Chapter IV

THE WOMAN IN THE WORKS OF THE NOVELISTS FROM 1931 TILL 1950

In Indian English novels, the women characters generally assume a mythic quality which has remained the same for long. They are generally very patient, submissive and self-sacrificing like Sita, and this is considered the ideal of womanhood. The man is generally thought to be stronger, dominating, unquestionable. This idea has become embedded in the Indian mind; and such characters are accepted as true to life characters.¹

The novels written during the period 1931 to 1950, often deal with the conflicts not only of the political level when India was struggling to achieve independence, but of the personal and social levels as well. For it is interesting and challenging to study a relationship that is 'confined with a limited space, with a few options and when the odds are against her, in other words when she is a woman.'² More so, when the woman is searching for identity in a charging India, struggling to achieve selfhood and independence. They begin to analyse the age-old traditional role of women in society and home and rebel against personal circumstances. They have to struggle to assert their individuality. It has generally been assumed that women find self-realisation only as a wife and mother. A woman is not generally considered a
separate being with an ideal of her own. So, it has been a struggle to break through this constraining bounds of conventionality. It has not been easy for some whereas others have managed to assert their rights and have chosen to walk out of a situation not desirable to them.

In this chapter, I have discussed a few novels that show how the women characters resort to self-analysis and questions the values and traditions of society and shake the very foundation of idealised feminity.

Umaro Bahadur's *The Unveiled Court* appeared in 1933, the story of which centres round a native prince's court.

His *Tears of Sorrow* which also appeared in 1933, Umaro Bahadur deals with the *Purdah* system and widow remarriage. Although several western writers did make mention of these custom prevalent in India at the time, they could not really do justice to it, remaining, as they were, outside the four walls of the court. They could not present a true picture of the life within the court.

Umaro Bahadur, in *Tears of Sorrow* brings about a social awareness of the suppression and oppression of women within and without their homes, the ancient customs and the exploitation in an extremely orthodox Muslim household. Meera, the heroine of the story is young and beautiful and recently
widowed. She is grief-stricken at the sudden loss of her husband, Yusuf. Nasir Ali, the younger son of Nasra's maternal aunt happens to get a glimpse of her in spite of the purdah and falls in love with the frail and beautiful widow. He had just matriculated and was all set to leave for London to study law. Being young and 'modern' in his outlook he was in favour of widow remarriage and did not believe in the purdah system -

... God never ordained that women should be confined within the four walls of the house. This is all the doing of men, and it has been forced upon the poor woman.¹

Nasra is conscious of her suppression by society, customs and religion, and also aware of who is responsible for it. For she replies,

... But you must admit that man is the cause of it all. Had his morals been better and had he not been so insolent, the honour of every lady would have been safe and the restriction would never have been imposed.⁴

Nasra is not willing to give in to Nasir Ali. She is too tradition bound to change her views on life. She feels her life has no meaning after her husband's death and she must spend the rest of her life in prayers. Nasir Ali, however,
is determined to change her mental attitude. He tells her that if she had died instead, Yusuf would have taken a second wife soon after. Nazra, however, is not against the idea of remarriage of widows — she objects to it only because it goes against her conscience, a conscience formed by living for years in a tradition-bound society and a suppressed environment.

... when the whole world regards me as an ominous being, who would be prepared to take me to wife?

Gradually however, Nazra's ideas about life undergoes a change. The society she comes into contact with when she goes for the holy pilgrimage to Mecca succeeds in changing her mental outlook. She even begins to consider remarriage favourably. She feels, it is much safer to remain married for it is the only way to safeguard a woman's chastity.

All the dissipated youths that I have met have taken me for the sweets of the bazaar, and have stretched out their hands to possess me.

By the end of the novel, Umaro Bahadur's waniyashin heroine does come out of her purdah. Strangely, after her husband's death, the three persons who had a direct influence on her were men — Zahid, Nasir Ali and Ayub. Zahid, her brother, whose
religious zeal bordered on the brink of eccentricity, insisted she follow the laws of God and the Holy Prophet. Nasir Ali, on the other hand, was irreligious, almost an atheist. And there was Ayub, her brother in-law, who advised her to follow her own conscience. Torn among these influences Nasra finally chooses to do what her conscience dictates. She does marry, but not Nasir Ali. She meets and falls in love with Saleem. However, their marital bliss is short-lived. She meets with a tragic end when she discovers that Saleem is actually her step-brother and she dies giving birth to his still-born child.

Thus we see that social conformity has always been more obligatory for women than men; and anyone who did not conform to it were doomed, as Nasra. Society, from its very conception, had formed stringent customs and tradition which were to be followed by women; and any laxation on their part brought criticism and social stigma. A woman was identified only in relationship with men - as a daughter, wife or mother and presented as such in the novels. This attitude was also present in Europe in the nineteenth century; as one of George Eliots' characters in *Mill on the Floss* (1860) says,

> We do not ask what a woman does. We ask who she belongs to.
But in Europe, whereas women were already on the verge of a feminist movement for liberation, India was still far behind. For, in Indian English novels, the woman protagonist had to be the ideal form of womanhood who re-enacted the suffering, sacrificing role of Sita or Savitri, embodying the qualities of a goddess — and she conformed to this, because she could not overstep the boundary laid down for her by society and religion.

Mulk Raj Anand, one of the foremost novelists of India, also falls during this period. As a writer, Anand is preoccupied mainly with oppression and exploitation of the poor and illiterate, as in Untouchable (1935), Coolie (1936), Two Leaves and a Bud (1937) and The Village (1939), with its subsequent sequels Across the Black Waters (1940) and The Sword and the Sickle (1942). But in one of his later novels, The Old Woman and the Cow (1960) which was republished in 1981 under the title Geeti, Anand depicts for the first time a village woman's status in the Indian society. Panchi, the village boy here takes a wife, a young girl

... whom he could fold in his arms at night and kick during the day, who would adorn his house and help him with the work on the land ... 8

And he was sanguine that, whatever she might be like to look at, she would be obedient, like a cow, very gentle and very
good. However, after the initial bliss of marriage, the more practical and not so pleasant aspects of village life takes over. Being peasants, Panchi and his family eke out their livelihood farming their small piece of land. And when a severe drought follows immediately after their marriage, along with their fall in their fortunes and family quarrels, it was but natural that Gauri should be blamed. She becomes the

... incarnation of Kali the black goddess who destroys all before her, who brings famine in her breath and lays bare whole villages ...

