

Chapter 2

The Feminine in Process

The feminist strategy of centralizing the female other's perspective arises from the awareness that women have been, throughout history, a marginalized category, denied voice and equal human status. The basis of this marginalization has been a misconception of gender as a natural biological factor that necessitates and justifies inequality. Feminist theorists seek to rewrite this historical error of dividing human species into superior males and inferior females, and to establish that gender is a social construct that has aided and supported the institution of patriarchal power structures.

As Simone de Beauvoir points out, the gender division obligates women to identify herself sexually, that is, as woman, and not as human or individual; it limits and imprisons her in her sexual nature. She is defined as the 'other' against the male who is the 'absolute subject'; thereby she is denied a subjectivity of her own (15-16). The dominant system has endeavoured to make out this female other as a universal category, using concepts like the 'eternal feminine.' This is rejected by feminists on the grounds that even the experience of otherness varies from woman to woman. In fact, the differences, of race, class, caste and so on, are more prominent than likenesses, and perhaps the best thing that unites them as a group is the almost uniform patterns of oppression they are subjected to, as if by some tacit universal agreement.

The concepts of male subjectivity and female alterity are emphasized and reinforced through the process of socialization that the human child is made to undergo; it is as required by the society that the child acquires masculine or feminine traits. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," says Beauvoir. "No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the

figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (295). Nancy Chodorow cites data from cross-cultural researches to show that there are no biologically explained personality traits that necessarily differentiate men and women. Studies in the behaviour of men and women in different societies show culture-specific, rather than gender-specific, characteristics, with each culture making a different set of demands upon the two genders. Chodorow observes: “Although one culture may have different expectations for male and female behaviour, the criteria of differentiation may bear no relation to the criteria of differentiation in other cultures” (24). These criteria are seen to depend on the subsistence economy that each society follows.

Margaret Mead’s observations in this regard are considered significant. She describes three different sexual patterns prevalent in primitive societies: with both men and women exhibiting the maternal, feminine, and sexually passive traits; with both the sexes aggressive and masculine; and with women dominant and men emotionally more dependent (qtd. in Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* 120). Commenting on Mead, Friedan says: “[T]he personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex, as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of headdress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex” (120-21).

Friedan reflects that “there are no true-for-every-culture sexual differences except those involved in the act of procreation,” and hence this one difference is given increasing emphasis in interpreting woman’s inherent femininity (123). It follows that there is no absolute or universal ‘feminine,’ and that what is disparaged as the feminine is a social construct that does not naturally proceed from biological difference.

Researches also show that in advanced societies, male and female children are socialized differently, with a regular gendered division of labour that indicates the subsequent difference in adult roles (Chodorow 25). This serves to create a gendered consciousness in both sexes. As often pointed out, intellectual pursuits and physical activities are also sexually allocated among children, effecting a psychological division in young minds. Thus, socialization becomes a process of gender construction.

For the girlchild, this turns out to be a 'feminization' process, which sums up the patriarchal society's innumerable interferences in her growing up, creating a 'woman' out of her, useful in the service of patriarchy. She is brought up on gender-specific rules and restrictions that often assume a moral guise. History and culture, tradition and custom, religion and morality—all contrive together in the formation of the female 'other.' Jean Baker Miller mentions how culture objectifies woman and what psychological effects this produces: "To be considered as an object can lead to the deep inner sense that there must be something wrong and bad about oneself. . . . To be treated like an object is to be threatened with psychic annihilation" (59). This is what precisely happens to the socially constructed category of woman; existentially, she is a non-entity, a conveniently empty space for the dominant male to attribute whatever meaning he chooses, and to project his fears and anxieties into (Morris 14). She is the myth that man has created, just as he has created his gods and heroes, to suit his needs (Beauvoir 174).

Morrison's female-centred narratives abundantly illustrate the intricate patterns that the process of construction of gender and feminization of the girlchild takes, and the diverse effects it produces. The impact of relentless socialization upon the feminine, in rendering it passive, accommodative,

or totally submissive, gets exemplified in the experiences of Pecola (*TBE*) and Nel (*Sula*), comparable despite the differences in their familial and economic backgrounds and in their individual character traits.

The Bluest Eye and *Sula* both tell the stories of girls caught up in the enmeshments of adolescent social and female existence. Growing up is a painful experience for them as they pass through the most crucial stage in their socialization. It is at this time of their life that intransigent rules and customs take the heaviest toll on the girlchild's developing self. As Beauvoir comments, "she is twelve years old and already her story is written in the heavens" (325). She accepts and submits to her predestined roles of wife, mother and grandmother. The process of socialization/feminization brings the girl to a sharp, often unpleasant awareness that is compounded with ignorance, regarding her female body's difference. The fact that the processes at work in her body do not require any active role or doing on her part confirms her passivity and inferiority, and prepares her for her destiny.

Such an abject mood of surrender is in evidence with Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*. She feels ashamed and guilty of her growing body; menstruation and growing up appear to be humiliating experiences that cannot be openly discussed. Even the kindness with which Mrs. McTeer helps her to get dressed strikes Pecola as marking her out as a ridiculous and pathetic object. She is curious about the mystery of procreation but at the same time too timid to seek means to satisfy that curiosity. Pecola's first impressions on the subject are formed by the secretiveness that Frieda insists on maintaining about menstruation, and her vague explanations about it as woman's qualification for the business of making babies. She learns from Frieda that the first prerequisite for this is to get someone to love her; and from the whores' conversation, she forms incomplete, conflicting and even perverse notions about love. Though to

be loved and to have babies seem to be her destiny, Pecola finds herself utterly ill-equipped for love, being black and ugly. For the major lesson that socialization has taught her is regarding her racial and social worthlessness, which prompts her to make a depreciative estimate of herself.

