CHAPTER I

Introduction: Wharton, Tyler, Theories of the Family

Introduction

The last half century has witnessed unprecedented and far-reaching changes in the personal, familial and social lives of human beings, most strikingly in the western world. In the context of the growing rate of divorces, single-parent families, the growing number of young people who opt for cohabitation, the rising number of children born out of wedlock, it is pertinent to question the future of the family as an institution. Indeed, it is the question raised by family theorists. A comparative study of the novels of Edith Wharton (1862-1937) and Anne Tyler (1941- ) proves beyond doubt that the family has survived and has withstood the attacks from the forces of disintegration. Actions and attitudes that were shocking and unimaginable in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with regard to marriage, divorce, and parent-children relations have been accepted as a matter of course in the second half of the twentieth century. The present study has chosen select novels of two women writers as representing the social changes affecting the family that have taken place in America during the 1870s to 1990s. There are striking differences between Anne Tyler’s portrayal of the family and Edith Wharton’s portrayal. All the members of a family in contemporary America enjoy a freedom unthinkable to Edith Wharton and her contemporaries. This however has caused greater strain among the members of the family. Nevertheless, the
strain has neither totally snapped family ties nor destroyed the family. The family is resilient. Now, the definition of the family includes and accepts infants adopted from Korea or China as portrayed in Anne Tyler’s latest novel *Digging to America* 2006. On the question of marriage, white Americans marrying Asians and accepting their culture is also witnessed in the same novel. The recent election of Barak Obama as President of the USA has itself been seen as representing a revolutionary change in familial, social, cultural and political norms.

There was and there is marital incompatibility. Divorce was frowned upon during the time of Edith Wharton. But now it is not so. So also there was and there is separation. Cohabitation, communes are now in existence and there are other modern experiments unknown to Edith Wharton. The selected novels of Edith Wharton confirm the supremacy of family and society over the individual. The individual’s wishes were sacrificed at the altar of the family and society. In the world of Anne Tyler, estranged people or divorcees remarry and form a new family. Sometimes the separated couple reunite. Family continues to exist in one combination or another despite the changes it has undergone.

The aim of the dissertation is to analyse the select novels of Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler to examine the fate of the family in the light of the theoretical construct dealt with in the first chapter.
The initial questions to answer are why these two novelists and why these eight novels?

Initially, I thought of doing research on Edith Wharton. Soon, I decided that a comparative study of Edith Wharton with a contemporary woman novelist would be a profitable area of investigation instead of focussing on Edith Wharton alone. After reading a couple of contemporary American women novelists I chose to compare and contrast Edith Wharton with Anne Tyler as both of them concentrate on mismatch in marriage and its consequences. Both of them are domestic novelists with a concern for family.

Both are, to begin with, women novelists who were against trend-thinking. They were interested in the ups and downs in the life of a husband and wife in the backdrop of the society they lived in. They were not interested in portraying the violent upheavals in the society. In contrast to it, their interest lay in the subtle psychological drama in the every day life of a family. They were aware of the economic and social events and their impact on its consequences in a family. Only in The House of Mirth by Mrs. Wharton does the life of the heroine end before marriage. All the novels taken for comparison explore the consequences of marriage.

The thesis aims to focus on the sharp changes in the American family by comparing two American women novelists who write chiefly about the
vicissitudes in marital life and the unforeseen consequences on the members of the family. Love, marriage, begetting children, raising a family, disillusionment in marriage, separation, divorce and remarriage are some of the key points of comparison.

Both the writers chosen for comparison are domestic novelists dealing with two different ages, in fact, two different worlds divided by a gap of several decades. Their novels are about the difficulties a husband and his wife face sooner or later and how they resolve them. Both these writers are sensitive to the moral issues pertaining to an individual's relation with the family and society. They do not attempt to present a rosy and romantic picture of married life. On the other hand, they present a realistic picture of it.

**Rationale behind the Choice of the Novels**

I have chosen for study four novels by each author covering different stages in their literary career, which can be roughly described as the early, middle, mature and last phases. Mrs. Wharton's career spanned a period of thirty six years. In her case this proposed division is easy, backed by broad critical consensus. *The House of Mirth* (1905) is her successful novel of the early phase. *The Custom of the Country* (1913) belongs to her second phase while *The Age of Innocence* (1920) is an acclaimed classic of her mature phase. *The Children* (1928) is written during the last phase of her career. All the four novels by Edith Wharton deal with marital problems.
With Anne Tyler, a living writer, a similar division is not an easy task. *If Morning Ever Comes*, her first novel, was published in 1964. *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (1982) was her first successful novel which commanded critical attention. *The Accidental Tourist* (1985) which won her The National Book Critics Award and *Ladder of Years* (1995) belong to the mature phase when her creative power was at its height. *The Amateur Marriage* (2004) was her last published novel at the time of finalizing the choice of the novels written by Anne Tyler. Strictly speaking, in the case of Tyler, the selection is more thematic than chronological.

In the present researcher's view, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (1982) is a serious investigation of the impact of a runaway husband on his wife and children. Hence it was chosen. There was a gap of three years between this novel and *The Accidental Tourist* (1985) the second novel chosen for the present study. The second novel is also about separation. The third novel *Ladder of Years* (1995) published after a decade, is about a wife who runs away from her family for a year and returns home a changed woman. *The Amateur Marriage* (2004), the last novel chosen for analysis, is about a quarrelsome couple who separate on their thirtieth wedding anniversary. All the four novels of Anne Tyler deal with the mid-life crisis of the protagonists, which is the chief reason behind the choice.
The investigation shows how the family, in each of these novels withstands crises in love and marriage. What is the fate of the family concerned, amidst the sea of troubles the protagonists face in their love and marriage? This thesis addresses this question.

A brief account of the life and works of Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler will throw light on the proposed study.

Edith Wharton

Edith Wharton was born as Edith Newbold Jones to wealthy parents in New York in 1862. She was educated at home by governesses. She was the only daughter to her parents and her brothers were much older than her to be her companions or playmates. From 1866 to 1872, her parents lived in Europe and spent their time in Paris, Rome, and Florence, to escape the ill-effects of the economic depression in America. Edith Wharton valued her life in Europe during her childhood for the opportunity it gave her to learn these foreign languages. Also, during this stay she developed a love for European paintings and architecture. She considered her acquaintance with these things the best part of her education. At home, her parents valued good idiomatic English so much that she learnt to avoid sloppy and artificial expressions.

