CHAPTER IV

NEFARIOUS FEMME FATALES
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NEFARIOUS FEMME FATALE OF THE BIBLE

I find more bitter than death
The woman who is a snare
Whose heart is a trap
And whose hands are chains.
The man who pleases God will escape
Her, but he sinner she will ensnare

(Ecclesiastes 7: 26 P 1083)

Apart from comprising the enduring and everlasting accounts of women, with remarkable and admirable characteristic traits, the Bible also puts on view the profiles of nefarious femme fatales with their negative and harmful characteristic traits. Living under The Laws of God, the Bible's Old and New Testament women and men are held to strict and exacting codes of high behavior and conduct. Some women go against God's Laws and hence they are stamped as nefarious femme fatales of the Bible. They present their own pasts to deal with examples of what to do or what not to do in their own lives.

Several scripture passages talk about the blessings of women. While the Bible offers encouragement both to and about women, several passages warn against evil women who lead men astray. Examples of wicked women throughout the Bible give solid instruction on the type of women to avoid.
The Bible is full of stories of virtuous women, but within the ancient narrative are also tales showing the darker side of womanhood. The Bible instructs and warns with varied examples through characters, stories and sayings. For example, 11 Timothy 3: 6 says of some women, They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires. (P 1979). This passage warns against women who are full of lust. Titus 2:3 addresses the older women in the church. Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God (P 1983-84) This warning combines admonitions toward good behavior, and to avoid accusations against others and too much alcohol.

The chapter focuses on women who are evil, wicked, scheming and villainy. Their lives are presented in the Bible to admonish the humankind. The characters chosen for study are Potiphar’s wife - the lustful woman, Delilah-the femme fatal, Jezebel- the painted whore, Herodias- the dancer, Sapphira-the liar and negative women in Proverbs all wrong in word and deed. Their stories deal with lust, betrayal, jealousy, unfulfilled needs and dreams, deception, rejection and above all perverted human traits.

They focus directly on women themselves within the context of Israel's life as well as the culture at large. The study on them shows these women as human beings with same passions and the choices they have made with the resources they have.
Barbara J. Essex, an ordained clergywoman in the United Church of Christ and Popular preacher elucidates,

Their stories tell us about courage, determination, independence and boldness. Their stories tell us about women who make the best choices they can with the knowledge and resources they have. Their stories tell us about women who are not so very different from ourselves. (P XVI)

The first character focuses on Potiphar's wife, the Egyptian woman. Her name is not mentioned but is associated with the comparatively modern title of 'Mrs.'

The modernization of the false wife's name seems to indicate that, of all female activities, attempted adultery is the most enduring, as, judging from the literature of the world it is the most interesting.

(Lofts P 42)

She plays a small role in a larger drama. She is unfaithful and untruthful. She is passionate and lustful woman. Her husband Potiphar is one of Pharoah's (Egyptian king) officials. Her story is included in the story of Joseph, the great Israelite descendant. Joseph, the Hebrew is well-built and handsome young man. He is sold to Pharoah as a slave. He is just and righteous. His sincerity, industry and success have won favour of Potiphar. He is kept in charge of Potiphar's house and property. She infatuates Joseph and determines to have her way. The first glance of Potiphar's wife in the biblical text is thus
"Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

(Genesis 39:6 P 65)

But he refused and resolve in his answer. He then deliberately and wisely sought to avoid her daily advances. And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. (P 65)

She is an incestuous woman. She is persistent in her endeavor to have Joseph to her bed. She is a female wretch tempting a young man to commit adultery. H.V. Morton in his sketch of Potiphar's wife says that

She occupies a prominent place as the first sensualist in the gallery of Scriptural women. (P 49)

One day Joseph went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants are inside. Potiphar's wife seizes the opportunity and forces the issue with Joseph when they are alone. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. (P 65)

Joseph, who is just and gentle, left the place. No one turned her down, but a slave does. She is humiliated and vows to take revenge. When she sees that he has left his cloak in her hand and has run out of the house, her desire and lust turns into hatred. Immediately, she conspires and calls her servants claiming attempted rape. Trying to get the servants on her side, she sarcastically blames her husband for her supposed distress and says: "Look this Hebrew has been brought to us to make
sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." (P 65)

She is a liar, diabolical, cunning and dastardly wicked. She is spoiled, selfish woman and certainly more worldly. She longs for physical pleasures. Suddenly, the passion she has felt for Joseph transforms into hysterical rage. She keeps his cloak beside her until his master comes home. She has not let the evidence out of her sight because she has to show the proof to him when he arrives home. Then she proceeds to tell him the same lies that she has told the servants. Lockyer says,

She may have been the first woman, but she was certainly not the last "to exhibit the classic retaliation of the woman scorned.(P 177)

Enraged Potiphar imprisons Joseph. At last she has succeeded in her evil mission. She remains silent without any repentance and concern for the young guiltless man.