Kesaro, Gauri's mother-in-law is an example of the woman who have been completely shaped by the male-dominated society as the guard of its own tradition. Such women naturally go against women violating the tradition of the male-dominated society. She constantly instigates Panchi against his wife. And when one of Panchi's friends calls in his absence, she plants the seed of doubt in Panchi's mind about Gauri's characters. He starts beating and kicking her as he would his bullocks; and although he does feel guilty about it, he is too proud to ask her forgiveness. He is aware that it is his mother who is creating tension between them; but he is unable to reason it out with her nor within himself. He merely gives vent to his predominant emotion - anger, which he takes out on his young wife. And Gauri, like most Indian
women, puts up with it merely because she does not know what else to do. She would lie down on a small string bed in a dark room and sulk. For, to her the eternal mother-in-law and daughter-in-law problem had only one solution - the death of either of them! When Panchi quarrels with his uncle and moves out with Gauri, they are almost blissfully happy in spite of their poverty. She even willingly pawns her only pair of gold ear-rings to buy seeds and lentils. But Gauri's happiness is shortlived, for Kesaro again begs Panchi to return home and blames Gauri for everything. This time, however, Gauri literally throws Kesaro out of the house 'with a courage and force that seemed to have suddenly welled into her gentle frame' (p. 95). She is fiercely possessive of Panchi and resents the oppressive and dominating attitude of Kesaro. Kesaro, on her part, is stunned at this behaviour from the timid and docile bride she had brought just a few months back. And Panchi too is dumbstruck, by this sudden 'flash of power'.

The severe drought continues and their situation worsens. Stark desperation is written on each peasant's face as they stare at the relentless sun beating down upon them, shrivelling up every blade of grass and killing the cattle. Panchi too is desperate. If there is no rain, they will surely starve to death. He becomes moody and doubts begin to creep into his mind - perhaps Kesaro was right, perhaps it is really Gauri's evil presence that brought about this
bad luck? He is confused - he would alternately love and hate his wife. But Gauri is 'willing to wait like the Hindu wife, and go patiently through everything' (p. 100). And when Gauri breaks the news that she is with child, Panchi becomes violent - he is frightend of his impending fatherhood and the added responsibility. He begins to doubt the child's paternity and throws Gauri out of the house - an example of male cruelty to women. Gauri takes refuge with her mother and uncle Amru with the hope that Panchi will come to take her back. When he does not, Amru marries her off to a rich widower Seth Ram Das in exchange for money which they had taken in mortgage of their cow, Chanderi. This shows how women are treated as commodities by men in the Indian society even in the middle of the twentieth century. Gauri, however, falls seriously ill and is admitted to a Nursing Home, where the owner, Dr. Mahindra appears as a savior to her. She confides in him and Dr. Mahindra restores Gauri back to her husband and her happiness is complete - Panchi, who had missed her terribly, was filled with remorse and guilt, especially since the rains had come and his fields are lush again. He welcomes her back. But Panchi again falls a prey to his own weak mind - he believes the gossip that the child Gauri is carrying is not his. He resorts to beatings and kickings again. This time, however, Gauri's patience has been tried too far. She goes back to Dr. Mahindra's Nursing Home, the only place where she
finds peace of mind and self-respect.

Thus Mulk Raj Anand's heroine experiences the cruelty and oppression in the family and in society. Her husband and family treat her no better than an animal. Even her own mother sells her off to the gath so that she can keep her cow Chanderi, 'it was a choice between my Gauri and my cow .....' (p. 201).

Though Gauri tolerates all this, towards the end of the novel, she musters enough courage to walk out of her home and her family. She consciously makes her choice regarding her future and the future of her unborn child. Although in the beginning of the novel Gauri appeared as the typical pati-vrata Indian woman suffering silently, towards the end of the novel she breaks away from this image when she chooses to walk out of her husband's home. This was possible with Anand's Gauri as the novel was published in 1960, and by then, there was a gradual change in the status of women in the society.

In Morning Face, which Mulk Raj Anand published in 1968, of the five women characters, I have chosen to discuss only two, Draupadi and Devaki. Draupadi is the typical example of a neglected uneducated Indian wife and Devaki is the unprotected and helpless widow who is taken advantage of by the family and society.
Draupadi is married very early in life; and even after several years, is without any children. She is blamed for it and her mother-in-law constantly taunts her, showing again how in a patriarchal male dominated society, a woman is the enemy of the women. The fact that she is not good looking makes the situation worse; for, her husband Harish beats her up often and spends his free time and money in a brothel. Draupadi sits at home and weeps into her headcloth. Uneducated and helpless, she would sit and sulk on the small wooden cot in the 'dark room'. She gets no sympathy from anyone, not even her father-in-law who ignores her tearful complaints. She even attempts suicide once, out of sheer desperation. As if this male indifference is not enough, she is also considered an ill-omen by her mother-in-law and referred to as the 'snub-nosed Sarupnakha, the sister of Ravana.'

But Anand's heroine here is very unlike his earlier heroine, Gauri. Draupadi is passive; the only way she protests is by sulking in a dark corner. She does not question her predicament, her position in the family; nor is she able to assert her rights as a wife. She does not grow into a new awareness like Gauri. She merely accepts her fate with a meekness born out of generations of submission to the male dominance. She is emotionally stunted by a shallow world, a world in which there is no place for her; where she remains
unwanted, unloved. She is filled with bitterness towards her husband, in-laws and herself but she is incapable of taking any decision or action regarding her own life. Draupadi has no social identity except as Harish's 'barren wife'. She remains in a closed world, unlike Gauri who moves out from a closed world to an open one.

The other interesting character worth studying in *Morning Face* is Devaki, Partap's pretty widow. She is one of the characters who plays an integral part in shaping Krishnan's growing years. Widowed early in life, without any children, unprotected and helpless, she is forced to adopt her nephew Ganesh, and, advised by her elders to accept -

... her fate as the respectable widow ... and to consider Ganesh, his education and marriage as the most important thing to live for ... \(^{11}\)

As the head of the Panchayat sums it up,

... According to the Hindu religion of our *Sanatan Dharma*, widows are not supposed to remarry ... Nor eat pan! ... Nor drink liquor! ... Nor wear gay clothes! ... Nor jewellery! they are expected to pray to the gods and earn a better existence in the next life. With good deeds, charities and devotion! \(^{12}\)
And Devaki slowly nods her head. For, being a woman, she is subject to the will of men even before she becomes a widow. Her occasional desire for freedom is immediately smothered by the family and the society in which she is born. In a structural society like ours, a widow's position is a difficult one. A widow is considered a threat to the stable order of society as she has no guardian to control her sexual energy. Severe rules are imposed on her on spiritual or religious grounds to minimize this potential danger. And Devaki being beautiful and young, must be suppressed under the guise of religion. Her longing for love, affection and a normal life is denied to her. Her very presence is considered an ill-omen, '... remain away from the bride lest the shadow of your widow's presence fall on her!' (p. 93). And Devaki merely weeps -

'Hai, ... they didn't even let me cross the threshold and ... great the bride ... or my adopted son! And when it was a question of spending money on the marriage, it was I who was the mother-in-law.'

Although Devaki is financially secure, she has no emotional fulfilment. Her desire for personal happiness is thwarted by the social norms imposed upon her. Devaki too, like Draupadi, is not able to take any decisive steps to
free herself from the binding laws of society. She accepts her fate as a widow and remain in her cloistered world.

