GYNO-CENTRISM

This chapter focuses on the gyno-centric vision of Edith Wharton and Sivasankari, whose primary centres of interest have been the familial, social and economic spheres of women. While most of their women do succeed in liberating themselves, others end up, as pathetic failures, at times, preferring death to a futile struggle. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that liberty for most Americans, regardless of sex, is a fundamental tenet of faith, as Saul Padover states:

Belief in liberty —— (has been called) the secular religion of the American people —— freedom from —— mainly Government intervention. The individual, being at the core of the political structure, has considered it his sacred right and even his privilege, as an American, to be free from Government curbs, domination, meddling, advice and even assistance, —— except in times of dire crisis. For the individual to retain and enjoy his freedom, —— freedom to express himself, to educate himself, to achieve status, to acquire property, and if he sees fit Government must be kept at arm's length —— . (19-21).

Being the world's foremost democracy, America seems to stand for the goal of freedom for all her citizens, freedom being the first of America's professed, tripartite values of liberty,
equality and fraternity, expatiated and propagated by thinkers like Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. Emerson advocates the cause of individualism in *The American Scholar*, thus:

The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature --- in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason. Nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul. (1837, 60)

Thoreau affirms the paramount value of Individualism in *Civil Disobedience* in the following statement: "There will never be a really free and enlightened state until the state comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, --- and treats him accordingly" (1849, 134).

And Whitman, sees Democracy as the fittest political system to ensure the dignity of the individual, as Robert Spiller points out:

Democracy for Whitman did not mean individualism alone. It included individuality, the pride and centripetal violation of a human being by himself. It also included equality, "the leveller, the unyielding principle of the average". These two principles were "confronting and ever-modifying the other", --- and they could be reconciled only by the addition of the third element in the revolutionary trinity, the principle of fraternity "the manly love of comrades" (32).
Women in America were profoundly inspired by such democratic goals, and women writers, actively engaged themselves in their struggle for greater and more meaningful freedom for themselves, thereby asserting their fundamental rights, for the first time in history, casting off the traditional subservient roles, foisted on them by a male-dominated society. Such an aspiration for the expression of their freewill on the part of women was not merely confined to the United States alone or to the nineteenth century. The urge for freedom on the part of women, could be discerned simmering even among the English women of the Elizabethan age. For instance, in the Epilogue to Beaumont and Fletcher's "Honest Man's Fortune", we find the following interesting observation:

Man is his own star and its soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man
Commands all light, all influence, all fate. Nothing to him falls
early or too late.
Our acts our angels are, or good or ill
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still (43).

The concept of selfhood as perceived by the American Transcendentalists seems to echo the concept visualized in the age-old *Upanishads* of India which state that the entire cosmic whole is contained in the microcosm of the individual man's mind. It is the individual who is the measure of the vast universe surrounding him.

More recently, Jung, the psychologist, calls such a quest for "individuation or wholeness", "a process by which a person
becomes a psychological individual, with a separate indivisible unity or wholeness" (165).

And, according to John Murphy,

While many modern feminists favour the sexually liberated Sophy Viner, it is Anna Leath, who reflects the author and approaches an independent, uncompromising heroine, --- The novel becomes problematic for feminists, who wish to assert a conception of sexual freedom--- which seems suspicious like the promiscuity for which men have usually been condemned". (234)

In "Wharton Questions Motherhood" Kaiku Bappu finds Wharton far ahead of her time, in questioning the "Myth of motherhood" that on the one hand, glorifies mothers as sacred, and on the other, subjugates them to the ideal of maternity and produces frustrated, repressed, disturbed and martyred women. In The Children and The Mother's Recompense, says Bappu, Wharton criticized both the traditional and modern motherhood with an incisive insight.

Annis Pratt's Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction too highlights the historic iconoclastic role played by the women artists, in the history of women's emancipation: "Women writers dig up the goddess from the ruins, clean the debris from the face, casting aside the gynophobic masks that obscured her beauty. her power and her beneficence" (178).
In Martha - Quest, Dorris Lessing remarks how women writers insist upon total eradication of fear that is endogenous, which hinders freedom of expression: "fear of what other people might say, fear of being different, fear of being isolated, fear of the herd we belong to, fear of seclusion from the herd we belong to" (524).

According to Weisstein, "themes in literary works are expressed through characters." Writers often tend to employ their protagonists to present some themes close to their hearts, and revolutionary writers often make their characters question the existing norms of society and blind conventions. Artists who cherish the values of liberty are satisfied only when they are able to make their audience see, think and act independently, and without fear. As such, they stand unique as beacon lights, amidst a group of the fearful, ignorant majority of mankind.

Edith Wharton belongs to such a group of novelists who are passionately concerned with the emancipation of women. Perhaps it is appropriate in this context, to bring in the Ardener’s diagram, concerning the boundaries of the spheres of interest:
In the above diagram, x and y stand for the boundaries of spheres of interest of men and women respectively. Ardener projects as if much of "y" falls within the boundaries of "x" when the spheres intersect each other. That which is outside the dominant boundary is, in Ardener's terminology, "wild". Seema Jene tells us how Ardener and critics like Elaine Showalter have agreed "that women's writing is not inside or outside the male male tradition, but inside the two traditions simultaneously" (19), the two being complementary to each other.

Edith Wharton's claim to being a feminist, lies in her creation of extremely self-reliant and exceptionally endearing sympathetic women characters, in an essentially male-dominated world. A distinct ubiquitous undertone of discomfort, dissatisfaction and discontentment can be heard in the experiences of most of these women. Critics like Mita Bose do agree with Elizabeth Ammons, the kind of women Edith Wharton portrays in her fiction: 'New woman' of the turn of the century, yearning to break out of her constricting role and attempting a courageous-rebellion" (73).

Edith Wharton saw herself essentially as an alien in her own land and society, with regard to values and attitudes. Several critics like Cynthia Griffin Wolff concede that Wharton was an emancipated soul, holding highly antagonistic views towards a society which was totally out of step with herself; "Wharton had
liberated herself from its malignant force in so far as she was able to" (FW 295).

In fact, Wharton had no particularly sentimental devotion to her own native place and did not care much for Newport, as her husband did. As for her convention-bound community around, Kellogg tells us how

"its social functions bored her --- she kept busy with her little house. One may surmise that her neighbour sensed and somewhat resented her independence" (72).

Edith Wharton is much obsessed with the theme of the independence of women, to which she gives eloquent expression in most of her works. It seems quite possible that Wharton's pronounced defiant posture towards a male-dominated society, was occasioned by her own early experiences as a young woman. In a typically democratic situation, an individual's liberty is almost dependent, on the other, equally valid, principles of equality and fraternity. Lack of any one of these three fundamental principles will ultimately end up in a chaos of values.