Her own silence, in face of the Youth's term in prison, is even greater admission to the bad character of Potiphar's wife, who was not only a sensualist but also a coward who could not admit her own guilt. (Deen P 48)

Her jealousy, falsehood and lust for her husband's slave Joseph traumatizes him but led to beneficial for the Egyptian commonwealth. She is disgraceful deceiver and wrong doer. Edith Deen considers her character,
An erring woman remembered only by her wickedness—that was Potiphar's wife. When she attempted infidelity with young Joseph during her husband's absence from home, she disgraced the distinction she might have borne, that of respected wife of the Egyptian King's bodyguard. (P 45)

In spite of its treatment of Potiphar's wife as bad, lustful women in the biblical text, Loft says

The fact that the Biblical account omits them and attributes her behavior entirely to lust need not be taken as evidence against her. It was not her story, her motive was unimportant to the historian intent only upon recounting the effect of her behavior upon his chief character. (P 44)

The story of Potiphar's wife had a prominent place in world literature. It occurs, in Persian epos (Firdausi, Yusuf O Zuleicha 1009), Spanish drama (Lope de Vega, Los trabajos de Jacob), German novel (Philip von Zesen, Assenat 1670), Goethe's West-ostlicher Divan uses only the names, but Hugo Von Hofmannsthal (Joseph Legende 1914) and Thomas Mann (Joseph in Agypten 1943) return to the story proper. In Northumbrian poem Cursor Mundi dwells primarily upon aspect of the story deriving from extrabiblical legend. Other variations are found in versifications such as William Forrest's The History of Joseph the Chaistte (1569)

Bunyan, in 'The Life and Death of Mr. Badman' (chap. 4), contrasts Joseph's behavior with that of Mr.Badman and his fellows. He goes on to state that many
women are made 'whores' like Potiphar's wife. In 'Pilgrim's Progress,' Potiphar's wife turns up in the allegorical figure Wanton, who tries to seduce Christian's companion Faithful. Laurence Sterne tells the story of the 'shameless woman' in order to 'recommend chastity as the noblest male qualification.' (Guardian, no. 45).

Potiphar's wife turns up in Henry Fielding's 'Joseph Andrews' (1.5), in the character of Lady Booby, who unsuccessfully attempts to seduce her young servant. Joseph's chastity is also alluded to by Surface in Sheridan's 'School for Scandal,' when he tries to protect Lady Teazle from her husband. Byron refers to the story in a similarly piquant situation of his 'Don Juan' (1.186), and other allusions to 'Dame Potiphar' are made in Sir Walter Scott's novel 'Woodstock' (Chap.25), and in Anthony Trollope's 'The Last Chronicle of Barset' (chap. 51). Keats calls Fame a 'Gipsey' and a 'Sister-in-law to jealous Potiphar', referring to her fickleness in his 'On Fame.'

The garment left behind by Joseph plays both a real and figurative role in a number of 19th century works. William Blake repeatedly describes Joseph's many-colored coat as being stripped off by women, evidently in reminiscence of the incident with Potiphar's wife. Emerson admonishes his readers in his essay, 'Self-Reliance', not to rely on their memories but on the present: Leave your theory, as Joseph his coat in the hand of the harlot, and flee? In 'Hippolytus Veiled,' Walter Pater echoes the biblical tale when he causes Hippolytus to flee from phaedra's seductive advances. In Herman Melville's 'Redburn' (chap 17) the pious black cook Thompson uses the story to admonish the ship's steward, a 'sad profligate and gay deceiver ashore.' In modern American literature Saul Bellow makes the account of Potiphar's wife the object of a Hebrew lesson in one of 'Moses Herzog's heder' reminiscences.
In ‘The Divine Comedy,’ Dante sees the shade of Potiphar’s wife in the eighth circle of Hell. She does not speak, but Dante is told by another spirit that, along with other perjurers, she is condemned to suffer a burning fever for all eternity.

Next character probes special attention for study for her sensuality is Delilah. She stands out as one of the lowest and meanest women of the Bible. She has used her personal charm to lure Samson, the strongest man to his spiritual and physical destruction. The Bible hasn’t portrayed her as prostitute but famous historian Josephus is of the view that she is a prostitute. The story of Delilah is a disastrous episode in the life of Samson, a hero of the Israelites at the time of the Judges. Delilah’s name sounds sweet which any vain woman could covet for it means ‘delicate’ or ‘dainty one.’