The notions about love that Pecola has nurtured in her childish simplicity are disproved by her parents' marital experience which plays a crucial part in her socialization. She learns of the unendurability of man-woman relationship and the 'unspeakability' of the sexual act from the home situation. Neither love nor making of babies turns out to be pleasurable in Pecola's own ironic experience too; when for the first and last time she gets someone to love her, it happens to be her drunkard-father. She is forced to bear the fruit of his sin which, however, is mercifully lost in a miscarriage. With her father's despicable act, Pecola's psychic life virtually comes to a dead end; but the socializing forces are still active, and manifest in the attitudes and reactions of her mother and neighbours, whose impatience and hatred are directed at the girl as victim, rather than at the man as culprit.

For Pecola, there is nothing new or surprising in this treatment; she has always been subject to double standards in her own home, where Sammy, her brother, would react violently and vociferously to their mother's black moods and to their father's drunken bouts, while Pecola has been denied the freedom of self-expression in words, or deeds. Having no voice in her, no comfort or reassurance issuing from any quarter, and quite incapable of facing the horrible reality by herself, her impaired self assumes a dual personality as a last resort. This leaves her disobliged to recapitulate or explain her experiences, to herself or to anyone else. In the duologue that takes place between her inner self and her mirror image, Pecola refuses to state whether it has been a painful experience or not, its horror being too great even to remember. Ironically,

despite her sexual initiation, Pecola is left as ignorant of her female self as ever; what socialization has done for her is to deepen her fears, doubts and uncertainties regarding her body, her sex, and life in general.

Pecola and her friends Frieda and Claudia have to bear the brunt of stringent restrictions and regulations that seem to apply to them alone, as girls, and not even to the black boys of their acquaintance, who enjoy the advantages of their maleness over and above their racial or class disprivilege. No rule restricts the latter from indulging in their favourite sports, or deriving pleasure and a sense of power from bullying a helpless black girl like Pecola: "Heady with the smell of their own musk, thrilled by the easy power of a majority, they gaily harassed her" (*TBE* 55). Even the coloured boy, Junior, brought up on the strict discipline that, according to his mother, distinguished the coloured people from the black, uses his male superiority as a prop-up against his loneliness and unhealthy home-relations. He enjoys encounters with girls because they do not do anything to defend themselves. Their passivity serves to affirm his own identity and to increase his self-confidence: "More and more Junior enjoyed bullying girls. It was easy making them scream and run. How he laughed when they fell down and their bloomers showed. When they got up, their faces red and crinkled, it made him feel good" (72). His ego gets bolstered up when he succeeds in frightening Pecola out of her wits by setting his hateful rival, his mother's pet cat, upon her face in an unexpected move, and then holding both the girl and the animal prisoners in his room. Overcoming her initial terror, Pecola has a feeling of sympathy for the cat as she identifies her own plight with the cat's, both being Junior's victims.

In the patriarchal scheme of feminization of the girlchild, women, especially mothers, are seen to act as accomplices. As Patricia Kaplan points out, the traditional notions about the mystical mother-child bond, and the

medical and psycho-analytical theories on the child's need for mother's care, all establish that "it is primarily women who are responsible for child-rearing and socialization" (76). Therefore, mothers' attitudes have a crucial role in gender construction. Being themselves patriarchally trained, mothers incline to instil in their children the same values they have imbibed. By their differentiating and preferential behaviour and labour division among the male and female children, they firmly implant in the girlchild a sense of inferiority and insecurity regarding her gender; her perspective is diligently kept under erasure. Beauvoir describes the female child's situation thus: "The sphere to which she belongs is everywhere enclosed, limited, dominated, by the male universe: high as she may raise herself, far as she may venture, there will always be a ceiling over her head, walls that will block her way" (324-25). And the difference in the apprenticeship of the male and the female to life is summarized in these words: "The gods of man are in a sky so distant that in truth, for him, there are no gods: the little girl lives among gods in human guise" (325).

It is such a differential training that Nel is subjected to. Her growing up is conscientiously watched over by her mother, Helene Wright. Being daughter of a Creole whore, Helene herself had been taken charge of by a god-fearing grandmother, trained free of her mother's "wild blood" (*Sula* 17) into a well-mannered, dignified woman, and married off in good time to prevent untoward happenings. Now Helene is anxious for her daughter's sake lest her own mother's unconventional traits continue in her. So she embarks on the task of bringing up the girl: "Under Helene's hand the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (18). Nel rises to her parent's expectations and promises to be a good wife and mother in the course of time.

The only thing her mother has been unable to predict and forestall is Nel's friendship with Sula, which indeed has a desocializing effect on her. Coming from an unconventional, all-women family, there is an overabundance of freedom at Sula's disposal, and the rules that bind Nel are alien to her. In the strength of their friendship, Nel too learns to override cramping regulations, and discovers that there is a world of personal freedom accessible to anyone who seeks it. Sula acts as a refreshing influence upon the emotionally sterilized Nel: "Her [Nel's] parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or splutter she had. Only with Sula did that quality have free reign. . . . During all of her girlhood the only respite Nel had from her stern and undemonstrative parents was Sula" (83). In the luxury and abandon of their friendship there is enough for the vigilant eyes of Helene to get uneasy about, and she grabs upon the first reasonably good proposal of marriage that would purge her daughter of all inconvenient traces of independent individuality.

It is because of an early feminization that Nel accepts Jude's proposal; not out of any romantic feeling, but as a sympathetic response to Jude's shame and anger, in being rejected as workman in the construction of the New River Road on account of his skin colour. Jude's friend Ajax accurately sizes up girls of Nel's social background, and even predicts their possible mental responses, when he says, "[A]ll they want, man, is their own misery. Ax em to die for you and they yours for life" (83). Wanting to help and soothe a hurt, to mother and nurture, getting flattered by the feeling of being wanted, all is part of the stereotyped social role predestined for them.