For instance, Bessy in The Fruit of the Tree turns out to be a daring rebel, despite all the unreasonable financial restrictions laid down by her husband. Bessy's happiness over marrying Amherst, the man of her choice, vanishes the moment her economic independence, and consequently, her personal
independence gets curbed in several ways by Amherst. While Bessy continues to indulge herself in luxuries like "a set of Chinese vases for twenty-five hundred dollars --- and a pair of cobs" (287) as was her vogue before marriage, Amherst proves himself to be "a calculating brute who has married her for her fortune" (324). He also raises objections to Bessy's needless purchase of a horse, when a steamer is already available for her. However, Bessy's contention is, "with only one motor, one must have more horses, of course" (287).

In sharp contrast to Amherst's meanness, Bessy gives him a free hand to spend her money towards the fulfilment of his plans at Westmore. On one occasion, she tells him, "I always expected that you would need a great deal more money than you thought ---- (286). These words clearly demonstrate Bessy's extraordinary generosity of spirit and understanding of her husband. It is little wonder then that Bessy has every reason to resent Amherst's persistent attempts to restrict her spending. She feels highly annoyed when he observes: "Your expenses will have to be cut down a great deal --- they are increasing steadily" (287). Essentially, deep within herself, Amherst's interest in Westmore, "his safety valve, his refuge"(158) is of no importance to Bessy. If only she had had her way, she feels she would not have begun, "this horrible house" (at Westmore) (36). Once, she expresses her discontentment to Justine, who in turn, confides it to Amherst that "Bessy has not been quite content of late to give you so
much time to Westmore --- because Westmore takes you from her" (253). Even more important, Bessy is denied the opportunity of indulging herself with her own daughter.

Bessy's personal happiness is lost not only because of Amherst's commitment to Westmore, but also because of his indifference towards her daughter, Cecily. On one occasion, Wharton comments how Bessy "alternated between moments of exaggerated devotion and days of neglect, never for long happy, away from the girl" (259). At one point, she begins to feel guilty of being extremely selfish as a wife and "of sacrificing her child's prospects to further Amherst's enterprise and therefore she dashes ---- upstairs [to] ---- do penance beside her child's bed" (262). Moreover, Amherst disapproves of Bessy's horse-riding, while Bessy "shows a great zeal in the pursuit of sport - a tireless passion for the saddle, the golf - course, the tennis - court, with an almost Oriental inertia within doors" (219). Amherst who does not understand this absorbing passion in his energetic wife, frustrates Bessy through a letter addressed to Justine, Bessy's nurse, with a simple injunction: "don't let my wife ride Impulse" (372). Amherst also objects to Bessy's intimacy with the Carburys, but in this regard Bessy dares to disobey him, as she finds him totally unreasonable. Bessy's rebellion can be seen from the butler's cryptic report to Amherst: "Mrs. Amherst has gone away --- this afternoon, Sir, to Mapleside ---- by motor ---- to stay with Mrs. Carbury" (341).
Once, referring to the Carburys, Bessy's mother charges Amherst with the words: "you have my daughter cut off from all her friends" (216). Though the Carburys are addicted to playing bridge for money, Bessy herself does not do so. All these acts of non-conformity on the part of Bessy, are sure signs of incipient rebellion simmering deep within her, which do not go totally unnoticed. Bessy too begins to openly retort "to his assertion of independence" (345). Consequently, Amherst refuses permission to Bessy even for a few weeks' rest in Europe, which could have revived her health and vitality.

Amherst who feels inwardly more pleased with the arrangement, says to Justine, "her little excursion with you did her well --- I think she only needed rest. Perhaps her six weeks in the Adrion docks were better than Europe" (210). But Amherst's assessment of the situation proves to be utterly absurd, as owing to his continued negligence, Bessy's health has already begun to deteriorate, and she is thoroughly "unhappy" (197) and proves to be "so wasteful of her strength of nerves" (210). Even more important, Bessy not only loses faith in herself as an individual, but suddenly realizes with a sense of terror that women can have no faith "in their own ability to change their environment because they have been taught that women cannot make it through life - economically, socially, emotionally or sexually without men" (134).
Bessy is later completely cured of her illusions, caused by her blind love for Amherst, as she realizes that she is "no more to him than the carpet on the floor" (230). She who had been all along so flexible and thus "the dearest little Chameleon" (160), learns gradually that "every woman must fight her battles alone". As "her love for Amherst was dead" (413), she initiates an open debate with him saying "Is that what you marry for?" (236)

Louis Auchincloss's assessment looks rather naive when she comments, "although twenty four years old, widowed and a mother by that time --- she is, in short, both ignorant and spoiled" (52). Even Blake Nevius' observation, "Bessy is a composite portrait of everything that Edith Wharton disliked in her own sex" (104) seems to be considerably prejudiced. On the contrary, Bessy emerges through all her ordeals as a triumphant fighter, who does not give in till the very end. In the will "made some months before her death", "Bessy had divided her estate between her husband and her daughter, placing Cecily's share in trust," (436) and her final shrewd move comes as a nasty surprise to Amherst. All her favourite projects like the pleasure-house, gymnasium and hospital are implemented now in complete accordance with her desire:

The Emergency Hospital, planned in the first months of his marriage and abandoned in the general reduction of
expenditure at the mills, had now been completed on a larger and more elaborate scale, as a memorial to Bessy. (439).

Bessy's project at Lynbrook is eventually carried out in letter and spirit by Amherst himself, in the end. Even at the cost of her own economic and personal independence, Bessy ensures her daughter's freedom. Her property is duly passed on to Cecily, as per the provisions in her will, and is eventually shared by the labourers, for Cecily herself declares, "In my mother's name, I give this house to Westmore" (629). Now, everyone can see the profound influence exercised by Bessy on her daughter and "the impetus of self-sacrifice had carried her straight to her good" (557). Further, once liberty is attained, equality and fraternity are concomittantly also assured, as symbolically presented in the novel, through the union of Justine Brent, Bessy's nurse, with Amherst, who has now become Bessy's equal through marriage.

In Wharton's The House of Mirth, it is Lily who rebels against tradition and the established moral code of conduct from the beginning. She takes to smoking cigarettes in public quite early and wears fashionable dresses of her choice. Judy openly warns her against such exhibitionism: "Don't wear your scarlet 'cripe de chine' for dinner and don't smoke" (47). Percy Gryce is shocked at her addiction to the game of bridge for "he had
never seen a girl play cards for money" (81). As for Lily, the
game is simply irresistible for "the gambling passion was upon
her" (28).

