INTRODUCTION

A parallel study between Edith Wharton and Sivasankari and their creations, has been undertaken here, as they appear similar in their progressive vision as women writers, sense of inherited tradition, notions of emancipation which, however, are circumscribed by their respective age, culture and social milieu; their passionate commitment to eradicate evil in society; their compassion for the marginalised and disadvantaged; their profound concern for the progress of members of their sex and their unremittant devotion to art in general, and fiction in particular. They prove to be eminently comparable as artists, by virtue of their humane experiences, ‘Erlebsträgenschaft’ than by the age ‘Altersgemeinschaft’ in which they lived.

Edith Wharton and Sivasankari, separated in terms of Space and Time, are yet eminently comparable as artists, in respect of the treatment of their chosen themes, and the techniques they have employed in fiction. Wharton, the American novelist, preceded Sivasankari, the Tamil writer, by nearly one hundred years. However, as Donald Douglas points out “the world revealed in Edith Wharton's novels and stories is a small closed circle of tight security wherein men and women behave like toys in the discipline of a heartless social mechanism” (21) and Sivasankari too is primarily preoccupied with the limited world of the Tamil middle class society of the twentieth century in general, and the
role played by women in it in particular. Seldom do we come across a writer, who lives long enough to win in his own lifetime, such accolades as Edith Wharton seems to have done. Though the Nobel Prize for 1927 finally went elsewhere, there was no dearth of literary and social honours for Wharton, for in the same year, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, a Doctorate from a University and the French Legion of Honour. Grace Kellogg points out how Edith was lauded by Henry James as ‘a new novelist’ quoting Harry Hartwick’s words with regard to the similarities in the literary strategems of Henry James and Wharton:

She really builds into her novels as diligently as James perhaps with more obvious success --- Both Edith Wharton and Henry James deal --- in situations artificially constructed to evoke certain action from their characters.... In order to accomplish their purpose they have to warp the irregular outlines of reality into invented symmetries (132).

Both Wharton and Sivasankari are also preoccupied with interrogation of areas of silence, especially those with regard to women. According to James Mckovern, "The twenties was an era of moral relativism.... there is evidence of substantial liberalization in attitude toward sexuality, feminine autonomy, female dress, birth control...." (215).

With regard to transition in values and tradition also Frederick Lewis Allen observes how, "Rouge, once the mark of the harlot, now adorns the acceptable young; drinking, debauchery
came to be practised by "nice" girls not only by their fallen sisters" (47).

"Silence gives a proper grace to woman", said Sophocles. Dennis Walder provides virtually an opposite view, since the latter considers that woman can play an equal role with man, only if she acquires a distinct voice of her own: "Though their culture may prefer them to be silent, they must have the faculty of speech in order that they may be recognized as human" (314).

In fact, feminists like Matilda Joslyn Gage have unveiled an age, which considers it wrong to use only the masculine form of God. According to Lanci, for instance, Jehovah, originally intended to be read from left to right, is pronounced "Ho... Hi" that is to say, "He - She". The Hebrew Word 'El Shaddai', 'The Almighty' when translated, even today suggests something distinctively feminine (45).

The novels written by some women inspired by feminist ideals make an attempt not only to highlight the problems faced by the so-called 'weaker sex', but also aim at defining in terms of art, the emerging identity of the New Woman. As Suman Bala observes: "the experiences and situations portray a female protagonist in her search for an 'aesthetic self" (19).

Marilyn French in her introduction to Old New York tells us how New York
in its stability and narrowness, granted its members the pleasure of security and continuity but at the same time also inflicted on them the pain of suffocation. Women must consciously nurture and develop the capacity to question conventional ethics and norms instead of accepting them complacently (vii).

According to feminist leaders like Matilda Joslyn Gage.

It has become one of women's first duties... to call public attention to its (society's) false doctrines and false teaching in regard to the origin, condition and subjection of women. She has engaged in too many battles, weathered too many storms ....... let those who fear, hide themselves, if they will, until the storm is past. Let those who dare defiantly rejoice that they are called upon to bear still more, in order that women may be free. A brighter day is to come for the world, a day when the institutions of the woman's soul shall be accepted as a part of humanity's spiritual wealth (542).

The uprising of the spirit of feminism in the early part of the century has developed into one of the world's most important liberation movements. As for feminism in America, it has had its roots in the Black Civil Rights Movement. Women's participation in these political and cultural movements, provided them with non-traditional experiences, equipped them with radical ideas about themselves and gave them opportunities to create alternative
institutions, by instilling in them an awareness of the discrepancy between articulated egalitarian ideals and unquestioned sexist practices. Feminists, accord, for instance, a great emphasis to the true meaning of the compound word, "free - man" which implies a free human being, regardless of gender - a freeman or a free woman. They often project the system of marriage as one of the key factors leading to the female subjection at the hands of the male.

According to Joyce Gillo, there are three types of feminists - Reformist, Radical and Socialist. While Reformist feminists seek equality through freedom, Radical feminists perceive society as rooted in inequality, based on patriarchy and the only way out, according to them, is by transforming the existing society. Socialist feminists, rooted more firmly in Marxist theory, wish to develop a strategy in order to jointly attack male domination and sociological injustices, thereby restructuring male - female relationships. The novelists who are under discussion here may be said to belong to the second category, namely, the radical feminists. As Vicky Randall sees it:

The "radical" (revolutionary) feminists see that --- both the family and the State are seen to embody systematic male power and domination. Alliances with men are not possible --- women must form 'separatist' groups, shun relations with men and seek an end to male domination ----. Their major points of attack are marriage, family control, reproduction and violence against women (44).
Elaine Showalter defines the tradition of women's literature in terms of three periods - "'feminine' (1840 - 1880) when women wrote to equal men; 'feminist' (1880 - 1920) when women dramatized injustices against women and 'female period' (1920 - ---), when women no longer try to imitate women". Both the writers under study, fall in the second category. In *The Archetypes in Women's Fiction*, Showalter discusses seven types of characters, namely stereotypes, archetypes, textual, contextual, ideological, bibliographical and the phallic. As the present dissertation expounds in the succeeding chapters, Edith Wharton as well as Sivasankari portray characters that are, by and large, contextual, as they are all very much correlated to their times.

According to the statistic report of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "approximately seven - eighths of American families controlled only one eighth of the national wealth in 1890"(46). Prices were relatively low; the cost of living was rather stable but vast number of Americans, even by the standard of the day could be considered poor while the birth rate was declining and the divorce rate was rising, in fact by one and a half times betwixt 1890 and 1910.