Sula too is not entirely unaware of the forces at work on the feminine, though the total lack of order and discipline in her home situation allows free reign to her whims, and renders her immune to socializing elements. Her own mother, who is unconsciously unconventional, finds her disagreeable because

she is different. Eva, her grandmother, herself different and non-conforming, makes attempts to cut Sula down to size, reminding her of the improprieties in her conduct, and of the selfishness entailed in her not marrying and settling down, like other girls.

It is the black community that is worst offended by Sula's resistance to feminization and her supreme indifference to public opinion or expectations. This community behaves much like mothers, as mediator of the dominant ideology and its feminization project; it succeeds in manipulating Nel once she is free of Sula's liberating influence. Having reverted into the perfect social being, she is placed under obligation to contribute to the maintenance of a righteous world. Nel's conformity is confirmed as she develops an exorbitant sense of right and wrong, which Sula, on her return to Bottom, finds hard to understand because the moral code Nel subscribes to is too one-sided.

It is as spokeswoman of the Father's order that Nel accuses Sula, on her deathbed, of offences which in her pre-marriage days she would have considered fun and wholeheartedly joined in for the sheer adventure of it: "You laying there in that bed without a dime or a friend to your name having done all the dirt you did in this town and you still expect folks to love you?" (145). And it is the community's annoyance that she voices when she censures Sula's overconfidence in her self: "You can't do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking around independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't" (142).

After their last meeting, Sula ruminates unhappily over the change that has overtaken Nel, obliterating her characteristic unbiased perspective: "So she will walk on down that road, her back so straight in that old green coat, thinking how much I have cost her and never remember the days when we were two throats and one eye and we had no price" (147).

The Nel who walks out on Sula presents the picture of the devitalized, disintegrated individual from whose remains a superb incarnation of the social process has emerged. As social product, Nel is bound to uphold moral laws that are extremely partial, by which she is compelled to judge Sula as pariah. Sula, on the other hand, has been driven to delinquency by those imbalanced laws of the male society that condemn the female and absolve the male, and chooses to remain outside their jurisdiction. She problematizes the integrity of that society by the proven fact of her own life-experience: that partners in all her escapades are its respectable citizens and staunch adherents of its morality. Sula also subjects to revision the ethical concepts that Nel has assimilated during her socialization, by which her trusted childhood friend has been branded as an ominous witch with a damning gaze. She points out to Nel that her notions on matters of virtue may not be infallible, and that she cannot presume to be the ultimate judge on human behaviour: "About who was good. How you know it was you? . . . I mean may be it wasn't you. May be it was me" (146). Nel's self-righteousness receives a jolt at this casual remark. Later, the old, raving Eva too makes a similar suggestion as she reminds Nel of her complicity in Chicken Little's drowning, that her passive role has been as much incriminatory as Sula's active one: "You. Sula. What's the difference? You was there. You watched, didn't you?" (168). This forces Nel to reevaluate her own feelings and reactions to Chicken Little's tragedy; while Sula had cried her eyes out, she herself had remained calm, bothered only about whether anybody had seen them:

All these years she had been secretly proud of her calm controlled behaviour when Sula was uncontrollable, her compassion for Sula's frightened and shamed eyes. Now it seemed that what she had thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only the tranquillity that follows a joyful stimulation. (170)

In effect, it is a reevaluation of the whole socialization scheme that Nel has undergone, which has differentiated her from Sula, and by which she has been alienated from her natural inclinations. That scheme had operated initially through the social aspirations of a snobbish mother who created a thoroughly feminized being out of her, with the aid of a conventional upbringing. It had continued to be functional through a typical middle class marriage that bred infidelity and had left her a jealous wife, who could not compromise with the fact that her husband had abandoned her for another woman nor forgive her best friend for being that other woman he deserted her for. In the final stage, the social process has left her a hardened and embittered woman, imprisoned in the intricacies of institutionalized motherhood, the responsible single parent who is worried about the hungry mouths she has to feed.

The feminization of the girlchild that is achieved mainly through the agency of mothers becomes, in effect, a programme for keeping female sexuality under check. In fact, the scheme of subordination of woman has its source in the time-old fear that has had sway over the male, regarding the destructive and demoralizing power of her sexuality, a fear strengthened and substantiated by evidence from legends and stories (Beauvoir 199-201). It is with the need to curtail that power in view that elaborate codes of morality have been constituted in all societies, which show an extra amount of sternness in their application to women. The flagrant duplicity and denial of equal rights implied in the gendering of ethical and moral matters have been prevalent enough to be accepted even by women themselves as a rule. In *Sula*, the black community of Medallion that judges Sula most unsympathetically for her moral lapses fails to take her male accomplices to task. Even the deceived wives exonerate their unfaithful husbands from their guilt and swallow their hurt for fear of losing them. While turning their hatred full swing upon the female

offender, they refuse to make allowances for the greater vulnerability of her youth. What is more, they even feel insulted for their men's sake at Sula's practice of "trying them out and discarding them without any excuse the men could swallow." So they "cherished their men more, soothed the pride and vanity Sula had bruised" (115).