Being a born fighter for freedom, Lily detests dependence of all kinds. What she actually yearns for is "freedom from
everything— from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety,
from all the material accidents" (71). Whenever Lily says "she
is free and I am not"(7), what she puts her finger on is her
frustration over her own economic dependence on Mrs. Peniston,
her aunt and guardian: "She was beginning to chafe at the
obligations --- to feel herself a mere pensioner of the splendour
which had once seemed to belong to her" (27). She yields to
the temptation of playing bridge only with the intention of
winning a large sum of money through a windfall now and then,
to just lavish on trinkets and dresses, for after all, "Once
or twice she had won a large sum ---" (28). Lily thinks
independently and acts impulsively though her happiness is often
marred by her fear of her aunt, who admonishes her from time
to time, and also her fear of the hypocritical society around. To
Lily, the mere act of living in society is to follow a strategem,
"to calculate and contrive and retreat and advance as if ----
going through an intricate dance, where one misstep would throw
--- hopelessly out of tune" (49 & 50). Lily is also ambitious
and quite fastidious, with regard to her collection of diamond
jewellery and it is this weakness in character that drives her, subsequently, to risk higher stakes with each of her fresh ventures. She feels at first, quite impatient with her position of not having a motorcar or a steam-yacht at her orders, "but the daily friction of unpaid bills, the daily nibble of small temptations to expenditure were trials as far out of her experience as the domestic problems of the charwoman" (80). It is only with a view to asserting her independence from her aunt, Mrs. Peniston, that Lily seeks the help of Augustus Trenor, who deals with "tips" and "deals".

Lily also fights in defence of her personal dignity and independence with regard to all her relationships. When men like Percy Gryce, Simon Rosedale and Selden make offers of marriage to her, in relation to the degree of the wealth each of them has at his command, Lily coolly rejects all of them one by one. "She is discerning enough to know" (22) the ulterior design of men in general and of Augustus Trenor in particular. Moreover, she is always on the alert to escape from being entangled in the enticing web of men.

Lily's determination to preserve her personal honour, goads her on to work hard, in order to pay off the debt she owes Augustus Trenor and, consequently, she dies happily, pleased
with all her efforts. To start with, her ultimate purpose in life seems to be to make the most of life, her watchword being, "I like being happy" (7). She is also over-conscious of her external appearance. But in her mature phase, Lily is even prepared to work as Mrs. Hatch's Secretary, a job she had looked upon with contempt earlier. She has become humble enough to say: "She (Mrs. Hatch) has helped me to earn a living when my old friends were quite resigned to seeing me starve" (294). She also works as a milliner's apprentice at St. Regina's, all with a view to saving her honour. She confesses the gross error she had committed to Mrs. Hatch on one occasion "Unfortunately, I had spent the money (9000 dollars) before I discovered my mistake - that's why I am trying to learn a trade" (307). She realizes only too well "the value of money" and prefers an honourable hand-to-mouth existence to a dishonourable life of affluence. This trait of resisting the charms of wealth itself marks her lately-attained maturity and strength of character. Though she has not a penny left after paying off Gus Trenor's debt of ten thousand dollars, she wins a meritorious moral battle in the end.

Ironically, Lily, a born aristocrat, dies as a working class woman. Yet her character reveals an admirable spirit of defiance against all the false values of the world. The equality she aspires for with the poor at the time of her death, is symbolically conveyed in the novel, through her holding a baby of the working class in her hands.
The baby feeling herself detached from her habitual anchorage made an instinctive motion of resistance --- Lily felt the soft weight sink trustfully against her breast ----. At first the burden in her arms seemed as light as a pink cloud or a heap of down, but as she continued to hold it, the weight increased, sinking deeper - as though the child entered into her and became a part of herself. (333).

The yawning gulf between the aristocracy and the proletariat has thus been bridged by Lily's death.

Similarly, Sóphy Viner in *The Reef* puts up a brave fight against countless tidal waves of adversity. At first, her guardian's sudden death lands her in utter deprivation of wealth. Sophy musters all the courage she needs as "years of repression were revealed in her sudden burst of confidence"(37). Seizing the first opportunity to work as a reader to Mrs. Murrett, she "wrote notes, and made up the visiting-book, and walked the dogs, and saw bores for her"(361). After five years of such devoted service to Mrs. Murrett, Sophy learns with a heavy heart, that she can have "few illusions as to their power of advancing her fortune". (379). Now she makes a fresh attempt with the Farlows "to earn enough"(379) at least from now on and soon she finds "herself alone in a busy and indifferent world --- left to her own resources"(336). Sophy tries the stage next, "I am going to Paris to study for the stage"(364), as she is "the kind of girl in whom certain
people would instantly have recognised the histrionic gift" (381). She accompanies George Darrow happily with the idea of joining the theatre through him. To her shock, Darrow proves himself to be a cheat and a humbug and consequently, Sophy is forced to forget the stage and to "take the first thing --- offered" (460), namely, to work as "a perfect governess" (452) to Effie. Millicent Bell, a critic of Edith Wharton calls Sophy "a bad heroine" in the sense of "the type of woman with no fortune" (314). On the contrary, Sophy's spirit of perseverance and valiant fight against poverty throughout her life disproves the above critic's statement, for it is her essential assertion of the spirit that must be taken into account, regardless of her success or failure. In fact, it is Sophy's poverty that launches her on a long arduous quest for wealth. Yet she resists such odds till the end, with the possibility of losing her own freedom, in the process daunting her at every stage, preserving her innate dignity and independence of spirit. The novelist employs, with telling eloquence the metaphor of successive mounting waves of the sea to suggest the challenges Sophy faces in life:

Though every starved sensibility were throwing out feelers to the mounting tide, as though everything she was seeing, hearing, imagining rushed in to fill the void of all she had been denied. (387).

Born in a heartless world of incessant materialistic pursuits, Sophy realizes very early in life that "loss of her ---- Fortune
had represented only the means of holding her in bondage —— of its disappearance was the occasion of her immediate plunge into the wide bright sea of life" (367) "to have sufficient clothes and fun and motors and admiration and Yachting and Paris" (363). When she meets George Darrow at first, she thoroughly enjoys his company. However, soon she perceives that Darrow is only a part of "the whirling social and official machine" (406), on whose steady favour she cannot count. Though, Darrow's sudden departure from Paris does cause a lot of pangs in her, she makes a frank confession of her firm resolve to Darrow himself to pursue a new line of action: "now I want to sweep everything away. I'd been trying to forget how you looked —— I'd been trying not to hear your voice" (541).