Samson is a mighty judge and hero of Israel. His birth is special as he is granted super natural strength by God in order to combat with Israelite’s enemies and to perform heroic feats. He has two vulnerabilities- weakness to women and his hair without which he is powerless. Philistines, the ancient enemies of Israel always try to win over the Israelites. It is only the heroic Samson who dares to resist them with his super natural strength. Once he visits the valley of Sorek, there he falls in love with a woman, Delilah. Some time later, he falls in love with a woman, in the valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, “See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver.” (Judges 16: 4-5 P 398)
Samson typifies for the supernatural strength in a man. Delilah typifies the terrible energy of evil in a woman. Hoping to capture Samson, the Philistines approach Delilah and induce her (with 1100 silver coins each) to try to find the secret of Samson's strength. She is a woman of unholy persistence and devilish deceit with personal charm, astute shrewdness, self-command and nerve which uses only for one purpose—money. Using her powers of seduction and deception, she persistently demands him to reveal the secret of his strength. Samson thinks Delilah is on his side. The philistine rulers feel that she is on their side. But she is only on her side. She uses Samson as an object of target to make money.

Samson desires not to reveal the secret, teases her, telling her that he will lose his strength if he is bound with fresh bowstrings. She does so while he sleeps, but when he wakes up he snaps the strings. She persists to know the secret, and he tells her he can be bound with new ropes. She ties him up with new ropes while he sleeps, and he snaps them, too. She asks again, and he says he can be bound if his locks are woven together. She weaves them together, but he undoes them when he wakes. Frustrated Delilah firmly decides to know the secret either by hook or crook. She is shrewd and great actress. She is a temptress superbly skilled in the science of seduction. She is a stealer of Samson's heart and a distraction from his will to follow God. Samson falls under her spell. She cleverly manipulates him by whining, wheedling and nagging. She persistently makes him reveal his secret by using the technique with accusations that he hasn't loved her. Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you, when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength. With such
nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. (Judges 16:15-16, P.399)

With that art of seduction and betrayal, she helps the Philistines to learn the secrets of Samson. Eventually Samson tells Delilah that he will lose his strength with the loss of his hair. Delilah calls for a servant to shave Samson's seven locks. Since that breaks the Nazirite oath, God leaves him, and he lost his super strength. Seizing the right opportunity, Philistines attacks Samson, stabs out his eyes with their swords and reduces him to a weak, powerless, blinded hulk. He is brought to Gaza, imprisons him and put to work grinding grain. Few days later, the Philistines assemble to offer a religious sacrifice to Dagon, their deity for having delivered Samson into their hands. He sincerely prays to God to give him strength once for God’s glory. Empowered Samson then pulls down the pillars of the pagan temple where the Philistines have congregated and hence 3,000 Philistines dies instantly. Delilah’s death in the temple is uncertain. She is never heard again and remains in obscurity. Her mission accomplishes and she disappears from the story.

Delilah’s depiction as both a highly sexualized and lethally disloyal woman throws light on her perfidy to bring the strongest warrior to his doom. In those cultural contexts physical potency, aggression, and sexual prowess are lauded as markers of idealized masculinity, Delilah exhibited the potential for women to use her femininity and sexuality to threaten and undermine the mighty man’s weakness in women. Her very negative cultural representations may thus attempt to ‘explain’ her within the cultural milieus in which she is paraded.
Delilah is identified as one of the top ten bad women of the Bible. She succumbs to corruption, betrays her true lover and has no qualms of conscience to trifle with love for the sake of wealth. She is a heartless wrecker of a mighty man yielding herself for her passions and purpose by using true feminine charm and appeal through trickery with out repentance. Barbara J. Essex, an ordained clergywoman in the United Church of Christ and Popular preacher elucidates,

Delilah is blamed for the demise of Samson. However, when value judgements are lifted from her story, we find a woman who is independent, who exhibited entrepreneurial skills, who understood the power of her femininity and used it to her advantage. (P XVI)

She is considered nefarious femme fatale of the Bible for her negative actions especially her betrayal to Samson whom he loved and trusted. Hence her part won't evoke sympathy and brands her as scandalous woman in negative shades. Caroline Blyth is of the opinion,

One particular way in which popular culture texts often ‘negativize’ Delilah’s characterization is by their suggestion that she did (initially, at least) reciprocate the love that Samson felt for her. While the biblical text itself leaves Samson’s love for Delilah in no doubt (Judges 16.4), it remains silent on the issue of whether Delilah had any reciprocal feelings of love towards Samson, either sexual or platonic. However, within a number of cultural representations of Delilah, her
love for Samson is assumed, at the beginning of their relationship at any rate. Such love on her part does not evoke the audience’s sympathy, however; rather, she becomes even more disparaged given her capricious and shocking ‘betrayal’ of the man she was supposed to care so much about. It is bad enough, after all, to do the dirty on someone you don’t like; but, to turn over the man you love to his enemies in return for hard cash...well, that’s really scandalous!