Mulk Raj Anand's contemporary, R.K. Narayan's novels are an observation of life in its depth and variety. All his novels have been placed in a small south Indian town of his imagination, called Malgudi. In his novels, R.K. Narayan has women characters both conventional and unconventional. Conventional characters are the mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and the like while we also have unconventional characters such as Shanta Bai (Dark Room, 1936), Rosie (The Guide, 1958) and Daisy (The Painter of Signs, 1976). Through these unconventional characters, the author portrays the clash between tradition and modernity. Although born and brought up in a typical Indian environment, they begin to question the religious beliefs and traditional values of the society. They reassess their position in the family and society. But how successful are they in breaking away from this tradition, from the religious beliefs ingrained in them from childhood?

Savitri in The Dark Room (1936) is the embodiment of all virtues glorified in an Indian woman, self-sacrifice, religiosity, compassion and sentimentality. Although middle-aged with three children, as an individual she has no right, not even as a mother. When her son falls ill, her husband Raman send him to school inspite of her protests. And then -
How impotent she was, she thought; she had not the slightest power to do anything at home, and that after fifteen years of married life. She is fed up with the same routine of cooking and housekeeping; but she has no choice.

It is when Raman starts an affair with a woman in his office, Ananta Bai, and disrupts her normal life that Savitri reacts. And when Raman spends nights away from home neglecting her and the children, Savitri reaches the limit of her tolerance. She bursts out in anger:

I am a human being ... you men will never grant that. For we are playthings when you feel like hugging, and slaves at other time. Don't think you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose.

She refuses to allow Raman to come near her:

Don't touch me! ... you are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can't cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch.

Raman is stunned at this violent reaction from his mild and unassuming wife. But, he tells himself, she will get over
it in time after a few days of sulking in the dark room, which, he knows, is her way of protesting.

Raman agrees that women must be educated; for they were as good as men, and so must be treated accordingly. But when Savitri begs her husband not to go to 'that harlot' again, Raman refuses to comply. It is this direct refusal on his part that compels Savitri to take the extreme step— to walk out of her home. When she goes for the children, Raman refuses to let her take them 'They are my children'. And Savitri then realises, perhaps for the first time, that she did not possess anything in the world, not even her children whom she carried for nine months in her womb, gave birth to them and brought them up. No, even the children belonged to her husband, for he paid the mid-wife, the nurses. He paid for their clothes and education. A woman owns nothing but her body.

Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's or her son's ...

After Savitri walks out of her house, she realises with some surprise that she actually has the courage to walk the streets in the middle of the night, unescorted. She, who was afraid to go even a hundred yards from the house alone! Why is it, she wonders, that they have this fear from cradle to the funeral pyre? Fear of displeasing her father,
her husband, society, fear even after death, of Yama and his
cauldron of boiling oil! Having taken this extreme step,
Savitri wonders what to do next. There is an intense need in
her to be independent - independent of her husband, father and
even sons. But she knows that she is 'unfit to earn a handful
of rice except by begging' (p. 79) for she is not educated. A
woman unless educated has to depend for her salvation on
marriage. But what salvation is there in a marriage? For
the only differences between a married woman and a prostitute
is that a prostitute changes her men and a married woman does
not, Savitri thinks angrily. She questions the social system
accepted by generations of women as the ultimate truth.
Society, ostracises anyone who deviates from the set norms:

What desperate creation of God are we that we
can't exist without a support. I am like a
bamboo pole which cannot stand without a
wall to support it ... 19

She adds bitterly.

At the same time, Savitri is also worried about the
consequence of her action, for the sin of disobeying her
husband and talking back to him. Here Savitri is torn between
two opposing influences - on the one hand, she has been brought
up as the typical Indian woman - ever suffering and submissive
woman which the society approves. On the other hand, she
wants her rights as an individual, her desire to assert her rights as a wife and mother. Raman is most discomfited by Savitri's unexpected walk out. Of course, he has nothing against the women's Movement as such, he reasons — but, a woman's primary duty is to be a wife and mother which is a divine privilege. After all, the ancient scriptures too enjoined women to identify themselves completely with their husbands! But when Savitri earns her first handful of rice for herself sweeping the village temple, she feels a thrill never experienced before, 'I am not obliged to anyone for this. This is nobody's charity to me!' (p. 120). But the triumph does not last long. For, a woman without the protection of a male is viewed with suspicion —

There must be something wrong with her ... her husband must have driven her out. Why would a husband drive a wife out?²⁰

- the village priest questions.

Savitri also begins to worry about the children, her home and her kitchen. And she is aware that if she returns home, it will have to be without any compromise. She knows she is defeated and is not strong enough to break away from her family, and from the set social norms. She, being a woman, must accept society's valuation of them, for chastity is the sole responsibility of the woman in a marriage, but
the man is free to violate marital norms. Either she must make a clear break and live outside the social norms or else conform to it and suffer. She has to make a choice - and Savitri chooses to suffer! She goes back to her husband.

Thus we see that Savitri consciously walks out of a situation undesirable to her, but after analysing her priorities, she finds that home and hearth is more important to her than her individuality, her rights as a woman. She goes back to her husband knowing fully well that her husband will continue his liaison with Shanta Bai, and she will have to put up with it. But Savitri shows a spark of independence, though short lived, and has a choice in life, to live life alone or go back to her husband. And she makes her choice!

R.K. Narayan's Rosie in *The Guide* (1958) may be considered one of the most complex characters. Unlike his other women characters, Rosie comes from a questionable background. Her mother and grandmother were *Devadasis* - women dedicated to the service of God and living in the temples as dancers. Rosie's father is not known. But unlike *Devadasis*, Rosie is an M.A. in Economics. She marries Marco because she wants a respectable life, and Marco provides her with a financially secure background. Marco marries Rosie after carefully examining her certificates, because he needs an educated wife to look after his basic needs. However it is with the condition that Rosie will never dance again.
Dancing to him was merely street-acrobaties, nothing intelligent or artistic in it. But never were two characters so opposed in nature, thought and their outlook. Rosie is warm, sensitive, fun-loving with a passion for dancing; and Marco is cold, self-centred and unresponsive. Although devoted to her husband, it is not long before she finds that every time they start talking, they ended by quarrelling.

Raju, the guide, takes advantage of this. He encourages Rosie to dance and openly admires her. While Marco is busy studying the caves, Rosie finds herself often in Raju's company. And it is just a matter of time before Rosie gives in to Raju's persuasion and they begin to live together, though she is torn with feelings of guilt. Rosie discloses her relationship with Raju ultimately and begs for forgiveness. But Marco cannot forgive her. Thus Rosie goes back to Raju. Her presence in his house, however, creates tension between Raju and his mother, and she leaves the house. Raju decides to start a new life with Rosie. But because of Raju's character, Rosie could not live a happy life even with him. Raju with his greed for money, goes to the extent of forging Rosie's signature to possess her box of jewellery. Though Rosie is shocked and hurt at this, she arranges to get the best lawyer to fight the case with a cold and hardened expression on her face.
Raju realizes with some surprise that she is strong enough to overcome everything, she does not need anybody -

I was growing jealous of her self-reliance
... Neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along. 21

Before going to prison, Raju asks Rosie her plans for the future; and Rosie says she will go back to Marco if he will accept her. If not, she would prefer to end her life on his doorstep. Her decision to stop dancing is, however, final.