Elizabeth Ammons observes in *Edith Wharton's Argument with America* that "despite a groundwell of optimistic feminism, around the turn of the twentieth century, Wharton remained pessimistic about the ability of the 'new women' to shatter the
constricting stereotypes of a patriarchal culture" (28-29). Although her fiction consistently, and compassionately, deals with the intricacies and tragedies of the upper middle-class women, Wharton steadfastly refused to be associated with those women who were known as 'the feminists' of her time. She avoided meeting the English novelist and reformer, May Sinclair, on two separate occasions. Much later in her life, she refused to be profiled in a documentary film entitled 'Woman Marches On'. She pursued undoubtedly, a different but feminist agenda of a more subtle political action. For, she saw a pervasive economic enslavement where the woman was concerned. To start with, women did not enjoy basic financial self-sufficiency in order to assert their independence and continued to pursue the only path available to them in a male-dominated society, namely, the business of marriage. Wharton saw the entrepreneurial approach as a way for some women. If marriage was frankly viewed as a business, then a woman could trade one husband for another, constantly and openly negotiating better terms, like Undine Spragg, the protagonist of Wharton's The Custom of the Country (97-123).

In New Year's Day, Lizzie Hazeldean does not seem to consider it wrong on her part to have sexual contact with another man, purely for the sake of improving the physical condition of her sickly husband, whereas marriage is nothing but business to Sophy Viner in The Reef.
Wharton's indignation can be best understood, only against the background of the Joneses and the Rhinelanders. Edith was born at West 23rd street in New York in 1862, to George Frederic and Lucretia Rhinelander. Edith's parents, like most among their respective groups, enjoyed a comfortable income from their investments on a municipal real estate, which enabled them, until the inflation that followed the Civil War, to maintain a Brown-stone in Manhattan. Thus, being the child of extremely well-to-do parents, hedged in by nurses and governesses, Wharton seldom had the occasion to know the activities of her own parents. In this context, it is important to take into account the enormous psychological stress and strain inflicted by the solitude of an extraordinary sensitive child. For, Edith's two elder brothers were so much older as to put her in the position, practically speaking, of an only child. Though Wharton does speak with considerable affection of her father, her associations with her mother seem to be invariably tinged with a touch of coldness, formality and sham. Little Edith's isolation must have been further intensified by the long trips that the Joneses undertook in connection with their financial interests in Europe, France and Italy.

Further, Edith's parents who were far from being intellectuals themselves and who could be hardly called educated or well-informed, gave Edith Wharton little chance to read and write. Later, Wharton was to whimsically, how she used to write...
stories and plays on brown wrapping papers. Wharton, in her teens, turned to poetry for self-expression. Between her verses in 1878 and the publication of her first short story in *Scribner's* in 1891, she had, in fact, published three poems – one in the *Atlantic Monthly* and two in *The World* perhaps the only early available evidence of her prodigious penchant for poetry.

In respect of her disposition, a certain shyness marked Wharton's youth, as she had to contend with a distinct lack of beauty as a child. Though she had a fine figure and beautiful eyes, she felt that her face was too long and her chin too determined. In fact, after her father's death in 1882, she and her widowed mother were left alone in a city, whose fantastic opulence must have made their Brown-stone sobriety seem more shabby than genteel. Edith's mother began to feel that perhaps the only way that Old New York was going to save itself was through intermarriage with the 'nouveauriche'. That was why, perhaps, Edith was engaged to Harry Stevens, whose mother, a rich and forceful woman, was probably looking for some one grander than a Jones for her son.

However, as things turned out, though Harry loved Edith, he could not stand up to his mother, as he was probably as weak in character as he was in health. Their engagement which seems to have been formalized at one stage was dissolved in the summer of 1883. In the following year, Edith became engaged to Edward Robbins. Wharton, a friend of Fred, her brother. Edward
was thirteen years her senior, handsome, easy-going, a sportsman
and clubman with an eye for a good picture, endowed with a
palate for good wine and a taste for lively people. Nevertheless, she and "Teddy" proved to be eventually highly
incompatible and their superficial congeniality could not survive
the glaring intimacy of marriage particularly of a childless
marriage. It was then that Edith Wharton turned to giving
expression to her artistic imagination, devoting more and more
time for reading. Edith's increased aloofness ought to have been
stifling in Lenox, in the eyes of her ridiculous mate. In 1910,
Edith moved permanently to France and in 1913, she secured her
divorce.

When the First World War was over, Wharton was awarded
the Legion of Honour by the French Government. The post-war
years were, however, tinged with sadness. Customs and manners
had changed and she felt herself increasingly a stranger, living in
a new world. But Wharton's later novels show that she continued
to grow as an artist and her accomplishment become formidable.
She wrote more than forty books as well as articles, reviews and
poems. Wharton's prolific output during this period has continued
to excite a lasting interest as some of them are considered to
belong to a very high order. She died of a stroke in France in
1937, at the age of seventy-five. She had, by that time already be-
come more than a living legend, looked upon as more than "An
American Jane Austen", for she had given a creative shape to a
vision, of the stature and moral magnificence comparable to that of George Eliot. She had also learned to regard 'the American spirit' as her greatest bulwark, against the forces of Philistines and that is why the Americans revere today, as the 'First Lady of the House of Fiction'.

Edith Wharton's literary reputation rests securely on her skill as a chronicler of a narrow segment of New York society; a nostalgic explorer of a world of fixed conventions; a critical observer of a society that may victimize its wayward souls, but which proffers its tradition of honour as a guide to the perplexed. R.W.B. Lewis in his *Biography on Edith Wharton*, makes an attempt to assess Wharton's merit in the following manner:

She located the lost America in the New York of her girlhood; the New York she had come back to, in 1872, after six years in Europe; the world in which she had passed her adolescence and the first years of her womanhood - a safe, narrow, unintellectual hidebound world; but from the tremendous distance of time and history, an enduring and honourable one (124).

However, Mita Bose makes a taller claim for her, as she insists that "Wharton depicts the plight of the exceptionally aspiring 'New Woman' of the turn of the century yearning to break out of the constricting role and attempting a courageous rebellion" (73).
Suman Bala endorses Elizabth Ammon's assessment of Edith Wharton as a writer "having an ongoing argument with America as Wharton continually resists America's preconceived notions of a docile, puerile feminity" (34).

Curiously enough, when Wharton brings to limelight mainly rebellious women in her fiction, her men, in the words of Irving Howe "are equally captured and dominated by women of conventional morals and middle-class ideals" (217). For instance, Newland Archer, who is virtually dominated by the conventional May Welland, feels less attracted towards Ellen Olenska, in *The Age of Innocence*. Darrow, in *The Reef* prefers only Anna Leath to Sophy Viner, as his life partner as the former is more docile than the latter. Selden too rejects Lily Bart, for her unconventional ways and might have preferred her to other women earlier, but for her strange, odd behaviour, in *The House of Mirth*.

As Edith Wharton's world of fiction is replete with feminist arguments, comparing her with her other contemporary feminists - Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather becomes almost inevitable. The deliberate assignment of secondary positions to male figures in their novels, raises the question whether these writers self-consciously seek pre-eminence for their own sex under some latent conviction that men are unworthy of the first rank.
In the stories of Edith Wharton, men are condemned for their appalling incapability of understanding with the result that the lament which sounds from Mrs. Wharton's fiction is not that women must inhabit a man's world. Women do not demand either the voting right or economic equality. What they care for, is an understanding presence, which men will never accord. Hence, in her view, the barrier of sex will remain always insurmountable. The woman thus, is always walled away. She remains un beheld because of man's own blindness.

