CHAPTER III

VIRTUOUS AND RIGHTEOUS WOMAN

As woman goes so the world goes.¹ Edith Deen.

Behind every great/successful man there stands a woman.²

The Holy Writ possesses imperishable records of women who are striking and prominent for their chaste, unsullied and commendable characteristic traits, which are tangible. Despite the fact that they are the products of their culture and time displaying human emotions, feelings and actions, their lives carry lessons for the present to bring hope for the future. They stand at their best as exemplars of womanhood and without failures and shortcomings they are portrayed as “the white flower of a blameless life”,³ building their families successfully and triumphantly.

The Bible is candid in entrusting the mission of building the family into the hands of a woman who has to do so with the God given wisdom which emanates from her hatred for evil and dependence on God because the Bible says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom:” and “to hate evil”. (Proverbs 9:10 & 8:13) and “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it”. (Psalms 127:1) So, for a woman to build a home acceptable and pleasing to God is the most difficult and the most valuable of
all her earthly accomplishments. The Bible projects a repertoire of women, who with the fear of the Lord, hating evil, ventured to be role models for the generations to come by their exemplary lives, in building their families acceptable to God and thus honoured as “virtuous” women of the Bible.

Becky Winn, a gospel preacher, defines virtue as:

‘Virtue’ comes from the Latin virtus, meaning strength, worth, and (surprise!) manliness. Its shades of meaning encompass ideas of excellence, goodness, morality, valour, chastity and effective working power. Thus, a virtuous woman, ...is also not the old societal stereotype of a weak, helpless, clinging wine. She is someone who is content and comfortable with her God-ordained womanhood, truly feminine, and a strong, worthy, biblical helpmeet. 4

Thus the Bible conspicuously presents the characteristic traits of a virtuous woman. She is a blend of all virtues that go into the making of an ideal woman. The woman who is endowed with the merits implicitly prescribed by the Bible is quite capable of facing all the vicissitudes of life and is a boon not merely to the family but even to the society. This chapter studies the lives and achievements of a few virtuous women in the Bible and proceeds to analyse the women characters from the selected works of fiction. The milieus,
cultures, conditions and contexts are varying but certain virtues and vices remain universal, irrespective of time and age.

From the repertoire of the Bible, the women characters with virtuous traits selected for the present study are Ruth, Hannah, The Proverbs 31 Woman and Elisabeth. The study proceeds with the character of Ruth who is considered to be one of the most beautiful, striking and touching love idylls in the entire canon of sacred or profane literature. The noblest traits of character are apparently noticeable in this memorial of a godly courageous woman. As Thelma Johnson, a biblical scholar praises her saying that she carved out “a special niche for herself ... by the matchless beauty of her character which like sweet fragrance wafts gently through timeless ages”.5

With her integrity, faithfulness, kindness, meekness, responsibility, and womanly sweetness, Ruth catches admiration from the people of Israel. In spite of her Moabite background, she has become a role model for the women of the world by being an ideal daughter-in-law, wife and mother.

At the opening of the narrative, Elimelech, a native of Bethlehem moved to the land of Moab to sojourn, a land of foreign worship, to escape the famine at Bethlehem, along with his wife, Naomi and two sons. He brought her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, from Moab, though it was against the will of God and forbidden by the
Hebrews to marry from gentiles. They were happy till misfortune struck them in the form of death. Elimelech died and shortly afterwards his sons Mahlon and Chilion also died leaving three widows to manage their lives by themselves.

Naomi, despairing and desolate, decided to return to her native land and entreated her daughters-in-law to go back to their families and remarry and start their lives anew. Orpah yielded, kissed her farewell but there was no turning back to Ruth. This **faithful daughter-in-law** cleaved to her mother-in-law. Once for all she decided to leave her family, her native land and lead her life with the lonely destitute, Naomi, in a strange land, believing in the God of Israel. The following exquisite expression of love mingled with loyalty ever spoken by a daughter-in-law reveals her nobility of character:

Entreat me not to leave thee ...for whither thou goest, I will go; ...Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if aught* but death part thee and me. (Ruth 1:16-17)

Thus Ruth, an embodiment of all that is fine in a young widow, decided to sacrifice her own personal interests and happiness by expressing her faithfulness and friendliness to her helpless mother-in-law with a spirit of love. Because of this **determined character**,
she becomes unique in the history of woman, whose devotion and dedication is not for a man but for her mother-in-law.

At Bethlehem Ruth, with the permission of her mother-in-law, takes up the humble weary and lowly task of gleaning, following the reapers in the field of Boaz, a distant kinsman of Elimelech. Under the blazing sun, this humble gleaner toiled continuously, like a diligent worker, bravely enduring the hardships. Following the Hebrew custom, Naomi wanted to do some specific favour to bring brighter future to her beloved daughter-in-law. In ancient Israel “it was the custom of the next of kin of a dead man to purchase or redeem his estate... If the man left a young and childless wife it was the duty of the next of kin to marry her and, by having children, save the family name from extinction”.6

Therefore Naomi directed Ruth to go to Boaz that night. She instructed her “to notice the place where Boaz lies and uncover his feet and lie down”. (Ruth 3:4) As an obedient daughter-in-law she carried everything very honestly. Boaz got up in the night and understanding the meaning of her action, promised to help this woman of excellence because he learned from the workers about the sacrifices that she had made for her mother-in-law after her husband’s death and of her diligent and sincere work in the fields. Next day Boaz gathered the elders of the land and publicly bought Elimelech’s property and purchased the beautiful Ruth as his wife.
She gave birth to a son and named him Obed, who became the grand father of King David in whose genealogy Jesus Christ was born. This honoured mother could even get an entry into the lineage of Christ.