In fact, Sophy wreaks her vengeance on Darrow when the latter's true colour is out, and boldly goes ahead in search of a better relationship. Her friendship with Owen, Anna Leath's stepson would have culminated in marriage but for the untimely intervention of Darrow, who sees in this development a potential risk in his own prospects of marrying Anna, an extremely wealthy widow, as Sophy is a mere governess to Anna's daughter now. Thereupon, Darrow decides "to find some way of securing Sophy Viner's future, without leaving her installed at Givr'e" (473) or allowing her to marry Owen. At first, Sophy directly pleads with Darrow "to spare her as she had to live" (474). When Darrow stubbornly declares that her marrying Owen is not
proper, Sophy grows bold enough to retort: "From whose point of view do you speak? -- you don't think me a good match for him?" (498-501). And thereafter, she resorts to an open confrontation. As her first move, she goes away creating a mystery and a puzzle in Anna's mind, making the latter sense that there is something fishy about Darrow's elaborate overtures of love. Eventually, Anna decides not to marry Darrow. Thus, Sophy "the reef" succeeds in wrecking the contemplated marriage between the ambitious and greedy Darrow and Anna, even as the former had thwarted her own marital prospects with Owen. Sophy, is grossly misjudged by William MacNoughton as "Edith Wharton's bad heroine" --- "Who is already an actress in life" (214). MacNoughton is far off the mark in his negative comment on Sophy as Darrow himself is seen earlier in the work admiring her simplicity and her "naturalness ---- that eased the situation of constraint" (375). Eventually, Sophy and Anna, join hands in breaking the shackles of bondage to Darrow, and emerge as free birds. As such, the existing disparity between the mistress and the governess vanishes, thus fulfilling the democratic values, which both cherish. In this context, it is pertinent to endorse Annis Pratt's words of praise for Sophy: "Peeling away from Patriarchal experience --- she gathers power to enable her to leap beyond the male maya" (AWF 166).

The conflict portrayed in The Mother's Recompense is primarily psychological, as it depicts Kate, a mother who
undergoes a profound internal conflict, thoroughly unable to decide between what is right and wrong. The struggle within her is caused by her own scruples and the consequent sense of guilt, as "she was the woman who had once stooped to folly" (53). She is also worried over her desertion of Anne, her daughter. She "could not confess even to her most secret self that she had willingly deserted her child ---- because to do so was to escape from the oppression of her married life" (16). Kate's joy knows no bounds, when, due to certain totally unforeseen circumstances, she is once again united with her daughter, after twenty long years of separation. Anne's coming into her life once again, to her, means nothing short of "lightening of clouds and opening of windows" (152).

Soon Kate is compelled to face even a more difficult and complex problem. Her joy over her daughter's prosperity proves to be short - lived, as she learns that Anne is to be wedded to Chris Fenno, her former fiancé. It is hard for her to digest the prospect of her lover marrying her own only, beloved daughter. Her first impulse is to prevent the marriage. Kate openly declares before Anne, "I know he [Chris] couldn't make you happy, make any woman happy" (201) and then she tries coaxing Chris to quit the place as his decision to marry her daughter is absurd and thoroughly unacceptable. She asks him with utmost impatience, "Promise me - give me your word that you'll go" (175). It is then she feels a psychological conflict raging within herself.
Instantaneously, she also feels "the loosening of cords about her heart; a deep breath of relief welled up in her ---" (179), with a sudden realization of her own selfish purpose in preventing the happiness of Anne. She also appears to herself, "a criminal, under cross - examination" (197) and "feels herself --- almost guilty --- but for her, he [Chris] might have been standing before her with a high head" (219). Kate cannot bear "to picture to herself the change in Anne's face from ecstasy to anguish ---" (274) and she feels like "a dizzy moth battering itself to death against that implacable blaze" (225), after which she comes to a firm decision: "I want to be myself - to think" (210). She begins to even consider, "if he loves her (Anne) as passionately as she [Kate] loved him, was he not justified in accepting the happiness forced upon him?" and prays "if anyone is to be destroyed, oh, don't let it be Anne" (276). Kate is further determined "to grope her way and the girl's through this ghastly labyrinth, without imperilling whatever affection Anne still felt for her" (194). Therefore she resolves, "to accept the idea of Anne's marriage and try to be in reality --- the acquiescent, approving mother---- atleast his mother-in-law" (275). Kate, eventually frees herself from a strange and awkward tight corner. Thus, even in this basically psychological novel, equality and fraternity are realized in a manner which is highly ironic, with a former sweetheart willing herself to play the role of a mother - in - law, thereby engendering a curious sort of fraternal relationship
between the mother and the daughter. In fact, Wharton glorifies the traditional image of motherhood, almost the emerging concept of motherhood, in this novel. Keiko Bappu states, "Wharton incisively criticized traditional and modern motherhoods" (161-169). Such a view, can at best, be only partially acceptable, for the main preoccupation of the novel is an encomium of motherhood and natural instinct in general.

Judith in The Children is another brave and selfless soul capable of great determination. Her sole aim in life is to liberate the children, 'the step' - 'half' - and 'whole' Wheaters. Francis Theresa Russel is right, when she says: "The Children exhibits the muddled families that come from many marriages" (vol.III, 561). In the novel, however, Judith voluntarily accepts to take charge of the children, being capable of showering inexhaustible affection and love. However, in the process of showing her love towards children, Judith faces innumerable challenges. To start with, she has set for herself, a noble ideal:

Judith has one thought, one vision and one aspiration and that is to protect the children from perennial changes wrought about by their fickle-minded parents and keep them secure as a close self-governing body. (28)

Cliffe Wheater, the father of the children in question "had made money enough to treat himself to half - a dozen divorces and remarriages" (11). Joyce, the footloose mother "had moved off
across the matrimonial chess-board at the same rate of progression as her first husband" (11). It is little wonder that the children brought up under such queer circumstances, have developed an intense feeling of insecurity. They realise that the names like "father" and "mother" had to be applied successively, or, almost simultaneously, to so many different persons because of their parents' various marriages and their own successive adaptations" (41).

Edith Wharton translates the traumatic feeling experienced by the Wheater children through a statement abounding in imagery and vivid associations of childhood:

What change signified to men was something as radical and soul-destroying as it would have been to Boyne to see his mechanical toys smashed, or his white mice left to die of hunger. (46)

Even Judith, in a mood of distress, expresses a growing sense of insecurity, troubling her inner world: "the real wilderness is the world we live in, packing up our tents every few weeks for another move" (23). Resisting such an inward menace of insecurity, threatening to invade the minds of the little children, Judith resolves to resist and accept to be "the little-girl-mother" (37) who knows nothing of the "oppression of its (life's) awkward reality" (34).
She had a quaint vision of them all living in a house somewhere in the country --- for each of the children, she had thought out a definite career. Blanca --- was to be "lovely" --- Terry was to be a great scholar --- Bun was manifestly meant to drive racing-motors --- Beechy would marry and have heaps of children --- Zinnie was undoubtedly predestined to be "clever" --- he [Chris] would be a banker. (247 & 248).