Ellen Glasgow's novels too do not cry out for man's understanding of women. The mechanism of the masculine psyche is so plain that any search on women's part for sympathetic communion would be gratuitous. Though men are mere mechanical constructs in Ellen Glasgow's fictonal world, they manage to exert life-long tyranny over women. Sarah Haardt declared that Ellen Glasgow viewed all women as inevitably oppressed and tragic. On the other hand, Ellen Glasgow is correspondingly unsympathetic towards men. Ellen Glasgow spent many years not only in championing the intellectual freedom of women, but in trying also to deliver her sex from the bondage of love. However, her Phase of an Inferior Planet (1898) seems to challenge, her basic thesis. Here, it is the man, not the woman who is deserted and it is he, not she, who is building a public triumph over a private catastrophe.
If the fiction of Ellen Glasgow, on the whole pictures women as struggling against traditional oppressions, Willa Cather's stories assert women's dominance. The female protagonist of the latter's novel has no need to do any battle against an impressionable and sentimental youth. According to Warren French the feminism of Willa Cather is more subtle than that of Edith Wharton or Ellen Glasgow: "Mrs. Wharton takes a stand far above her masculine characters; Miss. Glasgow never denies her rapier---; Miss. Cather professes a different literary mission. She comes to her heroes as a friend" (54-55).

While discussing the fictional works of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather, Warren French too approvingly quotes James Miller's assessment: In Wharton and Cather: "The two women's work seems old-fashioned because, they remind us of solidity in a time of disintegration and decay. While Wharton's work has as its goal the discovery of the Old Garden, Cather's works aim at the creation of a new" (180).

Wharton understands the heavy price that must be paid for any personal assertion against the familiar ways of the world and yet, she has no respect for blind acceptance. At the same time, she knows well how certain life experiences can reduce women to a state of hopelessness from which they gain a glimpse of the need for making choices. However, the availability of choice itself poses a new threat. Possibility of choice bristles with the potential of hope, whereas the impossibility of choice becomes a
veritable source of pain. Wharton's novels aim at striking a balance between both these opposing factors, inspiration versus reason, originality versus tradition, and feeling versus discipline.

Wharton's *The Greater Inclination* (1899) and later its successor *Crucial Instances* (1901) have some of the flavour of James's stories, for they are both set against European backgrounds. In three of her short stories, "The Pelican" "The Rembrandt" and "The Angel at the Grave", she shows herself already in full command of a style that was to make her prose as lucid and polished as any in American fiction. It is a firm, crisp, smooth, direct, easily flowing style, the perfect instrument of a clear undazzled eye, an analytic mind, and a sense of humor alert to the least pretentiousness (20).

While the first story deals with the confused and pathetic dignity of a little lady who dares to deliver lectures to Women's cells, first for the love of her baby, her delivering lectures eventually turns out to be for no ostensible noble purpose. The second is of a proud and splendid widow, who parts with her Rembrandt, when faced with dire poverty. The third is about a dedicated spinster, who guards her grandfather's house as she would a shrine. A collection of poems, published in three volumes, during this period appears dull and highly ornamental, as it is stripped of the fun and laughter present in the stories.
Edith Wharton was forty, when her first novel, The Valley of Decision appeared in 1902. Odo, the protagonist in the work realizes that he is not only the harbinger but also the prisoner of the Reign of Terror, though his early intention was to be the reformer of Pianora. Citing this work, Josephine Lurie Jessup comments how in her maiden novel itself

Edith Wharton announces the sexual pattern which her fiction will follow in the ensuing years. The woman will rise above men and stand on a pedestal as a goddess above mortal, sufficient in herself but stooping down for the welfare of humanity (15).

Wharton's maiden effort is also singled out for special praise in Modern American Novelists: "it is a better book than George Eliot's, for the fruits of sheer research are strewn attractively through the pages and not spooned into the reader like medicine" (21).

Sanctuary (1903) is almost a parody of Paul Bourget's theme. In this absurd but charming tale, Kate Peyton intentionally weds a cheat and a humbug whose morally defective offspring could be saved only by her. In the next twenty-five years, she succeeds as a mother by protecting him from committing a hideous, fraudulent blunder by radiating sympathy on him.

The House of Mirth (1905) marks Edith's successful emergence as a full-fledged novelist, a fact acknowledged by
most of her critics. In this work Lily has staunch belief in a miraculous rehabilitation for herself, despite her aunt's negligence and her own unwillingness to clinch an expedient proposal of marriage. Even as the readers continue to watch her with an agonized apprehension, she marches onward, ultimately preferring an honourable death to a successful deceit. This work investigates levels of society with a devoted precision comparable to that of Proust whom Wharton was later to admire greatly. Inspite of the enormous critical acclaim she received due to the success of the novel, Wharton did not return to the subject matter of New York for another eight years.

Madame de Treymes and The fruit of the Tree are so radically different from each other though they appeared in the same year. The former is a true Jamesian tale of innocents abroad, portraying a duel between John Durham, an American hero, and a wily, charming Parisian architect, Madame de Treymes over the latter's sister-in-law, Fanny Frisbee of New York, who had found only misery in her marital life with a French man. Josephine Lurie Jessup's in this context is not far off the mark as it underlines the ridiculousness of the hero's colourlessness:

"In search of feminist vehicle, Edith Wharton often settled upon a French background --- John Durham, who stands for American Integrity --- stands straight as a tailor's dummy" (17).
The fruit of the Tree (1907) is an experiment in a totally new field, being a novel of reform. Swerving from the customary social orbit, the story never-the-less maintains a consistent social paradigm. John Amherst in the novel, who is bent on repulsing commercial exploitation, seems an anachronistic Adam, less because of his factory background and Miltonic evaluation of the sexes, than because of his apparent ignorance of the fall, as applied to himself. The priggish manager marries Bessy the widow-owner of the factory, having thoroughly misconstrued her passion for himself as a zeal for the cause of the workers. Eventually Bessy's ride on a horse leads to an accident which condemns her to a long period of futile agony. The novel turns abruptly into a problem novel about euthanasia, in the manner of Bourget for Bessy's sufferings are abbreviated by the needle of Justice Brent, the nurse.

Wharton's The Hermit and the Wild Woman (1908) is another slender volume, of contrived Jamesian stores of artists and dilettantes. Tales of Men and Ghosts (1910) contains some superb chillers. In the words of Auchincloss, Wharton emerges in these almost as a "representational artist who looks askance at an abstract painting ---- this kind of tale requires a skill --- the skill of telling a story reduced to its bare bones" (28). "The Eyes" is the most effective story in the collection. Obviously Wharton's technique in ghost story is to keep the supernatural to the minimum, and in her view, character in such contexts, is by
no means essential. Wharton sets herself in these stories a
different task of scaring the reader even without the aid of a
ghost, for as in the best of her works she renders the
atmosphere appropriately ominous. Not surprisingly, "A Bottle of
Perrier" in the collection is not really a ghost story at all.