With her devotion to family, and dependence on God she could deliver blessings to herself and to her family. Her faithfulness and integrity lifted her from abject poverty to plenty and prosperity. Even then she showed her piety and obedience to her husband. A great theologian H. V. Morton praises that her outstanding quality was “a beauty of heart, a generosity of soul, a firm sense of duty, and a meekness which often goes hand in hand with a gift of decision”.  

She stands as a brilliant, exceptional role model for the present day women where in healthy equation and harmony with the mother-in-law, a rarity. In the words of Thelma Johnson, a famous theologian, who succinctly emphasises the need to take lessons from the characters like Ruth as:

In an age like ours with its ever growing number of strained relationships, broken homes and loveless lives, it is most refreshing to go back to the charming picture of loyalty and love found in the story of Ruth....No bright visions of hope or better prospects allured her to forsake everything she had held dear, except to be the sole companion to an aged, desolate and lonely woman.  

Hannah is another character, who deserves sufficient attention. The analysis of her character presents a plethora of virtues. Her character is a touchstone to judge the current values, which are under serious threat.

The story of Hannah is recorded in I Samuel of the Bible, which accounts the life in the days of Judges and narrates the transition of Israel from theocracy to monarchy. Hannah, one of the most well-known women of the Bible, demonstrates her strength by standing as an example for women who experience pain and suffering, but with her prayers, dependence on living God, patience, humbleness, submissiveness and obedience to her husband, chastity, and above all the greatest virtue of self-sacrifice, becomes successful in overcoming her affliction. And she excels as a successful wife by building her family and giving birth to Samuel, the earliest of the greatest Hebrew prophets of Israel. As Watton has praised the story of Hannah in the article *Hannah- I will never be the same again* saying:

This is a story of victory...it’s a story of deliverance...it’s about obedience, it’s about the privilege of being used by God in his plans and purposes. It’s about how God intervened in an ordinary woman’s life. It’s exciting!  

Hannah, with her husband Elkanah, a wealthy Levite, lived in the hill country of Ephraim, during the time when Israel lapsed to
follow the high spiritual and moral standards set up by God through Moses. In those hard times she exhibited her patience and holiness diligently by following God devoutly. Her life is said to be “a harp-note of the immortal triumph of patience”.¹⁰

But Hannah had no children. Elkana married other woman Peninna, because in those days polygamy was an accepted social custom to continue a man’s family line. Peninnah, who had children, taunted and reproached Hannah for her barrenness. Hannah, though, manifested the poise of self-control, became miserable, but without retaliating she meekly “took everything to god in prayer”,¹¹ and believed with all her heart that it was only in the hands of God to bless her with children.

Hannah appeared to be a woman of unblemished character because of her sanctity. She was said to be “fervent in her worship and effective in prayer”.¹² Though the environment was not conducive for leading spiritually good lives, she trekked a new path breaking away from the old traditions and leading a life in serenity to get an ardent answer from the living God and thus emerged as “a veritable lily among thorns”¹³ and “a ripe flower in an almost sterile field”.¹⁴

Every year Elkana took her family to Shiloh, the religious centre of the nation, the place where Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle symbolizing the presence of God rested, to worship the
Lord Almighty and offer sacrifices. In one of her visits, Hannah went into the sanctuary to pour out her anguish in the presence of God. She found refuge in prayer. The bitterness of barren life besieged her. In this troubled state of mind she made the greatest vow ever made by any mother:

O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid... but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life... (I Samuel 1: 11)

This prayer reveals her submissiveness and complete dependence on God. As she was praying, the high priest, thinking that she was drunk, upbraided her. But with her humbleness, she answered that because of her sorrowful spirit she was pouring out her heart before the Lord. Hannah left the place with renewed strength, confidence and faith with a positive hope that her supplication would certainly be answered. In the process of time, God remembered her and blessed her with a son. She named him Samuel, meaning “asked of the Lord”.

Hannah, as promised brought her son to Shiloh to lend him to God to serve Him all the days of his life. She articulated her gratitude to God for His goodness in hearing her prayer and answering. Hannah’s sacrifice was the greatest sacrifice ever made
by any mother. Samuel became the greatest prophet of Israel who was desired by God to anoint kings of Israel.

Hannah’s life stands as a proof that God shows concern for the poor and the afflicted and He hears the prayers and even answers. Thus Hannah’s life radiates as a beautiful example for the women of the present day. Jon. F. Jurst, a biblical scholar says:

The outline touches of her life sombre and mournful at first, but radiant with faith and hope at last, form the fitting introduction to the narrative of the career of her great son Samuel in his combined character of Judge and Prophet of Israel.\(^\text{16}\)

Elisabeth is another character, who displays certain ideal qualities. The analysis of her character emanates a surfeit of virtues, which are to be followed by women of all ages.

The New Testament begins with two grandeur, beautiful and model families of the house of Joseph and Mary, and the house of Zacharias and Elisabeth. The meaning of Elisabeth is “the worshipper of God”.\(^\text{17}\) Her story line is very briefly recorded in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. Being an excellent and honoured wife, she is an exemplary for the women of today because of her upright character, humbleness, morality, devoutness and faith in God.
Elisabeth hailed from the Priestly family of Aaron and married Zacharias, a priest, who is ordained by God to be holy unto Him. Zacharias married her because priests were allowed to marry only religious and pious women according to the laws given by God through Moses. Praising the qualities of Elisabeth, Sarah Smith, a biblical scholar, says that she had “inherited from her illustrious ancestry a powerful intellect, a warm heart, and soundness of judgment; above all, she had that crowning excellence of female character, ardent and consistent piety”.