The mothers of Medallion hold Sula as an example of evil resulting from bad parental nurturing. Sula's mother Hannah herself had neglected the social codes and had indulged her instinctual sexual hungers as she would her other physical needs. However, she is considered less offensive than her daughter because Hannah never undermined the self-respect of her lovers as Sula did. In truth, Sula has never intended to hurt anyone; she is just unaware of the social codes that have constructed the feminine and according to which woman's conduct is restricted, since she herself has never submitted to such social construction. In the absence of any curbing social influences,

[S]he lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. . . . She was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments—no ego. (118-19)

On her return to Medallion after an absence of ten years, Sula is ill-prepared for the change that has come over Nel. The self-established rules, by which both of them had been governed prior to Nel's marriage, have now become violations of the norm for Nel. It never occurs to Sula that her affair with Jude would cause any disharmony between herself and Nel, as they have always had a shared emotional life, always comparing notes in their amorous affairs and even sharing lovers. Nel's sudden possessiveness over Jude and her unwillingness to share him are incomprehensible to Sula: the atmosphere of

free sex in her own home never allowed conventions to stand in the way of woman's choice of her partner according to her taste. She has no knowledge of the complex issues involved in the institution of marriage; for "having lived in a house with women who thought all men available, and selected from among them with a care only for their tastes, she was ill prepared for the possessiveness of the one person she felt close to" (119). Now she realizes that Nel too has joined the ranks of those harried, jealous, scheming wives, unsure of themselves, frightened of desertion and loneliness—whom she and Nel together have criticized and joked about. They are separated by a yawning gap in perspective, caused by the social orientation of Nel.

Despite her fatal illness and social isolation, for nothing in the world would Sula exchange her lot with those perfectly programmed women of her acquaintance, who seem to her anything but alive. She breaks the complacent and superior airs that Nel assumes when she visits Sula on her deathbed with no intention to gloat over her friend's decline but to have a small victory in her own generous act of forgiveness. But Sula still seems to have the last word in everything, when she reminds Nel that though she is alone and sick, she is definitely better off than those virtuous women who are all dying despite their goodness: "Dying. Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world" (143).

Sula's instinctive understanding of virtue in one as an absolute quality that does not involve any other clashes with Nel's socially evolved one. She "overturns the conventional definition of good and evil in relation to woman by insisting that she exists primarily as and for herself . . ." (Christian, Pryse and Spillers 241). When Nel accuses her of breaking the trust of a friend who had always been good to her, Sula points out, "It matters, Nel, but only to you.

Not to anybody else. Being good to somebody is just like being mean to somebody. Risky. You don't get nothing for it" (*Sula* 144-45). Sula's utter purposelessness in her relationships with men is incomprehensible to Nel who has been trained to regard marriage and "keeping the man" the sole end of female being. But Sula has scheduled her life according to other lights:

"They aint worth more than me. And besides, I never loved no man because he was worth it. Worth didn't have nothing to do with it".

"What did?"

"My mind did. That's all." (143-44)

While marriage has turned Nel out as a jealous, unyielding woman, a great generosity of spirit characterizes Sula which has been generated from the inner freedom and ease she enjoys. Her reasons for getting involved with Nel's husband are simple and uncomplicated by any possessive instinct: ". . . there was this space in front of me, behind me, in my head. Some space. And Jude filled it up. That's all. He just filled up the space" (144).

The juxtaposition of Sula, the black sheep, with the law-abiding, morally upright members of the community implies a conflict between right and wrong or good and evil. But the elements in this opposition are often seen to deflect from the norms of value and privilege socially attributed to each, so that the determination of what is right or good becomes problematic: "In Morrisonian discourse, evil is not a sin against God. . . . it is one's failure to act existentially" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 34). Explaining the mutually complementing as well as antithetical characters of Nel and Sula, Morrison observes: "[O]ne can never really define good and evil. Sometimes good looks like evil; sometimes evil looks like good—you never really know what it is. It depends on what uses you put it to" (Stepto 381). In the final analysis the self-indulgent Sula comes out better than her virtuous, conforming, self-surrendering neighbours.

Having had no malice in her, she has never kept a grudge; and she dies with a clear conscience, having left nobody unforgiven. On the other hand, the perfectly socialized people of Bottom, who have claimed the monopoly of virtue and social correctness, are so firmly held in the vice of a “most magnificent hatred” (*Sula* 173) that it has kept them from visiting her on her deathbed. They fail even to pay her the last homage of attending her funeral in forgiveness of all her real, imagined, or suspected mistakes.

Evidently, the eagerness of the black female community of Bottom to harmonize Sula with the established social practices, and their opposition to her non-conforming ways and attitudes, do not ensue from any good intention to extend corrective nurturing to an orphaned girl. It is rather the manifestation of a perverse loyalty to an oppressive ideology that would not allow them to swerve from their pre-assigned courses, and of the natural resentment they feel for the woman who accomplished what they could not and presumed to challenge that ideology. Their air of being scandalized at Sula’s morals is, to a great extent, an exaggerated one; using Sula as a foil, they show off their own piety and purity, and literally make a virtue of necessity. Once Sula is out of the picture, they miraculously lose interest in moral excellence altogether: “A falling away, a dislocation was taking place. Hard on the heels of the general relief that Sula’s death brought a restless irritability took hold The tension was gone and so was the reason for the effort they had made” (153).

Subjected to critical reevaluation, the social ethics of Bottom is found to be an organized practice of hypocrisy and falsehood, by which its practitioners are left morally and spiritually debased. In fact, it serves only the interests of the system that depends and flourishes on the blind reception and acceptance of its ideology *in toto* by an unreasoning and unperceptive crowd.

Woman's conditioning to the patriarchal ideology, which continues through a major portion of her life, is actually a process of self-effacement. Conventions and tradition that are attributed an exaggerated importance *vis-a-vis* woman's existence function as the major tools of her conditioning. Her instinctual yearnings, aspirations, and her will itself, are subjected to modification to suit traditional concepts. Friedan describes how the concept of the "feminine mystique" is "grafted on to old prejudices and comfortable conventions which so easily give the past a stranglehold on the future," and how the patriarchal theories and concepts are ratified through their "assumption of accepted truth" (*Feminine Mystique* 37). Thus the feminine, projected as a mysteriously charming phenomenon, with its closeness to creation and the origin of life, is destined to "find fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love" (38). Any tendency to the contrary, to resist woman's 'nature' or the social conventions regarding her role and conduct, is vigorously forestalled in the bringing up of the girlchild.