Though she made her debut into New York society at the young age of seventeen in 1879, she got married to her family friend Edward Robbins
Wharton only in 1885. Her husband was thirteen years older than her. They enjoyed travelling and entertaining guests at their house Mount, in Lenox, Massachusetts. Theirs was a sexless and emotionally incompatible marriage. Though her husband encouraged her literary pursuits and played a good host to her writer-friends, he could never participate in their discussions. He had little interest in literary or intellectual questions. Her marriage was a total failure and she got a divorce in 1913. She settled in Paris. After divorce, she spent her time visiting friends, entertaining literary luminaries like Henry James and touring with them.

During World War I, she devoted herself to relief work and raising funds from America for the war-victims. Her novels written in this period reflected her war-related activities. She established homes and training schools for refugees. The French government made her Chevalier of the Legion of Honor. She lost her very close friends Henry James and Walter Berry. She infrequently visited America. In 1923, she visited America to receive honorary doctorate from Yale University. It was her last visit. In 1937 she died at St. Brice, France.

Edith Wharton, even as a child, had the habit of making up stories. With *Alhambra* in her hand, though she could not read, she walked up and down the room telling stories to herself. Her first and juvenile writings *Fast and Loose*, a novella, and a collection of poems were published by her mother, when Edith
was barely fourteen. However, *The Valley of Decision* (1902) which recreates the eighteenth century Italian life, was her first novel to be published. *The House of Mirth* published in 1905 shot her into eminence. It is an instant success. It was about the tragedy of a social climber, Lily Bart. From then onwards she never looked back and produced novels at an incredible rate. *Ethan Frome* (1911) a tragedy set in New England, *The Reef* (1912) a neat Jamesean novel, *The Custom of the Country* (1913) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920) which won her the Pulitzer Prize were her well known novels. The works she produced about World War I are *Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort* (1915), *The Marne* (1918) and *A Son at the Front* (1923). They express her attitude to the devastating war. *Old New York* (1924) consisting of four novelettes dealing once again with the vanishing community, *The Mother's Recompense* (1925), *Twilight Sleep* (1927) and *The Children* (1928) the last three novels, describing her concern for parent-children relationships, belong to her later works. *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) and its sequel *The Gods Arrive* (1932) are about the sufferings of creative artists. *The Buccaneers*, her unfinished novel about the adventures of a group of American girls in England, was published in 1938, after her death. *A Backward Glance* (1934) her autobiography, portrays her life in America and Europe laying emphasis on her relation with her artist-friends on both sides of the Atlantic. Her works include short story collections, two volumes of poetry, several travel books and a critical work entitled *The Writing of Fiction* (1925). Her letters were edited and published by R.W.B. Lewis.
In her own times Edith Wharton was patronizingly dubbed as an echo of Henry James. She was exasperated with this characterisation. In the 1960s she received attention from new critical quarters which were more sympathetic. Louis Auchincloss, Blake Nevius and Irving Howe were the sympathetic critics who revived interest in Edith Wharton’s works. Percy Lubbock, Louis Auchincloss and Olivia Coolidge were her early and sympathetic biographers. In the 1970s there appeared critical biographies of Edith Wharton. Of them, the books by R.W.B.Lewis and Cynthia Griffin Wolff encouraged psychological interpretation of her novels. Their works revised the usual complaints against Edith Wharton that she was conservative, that she ignored the working class, idealized the past, and refused to make literary experiments. Alfred Bendixen recounts the changes in the critical trend thus:

In the 1970s, however, our view of Wharton and her literary achievement changed radically. A number of critics began a major reassessment of Wharton’s life and literary achievements that still continues today. The single most important challenge to the standard portrait of Wharton as the simplistic defender of an old order came from R.W.B.Lewis’s prize-winning Edith Wharton: A Biography (1975), which showed a more complex, more vulnerable, more sexual, more intriguing, and more likable woman. Lewis’s brief but shrewd comments on Wharton’s themes and techniques also clearly established that she was a genuine literary artist whose works demanded sophisticated
attention. The value of this kind of attention was confirmed by Cynthia Griffin Wolff's psychologically oriented *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (1977), which contained a number of brilliant new analyses of Wharton's fictions... The formation of the Edith Wharton Society in 1984 both confirmed and further stimulated the existence of widespread interest in her life and art. Furthermore, the large number books and articles on Edith Wharton that have appeared in the last decade clearly suggest that the revival is going strong. (vii-viii)

In the 1990s Millicent Bell, Elizabeth Ammons, Gloria C. Erlich, Elaine Showalter, Annette Zilversmit, and Carol J. Singley dominated Wharton criticism. "Edith Wharton, who was never obscure or forgotten, has been rediscovered a number of times," declared Millicent Bell (1). By and large their approach to Wharton is feminist and sometimes even lesbian.

The concern of the present researcher is to make out a case for Wharton's interest in family not simply from the traditional point of view but also from a sociologist's point of view.

**Anne Tyler**

Anne Tyler was born to Quaker parents in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1941, four years after the death of Mrs. Wharton. Her parents took their
children to Utopian communities including the one at Celo, North Carolina in 1948. Four years of her early formative childhood were spent here before her parents settled in Raleigh, North Carolina. Anne Tyler had the good fortune to have Phyllis Peacock, a reputed educationist, as her teacher at Broughton High School. At college she studied Russian and after graduation worked as a Russian Bibliographer. She married an Iranian medical student and novelist Taghi Mohammed Modarressi in 1963. She started writing short stories when she was at college and her first novel If Morning Ever Comes was published in 1964.

Anne Tyler settled in Baltimore, Maryland with her husband and two daughters Mitra and Tezh. She managed to divide her time between home making and writing. She has written ninety short stories and has produced a novel once in three to four years. She has written seventeen novels including her latest novel Digging to America (2006). Breathing Lessons (1988) won her the Pulitzer Prize. Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant (1982) earned her the P.E.N./Faulkner Award. The Accidental Tourist (1985) which was also filmed, was her most famous novel.

Though Anne Tyler had a large number of devoted admirers, critical acclaim was slow to come. Reviewers were not favourable to her works. It was her policy not to read reviews of her novels. Her devoted readers include
writers like Eudora Welty, John Updike and Reynolds Price. It is difficult to classify Tyler.