Like her husband, Aaron, Elisabeth was a godly woman. Her family was ordained to be in the service of the temple as priesthood. Both husband and wife were righteous before God walking in all commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, which was a reflection of their faith in God. Above all they were a praying couple. As a good helpmeet she rendered her tender attention to her husband’s priestly vestments and her cooperation in all of his activities. Her Godly trait was reflected in her living, influencing every deliberation, word and deed.

The cause of her sorrow and disappointment was that she had no children, in spite of her righteousness towards God and loyalty towards her husband. Luke in his Gospel mentions that both of them were well stricken in years and she had lost the capacity of natural child bearing. This childless woman had longed for a child and sincerely brought the need to the living God only in prayer. This
was much more humiliating because in ancient Israel, a woman was
given respect and her value was measured largely by her ability of
giving birth to children. But regardless of this pain and suffering,
she was humble, never complained against her husband or God, but
remained much more faithful in her actions proving her mettle.

Her life proved that God would not forget to bless the people
who would be faithful to Him. He remembered her and gave the
privilege of receiving a miracle of God. When Zacharias was chosen
by lot, to perform his priestly duties in the sanctuary, an angel of
God appeared to him saying: “Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is
heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt
call his name John”. (Luke 1:13)

This was beyond their expectation and belief. As he doubted the
news because of their age and inability to bring forth children, he
became mute until the things, which had been foretold, had come to
pass. He faced the consequences because he blurted out his
scepticism. But she was different; she believed that all-powerful was
God’s word and revelation and nothing was impossible to Him. She
silently and prayerfully trusted God expecting a miracle in a spirit of
reverent responsibility and humility.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, visited her and spent three months in
the conducive atmosphere and returned comforted and strengthened
by Elisabeth. Shortly afterwards, Elisabeth gave birth to her
promising son, John the Baptist, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the ways of the Lord’”. (John 1:23) Thus being a deeply spiritual woman, she showed no doubts about the ability of God to fulfil His promise. Her life divulges that every situation is in the control of the Almighty, who doesn’t forget people who are truly faithful to Him.

Immortality is rendered to this privileged woman because she became the mother of John the Baptist, the prophet of the Highest and the forerunner of Christ, proclaiming and preparing the ways of God.

Basing on the real lives of many Israelite virtuous women in his jurisdiction, King Solomon gives a priestly teaching on the virtuous woman, who incidentally named as ‘The Virtuous Woman’ and referred to as ‘Proverbs 31 Woman’. She is obviously not an imaginary character.

The Virtuous Woman, “literature’s most perfect picture of the ideal woman,”19 rises up as a timeless example of excellence, discipline, virtue, self-control, responsibility, etc. Nothing can be added to the supreme beauty of the Bible caricature of the virtuous woman. The verses 10 -31 are in Hebrew alphabetic acrostic form because of which these twenty-two verses have been called “the ABC of the Perfect Wife”.20
Her chastity, her meticulousness, her efficiency, her charity, her care, concern and love for husband and children and her business foresight are radiantly elucidated in verbal skill that rise up majestically in the Holy Writ. But it is the source of her godliness, which throws light on her feminine efficacies and which is the guiding principle directing her life with a purpose and meaning. She stands as an ultimate example of how a woman should lead her life today as a noble wife and a model mother.

This devoted wife, who is compared to a priceless pearl, is God fearing; as a result she is faithful to her husband, instilling confidence and trust in him. She respects her husband and does him only good all the days of her life and thus fulfilling her responsibility as a wife with excellence and proven to be a trustworthy helpmeet.

The Virtuous Woman is not a shirker, but a worker who is pleased to work willingly with her hands, not of compulsion but of compassion. Thus she is a delighted worker, who never complains and works readily and enthusiastically, to carry on with her household duties with contentment. She is “no prima donna!” She is “not above manual work”. 21

She gets up early to be alone with God to get strength and vigour for the day before the hustle and bustle of the day begins. She
rationally analyses financial transactions and wisely involves herself in making a decision in family finances which will yield long-term benefits but not without the knowledge of her husband. This diligent labourer is girded to act readily with her household tasks to reap the harvest. She also burns the midnight oil. She is ever munificent to extend her hands to the poor and the needy and thus share her blessings with them.

She is dedicated to godly speech and so capable to express herself sensitively and also wisely. Her words reveal that she is governed by the rules of wisdom. Her dependable instruction and her consistent teaching to her children has made her home a place of love and learning and has given her an elevated position in the society. She speaks that “honours God” and “benefits the hearers”.22

She is dressed with care, the ornament of a meek and gentle spirit. This pertains to her inner beauty or beauty of character. She looks at future with much confidence because she does not know “what the future holds”, but she knows, “WHO holds the future”.23 Being virtuous she weighs down the responsibility of looking well the moral habits of her children, motivating them for good manners, healthy relations and fine habits.

Beauty is not considered to be beauty if it encompasses vileness. Beauty without prudence is useless. External beauty is evanescent and fleeting like a bubble or vapour and so not long
lasting. She does not rely upon her charm or beauty but her confidence is in God which earns her genuine extol and commendable living. As a result of her dependence on God she wrought blessings to her household. The ultimate result of all her tangible traits is that she delivered blessings for her children and her husband who is given an honour of sitting with the elders of the land.