Rosie’s choice is open to do what she likes with her life. She is not compelled to take any decision. Unlike Savitri, she has no attachment of home and children. She is disillusioned and disappointed with life. Raju exploits her physically and emotionally. She was his golden goose, he was afraid to let her out of sight; whereas Marco used her as a decorative piece in his well-planned and principled life.

In The Dark Room, when Raman violates the marital laws he expects Savitri to put up with it; but when Rosie gives in to Raju’s persuasion, Marco refuses to have anything
to do with her. She is called a 'seducer', a 'viper'.
Savitri chooses to return to the security of a closed world, her home and her husband. Rosie moves out of a closed world she shared with Marco towards an open one consciously, there is no compulsion. But she is educated and a talented dancer; she is no bamboo pole and requires no wall to support her.
She overcomes the conflict within her and the society towards the end of the novel. Narayan's Rosie is independent of Marco and Raju. She does not need anyone to support her — mentally, emotionally or physically! Rosie is faced with conflicts on the personal level and the social level. She dislikes the conventional life that is expected of her by Marco. She searches for an identity of her own through her only passion — dancing, and rebels against the traditional role of woman in society and home. And through another man, she also realizes her dream of becoming a dancer. Although Rosie succeeds in achieving her individuality, she does experience moments of guilt occasionally at having disobeyed her husband and leaving him. At the end of the novel, she wants to go back to him; but unlike Raman, Marco is not willing to have her. Here, we see a rare glimpse of Rosie as the conventional Indian woman where she feels a lack of fulfilment without her husband. But, she overcomes this emotional weakness; and, at the end, is ready to face the challenges of the society on her own.
The traditional woman has certain characteristics - she is devoted, submissive and exists mainly for the husband and family. She is generally docile and always operates within a well-defined framework. Raman's aunt in *The Painter of Signs* (1976) is one such character. Barren and widowed, she took upon herself the task of catering to Raman's needs. For,

... one cannot for ever flourish and fatten in a father's house, especially one born a woman.  

These traditional women, however, do react when their hearth and homes are threatened. But they do that in a mild manner. Raju's mother goes back with her brother to her village when Raju brings Rosie home (*The Guide*). Savitri walks out of her home for a few days (*The Dark Room*). Raman's aunt goes off to Kasi when Raman decides to marry Daisy (*The Painter of Signs*). These traditional women too try to protest in a tacit manner though they are not always successful.

Among the unconventional women characters, Daisy in *The Painter of Signs*, is not only different from the typical Indian woman; she is one of the new women, a modern woman. She runs away from an orthodox home at the age of thirteen because she hates the idea of being 'inspected' by a prospective groom. She wants to do something useful in life, to work for a certain goal rather than becoming a wife and bear children.
She runs away to Madras and graduates with the help of the Christian missionaries. It is here that she adopts Daisy. She lives among the fishermen in slum areas to help and educate them.

Raman's relationship with Daisy is based on physical attraction rather than mental or emotional compatibility. He is occupied with her physical form inch by inch all the time ... . That is the tragedy of womenhood - utility articles whether in bed or out. You never view them normally until they are past sixty and look shrunken, skinned ... .

He is obsessed with the idea of possessing her. Daisy, however, ignores Raman's advances. The only topic she discusses with him are birth-control and population. She does not spend time grooming herself. Daisy's imperious manner both charms and frightens Raman. But at the same time, he tries to assert his masculine superiority. He wants her to depend on him. When Daisy takes Raman to the village interiors to paint signs, he offers solicitations gestures for her comfort. But Daisy refuses, putting up with hardships and doing with the barest necessities of life. He cannot understand why Daisy does not want a 'normal' life - a life in
which the woman is obedient and submissive, and the husband the dominant decision maker and provider.

Raman and Daisy start living together without the sanctity of marriage vows, more to satisfy a physical need than for emotional security or mental satisfaction. Finally, when Daisy does agree to marry Raman, she does so on her own condition, that she will never have any children, and if perchance she has, she will give it away so that she can pursue her social work -

I broke away from the routine of a woman's life...
... I have a well-defined purpose from which I will not swerve... even when I am a wife. On any day you question why or how, I will leave you. 24

It sent a chill through Raman but he agrees. Her lack of interest in any household matters disturbs him. Home was of secondary importance to her and she separated 'her' things from 'his', which shakes all his notion of a life of 'togetherness'. However, just a day before their marriage, Daisy decides to change her mind and breaks off the wedding inspite of Raman's pleadings she remains firm.

Daisy has always been a challenge for Raman, to crush her indomitable spirit, to curb the independent spirit
in her. He tries to possess her physically and control her emotionally. And he does succeed in that, he manages to take her in her weak moment; but Daisy stands firm where her ideals and her aim are concerned.

Here, R.K. Narayan's Daisy is very different from the conventional Indian woman. Fiercely independent and firm in her beliefs, she refuses the security of marriage and home. Even children occupy a secondary place in her life. She is the New Woman, who wants to pursue her aim in life, which is not marriage and children but a career, independence and freedom. She rebels against the traditional role of woman and asserts her individuality. She refuses to accept husband and home as the centre of life. Unlike the traditional Indian women, she refuses to cook, clean and groom herself. Even the marriage vow does not mean anything to her. It was more of a contract with the option to walk out whenever she chose to.

Thus we see, that with time, the attitude of woman to her own role in the family and the society has changed a great deal. Their priorities and their values have undergone a great change. They have now become more sure of what they want out of life.

The political struggle for independence proved to be a stepping stone to the upliftment of women in India. Since the second decade of the twentieth century there have been
women's organisations and movements in India for the emancipation of women and to put forward their demand for political rights as it has been shown in Chapter II. And in its session in December 1918, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution unanimously for the franchise of women, whereby they were not to be disqualified on account of sex.  

Women took an active part in the non-violent Gandhi movement in urban as well as in the rural areas, much encouraged by Gandhi who insisted that in this movement women's contribution should be greater than men's, for:

To call women the weaker sex ... is man's injustice to women ... Has she not greater intuition, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? In non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women.  

