CHAPTER SIX
SUMMING UP

All oppression creates a state of War.

Simone de Beauvoir.

From the analysis made of the protagonists in all the novels so far, it can be understood that it is ultimately women's own propensity and meekness which has become a curse for them. The chosen novels and the protagonists show how women are still groping for an identity, be it in America, Canada or India. The parallel and contrastive characters presented side by side delineate how both the emerging new and the still traditional women act and react to this fact of being meek and submissive. This enables us to discuss the shape their reaction most often takes.

Sunaina Singh points out that it "is necessary to examine how the susceptibility and weakness of Eva-Sita, be it any culture, were used by mankind in general" (26). But what needs to be seen is- could one dismiss their whole existence with labels such as meek, submissive or as a curse? In this context it would be appropriate to consider what Ferdinand Leidberg and Marynia Farnham discussed (26). History might be responsible for what women are today but they have "perpetrated a graver crime by responding to their lives in the ordained, destructive manner" (26). Hence according to these writers it becomes essential for women to critically examine their impotency.

A woman who chooses to review her life must understand that pitfalls are a part of her existence. She should first comprehend and counter her own powerlessness. She must recognize her age-long passivity and be ready to take full charge of her life. She should be conscious of the fact that "it is not her inability which consigns her to a particular way of life but the image of the molly-coddle, of incompetence, which is thrust
upon her and assigned to her" (26). The chosen novels of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and Shashi Deshpande testify to the above statement. It is for this reason that most of the fictional milieu is confined to the domestic and to the everyday life of characters. Beginning with Morrison's first novel The Bluest Eye to Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine, silence is a natural condition for all the protagonists.

In India a woman's life is governed by tradition and family customs. A good woman is one who is a good daughter, wife and mother. To be good means to be of a sacrificing, self-abnegating, meek and of quiet nature.

In That Long Silence, Jaya's married life has always been attending to the needs of the husband. Tending and caring for the children become her full-time occupation. She states in "unequivocal terms" that Mohan is her profession, career and means of livelihood (Rajeshwar 45). In the process, she becomes dwarfed and annihilated as an individual. She believes that there is pain in hostility, and rebellion is anguish and agony. Hence, she adopts a subaltern and subservient attitude:

No, what have I to with these mythical women? I can't fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together... it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain? (TLS 11-12)

Jaya has thus learnt at an early age that a husband is like a tree, "a protection, a security" (Bhatt 159).

If protagonists in Deshpande are seeking equality in domestic and intellectual spheres, the "sense of being an individual" is peculiar with the Western thought and Literature (Slaight 16). Their value lies in their own personal fulfillment and development. Hence there is a vital difference between the "urges and aspirations" of women in India and Canada (16).
The similarity however lies in their drive to attain dignity and respect in a male-dominated society.

In *The Edible Woman*, Marian’s curse is her own meekness. Hailing from a small town, Marian like Jaya, also prefers to move in the set directions or standards of life. Marian has no inclination to disregard the set rules. And for her the question of working after marriage does not arise because Peter dislikes an employed wife.

In *Sula*, Morrison’s second novel, Nel realises the futility of being mute when she accompanies her mother Helene to attend her great grandmother’s funeral. Instead of explaining to the ticket master the reason for her entering the compartment meant for the whites, she freezes at the sight of him thereby evoking suspicion and censure. Morrison uses the image of a street pup kicked out from a butcher’s shop, to enforce her idea-of what happens when one is very passive and accepts one’s lot in life without questioning. Therefore in order to survive, one needs the spirit to explore and be imaginative.

In the case of Jaya, she gets from Kamat the best of her father’s concern for her- reassurance and the best of attention that she would like to have from Mohan. "I’m warning you- beware of this 'women are the victims' theory of yours. It’ll drag you down into a soft, squishy bog of self-pity. Take yourself seriously, woman" (TLS 148). Kamat makes her realise that the real reason for her failure was her fear; fear "of writing, of failing" (Palkar 167). When Jaya finally comes out of her emotional upheaval, she has sorted out a few problems with herself. For the two nights that she has to herself, she puts down on paper all that she has suppressed in her seventeen-year’s silence. In Jaya’s own words: "I’m not afraid anymore. The panic has gone. I’m Mohan’s wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible" (TLS 191).
Initially, Marian's decision takes the form of a flight but in the end she hands Peter a cake. Marian succeeds in negating her impotence by the act of baking the cake. And by eating the cake she is not rejecting her "femininity" as Ainsley her friend declared, but rather asserting it. Katherine Fishburn notes: "Whether, by the end of the book, Marian has improved her perspicacity enough to survive the opinion of others is unresolved but certainly questionable. We leave her as we find her, dependent on a man to provide her with answers" (725). But she affirms a sense of pride and proclaims at the end that a cake is edible but a woman is not. So recognition of the problem is evident in Jaya and Marian.