Her triumph and success is acknowledged and applauded by her children and husband. What more is required of her? She, as an incomparable wife, with her moral strength and virtuous character could emanate a sentimental feeling in the heart of her husband. This godly woman is described by Rev. Charles Bridges as a wife who makes her husband think that she is “the soother of his cares, the counsellor of his perplexities, the comforter of his sorrows, the sunshine of his earthly joys”. 24 Thus with her sensitivity, service and submissiveness she wins the heart of her husband.

Her grit and determination, loving discipline, wise counsel and tender guidance and direction, makes her stand as a blessed and ideal model for the women of the present day society perceived from such facets as a loyal wife a and a noble mother.

Mathew Henry, a great theologian aptly describes the suitability of the Virtuous Woman as: “This is the description of a virtuous
woman of those days, but the general outlines equally suit every age
and nation”. Thus it is aptly considered as follows:

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 stands as an ideal example
of God’s woman today, viewed from such facets as wife, mother,
member of society, manufacturer, merchant, and landowner.

All the portraits selected from the “World’s Gallery of Lasting
Fame” occupy seminal place by means of their virtuous traits
augmented by their fear in God, hating evil and leading morally good
and displaying strength of character. These women of biblical times
demonstrated the wisdom of God practically by means of their
successful roles in their families. Almost all these virtuous traits are
traced in the women characters of Indian writing in English.

In the considerable body of fiction in English, written by skilful
novelists of India, many women are portrayed as playing significant
roles in their family structure. Like the virtuous women of the Bible
they also display certain virtuous characteristic traits, which make
them elevated by fulfilling their responsibilities and emerged as the
beacon of light giving guidelines for the future generations to come.
Every character demonstrates simplicity outwardly but underneath
carries a vision and meaningful message for the readers. In fiction
no character is stamped as completely virtuous or vicious but if the
good elements in the character outnumber the bad ones, that
character is considered as virtuous and vice versa.
In Kamala Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire*, the protagonist Sarojini is a deeply spiritual woman with amiable qualities and also a staunch traditional woman following Hindu customs and traditions very devoutly. She takes time everyday to worship the divine *tulasi*, which stands in the middle of the courtyard. But her husband Dandekar, who is modern, never prays to it, saying that it is only a plant and one does not worship plants: but she feels that it is a symbol of God and it is necessary that “God should have symbols, since no man has the power or temerity to visualize him”. (P1)28

Being a Hindu wife, she believes in symbols to worship God because man has no power to visualize Him.

Like Elizabeth and Hannah who were prayerful, she also spends most of her time in prayers and visiting temples listening to the divine preaching of the swamis. Her deeply religious nature is reflected even from the walls of her dining room because the character and style of life of a woman is revealed by the walls of the house in which she lives. “…and anyway most of the wall space was taken up by framed prints. These were all of gods and goddesses, singly and in groups…” (P6)

The virtuous traits of biblical women are very much visible in Sarojini. In the words of Kamala Markandaya herself Sarojini is: “a good wife... good with children, an excellent cook, an efficient
manager of his household, a woman who still gave him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage, less from the warmth of her response than from her unfailing acquiescence…” (P2) and “a sensible woman in all the practical matters of life”. (P19) All these traits are similar to the character of Proverbs 31 Woman who was also an efficient manager of finance and other things, a good wife and mother, and who took care to prepare and serve nutritious food for her household.

Like the Proverbs 31 Woman, who bought a vineyard from her savings to multiply and safeguard money, Sarojini regularly and methodically converts a fair pile of savings into gold for the security. Dandekar himself says that Sarojini is a prudent manager who knows to manage the finances efficiently, when Sastri expresses his concern for a cut in the salary for absenting himself from the duty without prior notice.

When her husband comes home, as a dutiful wife, Sarojini waits and takes care of his needs. As such her absence will be immediately felt by her husband, where the peace of the house is restored by her presence only. He is addicted to her company. In his pain her presence has “the power to soothe him”. (P140) Her care and concern towards her husband is evident when he is sick with smallpox. Dandekar says Sarojini’s hand has been “a trustworthy guide”. (P141) Seeing that, even her cousin Rajam praises her as, “a sensible, devout girl.” (P150)
As the Holy Spirit of the family, she comforts, teaches, soothes, strengthens her husband and so he feels that he is not complete without her which is evident from his expression: “…but I know now that without her I’m not whole”. (P157)

All the biblical women are obedient and submissive to their husbands because of their spirituality. As Sarojini is spiritual, she shows implicit obedience to her husband. Her husband loves her and so her obedience is in response to love. He knows that when he says not to go she will obey, which is clear from his expression, “If I compelled her she would obey me, she is my wife”. (P158)

After fifteen years of her married life when she suffers from some growth in her womb she goes to a Swamy, a reputed faith healer without taking her husband into confidence. Adding fire to that he finds a photograph of a man in her trunk. Dandekar who believes in the traditional image of a woman opines in the beginning, “Our women are not like that…. They don’t flaunt themselves in front of men, either before marriage or after”. (P16) but when she repeatedly visits the Swamy secretly, he doubts her fidelity and faithfulness and changes his opinion saying, “…all women are the same”. (P27) He thinks that her family is on the verge of breaking because he has “not built it on rock”. (P30) The discussion with his colleagues about marriage echoes in his heart, “There is an increase
in divorce rate because of infidelity”, (P16) which amplifies his fear. He feels that his family life is twisted out of shape and calls her harlot and spoiled woman, when he thinks that she has an affair with the man and questions, “Can you deny you went with him – with this man whom you worship as a god?”(P56) With this she gets hurt but states very firmly:

‘The man whom I worship as a god,’ she said, looking at him directly. ‘You are very nearly right in the one thing. Just that one thing.’ (P56)

Like the virtuous women of the Bible, she is a woman of strong character. Being a pious woman, she knows to safeguard her chastity. She has not done anything that will defile her. She informs him: “I have a growth in my womb”. (P67) She informs why she has hidden the problem:

‘Because you would have stopped me going to be healed’…. ‘You would have sent me to a hospital instead. Called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share….You would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith, because faith and reason don’t go together, and without faith I shall not be healed’. (P68)

Akin to the character of Elizabeth and Hannah, she believes in the
divine power with faith. She calls it healing by faith or healing by the grace of God. Her inherent faith is revealed in her regular visits to Swamy. Her husband secretly follows her and finds her with Swamy:

She was sitting, cross-legged, on the man’s right. His hand was on her bowed head, and he was murmuring to her, his voice falling to a whisper, a soft stream of indistinguishable words. (P61)

When Dandekar follows her to find her secret, she blames him for his mistrust. She is truly a loving and trustworthy woman like Proverbs 31 Woman, who gained the confidence of her husband by doing only good to him. Of course Dandekar realises it later.

In order to make up for the time Sarojini spends away by her regular visits to Swamy, she works strenuously and diligently like Ruth and Proverbs 31 Woman and so finds little time for rest. Like the successful biblical women even her prime concern is not herself but her family.

She gives away jewellery and valuable things to Swamy because she knows how the helpless devotees and cripples are provided food and shelter by him. She can be compared to Proverbs 31 Woman who extended her hands to the poor and the needy.
When her husband insists to go for an operation, Sarojini expresses her staunch faith in God saying that she will be cured by Swamy divinely. She believes in the divine healing, like Elisabeth and Hannah who believed in God’s heavenly help and blessing for their barrenness. She is naïve and pious. She is faithful in her family responsibilities and loyal to her husband.

She gets strength and inspiration from Swamy and undergoes operation and gets cured of her ailment. Dandekar, who finds fault with his wife for giving valuable things to Swamy, after her operation realises how her faith has helped her and goes to Swamy’s house, where he finds a number of the crippled and the needy. When his jewellery is offered back to him, he refuses to take realizing the moral and spiritual values of his wife. Thus the life of Sarojini divulges that reciprocal understanding between husband and wife is, indeed, essential to make a relationship healthy. Thus with all her virtuous traits she builds her family like the virtuous women of the Bible and leads a happy, comfortable and blissful life.

In Kamala Markandaya’s *A Handful of Rice*, Nalini is portrayed as: “Pretty, modest, virtuous...”, (52) “…girl with the bright eyes and the thick, glossy hair, who could transform a man’s life”. (P25) Her voice is ever soft and low which is an excellent quality in woman. With her virtuous and modest traits she transforms the ill nature of her husband Ravi.
When Ravi barges into the house of Apu for food, he gets attracted towards Nalini at first sight and longs to marry her. He feels:

If I had a wife, he thought as he ate, she would cook for me, it would be like this everyday...but what had he to offer to get himself a wife? (P11)

What a lovely face, he thought, what a lovely woman. If...she were to become his wife, what would he not do for her, what could he not achieve!” (P42)

When he observes her obedience and helping hand to her parents, he thinks that she will prove to be a good helpmate for him. Her diligence in work and humility makes him realise that sharing a life with such a girl in marriage will be a blissful one and he can find mental peace in her company. So he senses: “What a girl he thought. Take a girl like that, and half a man’s troubles would be over”. (P25) All these traits can be compared to Ruth and Proverbs 31 Woman. Her magical personality and her goodness make him repudiate all unworthy things in his life.

In the beginning of his married life, he settles down with Nalini to joyful domesticity. His fascination for Nalini makes him adopt tailoring, his father-in-law’s craft, which is “neither exciting nor lucrative”. (P19) Her obedience and support makes him realise his
respectability and his responsibility at home. Ravi himself realises this, which is evident from the following lines:

...since his marriage ... he had become a responsible householder, a decent citizen with a decent job and a wife to support. (P108)

Soon Ravi develops a desire for material comforts. When Ravi finds Nalini sleeping on the floor, his heart becomes heavy because he cannot provide the minimum needs to his wife. Immediately he dreams of staying in a big room, a comfortable bed to sleep on and a bicycle to move from place to place. But she has the virtue of contentment like Elisabeth and Hannah of the Bible and so adjusts herself to the earnings of her husband and is happy with what she has. As a dutiful wife like Proverbs 31 Woman and Elizabeth she even assists him in his work. On one occasion he has a row with her father-in-law regarding the price that Apu fixes for the dresses. He wants to increase it but when it is objected he goes out and drinks with disappointment, because with these prices he knows that there will not be any improvement in their financial position. When he comes back drunk, his wife makes him understand their position by saying:

You are getting high and mighty, putting yourself on a level
with high-class folk. How can we ever be like them? Why can’t you be content with what we have? (P75)

From this Nalini’s sense of adjustment and simplicity is evident. Thus with her wise, smooth and soothing words she wants to bring a change in him. This trait is in relation to the Proverbs 31 Woman and Ruth who opened their mouth with wisdom to transform the minds of the members in their family. She also understands that he has developed this kind of aspirations after going to the houses of affluent people when he peeps into their rooms “catching glimpses of silk hangings ...gleaming floors and fine furniture, and feel an awe of so much wealth”. (P83) By observing all these things he feels bitter.