This work of early feminizing, in the case of the black girl, is also a matter of effecting a racial erasure. In *Jazz*, it is the widowed aunt, Alice Manfred, who takes up the task and constitutes a strict code of conduct for her ward, Dorcas. The kind of social training Dorcas is subjected to paradoxically seeks to feminize her spirit by physically defeminizing her. Her aunt takes pains to protect her from possible evil from the whitemen who "leaned out of motor cars with folded dollar bills peeping from their palms" or salesmen who touched a black woman's body deliberately "as though she were part of the goods they had condescended to sell her" (70). Alice tries to hide Dorcas' feminine charms as best she can, with restrictions and alterations in her dress and specifications about her conduct:

[S]he hid the girl's hair in braids tucked under, lest whitemen see it raining round her shoulders and push dollar-wrapped fingers toward her. She instructed her about deafness and blindness. Taught her how to crawl along the walls of buildings, disappear into doorways. . . . to avoid a white boy over the age of eleven. . . . High-heeled shoes with the graceful strap across the arch, the vampy hats closed on the head with saucy brims framing the face, makeup of any kind—all of that was outlawed in Alice Manfred's house. (70-71)

Alice is scared of the new kind or primal energy that the blacks are alive with, a power born of anger and hatred too deep for words. The new frenzied music that announces and emphasizes this change unsettles her mind by its dangerous boldness; for in the young, it settles deep down “to places below the sash and buckled belts” (72). Alice and her friends, the Miller sisters, agree that “It made you do unwise disorderly things. Just hearing it was like violating the law” (74). They are convinced that it is a sign of death and destruction. God's judgement was round the corner for sure. Even mothers were acting like streetwalkers with “not just ankles but knees in full view; lip rouge red as hellfire; burnt matchsticks rubbed on eyebrows; fingernails tipped with blood” (72), and coats clutched loosely around the body making the wearers “look like they had just stepped out of the bathtub and were already ready for bed” (71).

Alice had detested the “dirty, get-on-down music” (74) because of its subversive effect on the young, rendering them wild and shameless. She determinedly resists the music for Dorcas' sake, and engages herself with the task of “reraising her, correcting her,” and trying to “keep the heart ignorant of the hips and the head in charge of both” (77).

Dorcas' socialization continues with the Miller sisters' day-care where the one-armed Neola Miller, victim of a jilt, reads for her charges the psalms and

tells the "cautionary tales" (79) "of the wicked who preyed on the good" and "the power of sin in the company of a weak mind" (80). She warns them of the fate that awaits girls who lack proper orientation or neglect their duties and lessons. For illustration, she recounts how a girl who ran away from home and parents was abandoned by her lover and was forced to live a degenerate life.

However, in Dorcas' case, the institutions of breeding fail to raise the agreeably subdued female product. In resistance to the suppressive environment, Dorcas develops a predilection for the forbidden in which she finds the thrill of risk. Disregarding her lessons entirely, she grows into a bold girl: "However tight and tucked in her braids, however clunky her high-topped shoes that covered ankles that other girls exposed in low-cut oxfords, however black and thick her stockings, nothing hid the boldness swaying under her cast-iron skirt" (79).

Despite Alice's rigorous training, Dorcas "thought of that life-below-the-sash as all the life there was" (77). She gets "enchanted by the frail, melty tendency of the flesh" (80) that seems to have prompted many a girl in Neola's stories to throw caution to the winds and seek fulfilment in carnality. Neola's moralistic stories "of the goodness of good behaviour collapsed before the thrill of the sin they deplored" (79-80). She wonders about the power of love that forever paralyzed even the austere Neola's hand over her breast as if in defence of a broken heart. It is her curiosity about the forbidden fruit, engendered by her repressed sexuality, that drives her into Joe's arms, as the only available means to carnal knowledge; and later, on her growing ashamed and tired of her elderly lover's pranks, it rushes her on to seek fresh experiences to her young heart's content.

The ethical/moral codes and notions of honour and respectability that are evoked in the bringing up of the girlchild and the suppression of her

sexuality directly serve the interests of the patriarchal institutions of marriage and family. For it is through such institutional methods that the system of male domination and female subordination achieved through socializing is maintained (Mitchell 65). The cohesion, stability, and solidity of these are presumably dependent on woman's sexual purity and virtue. A paradox inherent in the issue is that female sexuality that is regarded as dangerous potential, triggering undesirable and shameful effects like unmarried pregnancy and maternity, assumes paramountcy within marriage where frigidity and sterility are deplored. Pregnancy and maternity are suddenly transformed into highly estimable social functions, failure in which brings on social stigma and ostracism. In *Jazz*, Alice Manfred is conscious of this incongruity from her own parental training, though the nurturing she gives to Dorcas is no different in essentials from the one she had received. Her parents had been painstakingly vigilant all through the adolescence of their daughters, because "unmarried and unmarriageable pregnancy was the end and close of livable life" (97). They had kept strict surveillance on her behaviour patterns, and even on her physical postures: "They spoke to her firmly but carefully about her body: sitting nasty (legs open); sitting womanish (legs crossed); breathing through her mouth; hands on hips; slumping at table; switching when you walked" (97).

External signs of sexual maturity were concealed as effectively as possible before her marriage, but then attitudes changed; sexual attributes that had earlier caused vexation began to assume a contrastive value:

The moment she got breasts they were bound and resented, a resentment that increased to outright hatred of her pregnant possibilities and never stopped until she married Louis Manfred, when suddenly it was the opposite. Even before the wedding her parents were murmuring about grandchildren they could see and hold,

while at the same time and in turn resenting the tips showing and growing under the chemises of Alice's younger sisters. Resenting the blood spots, the new hips, the hair. (97)

Though Alice had resented and resolved not to pass on these double standards in the patriarchal attitude to woman's sexuality, as soon as she dons the parental robe, she too is inevitably drawn into the value system that had governed her parents. Though there are other black women who are 'armed' and vigorously waging war, Alice decides that she cannot afford to defy conventions, being alone and unarmed; so "she had chosen surrender and made Dorcas her own prisoner of war" (98).