Women shared the struggle and the sufferings, marching side by side with the men, shouting slogans against the British as shown in Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1936). For the first time, women in India had a goal in life – they could participate in the common cause with their male counterparts. They were allowed, and accepted by society outside the four walls of their homes. Their lives no longer centred round their kitchens only. Says Rangamma to the other village
women, in the same novel by Raja Rao:

Well, we shall fight the police for Kencharma’s sake, and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as a silken thread, and you will hymn out the name of Mahatma. 27

The women in the village organised a volunteer corps and called it the Savika Sangha; after their housework, women would picket the foreign cloth shops, wine shops or spin khadi as part of the non-cooperative and non-violent nationalist movement. But, every time the milk curdled or a dhoti was not dry at home, the husband would beat them up,

... if I cannot have my meals as before, I am not a man to starve ... I want my wife to look after my comforts. 28

But this does not dampen their spirits. They cheerfully and enthusiastically carry out their duties of a wife and mother along with their voluntary work. Even police atrocities fail to deter the determined spirits of the women.

... we deafen ourselves before the onslaught ... the lathis rain on us ... we feel a new force in us ... there are shrieks and shouts ... our
bangles break and our saris tear and yet we
huddle and move on.  

The part played by women proved they were not the weaker sex,
as has been accepted all through the ages, and this Raja Par subtly interweaves throughout his novel Kanthapura.

The Independence movement was not only a political struggle but also an emotional experience for Indians - both men and women; and the writers reflected this in their work - as we have seen it already in Kanthapura. Many other writers during this period deal with the experience directly as themes or indirectly as a background to a personal story, as Khwaja Ahmed Abba's Inquilab (1955). His earlier novels Tomorrow Is Ours (1943) and Defeat for Death (1944) also reflects on the Indian Freedom struggle. Tomorrow Is Ours is about Parvati, daughter of a freedom fighter. On her father's death in jail, she becomes a dancer. She eventually marries a doctor. It is around this stage when she is influenced by the communist ideals and is sympathetic for the Communist movements in China and Russia. This aspect in her nature reflects on Indian woman's progressive outlook. And when her husband is sent as one of the members of the Medical Mission to China, Parvati parts with him in sorrow, but she is happy that she too has been able to sacrifice for the future of man.
Abbas Inquilab reflects the Indian Freedom struggle from 1919 - the year of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre to 1931, the year of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Set against this political background, the novel is the personal story of the hero, Anwar, at the tender age of eight years. The novel traces the growth and the various influences he is subjected to, up to the age of twenty-one when he is an adult. The two women who influences him to some extent in his growing years are Anjum, his sister and Salmah. Anjum is just eleven when she is compelled to observe purdah. She is no longer allowed to go to school or step out of the house without a burqa. Anwar cannot understand this restriction and wonders how women can breaths without getting stifled by the veil. 'Why has our religion ordered the purdah for women and not men?' wonders Anwar. Within a year, Anjum's marriage is fixed with her uncle's son. Brought up in the typical Muslim household where strict purdah is observed, Anjum has no say in any matter concerning her future. On her wedding day, Anjum's reaction is one of fear. She is too young to comprehend the meaning of marriage. The plaintive voice of the damaies or singers during the ceremony reveals the pathetic state of all child-brides who are forced to leave the security, love and warmth of their own homes to go to another alien one and bear the responsibilities of a wife and mother within a year.
Why did you marry me off so far away,
... we are, dear father, only the buds
of jasmine offered from house to house!
... only dumb haltered cows
Led off to any pasture you choose!
as the night is past we fly away.

And when Anjum comes home after a year, she is with a child. Anwar is overjoyed to see his sister again, but is worried about her thin body and pale face; and when Anjum starts sobbing violently, Anwar is visibly upset and disturbed. Complications arise during her delivery. The best medical care is given her, but the doctors say she is married too young and should never have been made to bear a child. It's because of such ignorance that many must die of it. Anwar prays desperately for his sister's life, but Anjum dies giving birth to a still-born child.

When Anwar grows up, he is sent to the University in Aligarh. There is a Muslim girls' college attached, but purdah is strictly enforced with walls of twenty feet high. Co-education is taboo and 'girl' is a commodity non-existent in the campus of Anwar's college. So the boys' only pastime is to go to the Railway station where they hope to glimpse a feminine face as the train steams in and out of the station. It is in one of these visits that Anwar sees Salmah, their Professor's beautiful fifteen year old and only daughter.
Almost every individual during this post-independence period was the product of the conflicts and reconciliations of two cultures - the Western and the Eastern. And this confusion is evident in Salmah, 'the only happy accident of their otherwise unhappy married life' (p. 168). Her father himself educated in England, wants his only progeny to grow up in a western environment, imbibing western culture. Her mother, from an orthodox Muslim background observes purdah, would dress up Salmah in heavy brocade saris, ornaments and make her recite the Holy Quran. Salmah is torn between these two opposing influences. Amidst this hostile and bitter environment, Salmah grows up a very lonely child. To escape this constant loneliness, she learns to live within herself in a world of imagination, a world of beautiful Cindereellas and gallant, handsome princes. After her mother's death, the Professor takes over completely the reigns of Salmah's life. He sends her to a convent in Nainital where she could learn to speak English like an Englishman. But Salmah is still lonely. She hates the Anglo-Indian way of life, their sneaky interest in boys and sex. Salmah, like her mother, still has her roots in the native soils which her father wants to wipe out.

After her school, she joins her father in Aligarh because he wants her to look after the household and prepare her for her destiny - a 'successful' marriage! Although the
Professor is broad-minded enough to nurture Salmah in a western environment without purdah, he is not modern enough to allow her to choose her own life-partner.

He would himself seek out a proper person and his idea was to catch a young man and then guide him to a lucrative job worthy of the husband of such beautiful and talented a girl as Salmah.

And his calculative and shrewd mind decides on Anwar, who, he feels, could be moulded and shaped to suit his requirements. But he fails to see that he is backing the wrong horse. For Anwar is already involved in the national cause for freedom. He is made to choose between Salmah and his national involvement. He decides to sacrifice Salmah, who is the innocent sufferer. She is a pawn in her father's hands who controls her future, her very life. He masterminds the entire affair between Salmah and Anwar.

In spite of the English education she was exposed to, Salmah is too weak to assert herself. She is not introspective enough to question herself. She blindly follows the plans her father chalks out for her, and does not analyse herself to find out what she wants in life. She finds it easier to escape into her make-believe world, away from the reality of domestic disharmony.
Both of Khwaja Ahmed Abba's women characters, Anjum and Salmah, conform to the traditional role. Both come from the traditional Muslim background, their lives are controlled by their elders. They are unable to take any decision and have no courage to rebel against situation which are painful to them. Neither Salmah nor Anjum even tries to analyse their actions. Both are helpless products of the same age - post-independence period, when the country was still in a turmoil trying to establish itself and its culture. Salmah, inspite of her English education in a convent could not accept the western ways. She remains as helpless as Anjum who observes purdah at the age of eleven.

In his later novel, Maria (n.d.) too, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas takes the political background. He writes about the atrocities of the Portuguese against the native people of Goa. Above all, it is the story of Maria, a Goanese and her seven valiant Indians and the obstacles they overcome in their struggle to free Goa.