No less decisive has been the feminist victory celebrated in
Ethan Frome (1911) the short novel, with which Wharton's name
has ever since been associated. Wharton says in her memoirs that
in writing Ethan Frome, she felt for the first time the artisan's
full control of his implements, though she could never agree with
her critics, that it was her best work: Once Zenobia marries
Ethan, he feels that he is at the end of the tether, for life has a
habit of stamping on his wishes. Fate endows Ethan with neither
money for elopement nor skill sufficient to bring off a double
suicide. The novel is an acute case of frustration for the man,
while the women manage to have their own way, if only to the
extent of sharing the same between them.

Summer (1917) punctuates feminine triumph, again on a
more felicitous level. The ageing Lawyer Royall figuring in it
with his lechery, ill-temper and open-handedness, is a plausible
delineation of a human character, realized extremely well. As for
Lucius Harney, the young architect, his near-sightedness and knack
of sketching old houses alone ensure excellent identification.
Royall's fears only underline the plight of his young ward,
Charity. Harney grasps at the season's diversions after learning that she is an orphan, dependent upon lawyer Royall, who is already engaged to a girl from a good family. Charity continues to love the architect, despite her recognition of the shallowness of his desire. Consequently, it is Charity who holds the readers' interest against men, whom society has placed above her by birth, education and material advantage.

The Reef (1912) is the story of defilement revisiting the defiler himself. George Darrow seldom falls below the prevalent standard of values and even his lapses have been only brief, parenthetical and incidental. His scruples do not exclude an interval at a hotel with Sophy Viner at a time when he considers himself engaged to Anna Leath, a widow, while Owen, her step-son is contemplating to wed the beautiful young governess, Sophy. The discovery that Darrow and Sophy had once been lovers reduces all the characters to a state of quiet desperation. Oblivious of his former liaison, Darrow does not seem to question either his suitability to be the child's stepfather or his right to marry the child's mother, though he finds peculiarly repugnant, the very idea of confiding the child to Sophy Viner. According to Josephine Lurje Jessup "The Reef by no means exhausted Mrs. Wharton's meditation of the double standard" (25).

The Custom of Country (1913) is a return to the novel of manners. The central character is not a victim but an invader. It is a good case to drive home the fact that the protagonist of
Edith Wharton do not always rely on spiritual or moral victories to mark their prowess; as their triumph is primarily measured by the yardstick of wealth. Undine Spragg, with only youth and sexual charms at her disposal, makes a frontal assault on the older aristocracy of New York first with considerable success, and then crosses the Atlantic in order to conquer a French nobleman. According to Josephine Lurie Jessup

Undine Spragg is a creature of alloy, as sentimental in her judgments of herself as she is ruthless in her judgments of others. A father is only a chequebook; a husband, a means of social advancement; a baby, a threat to the figure... Bright-haired as the Medusa devouring not only her husbands but her father and her son...(25).

How Spragg hews her way through all obstacles is rather fascinating to watch. Elmer Moffatt, her first husband is dying to become her fourth; Ralph Marvell, who believes himself to be the partner by Undine's first marriage lacks the courage to defend himself against the wiles of his faithless wife. The family of the Marquis de Chellas feels sufficiently humiliated by his marriage to Undine. All other men see their tapestries stripped from the walls, by her final suitor Elmer Moffatt in the novel.

Bunner Sisters (1916) and The Custom of the Country are pitted against each other, as taken together they could be cited as a mutual cancellation of sex bias through a deliberate design
on the part of the author. In the former work, Herman Ramy a
German, is a dope-addict, a worthless watch repairer, a wife-
deceiver, a thief and a man with considerable destructive power.
In writing these diverse tales of dupery, Edith Wharton seems to
present the idea that a woman cheated, becomes a cause for a
deeper dread than a man cheated.

Undine's personality is a kind of a 'tabula rasa' as she
absorbs each time into her own being, the prevalent attitudes of
those whom she confronts, while simultaneously eliminating from
her mind the predilections acquired earlier. She is the perfect
flower of the new materialism, rootless, vain and crude, equipped
with a marvellous capacity for survival. She is

opportunistic, she has all the worst traits of her fictional
predecessors --- being completely amoral, unsentimental and
without conscience --- she is a twentieth century picara ---
for the purpose of enhancing the social comedy (149-54).

The corrosive effect of war on a civilization, already
vulgarized by American money seems to have induced in Wharton,
a mood of nostalgia for the old quiet New York world of her
childhood, that she had found so cramping and yet so warm:

When I was young, it used to seem to me that the group
in which I grew up was like an empty vessel, into which
no new wine would ever again be poured. Now I see that one of its uses lay in preserving a few drops of an old vintage, too rare to be savoured by youthful palate. (B.G., 35).

In a surprisingly insipid little book, *French Ways and their Meaning* (1919), Wharton seems to pay France what she deems as the highest compliment possible, by describing as national vitues the qualities that most attracted her in her own polite, intellectual circle in France. In fact, there was always a certain predilection for France in her reckoning and taste, just as there was a prejudice against America, an unfair attitude depicted in several contexts in her works. Interestingly, when she speaks of French culture, she evokes Richelieu and the Academy but when it is a question of America, she cites only the middle-Western college girl who "learnt art" in a year.

*The Marne* (1918) and *A son at the Front* (1923) reveal that Wharton realized that war was terrible, and it may be a significant comment on the very nature of Armageddon, that the only literature that survives it, is literature of disillusionment and despair. Mrs. Lidcote, in "Autre Temps" (Xingu), is ostracized for leaving her husband for a lover, but when she returns to New York a generation later to take her stand by her daughter, who had done the same thing, she discovers that times have changed and that her daughter can now marry her lover and be accepted
by the same people. Nevertheless, there is a subtle suggestion in
the novel that Mrs. Lidcote, with all her suffering, has had a
richer life than her daughter, with all her newly acquired
privileges, with regard to securing an easy divorce and remarriage.

Newland Archer is the centre of interest in The Age of
Innocence (1920). In this novel, Archer's facile pliability in the
hands of women - mothers, aunts, grandmothers and long-dead
 ancestresses, renders him too weak a contrast for the daring
originality of Countess Olenska. Though Edith Wharton
received the Pulitzer Prize the following year, this honour was
spoiled for her, after her discovery that the novel had been used
by the committee as a handy substitute to keep the prize away
from Sinclair Lewis' Main Street.

Glimpses of the Moon (1922) is not seriously calculated to
forward any anti-masculine cause. Beginning her career as a social
hanger-on, Susan learns through all the sweet uses of her
adversity, the skill to get herself a husband in good time and to
proclaim in time a feminist triumph for a book which through
several chapters appears to endow the hero with a superior
character.