Not surprisingly, most of the little critical attention that has been directed towards Tyler has consisted of efforts to fit her work into traditional literary classifications. She has been variously termed a realist, a romantic, a Victorian, a postmodernist, a minimalist, a sentimentalist, a feminist, a non-feminist, and a naturalist — terms which generally are mutually exclusive or at least stridently incompatible (Petry, 5)

Anne Tyler has created eccentric characters like Morgan Gower (Morgan's Passing), Macon Leary and Muriel Pritchett (The Accidental Tourist), Belle Flint (Ladder of Years). The eccentric characters and her tragicomic world-view prompted critics to classify her with the school of Charles Dickens. The strong similarities between Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant and As I Lay Dying, both dealing with the reminiscences of the dying protagonist, compel one to see the influence of William Faulkner on her. For that matter, influences of Thoreau, Emerson, Hemingway, Henry James Eudora Welty and 19th century Russian novelists are unmistakably evident in the novels of Tyler. Though she disclaimed the influence of any one writer on her writing career, she openly declared her admiration for Eudora Welty. Alice Hall Petry writes:
To Welty, then, may be attributed Tyler’s sense of authorization, her feeling that she could pursue a career devoted to recording in writing what she saw about her in the South. To Welty Tyler may also owe her keen eye for detail, her overriding interest in characterization, and ‘the ordering poles of her fiction: a sense of distance on the one hand and a gift of sympathy on the other’. (11)

Anne Tyler was not averse to critics clubbing her with southern women writers. Her similarities with McCullers is pronounced, for both write about characters who find it difficult to fit in with their families.

As a writer of domestic novels she recreated the tension in the family that provoked her characters to run away from home. However, they could never sever their ties with their families permanently. Beck Tull returned to attend his wife’s funeral after several years. Macon Leary, after his wife’s separation, went back to stay with his sister and brothers. Towards the end of the novel he chose to live with Muriel Pritchett and her son. In *Ladder of Years*, Delia Grinstead returned home after a year’s stay in Bay Borough, separated from her family. The ebb and flow in the relation among family members, chiefly between husband and wife, form the central theme of Tyler’s novels.
The first chapter constructs a theoretical framework of the family, which is chiefly drawn from Mark Poster, W.J. Goode, J. E. Goldthorpe, A.J. Cherlin and Nijole Benokraitis. These family theorists deal exhaustively with various aspects of the family like upbringing, everyday life at home, parent-children relation, authority of the parents, socialization, husband-wife relation, marital incompatibility, divorce, remarriage, alternatives to marriage, historical changes in the family and different family models. They study these issues adopting a psychological theory or the economic theory or the sociological theory. Often they combine two or all the theories. Their concern with the alarming rate of divorces, declining birth-rate, teenage marriages, children born out of wedlock, single-parent families drive them to question the survival of the family.

Categories of the family are formulated, which are used for the analysis of the novels chosen for study. The categories are a combination of the three major theories dealt with by the family analysts. All the categories are not applicable to each of the novels examined in the second and third chapters.

Theories of the Family

Family has been an important object of examination for scholars who study social structures and their role in shaping the destinies of human beings. Scholars have found it difficult even to define it as it means different things to different races. Nevertheless, sociologists and theorists of family have evolved
categories to describe it. Family is the bridge between the individual and society and how it mediates is an interesting study. Theories about family can be broadly classified under three heads:

(1) Psychological
(2) Economic
(3) Sociological

There are indeed disciplines like religion, politics, law and feminism which too attempt a theory of family. There are of course, anthropological theories of it. However, our focus will be on the theories mentioned above as they are exhaustive and the others, in one way or other draw from them. Freud, Engels, Marx, Horkheimer and Levi Strauss are some of the theorists who have thought about the structure of a family and the principles governing that structure although family was not the main concern of their study. The academic theoreticians who have written full-length books on the family are Philip Aries, Talcott Parsons, William J. Goode, A. J. Cherlin, J. E. Goldthorpe, Edward Shorter, D.H.J. Morgan and Mark Poster. It is Mark Poster’s work *Critical Theory of the Family* that makes a significant advance. As the title indicates, it is an attempt at a critical theory enabling further research on the issue from a non-ideological position. It is a critical assessment of a host of thinkers on the family including Freud, Engels, Marx, Horkheimer and Levi Strauss.

In constructing the framework, the books by Mark Poster, William J. Goode, J. E. Goldthorpe, A. J. Cherlin and Nijole Benokraitis are followed as
the categories formulated by them are helpful and relevant in the analysis of the novels of Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler. Also, *The American Family and the State, Contemporary Marriage* and *Marriage and the Family* are included in the discussion wherever they are relevant in formulating categories or useful in the analysis of the novels.

**Early Theorists**

In his preface, Mark Poster makes a brief appraisal of Peter Laslett, Philippe Aries and Edward Shorter who have contributed to the study of family history. Peter Laslett, a demographer, “assumed that family was defined by size and by blood relations” (xi). Poster finds his definition inadequate as it cannot provide a concept of the family. Though Philippe Aries was concerned with a study of children and childhood in his remarkable book *Centuries of Childhood*, he broached “the question of the forms of intimacy between parents and children.” (Poster, xii) He initiated a psychological theory of family. Focussing his attention on the bourgeois family Edward Shorter, in his *The Making of the Modern Family*, argued that “the bourgeois family emerged as a nest of domesticity, as a private world withdrawn from society... Domesticity, romantic love and maternal love, all built around privacy and isolation, were the cornerstones of the nuclear family to Shorter” (Poster, xiii). In Shorter’s theory the family springs from man’s desire for freedom and individualism. He took an ideological stand justifying the modern bourgeois family. He had no explanation to offer about the rising divorce rate and the disintegration of the
family except that it is inevitable and that is the price of freedom and individualism. Moreover his study is wanting in psychological theory. Mark Poster is of the firm view that a psychological theory alone can account for the emotional patterns of a family. Shorter's simplistic explanation of the impact of market forces on an individual is another weakness of his theory.

In contrast to the theoretical positions of Aries and Shorter, Mark Poster presents his plan of analysis as follows:

I want to argue in these pages that we must redefine family structure away from issues of family size and towards issues relating to emotional patterns. The significant questions that can be posed in family history do not concern the number of people in the household or in the kin-group residence unit. Instead, family history can contribute to the knowledge of social history by looking at the emotional structures in the daily life of various family types. Such historical investigation will enable social science to shed light not only on the past but also on the present dilemmas of family life which concern, to a great degree, feelings, sexuality and psychic stability. In this way, family history can contribute substantially to our understanding of current discontents as they relate the isolated, conjugal family type... I hope to contribute to a reconceptualization of family
history, to aid in redefining the important question raised by studying the family, and to outline the future tasks of family studies (xvii).