Maria was a young girl living with her family in Goa when nine Portuguese soldiers attack them in the middle of the night, taking her father and brother and molesting Maria. After this brutal act, each of the nine men cut off a lock of her long luxuriant tresses to keep as souvenirs. Maria is consumed with hatred for them. She is unable to wipe out the humiliation and agony from her memory,
I am already dead. I died that night. Now I
only exist - for vengeance, and for the freedom
of my people. 32

She chooses seven Indians from seven different states of India
and leads them on a mission to free Goa from the Portugese.
When the seven men see Maria for the first time, their
reaction is one of shock as well as admiration - admiration
not only for her courage but for her beauty as well. But
Maria's face betrays no emotion - it is grim and hard. She
quickly and efficiently takes command over them. Throughout
the course of the novel, Khowa Ahmed Abbas shows how Maria
controls the men, with a firmness in her voice, commanding
respect and obedience. When the occasion demands, she even
uses a karate chop expertly. Abbas' Maria proves, she is in
no way inferior to men, even where martial art or wielding a
pistol is concerned. The men grudgingly admit that she is in
no way the weaker sex - she has an inner strength, dignity
and aloofness that keeps them away from her. The only time
she breaks down emotionally is when she is relating the gory
details of the night the Portugese committed the heinous
crime

... stole the sleep from my eyes
and the innocence from my soul

... Like wolves they came ... 32
After their mission is successfully achieved, others go back to their family, but Maria continues in the struggle for freedom. She is caught blowing up a bridge and is imprisoned for fourteen years after which she falls seriously ill. By the time her seven friends arrive by her bedside from different parts of India, Maria is already dead.

In this way, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas shows here the strength of women and their possibilities that could be an asset to the nation. She is Abba's study of an Indian woman in contrast. Maria is unlike Salmah and Anjum. She is strong emotionally and mentally and is able to take her own decisions just like any strong man.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain's only novel Purdah and Polygamy (1944) reveals the inner life of a Muslim household where strict purdah is observed. She reveals the pathos, ignorance and physical and mental torture that the women experience within the four walls in the name of religion and custom.

When Umar, a rich middle-class Muslim dies, there is mourning in the household, especially for his wife. Her bangles, lachha (black beads, a token of marriage), jewellery and coloured clothes are removed and she is made to wear plain white clothes. For, after a husband dies, his wife has no right to enjoy such luxuries. Not that Zuhra had much joy in life. Umar never gave her any money to spend. He bought
every household item himself; and clothes for his wife were bought just once a year, during **Ramzan**, and that too, in the way of **Zakath** (alms). She is confined within the four walls, for

no virtuous women will step out of the house and will see no third person.  

After his death, Zuhra’s life is even worse. Léning amidst taunts, in the seclusion of her room, she eats frugally for she is afraid of looking healthy, and can barely sit or stand without support. Her very presence is shunned by others, ‘- cover her face, let it not be seen by **suhaganas** (married women)’ (p. 11).

After the mourning period is over, Zuhra arranges her son, Kabir’s marriage with a beautiful girl from a rich family. Zuhra, however, is not permitted to see her prospective daughter-in-law, Nasni, as widows are considered inauspicious. Kabir wonders how his bride would look like, for

there is no such thing as temperament in a woman...
... Her only needs are food, clothing and decoration. The larger they are in numbers the greater her happiness.  

34
While Kabir is musing over his wife's beauty, Nazni must find the darkest corner in the house to spend her time crying or else 'she will not be doing justice to all their (parents) sacrifices for her' (p. 31). After the wedding, Nazni must not open her eyes in her husband's house for five weeks; and her mouth, for two months. Even her appetite is to be curbed, for, a good girl from a respectable family must not be forward and eager in her ways. Nazni must also mould herself to her husband's satisfaction, look after his needs and even keep her own mood in rhythm with his, for

Man is a representative of God on earth ... it is his birth right to get everything from her ... and she should be proud, happy and thankful to him for having accepted her services. 35

When a son is born to Nazni, she achieves a higher position in the household for motherhood is the most sanctified role in a woman's life! But Nazni develops heart trouble and is advised complete bed-rest. Zuhra is a representative of the common women in a male dominated society who acts as agents blindly for the tradition of the society. She insists her son take another wife. Nazni is heartbroken at the news, but she is helpless and has to accept his second wife, Munira.
Possessing neither beauty nor wealth, Munira’s only desire was to be a wife, determined to make up for her shortcoming with tact and spirit. It is not long before she is brought down to the level of a servant in the house. Yet Munira is happy. After all, she too is a common, passive woman who accepts everything blindly in the male dominated, traditional society. She is content if she can see her husband’s face once a day. ‘God has made him a man. Because of my sins He created me a woman ...’ (p. 166). Her dog-like faithfulness is unshakable even when Kabir takes a third wife. She considers it her duty to serve and love them both. When she gives birth to a boy and Haqbool, Kabir’s third wife, makes coffee for her, Munira is beside herself with gratitude. She is so used to ill-treatment that she never expects anything else -

You don’t hate to touch my clothes. The people here either pick or push them with a stick ...
I am treated here worse than a servant. The cook at least gets her pay. I get nothing except old torn rags ...

says Munira simply. Illiterate and poor, she has known no happiness. She has merely been transferred from one prison to another. When her baby is born her mother-in-law, Zuhra, comes to see the child from a distance, lifting her clothes
above her ankles as if they were outcastes. Even her husband is ashamed of her.

He treats me like a keeper and is ashamed if people know of me. Naturally he would hate to have a child from me.  

Munra knows she is treated no better than a servant, yet she accepts it as her destiny. She does not question this social code, the disparity between her and the other wives. She is grateful for all she gets.

Maqbool reached the age of twenty and still remained unmarried, a matter of shame among the orthodox Muslims there. Although pretty and educated, she is the third child, considered unlucky by the superstitious people. When Kabir enamoured of her beauty, sends a proposal of marriage, her parents immediately accept it. Not only is Maqbool educated, she even writes poetry, and builds her own romantic world of dreams which she hopes marriage will fulfil -

... under the protection of a man who would be all love and would care for her desires, comforts... a selfless man ...  