Before marriage when he comes to city to lead a better life, he comes into contact with Damodar, “a city slicker, born and bred in the streets of the city”. (P15) He joins hands with his gang dealing with smuggled goods. When Ravi gets intriguing rumours about Damodar’s possessions and wealth, he gets excited to meet him. Dandekar humiliates him and his job and offers him some work by which he can earn a lot. But he rejects the proposal saying:

‘I’ve tried’, said Ravi miserably. ‘You know I have. But now my wife- she- she doesn’t want me to do anything dishonest. She and her family I mean, they’re respectable-’ (P116)

Obviously, he gets disturbed and disillusioned by comparing his life
with the sophisticated life of Damodar. But with her good pacifying words Nalini restores his peace of mind. She is very much affectionate and her presence will make him forget the pain inflicted. Thus she is a peacemaker and thus donning the role of the Holy Spirit in comforting her husband like the women of the Bible. Also at this juncture the influence of Nalini on Ravi is ubiquitous. She has moulded him in such a way that even in her absence he feels like not doing the things, which will annoy or bring shame to the family. As she is a just and honest wife with good moral character he feels that he should not deceive her.

Surprisingly on some occasions when he is angry, he thinks of Nalini and he finds that the thought of Nalini itself removes his anger. She has such a soothing power on him. Thus whenever he is haunted by the failures and worries, he draws solace and comfort from his wife. But after Apu’s death, he finds it difficult to manage the household because he is tactless, inefficient in his craft and with customers he has no good dealings. Meeting minimum needs of the family also has become a difficult task for him. Choked by the husks of despair, he loses balance of his mind and even torments his wife in his drunken state. In this situation he comes to know about Damodar’s prosperity in dishonest and disrespectful means and ways. He goes to him at once to get redeemed of his debts and financial worries. But he realises how Nalini has influenced him by her virtuous and moral guidance. He doesn’t understand but is
caught in a dilemma between the moral guidance of his wife on one side and the aspiration for immense material prosperity offered by Damodar on the other side. But finally the virtue wins over vice preferring hard labour to dishonest ways of earning. It is pertinently opined about the character of Nalini that:

In spite of being beaten and ill-treated by her husband in his drunkenness, she tries her best to bring her wayward husband to the right path. She dissuades him to be associated with the smugglers. When Ravi gets frustrated with non-materialization of his ever-spiralling dreams, Nalini acts as a strong and powerful stimulus in helping him withdraw from the gangsters’ clutches.  

Dr. Sudheer Arora, the poet of *A Thirsty Cloud Cries*, also quotes the words of Iyengar regarding the goodness of Nalini as:

What is, however astonishing is the woman’s power of patient endurance, her inexhaustible capacity for love, her simple tenderness. The sisters Nalini and Thangam are the salt of the earth and the character of Nalini is exquisitely drawn. She is the sort that can redeem even an errant husband like Ravi. 

Similar to the women of the Bible Nalini is also chaste and submissive to her husband exhibiting her obedience and strength of
character and never complains against her husband in spite of his evil deeds. “Nalini, his wife, with her laughter and her sweetness” (P125) and “sense and sensibility” (P45) has drawn off the fury and bitterness from her husband’s life. For him Nalini is everything that a man can expect of his wife because Ravi feels “…his wife could talk, plan, dream, make love, undisturbed…” (P86)

Finally Ravi and Nalini come out, amidst all the hazards of poor living, as intimate lovers who share each other’s woes and joys. Nalini’s virtuous traits have brought a change in him to transform himself into a loving husband and a respectable young householder and an “industrious worker” and “a good husband”. (P80) The barren life of Ravi is transformed into the gleaming greenery with the life giving water of her virtuous traits.

Thus Nalini emerges as a successful wife by transforming her husband towards good, whose qualities are aptly observed and praised by Dr. Arora, saying:

…she is virtuous, blameless and possesses child-like innocence on her face. She plays well her traditional role of a good mother, an affectionate sister, an obedient and dutiful wife and a lovable daughter.32

In Jhabvala’s *The Householder*, which depicts the married life of
Prem and Indu, the role donned by Indu is commendable. Like Ruth, Proverbs 31 woman, Hannah and Elizabeth she displays certain traits which elevate her position as a good and commonsensical wife.

In the early days of his marriage, Prem is not happy with her beauty and so he develops a great dislike for Indu, which is apparent from his own feelings. “Why had they married him to her? She was not even very pretty”. (P10) He behaves indifferently and never brings her a gift and the food he buys, never shares with his wife and even considers her not as a source of strength but as a burden. But like the biblical women, Indu exhibits certain traits like gentleness and obedience towards her husband, which are the essential qualities of a wife, which really bring a change in his attitude towards her. When she sits with Mrs. Siegal, their owner, Prem catches a glimpse of her face, when she smiles he feels that she is really pretty. He can see beauty in her. Prem makes a hasty departure from Siegels, and Indu, though not willing, follows him as a dutiful and obedient wife.

On sharing his worries about his meagre salary and high rent, she advises him, like Proverbs 31 Woman, a good counsellor to her husband and children, to ask Mr. Siegel to reduce the rent. Thus she partakes in her husband’s worry.