Nevertheless, in the course of her long struggle, Judith has to forego not only the fun and frolic of her own youth but also her love for Gerald Ormerod, as her mother is "about to marry someone who, by Judith's own showing would have preferred herself" (253). At another instance, Boyne develops an inordinate passion for Judith, illustrated by Boyne's statement, "I'm looking at her without her knowing --- pain of not seeing her was unendurable" (345). In fact, till the end, Boyne is not able to articulate his love for Judith.

Curiously enough, Judith turns out to be the most peculiarly endowed, and exceptionally capable of helping the children to face changes in life, despite herself being a "little creature --- (who) changes every hour" (37), since "all her life had been a series of adaptations, arrangements, shifting of lights, lowering of veils, pulling about of screens and curtains" (38). Besides, she has one more ideal to achieve in life "that her children should never
again be exposed to these hazards," (46). It is true that in due course, all of Judith's "fabulous dreams and ambitions" (247) come true, amidst all apparent turmoil. "Terry's at school in Switzerland --- Blanca's ---- got engaged ---- Bun and Beechy are in Rome --- (though) Chip died of meningitis" (314). In the midst of all these developments Judith stands exalted, as if on a pedestal, through her life of self-sacrifice, thereby providing a striking contrast to her mother, Joyce who ends up marrying Dobree, a leading lawyer, suggested for marriage for her daughter. Thus, Judith is raised to the super-human stature of a martyr in the novel.

In Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* after her unhappy married life with Count Olenski, Ellen Olenska declares boldly what she wants in life: "I want to be free, I want to wipe out all the past" (1102). The spirit of freedom is innate in her, as her parents had been continental wanderers. So, was also her aunt and guardian, Medora Manson. Consequently, Ellen Olenska stands out unique in her dress, manners and style and Edith Wharton describes her, "as a young woman, so careless of the dictates of Taste" (1026) and "her offence against Taste--- and of form --- keeps her single ---- among the throngs of meaningless faces" (1248). Ellen Olenska's oft-repeated assertion is "Fashionable! --- why not make one's own fashion?" (109). People even comment on her rather exotic name, "Ellen", saying, "I should have changed it to Elaine" (1047).
Her mode of dressing invites comments like, "What can you expect of a girl who was allowed to wear black satin at her coming out of hall?" (1074). Ellen Olenska is so distinguished in her manners too. It is unthinkable in the New York society of the time, "for a lady to address her parlour - maid as my dear one and send her out on an errand wrapped in her own opera cloak" (1146). Further, society begins to wag its tongue when "she is seen driving about the streets with Beaufort" (1075) and "it was not the custom of New York --- for a lady to get up and walk away from one gentleman in order to seek the company of another" (1065) as Ellen Olenska repeatedly does. As for her appearance, "was not more stylish - for stylishness was what New York most valued" (1064).

Neither can Ellen lead a life of her own, as she is denied the liberty she expects from her kinsfolk in New York. It is well beyond her nature to lead a life of repression in New York, and hence "life is difficult - perplexing" (1110) for her and she feels "lonely and unhappy" (1111). Moreover, Ellen has grown tired of what people call "society" (1206). She has almost disentangled herself from a society which "was almost oppressively hospitable" (1206). "She has surprised and inconvenienced them by remaining obdurate to her husband's advances" (1222). After all, others seem to simply refuse to understand her suffering at the hands of her husband, and her daring attempt to secure her divorce from her husband "had fallen like a bombshell" on them.
They do not desist from spreading scandals about her and her secretary who has helped her to get away from "her brute of a husband" (1047). No doubt "she was fighting her fate" alone as she has "lived too independently" (1257). Perhaps the words of Annis Pratt come close to describing in vivid terms, her present condition: "aliens in their own land, trapped by depending upon male whims, who try to disentangle themselves from wifely behaviour ---" (AWF 67).

Ellen Olenska's admiration of Newland Archer vanishes in no time, as she finds him no better than any other man in society. Newland Archer's "conformity to the discipline of a small society", (1271) is so abhorrent in her eyes and Ellen tries, in the words of Annis Pratt "to escape from the inexorable enclosure to a new environment where maleness and femaleness no longer undermine the development of the human personality" (68). Archer is only a typical representative of the society, in which he lives and Ellen who is totally independent, considers it "highly stupid to have discovered America only to make it a copy of another country" (1206). Louis O' Coxe too seems to arrive at a similar view:

Archer, with his insecurity his insensitivity and his passion, has obeyed the moral imperatives of his class and time and has given up Ellen and love for the furtherance of the shallow- seeming aims, all amorphous as they are, of his world. He has stuck to May and to his New York, giving up another world. (NR June 27, 1955, 156-'57)
Thus, Ellen Olenska was like no other woman" (1249) and she frees herself from Newland Archer with the words, "We're near each other only if we stay far from each other. Then we can be ourselves". (1300 & 1301)

We thus find Ellen Olenska rebelling against all cramping social values and relationships as personal independence to her is of foremost importance.

Heliose Spear, nicknamed Halo, appears first in Wharton's *Hudson River Bracketed* and then makes a second appearance in *The Gods Arrive*. "She longed for freedom" (109), right from her earlier unhappy married life with Lewis Tarrant. Tarrant is an incorrigible sadist to whom "the mere pleasure of thwarting her" (5), gave pleasure, as "he was a man who grew fat on resentment as others did on happiness" (5). Halo's life with Tarrnat has been horrible as he always demanded her unconditional surrender to all his whims and fancies, by "devoting all days and nights, thoughts, impulses, inclinations in the arduous business of understanding him" (G.A.,9). Also she feels "she was unwanted" (G.A.,9) and "she did not know when she would be free"(G.A.,3). At last, an occasion offers itself after ten long years when Halo decides to leave her husband for good, "as the undivorced wife to Lewis Tarrant" (G.A., 3); She finds an outlet to her suppressed feelings in Vance, because "the relief of saying it to him was deep; it took her out of a world of suffocating dissimulations into a freer air" (HRB.,184).
However, for the moment Halo does not realize that she is falling from the fire into the frying pan. Very soon she realizes that she and Vance too are ill-matched and incompatible. Her prime concern is just independence, and hence to her, "money is only a means to independence, riches were nothing to her; --- she longed for freedom --- if only her eager interest in life had been matched by some creative talent" (HRB, 109). Contrary to Vance's greed and his materialistic preoccupations, she wants just to be herself, come what may. She knows only too well that

It was necessary indeed to have a comfortable amount of money, enough to grease the machinery of life, but even for that, there was a price --- that price was herself --- she would never surrender the least jot. (HRB., 183)

Halo is also shrewd enough to perceive that Vance being a young man with a fiery imagination,

wanted a new woman ---- a succession of new women --- for his flame to feed on ---. His flame devoured one lonely victim after another, how many had to be heaped on the pyre of genius? (HRB., 104).