The four stories that constitute Old New York (1924) evoke
in brilliant colours the atmosphere of the last century. Edith
Wharton aimed at nothing short of interpreting the age in which
she lived. She was always bent on seeking the origin and cause
of the increasing number of things in it that angered her from time to time. To take advantage of the big pay of the American Women's magazines, it became necessary for Wharton to write about Americans of the moment: "From the novellas of Wharton the reader learns about the self-assured nature of the New Yorkers, their clannishness, their adherence to customs, their narrow point of view and aesthetic limitations" (TCLC Vol. IX, 550).

In *The Mother's Recompense* (1925), Kate returns to a society in New York which had once ostracized her earlier. She discovers now that her daughter, Anne has been ignorant enough to marry Fred, her former fiancé. She tries desperately at first, to break up the match, but finally reconciles herself to the situation. On her daughter's behalf, she elects for herself a life of sterile pain, by turning down the offer of marriage from Fred who remains still her ardent and devoted admirer.

In *The Children* (1928), the triumph of womankind over mankind is complete. Rose Sellars has little humour and good sense. Yet she stands superior to her fiancé Martin Boyne even as Judith rises above him, who cannot even distinguish between what is paternal and erotic, inviting Auchincloss's comment: "the novel was published in the year that followed Walter Berry's death and the relationship between the two characters seems analogous to what may have existed between their creator and Berry" (45).
In *The Twilight Sleep* (1927) Pauline Manford is the daughter of an invader, who has first been married to a son of the age of innocence, Arthur Wyant. Time has altered both. She has become bland and colourless; and Wyant has degenerated into a reckless and foolish gossip.

**Hudson River Bracketed** (1929) is the fictional biography of a young mid-western American writer, Vance Weston. Typically, born in Euphoria, he leaves his home town, comes to New York, to an old house on the Hudson, where he meets a highly accomplished woman, Halo Spear. Most critics agree that Wharton's treatment of the aristocracy's caving in before the predatory activists, gave rise to a scathing criticism in the contemporary press. *The Gods Arrive* (1932) is the twin novel coupled with *Hudson River Bracketed* where both reader and writer become bored with Vance. Yet, reading the book, everyone cannot but be impressed by the fund of creative energy manifest in the author's seventieth year.

Edith Wharton's self-conscious strategy in respect of her ghost stories like *Ghosts* (1937) is to keep the supernatural under wraps to the maximum possible. Characters figuring in them can be important, but by no means essential. "The Lady's Maid's Bell" suffers from a slight overdose of the eerie, as there are frequent appearances of the ghost of Emma Saxon in it. In "Pomegranate Seed" a second wife's bliss is ruptured by the frequent appearances of letters, written in a faint female hand,
supposed to be by the dead wife, all addressed to the husband. "Miss Mary Pask" and "Bewitched" make the readers sit on the edge, each without the aid of any ghost. The characters in them appear gaunter, grimmer and paler than the characters in Wharton's other works.

The Buccaneers (1938) is an unfinished, last novel by Wharton, though had it been completed, it might have well ranked among the best of her works. Looking back from the mid-thirties, the protagonist in it regards the invasion of the Buccaneers, as perhaps a healthy movement. Awkward, uncultured and superficial they may be, they still are capable of infusing new blood and vitality into both the effete New York society and the English aristocracy.

In contemporary India, society's attitude towards women is highly ambivalent. The woman is looked upon both as a boon and a bane. She is the sacred deity adored and worshipped as well as a profane object of lust; a tool for the cot and the cradle and a potent instrument for creation and destruction, from whom the males must seek their escape- 'grahasta' to 'Vanaprasta', depending on the need. The woman being associated with both the mutually contradictory phenomena, society is eager to praise motherhood, while assiduously keeping the woman subservient. Instead of actively offering total security to the woman, it chooses to play the role of an interested but passive outsider in
her hours of trial, reserving its respect and honour only to the chaste among the women, utterly ignoring its own hypocritical double standards.

Moreover, society is hard on the woman in its insistence that she is essentially so weak that she cannot live without a male prop. It considers her a beast of burden as well, and it makes marriage the dead end for the most original, enterprising of women and crowns them with thorns in their roles as mothers especially when they happen to deliver female infants. R.M. Das translates a verse from the ancient Atharvanaveda, "The birth of a girl, grant it elsewhere, here grant a son" (46).

In the opinion of the orthodox Indians a girl ought to be married soon after her attainment of puberty. Rehana Ghadially proffers a possible rationale behind such a stringent social convention: "it is feared that if she remains long a maiden, she gives herself to whom she wills, ....... it is the mother's duty to train her daughter up to be an absolute docile daughter - in - law" for the "virtues of womanhood which will take her through life are submission and docility as well as skill and grace in performing the various household tasks" (51). Even today, most women are helpless even in the face of evil like dowry deaths, suicides, neglect of widows and failure to produce adequate and timely legal safeguards for women.
The brutal, physical strength and the socially approved power enjoyed by the husband or the father over the wife or daughters under their charge are expected to have social approbation as women are mere dependents on men. New literature plays a vital, activist role in creating awareness in the minds of women, exhorting them to resist all evils imposed on them. According to G. Buhler, 'Manu' has laid it down that, even if the husband proves to be unworthy and utterly devoid of virtue, he must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife. (27)

Further, in the Hindu perspective of life, the female principle complements and completes the male. The polytheistic religion boasts of several deities who present themselves as divine couples such as Shiva and Shakti, Purusha and Prakriti and Rama and Sita. Yet, the equality in status granted to the female, in the name of religion, remains only a theory, hardly realized in the daily lives of women.

Since 1947, each of the seven five year plans, has taken care to provide for the health, education, employment and welfare of women. Almost, as if it were a response to the demands of the feminists, the Sixth Plan made a striking departure with a new emphasis on involving women as 'partners' in natural development. There has also been a host of provisions made in the legal and political structures of the country that affirm the equality of the
sexes with regard to property rights, provisions for divorce, opportunities of employment and health.

The sociological changes in Indian urban middle class of the seventies are, in a way, comparable to what was obtained in America of the early decades of the twentieth century. For instance, Manisha Roy reports how, "the rate of divorce in Indian cities during the last decade indicated, among other things women's need to be free of the dependence on marriage" (41). However, it must be conceded that the rate of change in respect of ideas and virtues in India, is not as rapid as was witnessed in America, in the early decades of this century.

The Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Bill 1986, attempts to limit the provisions of the Act and includes Dowry deaths in the list of offences in the Indian Penal Code. The Bill provides, "If a woman dies within seven years of her marriage, due to causes other than natural, her property would be transferred to her children, and if she has no children, to her parents" (177).