When he receives a letter from his mother informing of her intention to visit them he feels happy because at least she will teach
Indu to cook the dishes of his liking. She also shows a letter from her mother asking her daughter to come home. He doesn't make any comment because her absence or presence makes no difference for him, which is obvious from his thoughts, “It did not, he thought, greatly matter to him whether she stayed or went”. (P29) But he wants her to stay exhibiting his patriarchal dominance, for which she shows her reluctance. She gets hurt by his words but bears and cries in silence like Hannah who bears the suffering silently. Similar to the nature of Hannah and Elizabeth she never throws herself into confrontation with her husband.

Prem being the son of an eminent and efficient Principal of a college, has been influenced by his father’s orthodox way of life and dictatorship and so follows his father's model even in his marital relationship. But unfortunately unlike his father he faces professional and financial problems. He, who is working as a lecturer in Hindi in Khanna’s Private College gets only 175 rupees per month, out of which he has to pay a rent of 45 rupees and certain amount to the maidservant to maintain his social status as a lecturer. He has to meet even the upcoming expenses as his wife is in the family way. As a result of all these expenses he falls into the pit of financial crisis. It is Indu, who motivates and encourages him to face the challenges of life. When he gets disappointed by the unsuccessful way of his career, Indu pacifies and comforts him. She makes him think about her and their family and forget his financial worries.
Thus she discharges her responsibility as the Holy Spirit of the family.

On the similar lines of Proverbs 31 Woman, she feels that she has her own role in family finances. When her husband finds it difficult to earn sufficient money for the family, she wants to cut down the expenses by doing the household work on her own without servant. Like Ruth, who took up the lowly task of a gleaner, she has no false prestige. She also sells the old newspapers to the paper man in order to get some money. Thus she saves money from the waste.

In the later days of his marriage, after observation, he senses that his past remark about Indu is wrong and feels that she is deft and neat in her ways, she has improved in her cooking and she is very prompt in her preparation and she is extremely good at preparing betel leaves. This is similar to Proverb 31 Woman who was a talented cook and generous host. When again she informs of her departure before her mother-in-law comes, he gets irritated and forbids her to go. For the first time unable to control her emotion she shouts and declares her independence retorting, “Who are you to forbid?”(P68). But the very next moment she runs and locks herself in the bathroom silently, which makes him realise that she is also right in her thinking. In spite of the disturbance at home, she never neglects her family chores and as such, she gains the heart of her
husband like Hannah who made her husband listen to her decision of leaving their son in the temple to serve God.

Prem is not successful in his career as a lecturer. He cannot maintain discipline in his class. As his teaching is not impressive, he doesn’t get the due respect from his students also. He develops inferiority complex because of his failure to control the class and helplessness to get a good name as a teacher. In this state of mind, Prem exchanges his sorrows, feelings, emotions and problems with Mr. Sohan Lal, Professor of Mathematics, who is leading a discouraging life owing to his financial worries. One day Sohan Lal takes him to Swami, where the atmosphere and songs make him forget his worries. He decides to live in contemplation only of spiritual things after meeting Swami but the Swami advises him to get adjusted with the realities of life and carry on his responsibilities of the family first, before taking up the spiritual path.

Prem’s mother expresses her feelings about Indu saying, she is “not very pretty, not educated, not very good at household duties but seems to be a good girl”. (P84, P85) Though her mother-in-law throws accusations at her, she bears them in silent hostility and never retorts, like Hannah who never retorted against Peninnah. But Prem knows that she is not an inferior girl as his mother supposes. At times they do have some strains in their relationship which are resolved by Indu and Prem. After the arrival of her mother-in-law,
Indu finds that there is a change in her husband’s priorities. Though she is neglected by her husband’s precedence, she never complains but bears the things in patience. Thus she displays tolerance like Hannah and Elizabeth, who showed their patience in times of snags. Like Ruth, she also exhibits her patience with her mother-in-law.

In these adverse circumstances, Indu suddenly leaves for her mother’s house along with her uncle in Prem’s absence. She does not leave any message to her husband. Now Indu’s absence is really felt by him. He realises, without his knowledge, how much he values her presence and how he gets attached to her. He cannot express it in words. This is apparent from the expression of his feelings in the following lines.

Nobody would ever love him again, he thought, like she did. Who else would serve him like this, fuss over him, cook his favourite dishes, massage his temples? (P116)

From the above lines the characteristic trait of Indu, who displays her care and concern for her husband, similar to the character of Proverbs 31 Woman and Ruth is demonstrated. He even buys a beautiful, glittering blouse piece for her and unable to control his feelings, he writes a letter, where in he expresses his pangs of suffering enduring her absence:
Why did you go away from me? I long for you and sometimes I feel like crying with tears because you are not there. I think of you so often. The house is empty without you and my heart also is empty….I feel I shall die with longing so much for you. (P142)

The same person, who feels in the beginning that her absence or presence makes no difference for him, afterwards feels the difference of her presence. This clearly shows her good relation with her husband and how she has gripped her husband with her excellent actions and has occupied a central place in her husband’s heart like the Proverbs 31 Woman, who had been blessed by her husband for her good deeds. Thus Indu’s life is an example of revealing the truth that a wife’s presence alone gives fullness to a man.