To her dismay, Vance shuts "up the idea of her in a box as if she were -- an unfinished picture" (119) eventhough his thoughts had earlier been much more gentle and highly appreciative of her:
Some fiery fusion of his whole being, the heightening and merging of every faculty, seemed to have loosened his tongue. ---- He and his art and this woman were one, indissolubly one in a passionate mutual understanding he and she understood each other -- with their intelligences and their emotions with eyes, their hands, their lips ..(HRB 438). She notices that his love for her is curiously mixed with a certain kind of mystery and "there hung between them the faint awe of her presence. She was the woman, his arms longed for, but she was also the goddess, the miracle, the unattainable being ---" .(439)

The next shock Halo receives from Vance pertains to the revival of his love for Floss Delaney, once dead, now renewed: "There were selves under selves in him and that one of the undermost belonged to Floss Delaney" (G.A.,260). Though she has learnt to be increasingly patient with the awkward situation, this new development takes her further and further away from Delaney: "The mere fact that she was so patient with him, didn't nag, didn't question, sometimes added to the sense of her remoteness (G.A.,326).

Hence, when Vance explodes before her, saying "what I want is nothing else, than all of you-all your time, all your thoughts, all yourself" (G.A.,441), she realizes that it is high time, she showed him his limits and the impossibility of being his wife, as she is firm in her resolve to follow her fundamental
principle; "I won't take a lover while I have a husband - or while my lover has a wife (Laura Lou)" (G.A.,441).

Halo has to face even a more perturbing situation as Lewis Tarrant refuses to consent to her divorce, once his proposed marriage with Mrs. Pulsifer fails to materialize. Consequently, in a dramatic encounter, Lewis and Vance engage themselves, in a heated verbal exchange in which each stakes his own claim on Halo. Nevertheless, Halo puts a full stop to the pestering plea of Lewis Tarrant saying, "I'm going to have a child" (389) and declaring that currently her one and only wish is "to be free---free and alone with her child" (G.A.,390), thus effectively doing away with both the fickle-minded men in her life. Ironically enough, the novel effectively ends with Vance once again coming back to her, after having lost all his strength and will. But now, Vance is no longer treated as one she had loved earlier, but merely a second child, for she says, "I shall have two children to take care of, instead of one!"(398).

Wharton's nineteenth century stance in relation to the tenets of feminism in America is akin to Sivasankari's attitude towards women of the twentieth century India. Sivasankari too feels it is her responsibility as a writer to bring out in the open the suppressed feelings of women over the centuries, echoing the words of Margaret Mead: "The emotional part of women's life that part which makes her a woman must be brought out of the dark and allowed to put forth its best" (147).
Sivasankari's independence of mind is reflected in almost all her women protagonists recalling the following lines of Michael Judith and Ann Orkleyed: "A woman must have sense and independence of mind --- meek wives are foolish mothers"(128-129). As a writer Sivasankari discusses with candour, ability and sincerity, the various struggles put up by women in India to gain greater independence for themselves. In the words of Susie Tharu and Lalitha, "The new woman was self-confident, autonomous and this was a figure that was to dominate the literary imagination for several decades to come" (WWI 173).

Similar are the views of Carol Pearlson and Katherine Pope too:

before withdrawing, the female hero must be ready to battle with herself, overcome the fear of being a "deviant" and shed those patriarchal ideologies she had internalised. "The dragon has to be slain --- (CPOC,7). In the same way you do find that the female hero does not martyr herself for others that she undergoes the journey for her own benefit and violates female sex role (69).

Visali in 47 Nātkal is grossly misjudged as gullible and treated little better than a fool, who can be easily carried away by attractive presents like sarees and watches by Kumar, her
wicked husband. Visali rightly smells that there is something fishy when Kumar disappears on the nuptial night itself. The incident shows that Visali, though illiterate is not ignorant. Once her suspicion proves to be true, Kumar openly announces that Lucia is actually his first wife. To Kumar's shock the tradition-bound Visali succeeds in breaking the mask of thraldom in her marriage with a cheat. She strives hard to overcome the depression that often goads her on, right to the verge of committing suicide. Therefore, she hits upon a plan to escape the clutches of Kumar, either through Lucia by showing her the wedlock or by meeting one of the Indian families she is likely to come across, on her way to shopping.

Visali preserves her will intact, even when Kumar ill-treats her, going to the extent of burning one of her fingers once. She turns a deaf ear to all his harsh words, thus paving the way for still greater utterly unexpected consequences. Her love for Kumar has now turned to bitter hatred, and she tells him to his face: "how I hate you touching me" (161). Kumar has become more and more rude towards her. Visali decides now to give him up, eventhough she will be helpless living in a foreign land, and having to use a foreign language. However, she avails of the first opportunity that comes her way and expresses her predicament to one of the Indian families, using the only word in English 'help', which she has picked up from an English movie and shows all possible gestures to make them understand
the seriousness of her situation. Visali's daring efforts prove eventually fruitful. One Mr. Dharunkumar sees the ambassador on her behalf and informs him of Visali's plight, who in turn puts up a trunk-call to a minister and with much difficulty, they all succeed in tracing her brother and Visali finds security at last in her brother's home.

Visali daringly and unexpectedly, severs not only the sentimental attachment of a wife to her husband but also of a mother to her child. She throws away the wedlock that has so long bound her to a blind, unquestioned tradition and aborts her foetus with Lucia's aid, as she feels it a sin to carry his child in her womb. She even asks once "How much would I have sinned to carry his child in my womb?" (206). Thus not only does Visali escape from her doomed fate but succeeds in sealing Kumar's fate too. She shatters his world of illusions by making him realize her true worth, and by encouraging Lucia also to leave him for ever. Now she returns home at last, relieved after a frantic period of forty-seven days.

Kumari is also innocent and uneducated at the beginning of the novel Paccōntikal. Ignorant of the ways of the world, she still discovers before long that Nagarajan her husband is deceitful and selfish. Subsequently, she not only resists the designs of her husband, but also that of her brother - in - law.
Kumari's maiden encounter is against Masilamoni, her brother-in-law who could have seduced her. The deceptive Masilamoni puts on the appearance of a loving and sacrificial brother, but is inwardly very selfish and in sex, extremely passionate. In the absence of her husband he even forces Kumari to wear a saree and flowers he has brought for her, and makes further advances to her, under some false pretext, after having deliberately sent his brother away on some errand. After meeting with several failures in her attempts to convey the matter to her husband, Kumari succeeds at last. Once Nagarajan discovers the ugly intent of his brother, the couple decide to leave for Pondicherry. Finally, having no other refuge, Kumari leaves her home taking with her, her daughter Indrani.