As Juliet Mitchell observes, "Woman's biological 'destiny' as mother becomes a cultural vocation in her role as socializer of children" (115). Alice does what a good majority of mothers are inclined to do: herself ill-equipped to withstand the tensions of rewriting history, and being aware of the severe trials awaiting the armed and fighting woman, she imparts her ward the kind of training that would keep her on the beaten track. Though she acts with the good intention of protecting her orphaned niece from pain, in effect she plays a role in the service of patriarchy, in the creation and perpetuation of the inferior gender.

Gender-formation effected through socialization is a more or less common phenomenon in the experience of the Afro-American and the Indian women; of course, with differences in the methods and the tools applied to attain the purpose. There are also variations in the responses of the respective subjects to the repressive social forces, which may be explained in terms of culture. Thus, for instance, the gendering process is seen to assume more severe forms and place more specific and careful-to-detail restrictions on woman's independent growth in Joseph's narratives. Similarly, the various

social and cultural factors that are active in the formation of Indian womanhood produce a more enduring effect. Tradition, a most exacting influence upon Indian woman, demands the utmost of sexual adjustment from her. The social, religious and institutional organization of the Indian society has an extremely efficacious equipage at its disposal for preventing or subduing deviant tendencies too. Here again, the older female generation plays a reformatory role.

In *Aalaahaayute Penmakka!*, Amma and Ammamma keep constant vigil upon Annie's growing up (though she hardly seems to grow up, but remains a perpetual child all through the story time). Her behaviour, deportment, and speech are strictly checked to forestall any possibility of her going astray. Her grandmother instils the fear of God in her as a warning against worldliness and the temptations of the devil. With this aim, Ammamma gives Annie a role in the rituals she performs. Amma also is watchful of the signs of her growing sexuality and chastises her on her improper dressing habits. She pinches her hard if her chemise gets displaced in sleep or if the hem of her skirt lifts as much as an inch, baring her legs; for she holds that girls should be conscious of such things even in sleep: "Girls should not sleep with such abandon. They should know if and where a leaf moves" (AP 37). Amma has a strict code curtailing her physical movements too; if she gets delayed while running errands, she will have to face Amma's acid tongue. Amma has fixed a time-schedule for Annie's duties away from home; whatever the nature of the task, she is expected to go and come back "at a single run," and if she takes more time, Amma rebukes her for "loafing around" (135). Amma also manages to inculcate a class-consciousness in Annie when she scolds her for wasting time play-acting with a bunch of children who are visiting at her rich neighbour's: "Play-acting is the game of the rich, you wretched girl!" (65).

Annie's sense of class is intensified by a humiliating experience that she has at school. She is thrown out of the queue at the children's free lunch, for the petty offence of jostling. This indignity is exacerbated by another circumstance. Annie is provoked to a fist fight when some children, taking advantage of her fall from grace, toss around her bronze lunch-plate which is a family heirloom and the most cherished of Amma's possessions. Misinterpreting this as a fight over the meal, her city-bred teachers open a tirade on the voracious, ill-mannered, foul-smelling lot of Kokkancira and their progeny. So great is their disgust that they are compelled to wash their hands for having touched one of those children. The incident casts a spell of heavy gloom upon the children: "Suddenly the children from Kokkancira fell silent. They walked on in line without producing even the noise of footfall. They put their lunch plates down under the scorn of the teachers and sat with bowed heads" (26-27).

Painfully reminded of their subaltern existence, Annie vows to change Kokkancira's name, for "No child should be insulted in the name of her native place" (27). It is Kuttipappen who disillusiones her by saying that only a change in the mindset of their people, especially of the mean and quarrelsome women, would produce any real difference. However, even these unenlightened women have a valuable insight to provide to Annie regarding caste-class-gender relations. Comparing themselves to the lowest caste of society, they maintain that they, the women who do the thankless job of removing the dirt of their children and old parents, are the real scavengers (68). As inhabitants of Kokkancira they are already counted as the meanest social category, and as women they are the lowest of the lowest.

The onslaught of urbanizing forces upon the peripheral space of Kokkancira literally stunts the growth of the child-heroine. As the city extends its ever-hungry tentacles to wall in all the utile space in Kokkancira, relegating the

natives farther into the marshes, Annie's freedom of movement is severely curtailed. The wide spaces beyond Annie's house where she had grazed uninhibitedly are now replaced with narrow strips of roads skirting new houseplots. Dogs bark at her from behind the gates of the stone buildings. Once she is attacked by one of these ferocious creatures that grabs at the loaf of bread she had bought for her invalid uncle. Annie cries her eyes out not because of fear, but because of her helplessness to protect her precious bread-loaf from the rich man's dog that is better fed and cared for than hapless human beings like herself.

The fact of being a poor girlchild in the miserable environment of Kokkancira has a critical effect upon Annie's formation. Growing up, for her, turns out to be the sad affair of growing in the awareness of her social as well as sexual worthlessness that jars with her innate sense of dignity and pride. Though outwardly she remains constantly on the verge of adolescence, psychologically she attains a premature sort of maturity and assumes a deeply philosophical attitude to life and to external stimuli. Her precocious insight into the complexities of feminine experience is the sum total of what she has gleaned from the female lives around her. She grows compassionate by listening to "the sighs that arose simultaneously from the bosoms of two women" (18), her grandmother and her aunt, discussing the miseries of their domestic situation. Annie is strengthened by the story of her grandmother's courage that prevailed over man and devil; over poverty, disease and hunger. From the accounts of her aunt's midwifery experiences she learns that delivering a baby is the most awful experience in the world, that a human life on the verge of birth is "like a mustard seed on the ridge of a plate" (39). The emotional void suffered by her mother and her aunt in their unhappy marital situations, one's husband missing and the other's dead, has become Annie's own unhappiness, as she identifies her feminine fate in theirs.