In constructing his theory of family Poster takes a position against ideology. A critical theory, he argues, is "normative" providing a basis for the reform of the family structure in question. He does not believe in the linear explanation of the changes in the family due to modernization or urbanization or industrialization nor does he believe that family structures are unchangeable.

The Psychological Theory of the Family

Mark Poster's significance consists in constructing a theory of the family which is broad, flexible, critical and non-ideological.

The fundamental principle of Freudian psychology is that the structure of the mind is formed in childhood influenced by the parents. Psychoanalysis reveals the role of the family in the formation of the mind of an individual and hence, the family is the secret of an individual. In his Totem and Taboo, Freud refers to the family as the germ-cell of civilization, bringing out the network of relationships among the individual, family, and the society.

Oedipus complex, castration threat and what he considers the three important stages in the growth of a child, namely the oral stage, the anal stage,
and the genital stage constitute the corner stones of Freud’s analysis of a child’s mind. At the oral stage, the child’s relation with its mother is free from any conflict or friction. The problem however begins with the anal stage when the mother gives toilet-training to the child and prevents it from exploring anal pleasure. A child-mother relationship gets complicated further at the genital stage when the child meddles with its genitals. The mother warns the child, particularly if it is a boy – not to indulge in it and threatens to have it cut off by a doctor. Freud calls this the ‘castration threat’.

The castration threat is pivotal to Freud’s concept of the Oedipus complex. As a Victorian, Freud was studying the Victorian bourgeois attitude to sex. Poster exposes Freud’s misunderstanding of a child’s handling of the penis as masturbation and improper. To a modern, there is nothing abnormal or improper about it, whereas to the Victorian parents it was shocking. For the 19th century bourgeois, sex was a matter to be repressed. Women and children were considered asexual. Nothing, according to Poster, was wrong with the child. But something was wrong with the parents who found fault with the child. Freud misidentified the issue and attributed meaning to the innocent activity of the child.

Freud noted a male-child’s abnormal affection for its mother combined with hatred for its father and gave it the famous mythical name Oedipus complex. A young Victorian mother dissatisfied with her husband sought the
affection of the male child, thereby rousing his sexual instinct in him prematurely. According to Poster, the Oedipus complex was not the problem of the child but that of the parents. The parents in the Victorian bourgeois society enjoyed a privacy and individualism which was a double-edged sword. "By failing to analyze the parents' eroticism Freud is incapable of explaining psychic phenomena through their properly social dimension" (Poster, 8).

While the parents of medieval times or the Renaissance refused to idolize the child, the Victorian parents, for the first time in European history, treated it like an angel. Poster writes:

The child shall have things better than his parents... He is really to be the centre and heart of creation. "His Majesty the Baby", as once we fancied ourselves to be. He is to fulfil those dreams and wishes of his parents which they never carried out, to become a great man and a hero in his father's stead, or to marry a prince as a tardy compensation to the mother (9).

Insisting on the psychic structure of the family, Freud underestimated the impact of society on the family. He failed to see that the neurotic problems he studied were in-built in the specific family structure—namely the bourgeois nuclear family. He universalized the bourgeois family structure. However, he penetrated into the structure and mechanisms of the psyche as no one before.
As against earlier theorists, Freud's contribution lies in the discovery of emotional patterns in a family with the father as a leader-figure internalized in the super-ego of the children. Freud was aware that the privatization of love and sex are an integral part of modern capitalist society. Repression of sex is another important discovery of Freud. It determines the relation of the individual to the family as well as society, and the relation is characterized by a sense of discontent which colours the emotional pattern.

The Economic Theory of the Family

Next to psychological theory of the family, a dominant theory to explore family in detail is the theory of economic determinism. According to this theory, economic history, more than anything else, decides the history of family. For instance, the change from matriarchy to patriarchy, an important event in the history of family was determined by the capitalist mode of production. Man introduced it to ensure the line of inheritance. Similarly, as a corollary, the mode of production was responsible for the shift to monogamous marriage. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State by Engels was an important primer to the Marxist student of family history. That the family is not eternal and unchanging is a significant contribution of Engels. It was he who first saw the family historically and stated that the changes in family history had their roots elsewhere. He saw it as a part of the superstructure. "Marx, like Fourier before him denounced bourgeois marriage as a form of prostitution" (Poster, 42). Marx and Engels declared that the
subjugation of woman to man was another tragic fall-out of capitalism and predicted that this inequality would vanish and woman would be emancipated "with the construction of socialism because then women will be allowed to work" (Poster, 45). Poster argues that the Marxist theory of family should be freed from the prison of economic determinism.

Wilhelm Reich, a Marxist, attempted to synthesize Freud and Marx in his theory of the family. He showed that ideas were not the direct expression of material conditions but influenced by the family. In short, a child was what it was because of the influence exerted on it by the family structure which in turn was determined by economic forces.

Max Horkheimer, the director of the Frankfurt school, was an important Marxist theorist who synthesized Freud and Marx in the line of Wilhelm Reich. His concept of the family made some advancement on Reich and it includes the following aspects:

He valued the family as a principal agency of socialization. In this respect he freed the theory of the family from economic determinism. However, he accounted for the authority of the father as an important feature of the family structure. As a result, the economic dimension of the parent-child relationship is recognized by him. He believed in the autonomy of the individual. To him, family was the all important mediator between individual
and the society. It influenced the psychic character of men. Mark Poster sums up the Marxists’ concept in the following words:

In sum, the Marxists’ concept of the family, relying generally on a theory of instinctual liberation is most helpful in probing the interaction between the family and the economy... The family must be studied in relation to the mode of production, and particularly one must be aware of class differences in family structure. Furthermore, they remind us of the importance of the sex needs, which also must be conceptualized in relation to family structure, even though they base sexuality on a suspect notion of instincts. (63)

Mark Poster’s Critical Theory

Mark Poster’s contribution to the theory of the family is important for the following reasons:

1) He wanted the theory to be an object of research.

2) He expected it to indicate parameters of findings.

3) He believed that the theory should play the role of the midwife in aiding the birth of empirical studies.

4) Without being a closed set of concepts, a theory, according to him, should provide categorical guidelines.
5) He chose the synchronic study of the family to the diachronic study of it.