*Cultural Representations of Delilah Web. 11 November 2011*

Of all the Old Testament romances, Samson and Delilah’s story has made most impact upon the world art. In literature and art Samson and Delilah are often associated with other biblical lovers (David and Bathsheba). St.Philaster (Liber de haeresibus 8 (PL 12.1122) and St. Augustine (De civ. Dei 18.19 (PL 41.576) identified Samson with Hercules, and 19th century scholarship connected the stories as solar myths and associated Delilah with Omphale, who humiliated Hercules, or more frequently with Dejanira, who caused his death. Robert Graves compared Delilah’s shearing of Samson with ritual shearing of the sun-god, associated with Hercules, by women (The Greek Myths 1960, 145.4) In St. Cyril of Alexandria, ‘De sanctissima trinitate dialogi,’ (7.641) Delilah is viewed as a sexual temptress and as a type of the treacherous, avaricious, inconstant woman.

‘Cursor Mundi ‘(7187-7262) stresses Samson’s stupidity in succumbing to his wife Delilah after so much of experience of women’s wiles. Abelard (Planctus Israel super Samson (PL 178. 1820-21), the ‘Roman de la Rose’ (9165-76), Gower (Confessio Amantis, 8.2703) and Chaucer’s ‘Monk’s Tale’ develop the theme of
Delilah as domestic traitor who brings disaster through love. In Chaucer’s ‘Wife of Bath’s Tale’, (Prol.3.721-26) Mr Bath reads the tales both of Samson and Delilah and Hercules and Dejanira to illustrate how women ensnare brave men. By natural extension the name Dalila is given to an unruly daughter easily seduced by Inquity in the Tudor interlude ‘Nice Wanton’. From 16th to 19th century, the name is used both in literature and homiletics of treacherous harlots, especially those luring men from religious or patriotic duty (OED Supp., s.v. ‘Delilah’; C.Hill, ‘Milton and the English Revolution’ (1977 429-30).

Thackeray’s ‘Becky Sharp’ is dubbed Delilah in her ambivalent relations with her enormous soldier-husband (Vanity Fair, chaps. 16, 45). Kipling’s poem ‘Delilah’ concerns the betrayal of a Viceregal confidence imparted to a highly placed gossiping wife. In Browning’s ‘The Ring and the Book’ (11.2200) Guido calumniates his wife as being a Delilah to his Samson. Scott’s references to beguiling books as ‘Delilah’s’ (Heart of Midlothian, chap.1; Letters, 8.127) are in the same tradition. In F.M.Krouse, Milton’s Samson (1949), Middleton’s ‘Family of Love,’ Henslowe’s Diary portrays Delilah. In Milton’s Samson Agonistes (711-22) and in Blake’s Samson (Poetical Sketches 1769-1788), she is voluptuously and immodestly dressed.

Another character which delves special distinction for study as notorious woman in the Bible is Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, king of Israel. She is a princess from the rich coastal city of Sodan. Her name ‘Jezebel’ means, ‘chaste free from carnal connection.’ Her character stands opposite to her name. She is voluptuous with all the tawdry arts of a wanton woman. She is an ardent idolater, worshipping the Gods of her land, Baal and his wife. Idol worship is sin and unholy to the God of Israel,
Yahweh, God of holiness and heathen customs (revolting and terribly cruel) of Jezebel makes her the enemy of God of Israel. The Bible states: *Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins... but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.* *(1 Kings 16:31, P.557)*

Captivated by Jezebel, Ahab and the people of Israel transgress the commandments of their God and follows idolatry. Thus she becomes a despot of the nation of her husband and turns out to be the sole reason for the degradation in the spiritual and moral values. She tries to abolish the worship of Yahweh totally and hence massacres the prophets of Israel. Thus her evil and cruel plans are thrived because Ahab is made puppet under the influence of domineering wife.