Further, the Bill has made the offence non-bailable and raised the minimum term of punishment under this category to five years and a fine up to fifty thousand Rupees. However, despite all such advances in the legal front, there has been practically little or no awareness among most people, with regard to protection of the women's marital rights and responsibilities.
There is an old Tamil proverb which states that even a king will end up as a pauper, if he gets five daughters. The financial burden involved in marrying off a daughter and the social stigma of having an unmarried girl living at home, make people resort to pre-selection tests to find out the sex of the unborn child, and at times, take a recourse to female infanticide. In 1952, Women's Organizations like 'Sahali' (Delhi) 'Women's Center' (Bombay) and 'Sabata' (Calcutta) felt compelled to register their protests against such tests, despite the fact that the British had introduced Prohibition Act for Suppression of Female Infanticide, as early as 1870 in India.

Rehana Ghadially reports how a woman's identity rests on her religion in India:

Her identity ....... has evolved out of the 'particulars of her life cycle and childhood', out of the 'dailiness' of her relationships as daughter in her parents' family and as (sic) wife and daughter - in - law in her husband's family and out of the universals of the traditional ideals of womanhood, absorbed by her from childhood onwards (144).

The Atharvana Veda has a touch of malice about the prayer in the Vedic verses that "sons will be followed by still more male offsprings, never by females".


Daughters are conspicuous in the Rig Veda by their absence. Hymns and prayers are sung and offered only for sons' and grandsons, occasionally for wives, but never for daughters. O.N. Lewis has written about a girl complaining thus: "Listen, O Sukhma, what a tradition has begun? Drums are played on the birth of a boy. But at my birth, only a brass plate was beaten". The Acharya Brahmana states flatly that "a daughter is a source of misery while a son is the saviour of the family" (47). Flavia Agnes rightly highlights the plight of women:

There are two types of violence inflicted upon women: one by her husband, and the other by her society ....... if we take imprisonment as an institution of violence, imprisonment in family is also of the same type ...... it is not marriage after love; but it is marriage first and love next, in the tradition..... (16 & 17).

Thiru V. Ka, the well-known Tamil scholar, observes in 'Indiavum Vitulaiyum', how our diverse opinions regarding various vital issues, have indeed paved the way for the British rule in India, though it is very often misunderstood. According to him, "it is not their army that had enabled the British to conquer India, but it is (sic) only due to the thraldom of women, superstitions, untouchability and casteism" (36).

Thus woman has been a subject of either slavery or controversy in the ancient as well as modern India. In recent
times, the responsibility of defending the fundamental rights of women has fallen on the shoulders of women writers in India. Sivasankari, the Tamil novelist, is one of the greatly admired champions, fighting for all the rightful causes concerning women in society.

Sivasankari, affectionately, called 'Jibbu' by her close associates was born on October 14, 1942, in Madras, in a family of six. As her father started his career first as an auditor and later, as the founder of Suri company, we may say, she belonged to an upper middle-class family, enjoying a comparative life of ease. Born in a close-knit South Indian Brahmin family, steeped in tradition, the husband's duty in the family was to earn a living for the household, and the wife's responsibility was to look after her household duties. Sivasankari herself reminisces in SAVVY:

I had a meaningful and exciting childhood. My parents' family originally hailed from Mysore. My father was a pioneering person, a giant in his profession. He was the Suri of Suri & Co., reputed chartered accountant in Madras and very popular too. He had an imposing figure of 5'10" and was an extrovert with a lovable temperament. Society then was very chauvinistic but my father used to call my mother 'Madam', a sign that he loved and respected her...... (19).
Her admiration and respect for her father become obvious in the light of the above words. It was her father again, who had inculcated in her a modern outlook on life, from childhood.

As Sivasankari's family did not consider it proper to admit indoors any male dancer, she had to learn classical dancing under the able guidance of K.J. Sarasa, a disciple of Vazhuvoor Ramayya Pillai, a well-known guru of classical dancing. Her interest in 'Bharata Natyam' was so much that her mother insisted upon her having an 'arankeitrrum' a ceremonial 'debut' in public, at a slightly advanced age of sixteen. Subsequently, she performed on stage on not less than twenty-five occasions. She also came first in the All-India Dance Competition and won several awards. Eversince the publication of her maiden short story in 1968, she had evolved into a prodigious, prolific writer, as the favourite author claiming a readers' circle of more than six millions, spread over the different parts of the globe.

Sivasankari was married when she was just twenty-one on April 11, 1963. Chandrasekar, her husband, was a distant cousin, as he was the brother of her sister-in-law. He was a highly qualified engineer, working for Bharat Heavy Electronics Limited, Trichy at first, and later ran his own industry. A harmonious relationship seems to have blossomed between the youthful pair as each respected the individuality of the other. Unfortunately, her marital bliss proved to be short-lived, with the doctors' shocking
announcement that Chandrasekar had developed cystic fibrosis which could result in sterility in the near future. In the fond hope for his malady, the couple went to the U.S.A., only to return home soon sad, as there was no hope. Chandrasekar proved to be healthy otherwise, and lived an active life even at the age of forty. In 1971, giving up his job, he went to settle down at Villupuram, to look after their family properties. To quote Sivasankari:

I never regretted that decision because it was a turning point in my life. We had an idyllic life for over thirteen years .... and that was where the metamorphosis of Sivasankari took place .... our house being within the campus (of the factory) we could enjoy twenty-four hours of togetherness .... so from 1971 to the day he died (1984), it was a wonderful partnership all the way leaving no residue of regrets (22).

Those married years, thus, were enjoyable for her, but for the fact of her barrenness. She had worked for the CITI Bank as a Development Officer during the first three years of her marriage, after which she chose to remain a free lance writer all her life.

For all her bringing in a very traditional family, Sivasankari has broken step by step, several fetters of conventions, in order to become capable of carving out a life, on
her own terms. The more she struggles against well-entrenched social conventions and values, the more brilliant she emerges as a thinker and a writer. Though it must have been a Herculean task for her at the initial stages, she has indeed emerged as a valiant role model and a source of inspiration for several enlightened women today. Currently, she is also actively engaged in serving the cause of the poor and destitute in society.

There is indeed a certain freshness, dynamic energy and vitality about Sivasankari, reflected in her irrepressible urge for dancing and classical music, and writing. At college, she secured the first rank in her studies, the ninth place in the entire University. Her adventurous spirit can be discerned from the following passage: "In Nepal, I have gone river rafting through forty rapids. I have also gone para-sailing and sea-walking..... it was exhilarating. I want to learn flying and parachute jumping." (34).

Till date, Sivasankari has written more than one hundred short stories and novelettes, eighty-four novels, ten travelogues and two biographies. Five of her short stories have been recreated as movies in Tamil, enjoying popular acclaim. One of her stories has been made into a movie in Kannada and another in Telugu. Two of her novels, one on alcoholism and the other on drug abuse, have been serialised on the national and regional TV networks. In the opinion of Indhu Mehta:
Sivasankari's direct, lucid style and her penchant for dealing with the pressing problems of Indian society—alcoholism, drug abuse, medical, the aged and the mentally retarded, have made her a messiah of the masses, though she disclaims any messianic or moralising role. A compassionate understanding, a deep perception and painstaking research mark her writing. Her sway over the masses is reflected by just two instances; a questionnaire attached to her novel, *Oru Manitanin Kathai*—resulted in scores of alcoholics voluntarily seeking medical help; an article on eye donation elicited such an unprecedented response that the internationally acclaimed eye-surgeon Dr. Badrinath, claimed: "she has managed in twenty days, what I have been trying to achieve in twenty years of medical practice" (8).