He sums up the elements of a critical theory of the family thus:

This chapter has presented the outlines of a critical theory of the family in which the analysis proceeds at three levels. At the first level, the family was conceived as a psychological structure. This level defined the family and indicated what contribution the study of the family can make to social science. The second and third levels, those of daily life and the relation to society, were conceptualized as supplementary to the first... Finally, the shape of the critical theory of the family offered in this chapter has been influenced by the need for clarification about the condition of the family today. Prominence has been given to the psychological level and to age and sex hierarchies because these determinations, when studied in a broad historical scope, can help make sense of today's concerns with the family. The scientific study of the value of the modern family can proceed only on a firm historical base (164-165).

The job of the theorist is to provide a categorical definition of the family, which is broad and loose enough to include various family groups of
the pre-industrial and industrial periods. Its categories should be flexible such that it can be applicable to the past, present and the future. The coherence of the categories is as important as flexibility. The theory should draw clear their boundaries as to i) what is and what is not part of the family, and ii) what is central to family structure and what is not.

Mark Poster’s theoretical stand is largely psychological and it revolves round the emotional patterns available in a family. He does not reject the sociological or economic factors which have a bearing on the emotional pattern. His theory accommodates the conflict between husband and wife, parents and children as well as the intimacy among them. The everyday life of a family is the object of his research. He considers the building, the arrangement of the rooms, the position of the furniture, the eating habits of the members of the family, the time of the meals, the seating arrangement of the members and many such minute details.

As marriage forms an important category in the study of the family, he includes it in his study. The age of the groom or the bride, who decides for whom in the choice of the partners, economic and political considerations in a marriage alliance, taboos like who should or should not marry whom, sexual life, extra-marital relations, sexuality of children, child-bearing, child-rearing, the role of the elders, the role of woman and wife in the family are categories
of the sociological study of the family. Mark Poster, thus, in his theory, brings together psychological and sociological approaches in his theoretical construct.

He generates four models of family structure using his critical theory. They are: 1) The bourgeois family in the mid-nineteenth century. 2) The aristocratic family of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. 3) The peasant family of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. 4) The working-class family of the early industrial revolution. The peasant family is the counterpart to the aristocratic family as the working-class family is the counterpart of the bourgeois family. Poster makes a study of these model family structures in terms of a) marriage, b) love and sex c) child-rearing d) privacy or otherwise of the domestic life e) authority and f) mother-child relation. He also makes an evaluative study of these four models.

The Bourgeois Family

The bourgeois family originated in towns following Industrial Revolution in Europe around 1750. Early critics believed that the Industrial Revolution was the prime cause behind the birth of the bourgeois family. They thought that it uprooted self-sufficient village communities or small guilds in towns and created the nuclear family with certain distinct qualities. But later theorists of the family came to consider that the nuclear family existed before the Industrial Revolution.
The bourgeois family life was marked by individualism, privacy, and emotional intensity hitherto unknown. It became inviolable with an autonomy of its own. The home was no longer a place of production, but one of leisure, of time outside the work world. There was no authority for the wife or children outside the family to refer to. The bourgeoisie made a systematic effort to delay sexual gratification in the interests of business. For men of this class, sex was divorced from feelings of tenderness. Marriage entailed a conflict between the parents and the children. While the parents had their eyes on wealth, the adolescents were filled with romantic love. Children grew up in an atmosphere charged with emotional conflicts.

The Aristocratic Family

The aristocratic households of 16th and 17th centuries consisted of kins, servants, retainers and clients making the strength between 40 and 200. The great chateaux in France for instance were public and political places. Marriage alliance was more a matter of political consideration than of personal, romantic love. Aristocrats made love with servants and with other aristocrats. Concubines were accepted publicly. There was no privacy at home. Babies of both sexes were sent to the nurses and later, when they grew up, to other aristocratic houses to be reared. Children were thought of as little animals. They were not idolized as in a bourgeois family. Nor did they suffer from any emotional conflict. There was no intense emotional intimacy between the child
and the mother. However, the child was to obey tradition, and social hierarchy, which were sacred to the aristocratic family.

**The Peasant Family**

The peasant family by definition was rooted to the village and their land where both men and women had to work round the year in accordance with the seasonal changes. The togetherness thrust upon the peasant family precluded family privacy. There was no need to delay marriage for business reasons. A woman was valued more for her skill than for her straight nose. Hence, romantic love was not a great force in a marriage alliance. Nor was political convenience a matter of importance in their marriage. As the wives were also expected to work, breast-feeding or feeding at regular intervals was a nuisance. The village was the peasant’s family. The whole village participated in all the major events of its member—be it marriage, birth or death. As the whole village participated in and supervised all activities, the child enjoyed the emotional configuration of the whole village. Social authority was not invested with the father of the house but with the village itself. Peasant patriarchy was different from aristocratic and bourgeois patriarchy. Life for peasants had a fixed pattern, governed by innumerable traditions which were not to be even questioned by the individuals.
The Working Class Family

The working class was made up of either the uprooted villagers who came to work in the factory towns or the urban lowest class. They huddled in small rooms infested with rats, lice, roaches and bed bugs. In some places there was only one toilet for 200 workers. Their living conditions at home were abominable for lack of sanitation. The condition of the working class in the beginning of the nineteenth century was too bad for words. For low wages men, women, and sometimes children too had to work for 14 to 17 hours a day in unhygienic conditions. All the members of the family had to work to make ends meet. Children were left to the care of friends or neighbours. Poster's observations about their life are poignant: Proleterian children, as it was often said, were raised by the street, not by the family. Left alone much of the time or in the easy going care of a relative or neighbour, these street urchins learned about life under capitalism quickly and surely (193).

As the father had no property to hand over to his children the parental authority over children weakened. Employed children grew up refusing to submit to parental authority. Similarly, working women slowly learnt to taste independence. In some cases women had no option but to become prostitutes when jobs became scarce. If at all they got a job, they were sexually exploited by foremen and bosses.
Mark Poster concludes his analysis of the four model families with a study of the recent developments in the family. He observes that with the fusion of the ‘white-collar’ proletariat along with the working class of the factories, capital has accumulated in fewer hands. With the mass production of consumer goods, the family turned into a social unit of consumption. Rampant consumerist notions have extended to sexual promiscuity among the middle classes. It is an easy transition from the instant gratification offered by consumer goods to instant gratification of sexual desires both within and outside marriage.

Growth of promiscuity on the one hand and emancipation of women due to growing job opportunities for married women on the other hand accelerated the feminist movement which in turn led to higher rates of divorce. Marriage was losing its religious sanctity, which sparked a new trend in men and women living together without ever getting married. The family and marriage as institutions headed towards a collapse. In fact a counter-movement to the collapse of the family has arisen. Americans have founded communes as an alternative to the bourgeois family. Gay families are also coming into existence.

