Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 OMEGA:

Social transactions which generally take the form of conversations, body language, looks, passing, emails, commands, letters, smirks, questions, smiles, sneers and/or handshakes are very significant within a social setting that are built on anything other than money. Social transactions are bound by usage of language. Language fails when one is depressed; it fails when one is too happy; yet it is the only medium to communicate. This was however never understood by the people of the 1920’s.

Much of the great American literature of the 1920s represented an intellectual backlash against the perceived materialism, conformity, and inauthenticity of the new mass culture. Sinclair Lewis and Willa Cather were prominent writers of this period. They wrote novels with critical depictions of American life. For instance, Sinclair Lewis attacked America’s prevalent protestant, middle-class and conformists. He produced a series of satirical novels that examined in detail the iconic figures found in every town in America: business leaders, doctors and preachers.

Babbitt 1922 was a realistic picture of the American society of 1920s; the materialistic was the dominant print of every aspect of their life and people were so concerned about machine and about comfortable life more than the real meaning of life. There were no values and ethics in those days, the main aim was to live up to the standard of life and to have all the devices that make them feel that they live up to the standard of the life.

American society had decided to make its chief aim in life of having perfect materials, flats, devices and cars more than anything else. This lead to social changes after the World War I as the society had lost its ethics and
values and that’s why there was a struggle inside the society and more so, inside the core of the society which is the family. That struggle was out of a failure of social transactions amongst them.

The hollowness of the American society was in every aspect of life, superficiality was the goal of the society members, being a member in the country club was something very essential. As already mentioned that the American society was so mad about the show off life and they had forgotten their real value of life, this led to depression and alienation inside the American society itself.

The society has its own standard which a successful man has to follow blindly. That standard has nothing more than show off life and selfishness. However, as noticed in the study undertaken, most people were more concerned about money alienating them from each other which lead to the failure of the social transactions.

The traditional way of thinking of the American society had completely changed into a new way of thinking that does not have any relationship to one another as most young people were so mad about money and superficialism of life. They had no interest in education as we have seen with Ted, and were more concerned of becoming rich people and leading a lavish life. The struggle between Babbitt and his family was out of not having social transactions; the different way of thinking as well as the life style had made a huge gap between the two generations.

Babbitt was too helpless towards the way of thinking of his family. This can be established from the conversation with his wife and the kind of struggle that he had with his daughters as well as his son. The plan that he had already made for their future and all the sacrifices throughout his life went in vain in the face of materialistic way of thinking. Babbitt was too
upset and he confessed that he can’t stand them anymore. Babbitt was unhappy with his family that he has achieved everything in his life but still he could not find himself that feeling was out of being inside a family who had a quite point of view of life, quite different way of thinking and resulted to impossibility of social transactions.

Further, Babbitt’s relations to his wife and his children are formalized and standardized; even his debaucheries are the orthodox debaucheries of a sound business man. The salient thing about him, in truth, is his complete lack of originality and that is precisely the salient mark of every American of his class. What he feels and thinks is what it is currently proper to feel and think. We can even assure that there is no American novel that more accurately presents the real America. It is a social document of a high order.

Among the most tragic things which have happened to Babbitt is his loss of capacity for pleasure. He who seeks so ardently for recreation, for entertainment in culture which has never been more materially conducive to pleasure cannot really be entertained.

At the same time Lewis realized and attacked the power of things in American life, he admired the ingenuity of those things, the technology which made them, and the operation and power of the system which markets them. Utterly to damn Babbitt would have meant to damn America.

*The Job* by Sinclair Lewis the Roaring Twenties were characterized by a unique fashion and style among American Youth. Clothing aided peers in identifying one another. Style marked the social status and was used to determine which groups and clubs a student belong to. Often, fashion and style followed current fads. Young men and women conformed to these fads and were commonly seen in the public domain. Young women did not dress as the previous generation. Youth challenged pervious cultural norms and
impacted modern society. Young people turned to new leaders and values and sought unorthodox dress, recreations, and morals.

In the late 1910s during World War I attitudes were more tolerant towards working women as their husbands were off fighting to defend their country. However in the 1920s attitudes changed after the war ended. With the return of male workers, women were expected to quit their jobs.

Women attended college in the 1920s, albeit not in the large numbers characteristic of modern times. The society did not expect women to aspire to professions other than teachers and nurses. According to Cornell women’s historian Cynthia Grant Bowman, an education didn’t necessarily mean a job. As women graduated and began to apply for jobs they often encountered disappointment in finding out those employers who were mostly men and did not take them seriously as applicants.