While most women appear to have realised their state, Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* is an exception. Overwhelmed by her own and the black community's self-loathing, Pecola becomes insane; believing that God has answered her prayers and given her blue eyes. She is a "broken-winged bird that cannot fly." Claudia however is a survivor.

One subject or theme continually prominent in all these writers is the problem of survival. With regard to Morrison, after they finish, she wants her readers to think about who survived the strains and stresses of the story's tensions, and why. Although she tries hard not to be didactic, and avoids "editorializing at all cost," she at the same time hopes to present stories that provide lessons in getting through the various danger zones of personal and social life without losing one's heart. "If Pecola were to *see* things differently, she might be *seen* differently" (Miner 19). The only mistake she commits is refusing to be tamed into "conventional behaviour."

Margaret Atwood like Morrison is aware that her characters are not "literary puppets," and might not make it all the way to such a haven. She wishes that the course of her characters in the end would lead to moral security. But that is also not certain. They might be trapped once again. In
Bodily Harm, it finally dawns on Rennie that she is not afraid of cancer or amputation. "She's afraid of men and it's simple, it's rational, she's afraid of men because men are frightening" (BH 290). At one point Rennie had been obsessed with her scar, but now it holds no significance. Her illness becomes an insignificant chapter in her life. She realises to her great relief that "nothing has happened to her yet, nobody has done anything to her; she is unharmed" (284) - but for how long she does not know. In fact, nobody knows for that matter.

Shashi Deshpande in That Long Silence affirms that "Choice is the right of both man and woman. The only thing to remember is that choice is relevant only when there is knowledge. In the same way, freedom is relevant only when there is responsibility- responsibility to oneself (to one's creative needs) and to the other (in service and compassion)" (Menon 37). Freedom is to survive 'whole' within the system and all the heroines realise this at some point.

As the number of articles and books on Morrison, Atwood and Deshpande are steadily increasing; the field of study on these writers is still open. It would be worthwhile to study the same topic in relation to other writers who use Silence as a strategy in their novels.

The employment of such a strategy is indeed nothing new, nor is it confined to writers. Silence has been used as a "weapon by generations of women" - especially the wives (Stout 18). Four women writers- Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter and Joan Didion- three of them American, one British; three of them representing the twentieth century, though their productive periods scarcely overlap- manifest at times the effects of silencing or repressing of women by a patriarchal social structure. That is, they themselves as narrative voice or specific characters in their fictions are seen to be at moments unable to speak fully or openly because of "the pressure of expectations" regarding the proper
(subordinate) role of women (19). All of them reveal, dissatisfaction with
the state of affairs and find ways of evading and undermining it, if not of
directing and altering it. The strategy of resistance most consistently
employed by these four writers who are in so many ways dissimilar, is a
sometimes evasive, sometimes aggressive silence.

Bharati Mukherjee, Katherine Vlassey and Joy Kogawa explore the
psyche of immigrant women belonging to traditional, conservative,
patriarchal societies who follow their husbands as dependents and
homemakers to North America. The lives of Dimple, Eleni, Obasan and
Naomi represent "different facets of the struggle of immigrant women and
their various responses as they attempt to come to terms with themselves in
an alien culture with its attendant marginalization, isolation and
loneliness". Further, there is benumbing confusion because of the demands
of the new roles and expectations thrust on them. "Racism, patriarchy,
isolation, marginalization, alienation, loneliness, feelings of inadequacy
and inferiority, gnawing doubts, all become familiar features of their
emotional and psychological landscape. They are able to get little or no
support from their men who are caught in the web of their silence in which
the 'word' has become 'stone' points to the truth that 'unless the stone
bursts with the telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in
my life no living word'
[Obasan]" (Sharma 58-59).

Shirley Jordan, the editor of Broken Silences notes the legacy of
Silence, which has characterized the relationships between black and white
woman. It is this interracial silence that Ellen Douglas has examined
repeatedly in her fiction. And in her novel Can't Quit You, Baby Douglas
brings to the foreground what most of us would like to forget, ignore, or
deny- the continued difficulty that black and white women have in forming
friendships with each other. In her novel, Douglas examines the socially-
constructed roles which create silences between Cornelia, an upper middle-class white woman, and Tweet, her black housekeeper. And in her depiction of Cornelia and Tweet's complex relationship, Douglas reveals how difficult it is for the women to break the silence between them, especially since language itself is bound up with the construction of the roles which have kept them apart and silent (Jacobsen 27).

Morrison's work has often been compared to William Faulkner's, mainly because of the "'oral'" quality of both the writers. Another point of comparison can be found in the fact that they both specialize in what Morrison calls "village literature," where the focus is on particular people and their isolated place. (Carmean 11). In Morrison's case of course, the focus is on black people who live in communities that haven't yet been swallowed up by urban sprawl.

Likewise revealing would be the writer's seeming defiance of traditional literary classification: that she has been variously been deemed a feminist, a non feminist, a realist and a symbolist would suggest that a firmer understanding of these novelist's place in contemporary fiction might well lead to a clearer understanding of the nature of literature in the twentieth century.