**William J. Goode’s Sociological Theory of the Family**

The sociological theory of William J. Goode supplements Mark Poster’s theory with focus on a working-definition of the family, the importance of role relations in the family, growing number of working mothers, and factors
contributing to divorce. While Poster's chief contribution lies in generating four models of family structure, Goode conceives the conjugal family as the family model.

Family is a social unit, and as such the study of the family as a branch of sociology has received great attention from scholars and theorists due to the changes family as an institution has undergone. And the sociologists' concern has been to define and account for the changes in it.

If we take the layman's definition of a family as a unit made up of father, mother and children, only about 35 percent of the U.S. households can be classed as a family. In the U.S., millions of households contain at least one child, but only one parent. In a few communes, every adult male is married to all other adult females. In some societies one wife may be married to several husbands whereas in others one husband may be married to several wives. Then there are single-parent families, or gay couple families or two or three sisters living together in a household. These family-like households make a viable definition of the family difficult. Sociologists are not deterred by such difficulties.

**Definition of the Family**

In his *The Family*, William J. Goode makes an attempt at a definition of the family thus:
First, the family is not a single thing, to be captured by a neat verbal formula. Second, many social units can be thought of as "more or less" families as they are more or less similar to the traditional type of family. Third, much of this graded similarity can be traced to the different kinds of role relations to be found in the traditional unit. Doubtless the following list is not comprehensive, but it includes most of those relationships: (1) At least two adult persons of opposite sex reside together. (2) They engage in some kind of division of labour; that is, they do not both perform exactly the same tasks. (3) They engage in many types of economic and social exchanges; that is, they do things for one another. (4) They share many things in common, such as food, sex, residence, and both goods and social activities. (5) The adults have parental relations with their children, as their children have filial relations with them; the parents have some authority over their children, and both share with one another, while also assuming some obligation for protection, cooperation and nurturance. (6) There are sibling relations among the children themselves, with, once more, a range of obligations to share, protect, and help one another. When all these conditions exist, few people would deny that the unit is a family. As we consider households in which more are missing, a larger number of people would express some doubt as to whether it really is a family.
Thus if two adults live together, but do nothing for each other, few people would agree that it is a family. If they do not even live together, fewer still would call the couple a family (9).

This is an adequate working definition of the family from a sociological point of view. Although the sociological theory is loosely equated with the functional theory of the family, it makes a systematic and scientific study of the family in terms of comparative structures such as i) Biological family ii) Nuclear family iii) Compound family iv) Joint family v) Extended family and vi) Domestic Groups. All these come under the comparative structures of the family.

William Goode does not dismiss psychological or economic theories, but makes use of them; for that matter any theory which has a bearing on family patterns deserves consideration. “Since all these sciences of human behaviour contribute to our understanding of the family, we should use the information as it becomes available” (14).

**Role Relations in the Family**

In his *The Family*, William Goode constructs his theory of the family based on the relationship patterns between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between family and society. He ranks psychological and economic theories of the family below the sociological theory. While Mark
Poster bases his theory largely on psychological factors, the four models of families, authority of the parents and emotional pattern in a family and the relationship between family and society, William Goode attempts a detailed analysis of the relation between husband and wife, parents and children, family and society mainly from the point of view of a social historian. Goode, of course, takes into consideration the economic factors which have a far-reaching impact on the family.

He begins his analysis with the role of husband and wife as a matter of division of labour. Until the Industrial Revolution, man undertook hard labour while woman took up the less difficult ones considering the peculiarities of womanhood like menstruation, pregnancy and lactation. Further, woman was assigned the job of the home-maker for the same reasons. However this division of labour was not uniform in all societies and all cultures. With the onset of industrialization, women worked along with men and role division blurred resulting in the emancipation of women.

Socialization

The question of child-rearing or socialization is an important aspect of the family like marriage, divorce, and inheritance rules as the character of an individual depends on socialization.
Goode presents a list of conditions conducive to successful socialization of the child. They are as follows:

1. Warmth, nurturance, and affection from parents or other persons (teachers, peers) who are trying to socialize the child.

2. Identification of the child with the parent or socializer.

3. Authority of the parent.


5. Giving freedom to child.

6. Giving explanations and reasons.

7. Punishment (87).

Socialization, obviously, aims at a harmony within the family as well as harmony between family and society, which is not easy to achieve. The conflict between parent and youth has increased with growing job opportunities for the youth after industrialization. "Adolescent rebellion" has become a worldwide phenomenon. It is time's irony that when the rebellious adolescent becomes a parent he has to face his adolescent children who rebel against him.

**Working Mothers**

When the traditional role of the woman as home-maker was abandoned by her, and when she actively claimed equality with man, the pattern of the family underwent a change. Though man was reluctant to accept the changes in the family in the beginning, soon he learnt to adjust himself to the changed circumstances. Nevertheless, this change had two consequences. First, the
economic freedom of woman often led to marital discontent and divorce in extreme cases. Second, if not all, at least a large section of the children wished their mother to be at home and give attention to them. William Goode, without taking sides with the issue, presents the matter from different viewpoints. Some children benefited from working mothers as their economic conditions improved. Similarly a working wife supplemented the family income considerably to the satisfaction of her husband and children, even as the authority of husbands and fathers weakened.

**Divorce**

The divorce rate in the 1980s was higher than it was in the 1950s. Apart from the conventional legal reasons for divorce, like adultery, insanity of the partner, incompatibility between husband and wife became an acknowledged fact leading to no-fault divorces. According to Goode, there are four modes of voluntary departures from the family – separation, divorce, annulment, and desertion. He declares that "divorce is likely to be a personal misfortune for one or both the spouses, but it may also be viewed as a social invention, one type of escape valve for the inevitable tensions of marriage itself" (150). He also asserts that social analysts have not succeeded in defining the causes of divorce. However, he ventures to tabulate matters leading to greater proneness or lesser proneness to divorce.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greater Proneness to divorce</th>
<th>Lesser Proneness to divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban background</td>
<td>Rural background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage at very young ages (15-19 years)</td>
<td>Marriage at average ages (male-23; female-22) or older ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter acquaintance before marriage</td>
<td>Acquaintance of two or more years prior to marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short engagement or none</td>
<td>Engagement of six months or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents with unhappy marriages</td>
<td>Happily married parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples who do not attend churches, or are of different faiths</td>
<td>Couples who attend church regularly, or Catholic, or adhere to the same church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower social rank</td>
<td>Higher social rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kin and friends’ disapproval of the marriage</td>
<td>Kin and friends’ approval of the marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General dissimilarity in background</td>
<td>Similarity of background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement of husband and wife on role obligations</td>
<td>Agreement of husband and wife on role obligations (161).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Divorce is a traumatic experience to the spouses as well as the children. Research shows that they are not as traumatic as it is painted by traditionalists who are against divorce. After a year the children recover from the shock, the analysts argue. Sometimes the children persuade the mother to remarry. Divorce is often followed by dating and remarriage unless the divorcee is too old to remarry.