the Clytemnestra, the Lady Macbeth of Hebrew history. Though by no means an attractive personage, she is invested by her extraordinary force of character and her appalling fate with a tragic grandeur which belongs to no other women of the Bible. *(Lockyer, pp73-74)*

She is a powerful woman of tremendous ability and intelligence, strong-willed, courageous, and treacherous schemer. She and Ahab make an evil duo. The Bible clearly mentions of her influence, manipulation and domination over her husband as: *There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife.* *(1 Kings 21:25, P.567)*
Ahab's envious eyes fall on the vineyard of Naboth, which adjoins his palace and he desires to procure it. But Naboth refuses to part with the inheritance of the family. Ahab feels distressed but his despicable wife plans an evil scheme to secure the land of Naboth. She launches treacherous plot of killing Naboth judicially without staining her hands. Her wicked plot is to, "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the King. Then take him out and stone him to death." (I Kings 21:9-10, P.567). The king is a marionette in her hands and the kingdom is ruled by her only. As per her instructions, Naboth is stoned to death and the vineyard is confiscated by the king.

She confronts with the Israelite prophet Elijah and swears revenge. He pronounces the fearful doom for her. In spite of the foretelling of the prophet Elijah, Jezebel is not stricken with fear. She is not timid and believed in her own might and trusted in evil. She stamps her name on history as the representative of all that is designing, crafty, malicious, revengeful and cruel. Tinna Pippin, a biblical scholar quotes the opinion of Southern Women in the United States on Jezebel that

She is wicked, scheming; cheap harlot; either promiscuous or complete whore; female form of gigolo; gave her husband bad advice; evil and treacherous; One who seduces men and lead them to destruction. (The Biblical End of the world in Text and Image Web.15.May 2010)

Shortly afterwards in a war with the Syrian king, Ahab is wounded seriously and died. After ten years, Jehu, the anointed king of Israel, heads a revolt against the house of Ahab. When she hears that he comes to her house, "she painted her eyes,
arranged her hair and looked out of window." (II Kings 9:30 P.590). Jehu ignores her words and orders her eunuchs to throw her down. As she fell the walls are sprinkled with blood and except the head and hands of this royal woman, her body is eaten away by the palace dogs.

Jezebel steadfastly remains true to her own beliefs. She tries her best to get her way with domineering spirit and wicked nature.

Apart from idol worship, witchcraft and sheer wickedness Jezebel also used the spirit of domination and seduction to get her ways. (Jezebel - Women of the Bible Web. 14 July 2009)

Jezebel stands as an outstanding bad example for the women with her misused powers, passion and purpose. She is identified with her pushy personality, her need for control, her angry outbursts... Thus this complex, carnal and controlling figure "serves as an archetypal bitch-witch-queen. (Deen P33)

For more than two thousand years, Jezebel has been saddled with a reputation as the bad women of the Bible, the wickedest of women. She is considered nefarious femme fatale for her power for lust. Steeped in the mood of an ancient culture she uses flattery and deceit to lure her husband, King Ahab and the people of Israel away from the worship of Jehovah, a just and Fair God towards allegiance to Melkart, a god of war and human sacrifice. Hence she becomes an enemy to the God of Israel and starts her ways to fight against Him.
This ancient queen has been denounced as a murderer, prostitute and enemy of God, and her name has been adopted for lingerie lines and World War II missiles alike (Janet Howe Gaines P 56)

From the pages of biblical history comes a study of power, pride, evil told with great vividness in the story of Jezebel. She plots her own son's death, murders her enemies, and betrays her husband and his people many times over. But Jezebel finds it a more difficult task to influence the prophets of Israel and thus sets of a classic struggle between the forces of Good and evil. She typifies the worst women in her evil deeds among other women of the Bible.

Jezebel cannot even be compared with the Bible's other bad girls—Potiphar's wife and Delilah—for no good comes from Jezebel's deeds. These other women may be bad, but Jezebel is the worst (Gaines P 23)

Jezebel is dismissed as a truly evil person allegedly because she has caused Israel to stray from God. Yet when value judgments are lifted from her story, one can find her zeal for her religion (which she practiced long before entering Israel's life) equaled Elijah's zeal for his religion. Further she has brought her royal background (she is a princess in a culture that provided royal prerogative) into her arranged marriage with Ahab and her actions, expressions a different understanding of privilege. There are in essence, cultural differences and world views that seemed evil to Israel but are acceptable royal behavior in the culture at large. In modern usage, the name of Jezebel is sometimes used as a synonym for sexually promiscuous and sometimes controlling women.
In Shakespeare’s ‘Twelfth Night’, Andrew Aguecheek refers to Malvolio as ‘Jezebel’ (2.5.42), the connotation is as much one of political aspiration and intrigue as it is of lust; Congreve’s mention of Jezebel in ‘The Old Batchelour’ (4.4.161-66) has similar implications. Crashaw, in ‘Sospetto d’ Herode’, associates Jezebel with such wicked and bloodthirsty women as Medea and Circe (43.337-39), while Shelley, in Charles the First (1.66-70), uses Jezebel in a slighting reference to ‘the papist queen.’ One of the most noteworthy Jezebel figures in English literature is Charlotte Bronte’s Bertha Mason Rochester, who incarnates the notorious lust and promiscuity of Ahab’s consort.