The early recognition by woman of her sexual role, urged by parental and societal nurturing, is further cemented through a sex-directed education which, as Friedan points out, tends to stunt her “non sexual growth” (*Feminine Mystique* 142). As a patriarchal institution, education promotes gender bias to an enormous extent, encouraging and affording opportunities for boys to achieve personal autonomy and identity while discouraging girls from pursuing any line that would ensure their entry into the public rather than private sphere. Their place is home, which is confirmed through the patriarchal marriage that finalizes and seals their subjugation. In the Indian rural and semi-urban situations rendered in Sarah Joseph’s fiction, the average woman’s sole aim and ambition in life is assumed to be marriage; education is supposed to play only a supporting role in her achieving this domestic goal. In “Ann Maryute Kalyaanam” (“Ann Mary’s Marriage,” *NA* 16-21), the young, college-going Ann Mary’s academic exposure has not apparently served any of its professed purposes: such as of making a person “broad in outlook and open to new experience, independent and disciplined in [his] thinking, deeply committed to some productive activity, possessed of convictions based on understanding of the world and on [his] own integration of personality” (Nevitt Stanford, qtd. in Friedan, *Feminine Mystique* 143). Remarkably such definitions of the purpose of education exclude woman from their purview since the personal skills and accomplishments they define are considered unsuitable for her. According to the orientation Ann Mary has received, intellectual and mental attributes are superfluties that do not further the sexual function that she is expected to serve. Hence, instead of being motivated in the direction of self-development, Ann Mary cultivates the feminine qualities of obedience, passivity and non-resistance which would equip her for the manifold adjustments that female life demands.

Thus it is an appropriately groomed feminine that enters the patriarchal institution of marriage where her subordinate status—sexual, social and economic—is sealed. Engels has theorised that the first class exploitation in history is that practiced by the male on the female and that marriage is the institutionalization of that exploitation (66). In the economic analysis, a bourgeois-proletarian relationship exists in marriage, with the male wielding the capital. The literal proof of this observation is to be found in an average Indian marriage in which woman is considered man's property with virtually no value or rights of her own. "Ann Maryuṭe Kalyaanam" satirizes the institutionalization of man-woman relationship in marriage in which the feminine is sadly neglected. Ann Mary is the typical muted Indian bride who has no role in the choice of her life partner; nor has she any claims over the handsome dowry her father parts with to get a doctor-bridegroom for her. As Trautman points out, the Indian ideal of marriage as the gift of a maiden—"Kanyadan"—is based on the presumption of the superiority of the bridegroom and his family. It also implies that woman is a commodity that can be given as a gift to the male (Uberoi 88). In Ann Mary's case, not only the maiden but a whole lot of other valuables are to be exchanged, which further devalues the bride's individuality. The substantial gifts are not for the girl herself as a part of her inheritance; they mark the 'irreversible asymmetry' between the male and the female in marriage.

For Ann Mary's father, brother, and uncles, the marriage is a celebration of their social power and a means to cement their position in the social hierarchy through alliance with men of equally powerful positions. Her mother and aunts, who vigorously participate in the discussions on the amount of gold and other items to be purchased, ironically, have no voice in the important work of decision-making; nor do they have any role in the power game that is

being played. Despite the social security that they enjoy by virtue of their husbands' wealth, they are really helpless and oppressed in all respects. Their only merit and usefulness lie in their conformity to the dominant view and in serving as role models to Ann Mary in the feminine and wifely virtue of adjustability to the umpteen domestic situations of oppression. These women are accomplices in perpetuating the conventions that favour the male.

Ann Mary herself is passive about the money or gold that is about to be disposed of as she has practically no rights of possession, of transference, or even of use over her share of the parental property. She appears to lack a will of her own, which is unsurprising since in her patriarchal household she has no use for one. Her romantic dreams have no relation to the reality of the thoroughly unromantic, conventional wedding about to take place, which promises to be a show of pomp and a reflection of the vanity of the affluent.

The story deals with an issue of topical importance, namely the devaluation of women in the dowried marriage, a grave social canker that corrodes Indian woman's life irrespective of class. If for the brides of the lower classes, marriage places a great strain on family resources, the upper class parents, driven by vanity, are ready to bid the highest price for the best bridegroom available in the matrimonial market. Since there is no upper limit for greed, no price will be enough either to satisfy the bridegroom's family or to guarantee the bride's happiness at the in-laws' household. Thus the prospects are not bright even for the upper class woman; her big dowry never reaches her hands since it is passed from a male to another male, nor does it stand her in good stead in her marital crises. The story indicates how patrimony engenders oppression in various ways for different economic groups. Not only the unwillingness or incapacity to provide dowry, but even an excessive enthusiasm in the matter can render life miserable for woman. In the midst of

the valuable commodities that are to be transferred to the groom's house, the bride is a quite insignificant and uninteresting item, her role diminished to minimum.

This is reflected in the narrative space given to the elaborate wedding arrangements. Ann Mary appears only twice in the narrative. The first is at the conventional "bride-seeing" when she submits herself to a critical inspection and evaluation by the disgusting groom. Since her opinion on the matter is immaterial, her fate is decided by the bridegroom's willingness to marry her. The second time she makes her appearance is on the eve of her wedding. The sudden limelight she receives, on this occasion, however, is not out of respect for her personal self, but is part of the pomp accompanying a typical patriarchal wedding. The only worth attached to Ann Mary is as a body to be decorated with the expensive garments and ornaments, and as one to accompany the various valuables due to the groom. For her parents she is a liability to be disposed of even at the risk of a considerable drain on the family's economy, and for the groom's family, nothing is deemed enough compensation for taking on that liability for life. The different rating that the patriarchal society accords to the male and the female is quite obvious in the whole affair.