Homemaking was still a large part of life in the 1920s for women. Society expected women to clean, cook, produce and raise children. According to Professor Lynn Dumenil the ads for home appliances targeted women specifically, and almost anytime advertisers produced radio commercials or print ads their aim was to let women know how their new products would make life as a housewife better.

In The Job market women flourished in the arts and entertainment fields. Zora Neale Hurston copyrighted her first play, “Meet the Mama,” in 1925. Two years later Dorothy Arzner directed her first film, Fashions for Women, and in 1929 Mildred Wirt signed a contract to write her first three Nancy Drew mysteries.

The “flapper” movement challenged the paradigm of the morally pure woman, who shunned alcohol and tobacco and remained refined.
A generational gap began to form between the “new” women of the 1920s and the previous generation. Prior to the 19th Amendment, feminists commonly thought that women could not pursue both a career and a family successfully, believing that one would inherently inhibit the development of the other. This mentality began to change in the 1920s as more women began to desire not only successful careers of their own but also families. The “new” woman was less invested in social service than the Progressive generations, and in tune with the capitalistic spirit of the era, she was eager to compete and to find personal fulfillment.

The popular image of young women of the 1920s was the “flapper”, a young, pretty woman with bobbed hair and raised hemlines. She drank alcohol, she smoked, she thought for herself, and she took advantage of women’s new freedoms. However, the flapper lived more in the media than in reality. The flapper figured in movies, magazines, advertising, and novels, such as those of F. Scott Fitzgerald. The flappers were essentially, “liberated women”. George Mowry in his anthology *The Twenties* sums up the essence of the flapper as a woman who demands “the same social freedom for herself that men enjoyed”. He goes on to state how their existence shaped new industries in cosmetics and beauty, providing the “prop” for a new mass consumer society.

Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* focuses on the distance financial forcer and their effects of the society of a small Nebraska town and the impact on the social setting of that town and how the people of Nebraska get affected by the financial changes and results in their social life and social setting. *A Lost Lady* continues Willa Cather’s account of materialism verses ideates and their effect on the social setting of the society and the social transactions amongst the characters of the novel, the struggle of the two generations and
how the old generations were fighting for their own values and ethics. Cather has depicted a very clear picture of Captain Forrester as well as the opposite side of the new generations of the materialist. The struggle between the two generations was the chief aim of the writings of Willa Cather and that’s why majority of her works shed light on one or the other aspect of that struggle.

The story is not that very simple; it’s a story of Captain Forrester, a retired railroad builder and his young wife Mrs. Forrester, who is twenty four years younger than him, an embodiment of beauty and graciousness; it’s the story of the pioneers against the new generations; the story of the idealist against the materialists.

As mentioned earlier that Willa Cather, in majority of her fictions, sheds light on the materialism of the new society and its effects on the social setting and the social transactions, *A Lost Lady* is a very realistic picture of the American society and how it gets affected with the new changes. People like Captain Forrester could not understand the new material life and why people were mad about money how. This created a generation gap and resulting in lack of communication between the two. The old generations could not have social transactions with the new materialist people and that’s why they were isolated from the entire society and kept alone without any role. Through Captain Forrester, we examined the realistic comparison between the life before and after the changes.

Willa Cather has portrayed a very realistic picture of the American society and how the pioneers have been isolated inside their own society facing the failure of the social transaction with the around people, the new generations with their selfishness and seeking for money have destroyed the values of the old generations of ethics and spiritual relationship to their land
and between each other, the old generations were so lost amongst the new kind of life style! There was no concerned about the past or the people who belong to that time.

In light of the issues traced above, we may now suggest how A Lost Lady compels further reassessment of Cather’s cultural significance for contemporary readers, particularly with regard to her position in American modernism. The basic contention that Cather’s fiction reflects her own psychological experience as well as her aversion to industrial modernity and their role in the social transactions is certainly inescapable.

The Professor’s House 1925 had taken a hand look from two viewpoints at the contemporary world. The first, a method Cather had used previously was to see it through the eyes of a man of high dedication, who is dismayed at what lies about him. The second, making to begin of an important trend, was to see current society against the backdrop of an old and often better world.

There are two major themes running through the novel, one personal (social Transaction as an individual) the other public changing society which created a gap between the pioneers who are very idealistic people and new generation who are materialistic and selfish.