For Browning’s Pietro of Abano Jezebel is a painted immoral woman (213-16). G.K.Chesterton notes his contemporaries tendency to equate ‘the Modern Girl’ who wears make up with lascivious Jezebel (Sidelights on New London and Newer York; and Other Essays 1932). The name has in fact become a term of derision, denoting a wicked, lascivious, or ‘painted’ woman. Thus, James Joyce in Finnegans Wake refers to a ‘jezebel’ or an immoral girl, and Faulkner, in Light in August, makes repeated use of the name as a term of abuse delivered by religiously fanatical men. In his two-volume Guide to the Bible (1967 and 1969), Isaac Asimov describes Jezebel’s last act: dressing in all her finery, make-up and jewelry, as deliberately symbolic, indicating her dignity, royal status and determination to go out of this life as a Queen.

She is portrayed in novels too. The novel Jezebel’s Daughter (1880) by Wilkie Collins and ‘The Caves of Steel’ by Isaac Asimov. In her novel, The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), Margret Atwood names an underground brothel ‘Jezebel.’ In the novel Skinny Legs and All (1990) by Tom Robbins, Jezebel makes a cameo appearance. Lesley Hazleton wrote a revisionist historical non-fiction account, Jezebel, The Untold Story
of the Bible's Harlot Queen (2004), that presents Jezebel as a sophisticated queen engaged in mortal combat with the fundamentalist prophet Elijah.

Jezebel’s New Testament counterpart is Herodias. She is Jewish princess of Herodian dynasty. She is a minor character and shadowy figure in the New Testament. Her story brings her to life in the fascinating context of court politics and intrigue. The name Herodias is female form of Herod, the royal name for the political rulers during the time of Christ and the apostles. Herod means ‘heroic’. Most of them are more hellish than heroic.

She is notable figure in any overview of earliest Christianity, since the New Testament credits her with mistress-minding the death of John the Baptist. (Morgan p XVI)

Herodias ancient royal history speaks how the women in her dynasty undergone captivity, torture, political restrictions and physical constraints all due to part of court politics. Hence they are ready, willing and able to shape the world around them, to take risks, and to assume painful responsibilities. (Sievers P 343)

Empowered by the stories of her ancestors, and those who raised her, Herodias becomes not only a survivor but also and shaper of her own destiny. She, too, learns to play the game of survival and advancement in her birth family. She is self-cantered woman. She is one among the top ten bad women of the Bible. She is harsh, brittle and hardened. She cares for nothing but revenge.
Among the female characters in God’s portrait gallery there are many wicked women as we are discovering, but surely Herodias stands out among them as one of the most vile and vicious. (Lockyer P 68)

Herod the tetrarch rules a small region that includes Galilee, the setting of John the Baptist’s (forerunner of Jesus Christ) ministry. He marries Herodias, his brother’s wife. Josephus, the famous historian reports in his Jewish Antiquities (Book XVIII, chapter 5)

Herodias, was married to Herod, the son of Herod the Great by Mariamne II, the daughter of Simon the High Priest. [Herod II and Herodias] had a daughter, Salome( Whiston P236)

So her relationship with Herod the Tetrach is unlawful. No one dares to speak out against their sin and lewd desires, except John, the Baptist, and a fearless and righteous servant of God. He repeatedly exposes the incestuous nature of Herod’s marriage to Herodias. So he is imprisoned by Herod. Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, for John had been saying to him: *It is not lawful for you to have her. Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.* (Matthew 14:3-5, P.1606)

Herodias is lascivious wife and an evil woman. She hasn’t liked the find faulting attitude of John, the Baptist. She shows her true mettle in compassing the death of a prophet. Her marriage violated Jewish law as she is already a married woman. Public criticism of their relationship arouses angry and hatred against John,
the Baptist. She waits for the right opportunity to take revenge and hence becomes adversary to John. *So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him.*