Kumari also has to fight against bitter poverty. As ill-luck would have it, Nagarajan loses his hand in an accident and thereby his job. His regular income, thereafter ceases to flow in. Incurring a heavy loss over running a petty shop, does not deter Kumari from her goal. Once Nagarajan's ill-temper dissuades his boys from coming for tuition to him, she ekes out a living by grinding flour on a commercial basis. In order to make both ends meet, she takes to knitting and part-time cooking for others, on special occasions. However, she finds even doing all such heavy manual work by herself does not procure adequate income for the family and gradually her health begins to deteriorate and she is changed beyond any shade of recognition.
Kumari is prepared to resist her husband too, whenever the occasion demands. In the early phase of her marital life, Kumari used to be often bashed by Nagarajan, whenever she levelled any charge against her brother-in-law. Though she works very hard now to run the family by herself, her husband once again, falls an easy prey to the snares of Masilamoni, who ruthlessly chases her, as he knows for certain that his brother is utterly helpless now. When Kumari informs Nagarajan about this development, instead of rushing to her support he admonishes her for not being wise enough to do what profits the family. He even advises her to understand Masilamoni's feelings and oblige his demands. Seeing the second chameleon in her life changing its colour Kumari decides to leave him, in order to stand on her own feet.

Durga in Poy also dares to break her bond with Giridhar, her husband. Giridhar, the father of two sons, has suddenly fallen for Linda and he is bent on justifying his lapse. Now Durga resolves to expose the true colour of Giridhar, for she knows that he has married Linda only for money and for procuring a green card in the U.S. It is neither Giridhar's disinterestedness in life, nor his kindness towards a helpless widow, but his own inveterate desire for self-advancement that have drawn him to Linda. His flattery is at its best, only when it serves his own interests: "My heart's desire is to marry her only after securing your letter of acceptance of divorce, following all
regulations, strictly in accordance with the law" (114).

Thus, despite being pushed to the verge of losing her husband, Durga is determined not to lose her sons. Accordingly, she sends a shock wave down Giridhar's spine, paying a surprise visit to America with her sons. Treating with contempt the very suggestion that she has come for money, she asks him defiantly, "Who needs your money - Linda's money?" The father's weaknesses and the mother's virtues get amply exposed before the boys who promptly turn their backs on their father for ever. Sivasankari concludes the novel thus: "Feminism is a code that rejects with utter contempt the shameful lot of agony and pain assigned to women drowned in the dark abyss of ignorance" (136).

Chandra in Mūkkaṇkayiru lays a fitting snare for Moorthy and takes the initiative in deciding his fate. Indeed, it is Mano, her son who opens her eyes to her blind acceptance of all her sufferings in life in the name of fate, for the sake of her children. She is decided at last: "I should make the right decision right now. I cannot afford to remain the same old Chandra, enduring everything for ever" (45). However, it is too late when she realizes the need for such a change in her attitude towards Moorthy. Initiating a probe, she finds out that Moorthy very often takes out Nalini, his colleague in the office, either on official or unofficial grounds. She is furious at the
words of Nalini's father, who tells her in a heartless fashion:
"You do not give Moorthy any peace at home. His condition has
become pathetic. Atleast he finds a little comfort in Nalini's
companionship. Should you destroy even that? Are you really a
woman?" (56)

Chandra daringly faces such odds, each time rising to the
occasion. Once, she realizes the meaninglessness of continuing her
miserable married life, with a sensitive, adolescent son like Mano,
who keeps complaining to her whenever he catches his father on
the wrong foot: "Yesterday I saw daddy in the company of
Nalini" (24); "I myself saw him fully drunk, blabbering and with
four or five women" (32). Cut to the quick at last, Chandra
gives her consent to Moorthy, to marry Nalini and takes a
fervent interest in making all the preliminary arrangements for the
consummation of their marriage. Initially, she wins their
admiration with her seemingly apologetic and confessional tone,
accepting that only now she has realized her mistake of not
satisfying her husband's wishes so far. It is only at the end that
she reveals her real intention when, once again, Moorthy slowly
makes advances to her:

The wedlock that Nalini is wearing now around her neck, is
the noose strung through your nose, as even as an
uncontrollable heifer is brought under control by the noose
piercing through the holes of its nostrils. This marriage is
sure to turn a lifesentence for you (105).
From now on, Moorthy ceases to be her husband. She knows it is meaningless to live with him, for there is "no kindness in his glance, concern in his words or grace in his conduct; absolutely none" (6:7).

Bhuvana, in Veṭṭkam Keṭṭavarkal, acts wisely and escapes from Duraisamy, her husband, a flirt and womanizer, as she knows that "there is no crying over spilt milk ----" (39). Bhuvana sees to it that she continues her study even after her marriage by securing her husband's prior permission. To make matters worse, her step-mother utilizes her period of absence, allowing Sundari, her own daughter, to move freely with Duraisamy, when he is at the zenith of his success. Bhuvana questions him: "Can they be considered as human beings, who are bent upon money and sex, and utterly bereft of love, intimacy, virtue and conscience?" (82). Next she starts working as a receptionist cum telephone operator in a firm, to earn independently and provide enough for her daughter. She boldly erases from her mind, all traces of fear of failure in her purpose, by constantly reassuring herself; "I can dare and do it --- I can show that I can live alone with my daughter" (93).

Eventually, Bhuvana is appointed the Head of the Accounts section in another sister concern, as a reward for her relentless efforts. Though she has lived successfully and independently for seventeen years, she approaches Duraisamy again for the sake of
celebrating her daughter's wedding and requests him to be present, in the capacity of the father of Yasodha, on the wedding day. Duraisamy unashamedly lays down such a vulgar condition before her, that she calls him "Brute, utterly lacking in honour and sensitivity" (119). Chandra, her ardent friend, heartily compliments Bhuvana on her success.

It is a wonder, how you managed to break free from the shackles, binding you down in a quagmire --- if only the women of our country learn to struggle in a gentle but determined manner like you did, there will be no room for men demanding dowry. (118)

Susheela, in Orrai Paravai, too dares to break her marriage bond with Senthil, as Bhuvana does. Like Bhuvana's step - mother, Senthil's step - mother also secretly encourages her son to marry a second time, for fear of losing her wealth. However, Susheela overcomes the challenge by seizing the first opportunity that comes her way, taking up the job of a L.K.G. teacher and later, the responsibility of a governess to the two children of Gopinath, who pesters her often with his proposal of marriage. She frankly expresses her strong feeling of disgust against marriage, to him, "It is long since I have become immune to the craving for a husband, a family and children---" (141).