Maqbool is also financially independent, her father makes sure Kabir registers one of his houses in her name, and he gives her a substantial dowry, whereas Nazni, inspite of a
lavish wedding ceremony, is financially insecure. Maqbool’s dreams are shattered when she finds that Kabir is a very selfish man. She blames her parents for her unhappiness; but her father consoles her,

Plurality of wives is not uncommon ... women quickly adjust themselves and create a happy world of their own ... Thinking women don’t make good wives even with a monogamous man 

He advises her to submit herself; for a woman’s life is meaningless without a husband. And her energy should be used to fulfil his every wish. That is the only recognised goal for her. But Maqbool does not agree with him. When she wants to publish her poems, Kabir and his family strongly oppose. Kabir realises that Maqbool is different from other women. She is a rebel and has a mind of her own. His cruelty might lead to her separation, and he knows she is financially independent ‘with the means he had unwittingly provided for her. He would lose both a woman and her income, Kabir shrewdly concludes. By the time the novel ends, Kabir has aged; but he marries again, for the fourth time - a girl much younger - and when he dies he leaves behind four widows.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain, in this way, criticises here the practice of polygamy and the purdah system in the Muslim
society. Islam is one of the few religions which have given women financial independence and equal rights. Yet Muslim women suffer the most in their lives because of ignorance, repression and oppression. Maqbool, in spite of her education and financial security, is unable to assert her rights, for her parents force her into a marriage she does not want, and socially, she knows she will never be accepted if she remains unmarried. For, an unmarried woman has no place in Indian society.

During the struggle of independence, and the years following, several novels appeared where the tension or conflict is not between two cultures alone, but also on the personal level. The emphasis shifts from the social issues to the private turmoils and confusion of the individual mind. The authors emphasize the individual's search for identity or liberty, a quest for oneself, in a country that was undergoing a major change within itself. Ishvani's autobiographical novel, *The Brocaded Sari* (1946) throws ample light on such a situation. Ishvani was just nine years old at the beginning of the story and the freedom struggle was on. Belonging to a strict Muslim household, Ishvani was under strict purdah. She is the youngest daughter of a flourishing doctor. Her parents are broad-minded enough to educate the girls in the family. English lady teachers are engaged for the purpose. But after
her mother's death, her father remarries - this time an orthodox and religious lady. She hates everything connected with the west and immediately puts a stop to the western education and teaches them Arabic instead. Ishvani's two older sisters are married off early against their wishes.

By the time Ishvani is fourteen years old, she is considered too old to enjoy the simple and harmless pleasures of flying kites or taking a walk in the garden at home -

There were thousands of girls like me. Our face were not covered with veils, but we were denied the most innocent liberties ... Castes, social custom, religion, marriages, filial duty, were dinned into our ears till we became bilious. I wondered when I and others like me would have the courage to break away from this moldy prison and find a place for ourselves in the sun.42

Ishvani, the youngest and most sensitive child hates this restriction. She spends her time reading, and whenever she can, she escapes to the terrace where she kicks off her shoes and her veil and dances in wild abandon, indulging in this passion secretly. She dances secretly for her step mother says dancing is shameless. It is not long before her marriage is arranged with a rich old man with five grown
children. However, Yusuf, her brother, manages to stop this marriage from taking place.

It is during their vacation in Darjeeling that Ishvani 'sees' her prospective husband, Rachid. Rachid comes to meet her and expresses his desire to marry her. Ishvani is amazed and happy, for girls did not meet their husbands till after the nikah ceremony. He keeps in touch with her through letters which arrive frequently, expressing his love and adoration, and praising her beauty and intelligence.

Ishvani begins to wonder if she is really worthy of all this. There is a nagging question at the back of her mind - would she marry him at all if she had a choice? But with the excitement and preparation for the wedding, she pushed the thought away. Besides, she consoles herself, with Rachid she would have all the freedom she wants. However, the wedding ceremony had to take place in the middle of the night and in secrecy because Ishvani is a Koli Shia whereas Rachid, an Agha Khan, so a communal disharmony was feared.

Rachid's family is much larger than Ishvani expected. Although Ishvani has her own little cottage within the premises with all the gold and brocaded saris she could ever wish for, yet she is lonely. Her activities are restricted -
she has to ask permission even to walk as far as the garden gate. Here, every conversation revolved round food, clothes and prayers. Rachid takes her occasionally to the theatre and her in-laws feel it is the 'height of emancipated freedom to visit the theatre even once in the company of one's husband' (p. 156).

But the humiliation comes when Rachid's grandmother refuses to eat at the same table because Ishvani is not an Aga khan. Rachid asks her to enter their community but Ishvani protests -

I would do anything for you in the world except this ... Don't you think that we should have the normal courage to do what we think is right? After all, we represent young India ... shouldn't we be able to think for ourselves now? Such ideas were all right a hundred years ago, but with our modern upbringing, it really makes no sense.

This consistence in doing what one thinks right and on thinking for oneself is based on the idea of individualism, and individualism is the hallmark of feminism which is evident in Ishvani's character.
Rachid, though himself educated abroad, blames Ishvani's western education, which he feels is dangerous for women. Ishvani, out of anger and humiliation, walks out of her husband's house, leaving behind her gold and brocaded saris. She realises she married Rachid because she had no choice. That they were allowed to meet before marriage made no difference—really, for

Our parents arrange these matters. We would be unnatural and ungrateful if we had refused.

There's not much a fifteen year old girl can understand about marriage, especially when brought up in a strict, orthodox family. For Ishvani, marriage meant freedom to do what she wanted. Whenever she wanted to do anything out of the ordinary, she was told to wait until she married—

Then you can do anything you like. You will be free... and then we were flung into the bed of a man, and expected to accept it just as meekly.

Ishvani finds there is a vast difference between a man and a woman in India— a man can climb towards the moon, but a woman must ask permission to cross the threshold of her house! She is disillusioned with marriage and refuses to go back to Rachid even after much family pressure. She decides
to divorce him. Ishvani confesses to her sister that she could not be the ideal Indian wife ... for she cannot 'sacrifice without a murmur, suffer with a smile and follow blindly wherever ... led. I am not at all humble, meek or obedient. I could never make Rachid happy' (p. 184).

Ishvani knows Rachid will never change his outlook inspite of all his degrees from England. He will remain the same - like his father and his grandfather. Ishvani is initially afraid to take the final step to freedom, to a future uncertain and unknown. She has always longed to be free, but now that freedom is within her reach, she hesitates; for 'My education and upbringing had not prepared me for independence' (p. 73). But the hesitation is only for a moment - she signs the divorce papers and is free! Free from all constraints of society and family oppression. She decides to go to England for further study, to begin a new life in a new world. Unlike Savitri, she does not retrace her steps. She has the courage and determination to walk out of a situation she finds oppressive.

Ishvani journeys from the acceptance of traditional family values to questioning, rebelling, and finally, freedom. Her search for her personal fulfillment goes against the expectation of the family, but Ishvani is firm in her convictions - she will not be suppressed by traditions and beliefs. As mentioned earlier, the affirmation of one's
individuality in a traditional society is at the root of feminism.

