Chapter VII

FICTION AS EVANGEL

The fact that fiction can be Evangel for social justice is amply borne out by the impact of Uncle Tom's Cabin not only in America, but all over the world.

"Essentially, then, Mrs. Stowe represents the Novel as Evangel. Even Uncle Tom's Cabin was more than an antislavery tract. Slavery is used to introduce universal problems: a mother's struggle for her child, cruelty of the story and the helplessness of the weak, the terror of all mankind in the face of death."1

Uncle Tom's Cabin was the most sensational event in the world history of the novel and it made its author the most famous American woman of her time.

Uncle Tom's Cabin raised strong antislavery sentiments in America, Europe and elsewhere in the world. It won
public opinion in favour of abolition of slavery. A world-wide debate on the issue of slavery was initiated by the novel. It also provoked verbal and literary attacks on Mrs. Stowe from the protagonists of slavery. A tirade was started against Mrs. Stowe and the truthfulness of the episodes in the novel was questioned. This resulted in Mrs. Stowe publishing *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* containing excerpts from law suits, newspaper reports, and such other documents establishing the veracity of the episodes in the novel. This was followed by the publication of *Dred*, another antislavery novel, more aggressive than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. These two antislavery novels divided America on the issue of the abolition of slavery, the North being predominantly in favour of abolition and the South predominantly in favour of continuing the institution of slavery. The impact of these novels was so profound that it led to the Civil War in America on the issue of the abolition of slavery.

In the mid-nineteenth century New England was obsessed with Calvinism. During this period Mrs. Stowe's New England novels contributed significantly in generating and fostering anti-Calvinist sentiments for focusing the
attention of the readers on the nightmare of Calvinism. Through these novels Mrs. Stowe expounded the concept of a God of love and hope as against the God of low and doom preached by Calvinism. Her society novels highlighted the social evils prevailing in the contemporary society and endeavoured to create public opinion against the social evils. *My Wife and I* highlights the corruption and hypocrisy with which the press is afflicted. Some of its characters launch their crusade against the domination of males over the females. They also advocate for woman's rights, including suffrage. The extremists among them go to the extent of demanding that the government must be run by women only. *We and Our Neighbors*, the sequel to *My Wife and I*, also vociferates the same themes. It also deals with the issue of prostitution. Mrs. Stowe is against divorce; she expresses her viewpoint through one of the characters in the novel. Through her novels, Mrs. Stowe prescribes certain code of conduct for men and women and charts of path for happy family life.

Thus Mrs. Stowe communicates her message to the society through her novels. In other words fiction acts as messenger, i.e., as Evangel to the society.
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