parental generation and children becomes a major cause of the unhappiness of both the groups concerned.

Miranda who is a fictional counterpart of Miss Porter comes to the conclusion that she should reject the myths of her family and seek the truth of her own existence without illusions. In ‘Rope’ if it is the uncaring and selfish absentmindedness of the husband that is the reason for their unhappiness, in the satirical story ‘The Cracked Looking-Glass’ it is the wife who forgets to buy a new cot and a mirror. In all the stories she holds an implicit vision of an ideal that has been vitiated, betrayed or perverted.

In *Ship of Fools* the family consists of only two generations, and the smallness of the ship gives the author a clear opportunity to pinpoint the responsibility on particular individuals. The families with children on board are the Baumgartners and the Lutzes. Herr Graf, a dying religious zealot is accompanied by his nephew Johann. The bride and groom from Guadalajara who are on a honeymoon trip, the Huttens who do not have children, all can be taken as families. There are families with children in the steerage and some children are born during the voyage. In none of these families is there any real happiness. The emotional fluctuations of Frau Baumgartner make the life of not only the husband miserable but also that of her young son. The husband, being a drunkard, cannot give happiness to others. He even speaks of his desire to commit suicide. The
senior Baumgartners are strangers under one roof and their behaviour subjects the boy to psychological torture.

If it is a small boy who has to undergo psychological torture here, in the family of the Lutzes it is an eighteen year old girl whose happiness is destroyed by a dominating mother and an irresponsible father. The mother's disapproval of the father and the resultant tension adversely affect the personality of the growing Elsa Lutz.

The Zarzuela company consisting of grown-up singers, dancers, prostitutes and mischievous children also presents unhappy family life. The childless Huttens are incapable of harmonious existence. If professor Hutten's principle is that a wife's duty is to be in total agreement with her husband always his wife cannot concur with it. Added to this the husband's perfectionism becomes another cause for the disharmony.

There are two people, namely Freytag whose wife is a Jew and Mrs. Treadwell who is a divorcee, who are delineated in such a way as to establish a specific and important point of view. Freytag loves his wife but he is forced to curse himself because of the insults heaped on him by the Germans. Mrs. Treadwell has had a miserable family life and the marriage ended up in divorce. Even Dr. Schumann who is a shade better than the other passengers secretly loves La Condesa. When we remember that he is already married, this is
definitely a blackmark. In spite of poverty the steerage families observe an ancient system of ethics which gives importance to family and kinship and so their lives are happier. The Mexican bride and bride groom enjoy the company of each other and the Mexican Senora with her child is generally happy. Only in these do we see some rays of hope for the future.

After "Family" the concept of "Nation" finds significant treatment in Miss Porter’s fiction from which emerges her view on nationalism of the pre-Second World War times which was becoming a Planetary nuisance creating international disharmony. She realized that the patriotic spirit of the people was transformed to unhealthy narrow-minded nationalism by continuous propaganda and efficient indoctrination. Thus, nationalism which is basically an amalgam of healthy attitudes and sober emotions that can create a sense of belonging to a country becomes an idea which would generate hatred towards other nations. She has herself confessed that whenever she observed the happenings of the twenties, she knew they were the results of shallow, trivial and silly thinking. In her short stories and short novels, she has given only some hints about the potential dangers of narrow-minded nationalism. But in Ship of Fools, she exposes the irrational nationalistic tendencies which culminated in the Second World War. She establishes that nationalism, which is a socially approved symbol used by the modern society in its search for security, does not provide any security to any one.
She projects the view that the evils that caused the First and Second World Wars, were essentially the same. The arrogant nationalists were instrumental in creating international disharmony. The S.S. Vera is a German ship and almost all the Germans aboard believe that they are superior to all others. They think that the steerage passengers are "the elemental forces of darkness to unsettle the superior German order". They have contempt for the people of all the other nationalities. The Captain of the ship is an embodiment of Nazi nationalism. Prof. Hutten who commands a lot of respect, himself has narrow minded nationalistic spirit in him. Not to be outdone the German women too manifest this trait in them.

Though it is the Germans who are the main target of Miss Porter's attack, she is not lenient to people of other nationalities. The Mexican priest Carillo also is taken to task by her. In this respect Dr. Schumann, who is not a devoted fraternityman and the American artist-lovers David and Jenny are more broad-minded than the Nazi Germans. These notwithstanding, German critics have found her to be highly biased in her portrayal of Germany and its citizens. But remembering the holocaust such nationalism resulted in, it seems logical and resonable to convince ourselves of Miss Porter's intellectual honesty.

"Race" which in general parlance is meant to denote one of the major divisions of mankind like Black and White or to specify the actual human material of a country was being used by some political leaders like Hitler to establish the idea of Aryan superiority. In some of her short stories there are Black characters
and Miss Porter is charged with a patronising tone and "Uncle Tomism" in them. There is also a feeling that Miss Porter herself has an anti-semitic attitude. In ship of Fools the focus is on racism especially of the Germans which was a major reason for chaos in international society. The theory of Aryan superiority was propagated and put into practice by the Germans. Their main target was the Jewish Community. In the novel the deep rooted anti-semitic attitude of the Germans is exposed through their attitude towards Freytag who has married a Jew. They hold him guilty of polluting their race. The only Jewish passenger in the ship is neither allowed to mingle with them nor to eat with them. He is provided a separate table and he becomes the butt of ridicule. Miss Porter does not spare the attitude of Lowenthal the Jew who thinks that he belongs to the chosen community of God. Her contention is, if the Germans are guilty of racism, so are the Jews, guilty of the same sin. Race also thus becomes a cause for disharmony among human beings. Thus at different levels of human encounter namely Love, Family, Nation and Race where happiness and understanding should prosper it is the opposite that takes place.

Though Love, Family, Nation and Race do affect the individual's life in its various aspects, they are not totally extraneous factors, for in the final analysis it is the collective individual will that gives shape and form to these. Hence, the fiction of Miss Porter does underline the fact that any change for the better should have its origin at the level of the individuals. Miss Porter seems to suggest through
her fiction that no individual can realise himself by insulating himself against society. She has no interest in any such creature and an individual can establish contact with his potential as a human being only in a social context. Failure of relationship at different levels of human contact is the main reason for unhappiness and disharmony. The individual places "self" above everything else and stubbornly refuses to understand and tolerate others' viewpoints and attitudes. The irony is that he deludes himself to consider this a conquest where as in actuality it is a pathetic inadequacy and failure. Cruelty and lust interfere with love and it cannot be expected to bring happiness to anyone. Inevitably it becomes love-hate relationship. The family relationships too are a miserable failure as the memebrs feel too self-important and are capable of only animal joys and sorrows. Similarly individuals do not have a healthy concept of interdependence at the national and international levels. Feeling of superiority based on "Race" creates disharmony among people and relationships fail on this count also. What strikes one as most significant in Miss Porter's fiction is a painful awareness of the cruel irony of man perverting the very forces that he shaped to bind humanity together, to bring about distrust and hatred. She persuades everyone that human living requires decision and involvement and all personal failure is equally society's loss. Her feet firmly rooted to the earth Miss Katherine Anne Porter stoutly refuses to be comforted by illusions.