Goode’s theoretical position looks backward to Mark Poster. It also looks forward to Goldthorpe’s who offers a critique of earlier sociologists.
J.E. Goldthorpe continues from the theoretical stand of Goode and elaborates the question of working women and their attitudes to women in employment. He also expands on the consequences of a divorce from a psychological point of view. More than statistics, percentage, growth rate and the causes and consequences of divorce from a sociological point of view, the psychological approach adopted by Goldthorpe to divorce is relevant for the analysis of the novels. Moreover he deals with the alternatives to marriage elaborately. Communes, The Kibbutz, cohabitation without marriage, swinging and group marriage are the alternatives experimented by Americans.

**Andrew J. Cherlin's Theory**

A.J. Cherlin's discussion of divorce and family life after remarriage is significant as he looks at the issue from the point of view of the children and stepchildren too. He sheds light on the comparison and analysis of the novels. He observes that (1) “almost all children experience an initial period of great emotional upset following a parental separation; (2) most return to a normal developmental course within one or two years following the separation, and 3) a minority of children experience some long-term psychological problems as a result of the break-up that may persist into adulthood” (78). He touches upon the emotional state of the children of a family where husband and wife quarrel constantly. “It is probably true that children are better off, as many researchers have claimed, living with one separated parent than living in a home torn apart by intense conflict or abuse” (88).
Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage (1992) by Andrew J. Cherlin attempts to answer the crucial question "why are the common patterns of marrying and divorcing so different from what they were just a few decades ago? And what are the consequences of these changes for the lives of adults and children and for our society as a whole?" (2).

In the 1970s, there was an increase in the divorce rate. Since about that period cohabitation has also increased. They have complicated marriage patterns and family patterns. "What does it mean for people's lives and for the institution of the family when about one out of six women is likely to be still unmarried at age thirty, when nearly half of all adults will live with a partner before marrying, when about one out of two recent marriages will end in divorce, when about one-third of all young adults can expect to find themselves eventually in a remarriage following a divorce?" (Cherlin, 67) are the painful questions raised by Cherlin about the worsening condition of the family in the 1990 in the U.S.A. Such a condition prompts the social analyst to wonder with alarm if the institution of family was dying. "How long would it survive?" has been the doubt of critics whenever divorce rate increased or birth-rate decreased alarmingly. A concrete problem arising out of this condition is to redefine the family.
Family Life after Divorce

In 1990, there were 4.8 million separated or divorced mothers heading families that included children under eighteen, more than double the number in 1970. Moreover, in 1985, there were 4.5 million husband-wife households that included at least one stepchild under the age 18. The staggering figure presented by Cherlin supports and substantiates his conclusions about the family. He continues thus:

On a social level, therefore, patterns of marriage and family life are very different from what they were just a few decades ago. The statistics I have presented suggest that among the most significant differences are the increasing levels of divorce and remarriage and the associated rise in the number of single-parent families and families formed by remarriage (71-72).

Cherlin refers to Robert S. Weiss's observations about single parent families. In a single-parent family, usually it is the wife who headed the family. She experienced overload at three levels. One is responsibility overload: it is the mother who has to make decisions and meet all the needs of the family. Another is task overload: the single parent has too much work to do like housekeeping, working for a livelihood and parenting. A third is emotional overload: the single parent has to offer emotional support to their children when they themselves need it badly (73).
Divorce has its own rewards for a single-parent family. First and foremost is the end of the marital conflict. It boosts the self-esteem of the parent.

It is the children who are very upset by the divorce. Pre-school children are frightened and feel guilty, while older children are angered by it. Adolescents, who are able to understand the need for a divorce, are deeply worried about their future. Boys and girls react differently to divorce at least during the early months. Boys turn aggressive whereas the girls adjust quickly. However, girls suffer from depression as they internalize the distress. There is the long-term impact of divorce on children engendering distrust of marriage as an institution. They entertain great doubts about their future life-partners.

**Family Life after Remarriage**

Remarriage is the traditional answer to most of the divorced men and women who face many problems of single parents. It is a relief from unbearable loneliness. Cherlin has made a study of remarried persons, their relation with stepchildren, their ex-spouses and their stepchildren. His study has yielded a wealth of interesting details. Children of divorced parents keep meeting their non custodial parent (usually the father) and establish a relation with his second wife and his stepchildren. Similarly when a divorced woman remarries a man with children by earlier marriage there is another of group of stepbrothers and stepsisters. There is the possibility of half-brother and half-
sister and stepgrandparents joining the family resulting in a jumbo family. When asked about the members of the immediate family, a child’s version would include the father who has divorced the child’s mother. The mother’s version would exclude him. So, a definition of the family will depend on the person interviewed.

Although remarriage offers relief to all the parties concerned, it does not ensure unadulterated happiness. A stepfather could discipline the aggressive boy and comfort him with warmth. On the other hand, a girl views the stepfather as an intruder. Cherlin concludes that adjustment in remarriage is not as easy to achieve as expected because remarriage is yet to be institutionalized.

Nijole V. Benokraitis’s Theory of the Family (1996)

Close on the heels of Cherlin the formulations of Nijole V. Benokraitis on different theories of love, marriage, micro and macro analysis of problems in the family, fresh practical approach to the consequences of divorce and remarriage offer fresh insights into these issues.

Like every social analyst, Benokraitis begins with the difficulties in defining either marriage or family as both the institutions are not what they were two generations ago. The number of single parents touched the ten million mark in the mid 1990s in the U.S.A. It was an increase of more than 40 percent since 1980. Childless couples, gay and lesbian couples, cohabiting
couples, and communes make it impossible to arrive at a precise definition of the family. Similar is the case in the definition of marriage. The writer explodes the myths about self-sufficient families, happy families of “the good old days” and family as a loving refuge.