Bhabani Bhattacherya's first novel So Many Human (1947) is a political novel about the freedom struggle of this period, showing the injustice of the foreign ruler in India. But because it shows no sign of any woman's question, it need not detain us here. We would rather discuss his second novel Music for Mohini (1953) in which he shows the adjustments and sacrifices a city-bred girl has to make when she marries and goes to live in the village. The central theme concerns Mohini, born and educated in Calcutta and with a talent for music. When she is seventeen years old, her grandmother (Old Mother) is impatient to see her married off, as any common woman shaped by the male-dominated society is:

You will brighten another house, child. What use is a lamp, golden and filled with oil, if it has no wick? The house is the lamp, man is the oil, the woman the wick, Mohini, and happiness the flame. 48

Much against her father's wishes, an advertisement is put in the matrimonial columns of the newspapers. Several families came to 'see' her. Mohini, bedecked and bejewelled, shyly walks in to be inspected. They survey her from head
to toe, make her walk to see if she has grace, loosen her hair to check the length, even rub her face to make sure her complexion is actually fair. Mohini swallows her humiliation and bears it all. When they raise her sari to examine her ankles, that reveal, according to a belief in the Indian society, the character and the future of the girl, Mohini's father loses his temper. For he is a man of the city—advanced in ideas and free from traditional beliefs and superstitions. Seeing his face livid with anger, Mohini says,

"Why must you bear insult on my account? Why must I get married? So many girls these days remain unwed, they work and earn their living. Why can't I do it?"

But old Mother says, 'Peasants girls and princes alike bear this ordeal' (p. 48). However, Mohini does get married—to Jayadev from Behula village. And on her wedding day, as she catches a glimpse of her husband, she pauses to wonder,

"A hundred thousand Hindu maids each bridal day of the year give their hearts to their unknown husbands, asking nothing in return but approval. Will he approve of me?"
Although educated and talented, Mohini has to succumb to the traditional attitude of the society towards women - a patriarchal society that confines women within its own prescribed values and norms. For, a girl has no right to desire, she cannot choose her life partner. So the girl is paraded before her prospective husband and his family, to see if she has any physical abnormalities and if her mental awareness is sharp enough, just as one would scrutinize an object carefully before purchasing it in the market, keeping in mind its price and its durability in the long run. The girl can have only one fear in her - that is, will she be chosen, will she be accepted by the man? For a girl's only aim in life in a traditional society is marriage, no matter how educated or talented she is. Mohini leaves for her new home with Old Mother's advice ringing in her ears - advice to be an eternal woman in the traditional society.

Honour your mother-in-law as though she were your mother, and abide by her will. Answer her hot words with absolute silence. Sweeten your speech when you talk to your neighbours ...

... Bend yourself to the customs and traditions of the village.49

Mohini must now learn the ways of her husband's rural home. It is always the woman who is expected to adjust
to new surroundings. Not only is she faced with the trauma of leaving the only home she has known, but is also uprooted and placed in an entirely alien environment. And yet she is expected to adjust to the new ways. But Mohini is determined to do her best for her husband and his home. The Big house here is not just a residence but a way of living with its discipline and tradition which has been deeply entrenched with the passage of time. Mohini is confident she will succeed in merging herself into this tradition-bound family.

But as the days pass, Mohini finds that Mother is old-fashioned and very exacting in her ways; and Jayadev is an idealist and basically a loner. But Mohini is eager to know, to learn and to adjust. She even makes an effort to understand her mother-in-law's stern discipline:

That was her way to make her son's bride grow into duty, discipline, grow into the structure of family tradition.

Gradually, Jayadev tries to encourage Mohini to take an interest in serious study. He wants her to be his 'Maitreyi', the intelligent wife of the ancient Yagneyalkya, and inspire him in his scholarly pursuits and give him the necessary moral support to carry out his programmes of social reforms.
A common synonym for the wife is partner in faith: she shares her husband's thoughts and ideals just as he shares hers. They have one spiritual income between them.51

Jayadev's study of ancient lore gives him the idea that Mohini should be his Maitreyi, to share in his scholarly pursuits. He wants an intellectual partner in his wife, and says so to Mohini. He feels he is giving a new concept to the husband-wife relationship. But Mohini who is more practical and interested in mundane matters, longs for his physical presence, wants to share her thoughts, her emotions with him. She wants to experience life in all its various aspects, and when Jayadev finds Mohini is not interested, he is disillusioned.

Her mother-in-law's constant and obvious hints about a grandson creates more tension in Mohini's mind. Mohini feels that she has given Jayadev all of herself, merged herself completely in his way of life. He ought to understand and share her sufferings too. Her mother-in-law would give her accusing glance which seemed to say 'you are barren.' Out of sheer anger and frustration, Mohini flings back, 'I am not going to have a baby. I never will' (p. 205). Mother is aghast. No progeny of her only child?
What evil destiny made me bring you in this house? Your barreness will curse it for all time.

With a shock Mohini realises, 'I am needed only to bear a son?

Mother takes Mohini to the Virgin Goddess to pray for a child and to offer a little of her heart's blood to lift the 'curse of barrenness'. Mohini meekly follows her to the temple. It is only when Jayadev intervenes that this heinous crime is stopped. Her mother-in-law even thinks of getting her son married again if it is necessary; after all, Mohini should consider it a proud privilege to welcome the new bride if fate made her barren. However, before this drastic step is finalised, they find that Mohini is with child. And there is joy and happiness once again in the Big House, filled with the sound of music. Mohini's life is thus fulfilled according to the traditional society. It is almost as if Mohini's pregnancy solves all problems in the Big House.

The importance of the motherhood is very much evident in the mind of the Old Mother. This is the ultimate goal of every woman, according to the tradition of the society. Inspite of all her sacrifices, Mohini is unable to please anyone. She cannot break away from the tradition-bound family. And then inspite of her western education, Mohini also has the bent of the traditional in her outlook. Even in her most
despairing moments, she cannot think of leaving her husband's home. 'Why don't I die?' - is her helpless cry. She also tells herself that she has given herself up to this ancient house, to its traditions and its rules, she has become a part of it - an example of the deep influence of tradition in society. The only time she asserts herself is when Mother forbids her to go to the mango-grove because it is not 'proper' and Mohini replies in clipped tones, 'I like it', for it is here that she takes refuge against negation of life. Here she expresses her right to be free!

Unlike Ishwani, who walks out of her marriage because she could not adjust to the traditional ways of the joint-family. Mohini not only adjusts but finds content and happiness within it; she matures into a traditional wife. At last there is harmony within her and harmony between herself and the tradition-bound society.

Thus we see here that some of the women characters of the novelists from 1931 to 1950 emerge from the passive and conventional roles to that of rebels, while the majority of them fall in the traditional patterns. The few who want to assert themselves, rebel against personal circumstances to break free from the stifling social conventions and put forward questions and arguments for new standards of morality, new codes of behavior for themselves. Marriage,
to some of the women, is no longer the conventional happy ending in a novel from the thirties to the forties, for by minutely dissecting unfortunate marriages, the novelists of these two decades showed ordinary women going through bitter experience, and eventually realizing the importance of personal freedom and desire to evolve as a person on one's own right - not merely to live as an ideal of female purity. But it must be noted that such women were mostly rebels, and had hardly succeeded in carving out a place for themselves in society.
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