Sivasankari's devotion to and love for her own sex does not, in any way, inhibit her regard for men. Being an individualist at heart, she advocates the cause of Individualism at any cost, for both the sexes.

Apart from writing articles to the press media on various types of donations of the vital organs of the body, she also conducts useful programmes in the audio as well as the video media, in order to reach out to the masses.

Sivasankari is comparable to the best of her fellow women writers in Tamil like Rajam Krishnan, Vasanthi and Anuradha
Ramanan. Vasanthi’s *Nīlaṅkālīn* (Reality Reduced to Shadow) published in 1985, is the story of Samba, deserted by her husband and also Subathira, a kidnapped woman who ends up as a prostitute. After her marriage to a wealthy man, the latter turns a new leaf and becomes the dutiful mother of two. Her other novel, *Tirakkāṭa Jannalkal* (The Unopened Windows) published in 1987, presents a Traditional woman and a New woman, who liberate themselves from the clutches of the society. Her *Ellaikalin Vilimpil* (On the Edge of the Boundaries) published in 1980 depicts a woman’s disappointments, struggles and irritations, in her long quest for herself.

Indumathi’s *Mūkaṅkallilata Manitarkal* (The Faceless Men) published in 1987 describes how a woman manages to find freedom from male domination. In Anuratha Ramanan’s *Kūṭṭup Pulukkal* (The Larvae) published in 1982, Surya, manages to secure a job due to the extraordinary generosity of Manga, a prostitute and eventually marries the daughter of his supervisor, on the moral strength provided by Manga, who ends up resuming her former life in frustration and despair. Thus, most of these women writers in Tamil present almost identical themes with stereotyped characters.

Rajam Krishnan’s themes and characters show a remarkable kinship to those created by Sivasankari and even a constant evolution is discernible with regard to the former’s works. If her
Kūttuk Kunču (The Chick in the Cage) published in 1950, deals with child labour and women's liberation, her Putiya Cīrakukaḷ (The New Wings) published in 1983, concerns the emancipation of a young woman from the clutches of her mother-in-law. Often Rajam Krishnan identifies herself with her protagonists as in her Maṇṇakattup Pūkkal (The Blossoms of the Sand Dunes).

Sivasankari has been the proud winner of several laurels. Pālaṅkal (The Bridges) won her the Kasthuri Srinivasan Award. Oru Cinna Nūḷ Kanta Nammai Ciraip Paṭuttuvatu? (Can a Flimsy Clue of Thread Imprison Us?) secured for her, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar Award. Veirillāṭa Māraṅkal (The Rootless Trees) fetched her the coveted Bharatiya Basha Parishat Prize. Honoured with the Best Youth Award in 1976, by the Jaycees she also was given several other honorary awards from the Southern Book Publishers and the Rotary Club of Madras. One of her creations was selected as the Novel of the Year in 1969, by Ananta Vikatan, the popular Tamil Weekly having a long tradition. Two of her short stories bagged the Best Story Prizes from the Ilakkiya Cintanai Association in 1974 and 1977. She also won a prize from Kalki, another traditional Tamil Weekly; and yet another prize from Amuta SuraPi for two of her short stories. Her novel Avan is about to be translated into Russian by Furnika, a well-known translator and Indologist.
Indu Mallah perhaps echoes the feeling of several of her readers and admirers, when she observes:

...It is her total commitment to life as an activist, thinker. Writing is not just an isolated ivory-tower activity with her. She actively involves herself in positive action, honestly pursuing the goals she writes about. For instance, her novel Avan is preoccupied with drug addiction and Sivasankari is actively involved in combating the above social evil through ADAPT (Apollo De - Addiction Therapy) (8).

Sivasankari's works written over the last three decades since 1969 can be studied under three periods, for the sake of convenience. In the first decade, she wrote about twenty five works, in the second, about fifty. A brief survey of her works may reveal that there has been a certain conspicuous evolution of her vision as an artist. Till 1977, most of her works, depict men as very considerate towards their womenfolk. From 1978 to 1982, with the exception of Vaļartta Kata, (The Pet He-Goat) Pirayacciṭam (The Self-Sacrifice) and Tiri Caṇku Corkkam, (The Unsettled Heaven) men are presented as domineering and even sadistic. From 1982 to 1988, she has written profusely, primarily focusing her attention highly on unconventional, women, with the exception of Kan Ketta Piraku, (Once vision is Lost), Vilai (Price) Ovər Tōs (Overdose) Karrulla Potē (While the wind
Blows) and Ruci Kañña Pūñai (The Cat Familiar with the Taste). From 1988 to 1994, her vision seems to have undergone a further change, as most of her works of this period present at least one male character each, who is extremely gentle, generous and highly commendable, once again with the exception of Kātal Ėppatu Ėtu Varai? (How Enduring is Love?).

It is interesting to note that nearly half the number of all her works deal with the issue of marriage and the various problems associated with it. Often, it is male domination, which is the primary cause that perpetrates ruin in respect of marital bliss. At times, sheer ignorance on the part of women or the superstitious conventions of society contribute to the failure of marriage. As her novels have been dealt with in this thesis in detail, only the works which contribute the 'bunch of exceptions' are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Natiyin Vē-kattoṭu (With the River's Velocity) 1978 presents Dharma, a veritable mischief monger, who makes Murali's life miserable. All her mother's words of counsel fall on her deaf ears as Dharma is in no mind to weigh the pros and cons of her action. She has been taught to learn the lesson of surrender, like a reed yielding to the flow of the river's tide. In contrast, Rukku, her neighbour, a patient and loving wife brings out unbelievably, certain positive changes in her apparently heartless husband.
In *Valartta Kata* (The Pet He-Goat) Tulasi proves to be the proverbial goat that charges on the heart of her own benefactor, landing her devoted foster parents in unmitigated misery, despite all the privileges she enjoys, even laying a claim over their own daughter. The fatal illness of her foster mother, however, proves to be the turning point in her life at least, when she realizes the depth of her love, after going through the will executed by the former.

In *Kālān* (The Mushroom) published in 1981, Anuradha serves as the catalyst and thwarts Shankar's lustful design of marrying a widow, after deserting his helpless ailing wife and Nithya, Anuradha's daughter.

*Tān Tān Čukam* (Self, the Pampering Pleasure of the Self) published in 1981, is a different kind of novel, in which Thanickachalam, Dhanam's uncle and her own brother are responsible for Dhanam's ultimate suicide. Dhanam, who is nursing and assisting Sivakami, her sickly aunt, becomes the prime target of her uncle's insatiable lust. The latter exploits her beauty, showing the payments for her brother's studies as a bait in the bargain. To her shock, she learns at the end that her brother too is hands in glove with the uncle's nefarious scheme of things.