Benokraitis begins with a definition of theory, making a distinction between micro-analysis and macro-analysis and proceeds to explain the six theories of the family:

A theory is a set of logically related statements that try to explain why a phenomenon occurs. A theory enables us to propose specific topics for study, and it also helps us to analyze the findings of our research...however, analyses of a particular phenomenon or series of events may address different aspects of a problem. For example, micro-analysts, who examine everyday social interaction in specific settings, might explain teenage runaways as victims of interpersonal problems; macro-analysts might consider how the economy creates family problems that encourage adolescents to leave home (29).

According to Benokraitis the six prominent theories of the family are:

1. Structural-Functional Theory
2. Conflict Theory
3. Symbolic Interaction Theory
4. Social Exchange Theory

5. Developmental Theories

6. General Systems Theory

Social Exchange Theory

This theory alone is immediately relevant for our analysis. The basic premise of this theory is that the relation between two people is a matter of barter. Both the parties want the reward to be higher than the cost. "People bring to the relationships certain resources-some tangible, some intangible—such as energy, money, material goods, status, intelligence, good looks, youth, power, talent, fame or affection" (Benokraitis, 33). The weakness of this theory is that there is nothing but crass calculation in human relation.

Most of the social analysts adhered to two or more theories in their analysis of the family as no single theory was adequate for their purposes.

Gender Bias

Gender role and gender bias are a growing concern of the sociologists who study the family-books, magazines, advertisements, and films which offer stereotyped images of boys, girls, men and women. Aggressiveness, intelligence, physical prowess, aptitude for learning mathematics and science are some of the stereotyped images of a male. A girl or a woman is presented as a docile, charming, fragile, emotional creature possessing an aptitude for
music, botany, literature, and the so called feminine disciplines. Benokraitis demolishes these myths which perpetuate gender bias.

Theories of Love

Everyone knows what love is. But when asked what it is, they will give different answers because love has many dimensions. It can be romantic, altruistic, obsessional or irrational.

At the very least, three elements are necessary for a love relationship: 1) a willingness to please and accommodate the other, even if this involves compromise and sacrifice; 2) an acceptance of the other person's faults and shortcomings; and 3) as much concern about the loved one's welfare as one's own.

(Quoted by Benokraitis, 112)

There are various theories of love which explain the why of love and the how as well.

More than marriage, wedding customs and rituals, marital success and happiness are the concern of the sociologists. According to Benokraitis, the recipe for a happy marriage consists of i) positive attitude towards the other person ii) providing emotional support iii) offering long-term commitment.
Divorce – Causes and Consequences

According to Benokraitis the United States has the highest divorce rate in the world. One out of two marriages ends in a divorce. Just as divorce rates have increased, so have the rates of remarriage and redivorce.

Causes

By the 1990s, divorce is considered normal, even though many do see it as morally reprehensible. There is an industry thriving on divorce. Lawyers, psychologists, counsellors and mediators offer their services in helping divorce for a fee. Religious institutions have come to accept divorce. No-fault divorces are approved by law.

Where families have a strong bond with the community at large divorces are rare. The social welfare scheme provided to single parents has increased the divorce rate. There are many other reasons like mismatch in age, race, religion, education and income behind divorces besides emotional incompatibility.

Consequences

The consequences of divorce are more painful than the causes, though it is a release from perennial conflict. Both husband and wife suffer from what is called ‘Divorce Hangover’, guilt, financial instability and emotional upheavals. There are legal problems like alimony, custody of children, property
settlement, and child support. Most important, it is the children who suffer most.

**Remarriage and Step Families**

In most cases, remarriage is the inevitable consequence of a divorce. The rate of remarriage is the highest in the United States. "More than 50 percent of today's youth will be stepsons or stepdaughters by the year 2000" (Benokraitis, 480). The problem area in remarriage is the relation between the children and the stepparent and stepbrothers or stepsisters. The integration, if at all, comes after great emotional friction.

Success in remarriage cannot be taken for granted although the husband and wife remarry with great expectations. The rate of redivorce is also astonishingly high in the United States.

Nijole Benokraitis's book *Marriage and Families* is an exhaustive theoretical study as much as a text book on the subject. Though it is ten years old, it is contemporaneous with the novels of Anne Tyler.

The "neo-bourgeois" family is characterized by the following features:

1. The family is a unit of consumption. Consumer culture is an important category.
2. The TV and the automobile serve to isolate members within the family.

3. Growth in the rate of divorce, separation or cohabitation or extra marital sex.

4. The growing gap between parents and children.

5. Increase in demand for emotional fulfilment in marriage.

6. The contemporary family as a neo-bourgeois family retains some of the qualities of the Victorian bourgeois family.

7. The sexual promiscuity of the middle class neo-bourgeois or the contemporary society is a fall out of the consumerist culture of “impulsive buying” and instant gratification.

8. Sexual revolution, and sexual experimentation, leads to gay marriages, cohabitation, women’s communes, and kitzbutz

The theoretical stand of the present study is drawn from the social theorists discussed above, making a selection of some principles while rejecting some others. The principle behind the selection is guided by the novels taken for comparative study. The following categories have been selected in framing a theory of the family:

1. Upbringing and child-rearing practice

2. Everyday life

3. Psychic structure of the family

4. Parental authority
The categories are obviously drawn from sociology and psychology. Psychology, of course, does explain certain idiosyncratic behavioural pattern of the family members, the conflicts and cohesion among them. Sociology, psychology and economics rely heavily on empirical and scientific approach in their analysis of the family and the question of its survival.

Theories of family are interesting and persuasive. There are many theories of family, marriage, love, marital instability, and divorce, but one would like to believe that novelists are more successful than theorists because of their "inwardness", in their unfolding of character, conflict, and events.

In the second chapter the four novels of Edith Wharton – *The House of Mirth, The Custom of the Country, The Age of Innocence*, and *The Children* are examined in terms of the categories formulated about the family in Chapter I. Similarly, in the third chapter, Anne Tyler's four novels – *Dinner at the*
Homesick Restaurant, The Accidental Tourist, Ladder of Years and The Amateur Marriage – are scrutinized.

The fourth chapter compares Edith Wharton and Anne Tyler as novelists. To begin with, their life, the time and the society they lived in, the values of their different eras, and how they shaped their minds and creative writing are compared.

There is a gap between how a family theorist and how a novelist look at the family, its psychic structure, the tension that prevails among the members of the family, the causes and consequences of the emotional strain. The former is looking at them from a fairly scientific point of view and arrives at general principles. On the other hand, the novelist focuses on individual characters, their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities. There are meeting points too between the theorist and the novelist. The conclusion is allowed to emerge from the arguments of the foregoing chapters and this forms the fifth chapter.