Susheela then takes up the charge of the orphans, under the custody of one Mr. Ramanujan, as it appears to her to be the
stand the test of time. A life of ease and a lion's share of property, offered by Ravi, Senthil's son, do not make her budge even an inch, from her determined purpose. She realizes that a life among the orphans, is more than enough for her. At the end Ravi cannot but admire her for what she is: "an independent, self-confident regal eagle, soaring so high in the sky" (154).

Mohana in Āyuṭ Tāntāṇai is also a "new woman" who marries Bharath, a widower and rears his daughter, Sunya, as her own. Her early life as a call-girl in Delhi is forgotten by Bharath, only until he meets one of her early acquaintances. Thereafter, Mohana's life turns bitter as she is often teased in public by her husband like, "if it is Nalini (his first wife) she would have listened to me, and not made such a fuss over drinking" (156) and is often pestered with vulgar questions like "How intimately did you move with so and so?" (178).

On another occasion, when Bharath is fully drunk in Dhashthur's party, Mohana, unable to bear the stink of liquor, comments: "you stink", and Bharath immediately retorts: "Oh I stink! What about Giri? Did Giri smell sweet?" (195). Such scathing comments pierce her inmost, sensitive being. Hence, she decides upon leaving Bharath, once and for all, with a letter of warning addressed to the latter:

I just do not know when you'll ever understand. It is only circumstances that make a woman chaste or take her to the
damned life of a whore. You who have been brought up, in the shade, will realize some day the heat of the sun. I promise that I will create a first class whore, out of your (Nalini's) daughter, - Bharath, I promise. But blame yourself for everything ---- .(209)

Bharath undergoes an intense mental torture now as Mohana once did. As he is kept informed, every now and then, by Mohana, over the phone allegedly from Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi, how Sunya is being brought up in some brothel area. His pain grows unbearable when she informs him how a certain Setji is ready to shell out millions for a date with Sunya. The fourteen years of rigorous punishment slapped on Bharath by Mohana makes him realize at last the blunder he has committed and the consequent havoc wrought for he has lost his wife, daughter and above all, his marital bliss and peace of mind.

Though Mohana's rebellious act seems aimed at taunting her husband it is actually meant to shield herself and Sunya against a Patriarchal society and its hunger for the flesh. Actually, Mohana becomes a nun, feeling fed up with worldly life. She takes up the responsibility of bringing up Sunya well, who eventually emerges as an excellent student, winning ample recognition for her talents at school. Thus Mohana stands as a role model, "par excellence" triumphing over the shackles of marriage and empty religious conventions laid down by a Patriarchal society.
It matters little to Kalyani in *Man Kutiraikal* whether she breaks the marital bond or parental bond for the sake of sheer survival. Her husband, Sivaraman is utterly ego-centred and is bothered about none but himself. Hence, he remains an enigma to the family, with his intermittent switching over from one job to another, and his frequent absences from home. Kalyani ceases questioning his actions as he very often drives her hard. It is she and not he, who is blamed for not bringing enough dough to feed the six members of the family. His reaction is always arrogant "What a bloody family you run I say?---- 'I can be at peace, only if I succeed in taking her to the streets and suffer"(7). Worst of it all, with all these burning domestic problems, Sivaraman stays away from home for several months, quite oblivious of the family and when he reappears again never fails to give them an additional shock, expressing his suspicion over the possibility of Kalyani's pregnancy. He is so mean and brutal as to satisfy "his desires even on those wearisome days of illness" (44). In addition, her brother has to pay off the heavy debts incurred by Sivaraman, during his absence.

Kalyani, who has so long been striving hard to eke out a living, determines to stand on her own feet, leaving the rest of her children in an Ashram, after the demise of one of her sons and the elopement of her daughter. She is not prepared to be pulled down or restricted by any burden or responsibility, even if it be his children.
If Mohana in Āyūṛ Taṇṭaṇaī suffers with her husband's child and Kalyani suffers with her children in Maṇ Kutiraikāḷ, Lavanya suffers because she is barren in Oru Ciṅkam Muyal Āhiratu. Lavanya's progressive attitude and unshakeable confidence in her husband's character compel her to suggest artificial insemination as a solution for getting a child of their own. Subsequently, the foetus is nurtured in the womb of Menaka, the foster-mother who is promptly instructed to quit from their orbit of life, soon after the delivery of the child, in return for a tidy sum. In the end, Lavanya finds that she has been cheated by her husband, who tours around Calcutta, Darjeeling and Simla and other such pleasure resorts in the company of Menaka. The narrator of the story comments: "Who will inform her that he had gone away to Darjeeling or Madras with Menaka? How will Lavanya ever know of their happy trip to Missouri, executed in accordance with his elaborate plan, designed with utmost cunning well in advance, just as it happened on the last occasion?" (94+95).

Eventually, when everything comes to light, Lavanya tells him firmly:

Bring advocate Lakshman at once; I want right now, this very minute, my divorce —— I must file my papers at once ——" (107).
In all these novels all the vital decisions of life are made and executed by women. Ini Totarātu is just an exception where it is the cousin of Pushpa who makes the right decision during her crisis, on her behalf. Her husband, goaded by his mother, blames Pushpa for her barrenness and poverty and hence he is about to remarry. It is Sudhakar, his brother, who rouses the dormant spirit in Pushpa, as she is blindly steeped in tradition. He eggs her on to file a case against Karthikeyan's remarriage: "It is true that my brother is going to marry another woman, You can sue him in court, being his first wife" (73 & 74).

In fact, it is Sudhakar again who saves Pushpa, when she is most inhumanely thrashed under her husband's very nose, on the false pretext of being 'possessed', with the words, "Do you call yourself a man? I'll see that she is given in second marriage" (86). Throwing this challenge directly at his brother's face, Sudhakar walks out of the house with Pushpa. Sudhakar, like Sivasankari, is a radical reformist, who stands up for rational solutions in "the Year of Liberty and Freedom for Women". Both of them are resolved to break the bondage of women at the hands of tradition and society. In the words found in Malaiyin Atuttap Pakkam, "Future must be left to the decision of the affected party alone"(88) and the question posed by women is: "why do people have double standards one for man and another for woman?"(89).
In Edith Wharton, all her protagonists, with the exception of Bessy, are 'new women' in their values and behaviour. It is exclusively their own responsibility to solve their problems. Though Bessy is excluded from this list, in a way, she too triumphs over her obstacles, in her own quiet way. Wharton's women are confident that they can countervene every wily, chauvinistic move on the part of their men.

In Sivasankari's world of fiction, most of her heroines, are quite conventional to start with, and they gradually evolve into "new women". Mohana, the ex-call-girl of Delhi, is the only exception. The only married woman, who evolves into a "new woman" is the childless Lavanya. All the protagonists ultimately manage to find their way out to freedom from the clutches of the heartless, materialistic and chauvinistic men in their lives.