(Mark 6:19, P.1652)

She is a spiteful woman, treacherous schemer, murderess, woman of lust and grudge. Herodias has a young daughter, Salomi, a dancer. On Herod’s birthday a banquet is arranged inviting elites of the society. The young daughter of Herodias pleases him with her sensual dance. In drunken mood, he promises to give her whatever she asks. Her mother Herodias uses the opportunity to get rid of John, the Baptist whose only offense is telling the truth. Prompted by her mother, she asks the head of John, the Baptist on a platter. He presents it to the girl and she gives it to his mother. Herodias and her daughter are perfect examples of women ‘more bitter than death.’ In the drama of their lives Herodias and Salome plays parts as having made decisions out of love and decisions out of hate.

She is delineated as the ‘female hyena’ (Lockyer, P 69) for her craftiness and bad conduct. Her portrayal is brief and sheds light on her notorious nature.

Herodias is a person in her own right. She is a savvy kind of gal, gruesome, evil-minded and barbaric. She has cleverly devised the plan for the banquet and the entertainment and included her agile daughter in the entertainment to inflame Herod’s passions. She has no regrets of her illicit union. She is not interested either in children or in mothering, a vindictive mother. Her focus is to satisfy her own selfish motives. She is violent and barbaric.
Traditionally, she is portrayed as a latter-day Jezebel, using her influence in a bloodthirsty quest for revenge against the Baptist for daring to criticize her marriage in moral and religious terms.

(New World Encyclopedia P 325)

Herodias and her daughter would become famous subjects in art, since their role as described in the Gospels provides dramatic opportunities to portray Salome’s famous dance and Herodias with the severed head of the Baptist on a plate. In medieval Europe a widespread belief held Herodias to be the supernatural leader of a supposed cult of witches, synonymous with Diana, Holda and Abundia. In fiction her character is delineated in various genres. Herodiade opera by Jules Massenet, Herodias story by Gustave Flaubert, Salome, a French play by Oscar Wilde, Salome opera by Richard Strauss. Ruskin, commenting on the novel in Fors Clavigera (7.268), attacks the ‘Deadly Muselessness’ of those who ‘would read of the daughter of Herodias dancing before Herod, but never of the son of Jesse dancing before the Lord.

The next character chosen for study is Sapphira, the wife of Ananias. A Hebrew name, Sapphira means the jewel, ‘sapphire’ - a precious gem of deep blue. It signifies ‘beautiful or pleasant. As members of the newly formed Christian community, Ananias and Sapphira are given the privilege of sharing the fellowship of God’s children. They have professed their faith in God and without true conversion they associated themselves with the faithful and imitated other disciples and pretended to offer their entire property to the common need of the members of the church. They have desired to be stamped as believers without true conversion in their
hearts. Their spiritual foundation is not strong. They have no commitment towards their faith. Their actions expose their hypocrisy by saying that they have certain moral beliefs but behaving in a way betraying their faith. More than her husband she has coveted discipleship of God.

With the knowledge of his wife only, Ananias plans to sell his possession. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles feet. (Acts 5:2 PP1797) No one imposes on them to sell and surrender theirs. Both of them, being the affluent ones, in order to be thought selfless and to impress others, planned to dispose their possessions but pretended to surrender their complete property. She aspires for honour and respect among the believers. She wants to be considered equal with others though she has no real devotion towards God.

After selling the land Ananias and Sapphira, with one accord keeping aside a part of the price brought certain amount to Peter, one of the Disciples of Christ. It is not considered wrong on their part if they have not sold and brought the price amount because no one has demanded and it is purely a voluntary commitment. But they have surrendered only a part claiming that it has been the whole, where their dishonesty, deceitfulness and lying involved revealing their sinful nature.

Everything is done with the knowledge of his wife. She has her role in disposal. This is a strong indictment on the part of his wife because, instead of admonishing her husband for going astray from the will of God, she agrees for the wrong doing being controlled by the carnal desires. They have accomplished their deceit by means of deliberate lying. They have acted as hypocrites. But the Bible is
candid in imposing punishment to the hypocrites. *Prostitutes may enter the kingdom of God but not hypocrites.* (Mathew 21:31)

When Ananias has lied to the men of God, within no time he paid the penalty of his lying. He has died instantly. Three hours later, Sapphira not knowing what has happened entered and confirmed her husband’s words, instantly she also dies. Thus both of them agreed to deceive the Holy Spirit God and thus reaped crop of their sowing. Together they have concocted a lie for their safety. The upshot is that they faced sudden death and destruction, which is the signal proof of the severe and swift judgment of God’s anger.