She makes him realise that the happy adjustment in conjugal life is possible only through mutual affection and understanding. After some days she returns. He feels happy about her return. In his college, he gets warning from the Principal about his inefficiency in maintaining discipline and handling class work. He becomes melancholic because of the fear of losing the job. But after coming home, like the Holy Spirit of the family she pacifies, consoles and encourages him. In her presence he forgets all his sorrows. He gets psychological security. She becomes her husband’s main source of consolation, comfort and support.
Prem gets in touch with Hans, a German who comes to India in search of spiritual life. He becomes a close friend of Prem. Towards the end of the novel, both of them feel sorry for their separation as Hans is leaving for Germany. Hans expresses his deep sorrow, which is perceptible from the following lines:

Hans tried to smile; but looking up, Prem was surprised to notice that his eyes were swimming with tears. (P188)

But Prem does not feel like Hans because he no longer needs a friend, as he has a good friend at home. The novel ends with a positive note with consummation of marital love in which the credit goes to the winning role of Indu. A woman of strong character, moral strength and chastity like the Proverbs 31 Woman, Ruth, Hannah and Elisabeth, Indu also dons her role successfully, thus building her family with all her virtuous traits.

In Jhabvala’s *Esmond in India* the role of a wife is explicitly explicated through the character of Indira, wife of Amrit, who proves her mettle like the virtuous women of the Bible and builds her house successfully.

Indira, like Ruth, maintains good and cordial relationship with her parents-in-law and sister-in-law. When she wants to buy a gift for her friend’s wedding, she seeks the advice of her sister-in-law
and also mother-in-law knowing that she (mother-in-law) has better ideas than herself. She gives due respect and understands her mother-in-law’s experience of life. She politely consults her father-in-law also. Thus like Ruth, who sought her mother-in-law’s consent to go out for work, Indira, even in trivial matters, depends on in-laws because of her cordial and dependable relation. Her humble obedience is revealed in her actions.

She marries Amrit, who is calm and an ordinary man and “she manages to be satisfied” (P16)\(^{34}\) and happy with him. He has not inherited the trait of his father to be attentive to his wife. He is good and expresses concern towards his parents but not towards his wife. But she does not take it seriously or negatively and never complains against her husband, akin to the character of Elizabeth and Hannah. Her mother-in-law, Madhuri, is very much impressed by the good traits of Indira, which is evident in the words of Madhuri herself:

Indira was the best possible company for Shakuntala; so nice, so sensible, such good manners.... she was aware that they (virtues) were there; all the virtues she had been disappointed in not discovering in her own daughter. (P26)

Madhuri was pleased to see her daughter-in-law so well-groomed; but less pleased by the contrast she presented to her own daughter. (P33)
The trust of mother-in-law for her daughter-in-law is shown here who wants her daughter to be in her company to develop the virtuous traits of her daughter-in-law. Madhuri also knows that indeed Indira is sensible to take wise decisions in spending her money. This trait can be compared to Proverbs 31 Woman, who was wise in her expenditure.

Indira always sits demurely beside her mother-in-law. Madhuri really understands the help and usefulness and pleasantness of Indira. She has asked Indira to accompany her because:

She found her daughter-in-law increasingly useful and indeed very pleasant, quiet company. (P121)

She is also very happy about the actions and deeds of her daughter-in-law in sustaining a loving and affectionate relationship with her husband and establishing a good relationship with other members of her family and so praises her. Thus like Ruth, Indira also wins her mother-in-law’s heart by her integrity and faithfulness. Like Naomi, Madhuri admires her daughter-in-law with ringing satisfaction, which is candid in her words:

She is an excellent wife to my son and an excellent daughter-in-law to me. (P123)

When Uma, Amrit’s aunt praises Amrit for his responsible, executive
position in the office, Indira feels self-satisfied because she believes that she is indirectly helping him to occupy higher positions like Proverbs 31 Woman, who was responsible for her husband’s success.

Amrit, an Administrative officer in a large British firm, is also well-fed and well-cared by his wife, Indira. As she serves him good and nutritious food and takes care of his needs, he feels comfortable in his duties outside and occupies an executive position in the office. In a way she is playing her role in her husband’s elevation like the Proverbs 31 Woman whose husband was given position to sit with the elders of the land. Madhuri also feels that she is the finer girl in carrying her duties towards her husband.

Indira always supports her husband enthusiastically. She has even encouraged him to send a photograph for a competition, which is awarded the first prize. As a married woman, she counsels Shakuntala, her sister-in-law, about the qualities she should develop, like Elizabeth who supported and counselled Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Thus, this indispensable bond of human life, marriage is made strong by the proper understanding, commitment and mutual trust between the husband and the wife. Markandaya and Jhabvala transformed their women characters into bright stars which glimmer
brilliantly with their own luminous bodies, with their precious ornaments of chastity and devotion to their husbands, in the shrine of their family; they support their husbands in all arenas sacrificing their individual life for upholding their families. They presented the characters where the women had their successful roles like Sarojini, Nalini, Indu and Indira who by dint of their virtuous traits become successful like the women of the Bible in building their families like the wise women.

The juxtaposition of the virtuous women characters from the Bible and selected fictional works (though it is an imaginary real world) gives an impression that despite deterioration of virtues and values, there is hope, a hope to return to the meaningful world of rich tradition where woman is perfect by all means. But good and evil coexists and the struggle between them is perennial. The quantum of viciousness is always more than goodness and that is the way of the world. In the Bible, one finds a host of vicious women, who, misguided by their own passions, bring calamities in their conjugal and domestic lives. The succeeding chapter undertakes a close examination of such vicious women and bring into context similar figures identified from selected fiction.
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