Sudhakar in *Tavam* (The Penance) published in 1982, marries Charumathy, out of gratitude for her parents, who had been his generous benefactors in life, though he has been deeply in love
with Gayathri. Gayathri leaves the place, obviously, to avoid seeing him again. It is much later that her true love for him becomes evident.

**Tiri Caňku Corkkam** (Unstable Heaven) published in 1982, is about how Kamali's extramarital relationship with Manohar, Padma's husband, results in the loss of a loving husband.

**Pōka Pōka** (By and By) published in 1982, portrays Nithya, who is blind to all the goodness in Viswam, her husband. It is always she who prefers to dictate at home. Disobedience to any of her stringent rules, means instant deprivation of her 'love'. When she turns her whimsical attention to Arun, Viswam's friend, spurning Viswam, over a petty cause, it is Arun who surprisingly serves as a responsible guide to her, opening her eyes to reality, restoring thereby the unity and harmony in her household.

**Rucî Kaṇţa Pûnai** (The Cat Familiar with the Taste) published in 1985, shows how Chitra spoils the happiness of her uncle's married life, through her excessive and possessive love for the latter. It never occurs to her that she will have to part with him and of his possessions eventually. After his marriage, her presence in their house means anything but peace and joy. Hence, the wise uncle teaches his immature niece, that true happiness can spring only from a loving wife and departs from his loveless
but possessive niece, leaving behind, Chitra and Whatever else she desires so much of him.

In Vilai (Price) 1988, Min Mini, a harlot by profession, fleeces money out of Rajan who keeps on foolishly pursuing her, in his wife's absence, unaware of the danger lying in wait for him. Once he realizes his mistake, he is more than willing to pay a heavy price for his lapse and resume a clean, straight life.

Malini feels immensely superior to her husband in Vāṇattu Nilā (The Moon in the Sky) published in 1989, as she is talented and attractive. All the sincere efforts taken by Santhanam, her husband in her interest, fail to please her. She continues to remain what she is, perhaps only because of his benevolent and tolerant disposition. Such a woman living in a world of dreams comes down to the world of reality at last in the novel.

Malarvizhi, a reckless wife in Āyiram Kalattu Payir (Crop for a Thousand years) published in 1991, would have continued to be an infinite source of pain to her husband, had she not been stopped in her perverse course, by the persistent sincere efforts of her mother and the kindness and understanding of her spouse.
Mella Mella (Slowly, Slowly) published in 1978, deals with Sudhakaran, a wealthy but physically handicapped husband, who is made fit to work through the patient and strenuous effort of Akila, his wife. She is, on the other hand, considered a misfit for family life by him, after he falls a victim to all kinds of obscene fantasies and experiences on his recovery.

 Ini Totarātu (This Will not Continue Hereafter) published in 1986, talks about the physical torment inflicted on a young woman by her mother-in-law, in addition to all the mental torture she receives from her husband. A remedy comes to her in the form of her brother-in-law who stands up against his mother as well as his brother, on her behalf.

Virillata Marańkal (The Rootless Trees) talks of a loving couple, belonging to two different religions, whose togetherness is spoiled ultimately due to myopic religious prejudices and consequent clashes of wills.

Evarkaľum Avarkaľum (These People and Those) published in 1992, is didactic and warns us of the evil of jealousy. Kamali is extremely impatient with Kalpana's success, as she considers herself the more talented one and thus, fails to recognize what the members of the Ladies' Club have seen in Kalpana. It is much later, that she learns from her husband, that the sure road to success is not just being a Jack of all trades, but being simply a master of at least one.
In *Mutal Koṇal* (The Initial Lapse) published in 1890, Pandyan is an embodiment of evil, right from his school days. He destroys the property of the school and blatantly justifies his act, claiming that they were all donated by his own grandfather. As an adult, he tricks Sampath into believing that he can prove his transformation in the latter's character, if only the latter secures him a job in the bank, using his influence on Prabhu, Sampath's bosomfriend. At last, to the shock of Sampath and Prabhu, Pandyan manages to run away with a huge haul of money from the bank.

*Kuṭṭi* (Little One) published in 1991, is a novel that deals exclusively with child labour, written in the year of the Declaration of the 'Decade of the Girl Child' by SAARC, and depicts the ill-treatment of a child at the hands of her mistress.

*Tirivēni Caṅkamam* (A Tripartite Confluence) 1971 and *Palaṅkal* (Bridges) 1988, serve as mirrors reflecting society, covering a time span of three generations.

*Kaṇ Keṭṭa Piraku* (Once Vision is Lost) 1984, deals with parents, who ruin their three daughters, from the start, despite all their professed genuine love towards them. The work tells us how such levity is not indicative of love, for true love does not absolve any person from the responsibility of correcting their children at the right time.
**Ovar Tōs** (Over Dose) 1984, presents Manohar's failure in life as a husband as well as a father due to his own naivety and failure to keep his wife under vigilant watch and imposing too many restrictions on his daughter, that drive them both eventually away from home.

**Kinarru Tavaḷaikaḷ** (Frogs of the Well) 1989, is the only novel that deals with the issue of sex-determination, which drives home the scientific fact that the male is solely responsible for the determination of sex of the foetus.

Special mention must also be made of **Oru Manitaṉin Katai** (The Story of a Man) 1980, serialized first in 'Ananda Vikatan' a Tamil Weekly, and later screened on Doordarshan as a serial entitled 'Subah' in Hindi, adapted from the Tamil serial 'Avan'. 'Subah' was adjudged to be the mega-hit of 1986 - 1987. Its sequel, 'Inkar' portrayed the entire process of rehabilitation.

Interestingly, the year 1992, marked the twenty-fifth year of Sivasankari's writing career. As per her recent decision to strive after a more meaningful and practical goal, which is to serve the cause of society at large, Sivasankari's new project, "Knit India Through Literature", has been successfully published on January 27, 1998.

Wharton does not consider marriage sanctimonious any longer, since society sees woman, a mere toy in the hands of
men and children, mere hindrances to remarriages. In her fictional world, even mother and daughter fall for the same male. Often the wife is not aware of her husband's major business deals. Wharton's women feel so insecure that they cannot but launch themselves on a quest for their own identity. In the words of Calvin Winter,

Her understanding of human nature, relentless pursuit of a motive, down to its ultimate analysis, her deliberate stripping off, of the last veils of pretence and showing us the sordidness and cowardice of human souls in all their nudity, are unsurpassed by any other novelist (169).

Sivasankari too, feels moved seeing the plight of women, in the context of dispensation of social justice. Most of her recent fictional works faithfully record the failure of society to discriminate between double standards applied to issues of morality in respect of the different sexes, often making daring comments on extramarital relations. However, she does approve of the recognition and honour associated with the institution of marriage. Her works also highlight the increased materialistic compulsions on modern women and distinct areas of male dominance and other social challenges facing women in general.