The loss of space and self, which is the finale of female destiny in the patriarchal society, is symbolically represented in the story. Escaping into her own room late on the eve of the marriage, she is annoyed to find it transformed into the bridal chamber. Ann Mary realizes that she has lost her space in her father's house without hope of recompense at the husband's. Despite being a thoroughly feminized female, her reaction to this loss is poignant. She lowers herself into the golden barrel which is her father's gift to the bridegroom, and covers it from the inside with two of the silver bricks that also are part of the dowry, in a metaphoric pre-enactment of the burial of her self in marriage.

A good number of Joseph's stories are illustrative of the repressive nurturing that the girlchild undergoes at various stages of her growth. It may be seen that the institutions of marriage, maternity and family, which have a great hold on the Indian society at large, become the conventional gendering tools. The story "Muditteyyam Urayunnu" ("The Hair-Goddess Dances," *PT* 50-63) makes a piercing critique on certain preposterous patterns of gendering. The protagonist Lalitha's luxuriant hair, which assumes great symbolic significance in the story, is the manifestation of that part of her self that is determined, fearless, and indomitable. Raising its hood like a snake, it metamorphoses her 'normal', obliging, and conforming non-self. As with Violet in *Jazz* who carries an unconventional double in her that surprises her normal self to ejaculate "... that Violet is me!" in proud self-affirmation (*Jazz* 119), Lalitha's dual self makes her conscious of a power in her that is bold and independent of oppressive influences.

The explosive situation created in the narrative by the seemingly unresolvable question of indisciplined female hair and the exaggerated reactions of the male members of the household mark a good degree of sexual politics. Lalitha's father and brother are infuriated by the way her hair "grows like a palmgrove resisting all discipline" (*PT* 59). They regard it as a symbol of dangerous female sexuality. Even in braids, it appears as menacing as a "black snake that slithers along her shoulder and picks on her bosom or spreads its hood to lick her back" (58). Acchan ("father") and Ettan ("elder brother") develop a hair phobia and order her to gather it up in a bundle on her head, like a "sivalinga," as her mother and aunts do to please them. This, to Lalitha, is evidence of the blatant appropriation of femininity by the male tradition; she mentally resists the idea that female hair should be shaped like the "sivalinga,"

symbol of masculine power, so as to tone down its inauspicious aspects and to make it less irksome to the male. All the other women in the house, however, comply with the dominant wishes, and virtually hide their hair from male view. They daily gather up fallen hairs and bury them in the shade of the plantain tree, beyond the boundaries of the yard. Still, by some mysterious will of its own, female hair continues to prevail; Acchan trips on hairstrands and makes a hue and cry about the hair that always seems to appear in his rice. Lalitha is secretly delighted at his annoyance.

Despite the severe injunctions imposed upon the female quarter of the house and the general atmosphere of terror prevailing on account of the damning issue of hair, Lalitha contrives to undermine the Father's Law. If for the older women, their hair becomes an encumbrance, Lalitha derives sensuous pleasure out of fondling her serpentine curls. Every night, after mother sleeps, she unties the 'sivalinga' clump of her hair, spreads it on her face and neck, gathers it in both hands, and draws its aroma deep into her soul. She sleeps with her face nestled in it. She finds her identity in those soft yet powerful strands that are reassuring in their wild strength.

Lalitha's is a battle against the mores that restrict the female. She schemes up a secret, independent existence for herself and her hair where both thrive on breaking restrictions and prohibitions. When she is out of sight of her home, Lalitha unties her serpent and simultaneously transforms into her unrestrainable self. The other girls confine their hair and selves to the disciplined ways expected of them; hiding their feminine aspects as best they can, they flit along noiselessly, never raising their eyes from their toes. Lalitha, on the other hand, blossoms out in complete self-abandon; she frisks down the stairways, corridors and verandahs of the college, her anklets tinkling merrily,

her smile dazzling bright, her whole self radiating the joy of life. The clothes and the jewels she wears and the spot on her forehead, all sparkling red, stun the viewers but exasperate her father and brother.

Lalitha's deviant response to socializing forces and her repudiation of the stifling norms that govern woman's social conduct owe to her active interaction with a world outside home and the fruits of learning it has offered. The groves of academe have rolled out vistas of freedom before the girl; and encouraged by these she allows her dreams, hopes and desires to graze on unexplored terrains of imagination. But when her power-wielding brothers and father realize the dangers of leaving her free spirit untethered, they resort to the extreme measure. They chip off the wings of her fantasy by putting an end to her studies and securing her in the fetters of a conventional marriage.

However, the dauntless self of the enlightened woman is not easily suppressed by the iron framework of institutions. Despite the stringent measures adopted by her husband Sanaatanan to dampen her exuberant spirit, Lalitha does assert her will, even if it requires her to assume the terrifying aspect of the goddess Bhagavati in wrath. Having outgrown the lessons of socialization, she draws on the subversive potential of the feminine, represented by the goddess, to sabotage the repressive order.

Feminization works in more or less symmetrical ways in different cultures. The social process that women are subjected to is an ongoing subliminal operation whereby they are "psychically induced into femininity" (Rose, M. Eagleton 353). The female psyche is indoctrinated with assumptions and prejudices about gender which show a uniform character in all male-dominant communities. A vast majority of women are persuaded to acquire social conduct and habits agreeable to the establishment and to internalize negative descriptions of the feminine such as its absolute

inferiority and alterity in contrast to the male's sovereign subjectivity. Even their attitudes and reflexes are conditioned accordingly.

However, the dire oppressiveness of the environment frequently awakens the feminine into insurgence, as illustrated in the resistant women in the narratives of Morrison and Joseph. Woman's recognition of the multiple repressions that she labours under provokes her to question the grounds on which the non-status of a perpetual otherness is ascribed to her.