In the very early begin of the novel The Professor’s House we could see clearly the cross way of thinking and social transactions between St. Peter and his family, the struggle of St. Peter and the entire society and not only his family and wife. Even the result of his entire life was simply a good opportunity to buy a new house for his wife Lillian and not more than that.

Cather’s fictions, where change take place, and the self-understanding emerges, was a reason to produce a characters who have no social transactions, isolated and marginal who caught up in the changing societies
and lost themselves and face the reality of their conflict in every aspect of life. Cather has depicted a realistic portrait from the real life of a person who could not have a normal life with his wife and family since he could not have social transactions with them.

Cather writes not only about the pioneer she writes about the struggle between the pioneer and the new generation, that struggle was because of the emerged ethics and believes which created by the new generation out of being very thirsty to money. They were accepted by themselves and refused by the pioneers who struggle to live in the new society.

St. Peter was fighting alone against his family to make them understand what the real meaning of joy and happiness. The Prof. wanted to show them that there are things cannot be bought by money like the joy of writing and the happiness that St. Peter had when he was writing his book. The problem that he was not writing for the profit and money, but was writing for something far beyond that, when he was writing his book he had the feeling of joy and happiness and was not merely for the benefit out of it, that’s was his chief aim for writing but the new generations and those who affected by the materialistic of the new generations couldn’t understand what was St. Peter feels.

The professor has replaced himself, has been recalled to the present, but any such recollection is always only momentary. In emphasizing throughout the novel that the dead speak only with the voices of the living and that memory is never a redemption of lost time, but only a repetition and a rendering of that loss itself, Cather does not in the end give St. Peter or her readers a firm ground to stand on. Instead we are faced toward the outside of everything, the “future” that we can never see, that lies beyond the moment and, here, beyond the last mark on the page. Opening up in this way, the
novel orients itself toward what it cannot know and cannot account for in a gesture that perhaps sympathizes with the desires of the protagonist while it also ironizes them. The “ground” we are left with, then, is no more substantial than a tenuous period, the ground where we stand were there are no social transactions with the around people and that’s why that was a very complicated issue for the Professor.

The study tries to reveal the reasons for the failures of the protagonists. The characters in all the selected novels are prone to the rapid changes around them. Nobody tries to understand why they have to change with the changing world; nobody tries to understand why the changes are taking place and their consequences. The only thing they do is to bear the aftermaths. There were no social transactions in them. If they were there, people could communicate their issues with each other; could communicate their fears with each other. Due to this failure in social transaction, the people of the 1920’s and the characters could not help others or themselves to get out of their restricted, unhappy lives.

The novels produced by the writers of the Lost Generation give insight to the lifestyles that people lead during the 1920s in America, and the literary works of these writers were innovative for their time and have influenced many future generations in their styles of writing.

Writers and artists now look back at the roaring nineteen twenties as an extremely important period that gave birth to many new styles and ideas. The changes in American society caused many of these artists much sadness and pain in their personal lives. But their expression of protest and rich imagination produced a body of work that has grown in influence with the passing years.
To understand the twenties better it is beneficial to make use of techniques drawn from various fields. The most important developments in the decade did not take place in the realms of politics, or economics, or literature, or science alone, but in all these areas and the relation, or lack of relation, among them. If one uses one kind of sources one will inevitably emerge with one point of view, which will be inadequate to understand the others.

By changing the unfavorable events that led to despair and continuing the benefits to society, one can understand why they happen and better the future. Therefore, to improve social relations, one has to strive for having better social transactions.

5.2 RESEARCHER’S CONTRIBUTIONS:

The present research revolving around a critical study in the fictions of Sinclair Lewis and Willa Cather as they relate specifically to social transactions in the American fiction is perhaps a novel attempt made by the researcher in India, till date. The conclusions drawn in the present work will have long lasting and far reaching impact upon all concerned.

Further, the researcher’s suggestion for reassessment of Cather’s cultural significance for contemporary readers, particularly with regard to her position in American modernism will facilitate the understanding of social transactions in the contemporary period we are living in.

5.2 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Teen conformity in Sinclair Lewis’ Babbitt and in society today.
- The conflict between conformity and individuality in Willa Cather's Paul's Case.
- Comparison between Sinclair Lewis' Arrowsmith and Babbitt satires.
• A detailed analysis of women characters in Willa Cather's “My Antonia” and “Giants in the Earth”.

• The echoes from Zenith and the reactions of American businessmen to Babbitt novel.

The issues enlisted above were not robed within the scope of the present research undertaken they are therefore suggested for future researchers’ consideration.