In this abominable act, Sapphira has her own share and her own role. Instead of reproving her husband while doing wrong things, she supported him. She has oneness with her husband but for wrong things. She has no real devotion and so conquered by hypocrisy. She has conspired with her husband to lie and faced the result. It is in her hands to direct and guide her husband not to follow the evil path and eventually invited the wrath of God. Thus she could not play her role successfully and so became a failure leading to the destruction of her family. About the role of all the women selected, in taking drastic decisions and influencing their husbands to choose the wrong paths at the cost of their lives and resulting in adverse effects, Lockyer remarks:

Sapphira was the instigator of the deceptive transaction, costing the life of Ananias and herself. As Eve tempted Adam into sin, and Jezebel caused Ahab to perpetrate his terrible crimes against ancient Israel, so Sapphira tempted her weak husband to sin to his ruin.

(P 155)
Their story is presented in many literary works. Bunyan’s Pilgrim (Pilgrim Progress) is shown a door in the side of a hill which is ‘a By-way to Hell, a way that Hypocrites go in at; namely, such as sell their birthright with Esau... and that lie and dissemble with Ananias and Sapphira his wife. Ananias appears as a puritan deacon in Ben Johnson’s The Alchemist, ‘the valet that cozen’d the apostles!’ Ruskin in ‘Sesame and Lilies’, shifts the focus onto a commitment to life (in Pater’s sense) and to community, observing that ‘most of us think not of what we are to do, but of what we are to get... the sin of Ananias... When Melville’s Billy Budd kills the scheming Claggart, Captain Vere calls it ‘the divine judgement of Ananias.’ The story from Acts has been dramatized by H.W.Githens (1929) and A.B.Knowles (1925).

Finally, the Chapter focuses on negative women in Proverbs who are regarded nefarious femme fatales. Filled with snippets of wisdom and observations about life, the book of Proverbs is a marvellous source of insight on a variety of topics that affect daily living. Compiled by King Solomon and others, this book provides timeless counsel encapsulated in easy-to-remember maxims. It gives an instruction to the young about the moral foundation of successful living (for attaining wisdom and discipline), and to get understanding and mental perception. This is shown, for example, by the lengthy discourses on the ways of the prostitute (chaps 5 and 7). From this perspective Proverbs contains ‘general principles of right living.’ It covers both virtuous and vicious women characteristics. The present study focuses on women who are evil, wicked, immoral and negative in attitude like an adulteress

Proverbs second chapter directs to the means of attaining to the knowledge of divine things, and shows the profit and advantage arising from there. Proverbs 2:16-19 speaks about the evil woman, whose character is given, whose vicious course of life, and the ways she leads persons into, are represented as very dangerous. *It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life. (P 1020)*

Following the ways of wisdom protects its adherents from ‘wicked men’ and their perverse and crooked ways, it also speaks of the ways of wisdom which provide protection against ‘the adulteress.’ She is a married woman who has forgotten her marriage vows and will work her seductions on anyone who is foolish enough to give her attention. Her appeal is subtle and alluring, and following her will only bring disaster. In a culture as permissive and pervasively sexual as the present world today, following Lady Folly rather than Lady Wisdom is a seductive and disastrous a course as it was in Biblical times. The way to her house stills leads ‘down to death’, the death of marriages, faithfulness and trust.

Proverbs 5:3-6 also warns against adultery and instructs to shun an adulterous woman by saying, *For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged*
sword.... She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not.... Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house. (P 1024)

The Adulterous woman is not what she is. Her actions and temptations lead a person to ruin and death. The destructive power of seduction brings spiritual and physical downfall.

The ways in which she walks, and in which she leads others, issue oftentimes in corporeal death; and always in eternal death.

(Gill Chapter 5 P 67)

Proverbs chapter six deals wayward wife and cautions immoral women. Keeping you from immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife. Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. (1026)

Though the Bible is an ancient text, it clearly expounds the plans and attitudes of bad women who is deceitful, cunning with sweetness in her tone. All lead to destruction of men and material. Proverbs chapter 7 also warns young men against lust of the flesh. It describes an evil woman:

The woman approached him, seductively dressed and sly of heart. She was the brash, rebellious type, never content to stay at home. She is often in the streets and markets, soliciting at every corner....He followed her at once, like an ox going to the slaughter. He was like a stag caught in a trap. (Smith P 22)
This passage clearly describes a prostitute who roams the street, looking for men to seduce. She dresses to allure them. She approaches them boldly. She invites them to her place and she answers his every objection and persuades him with smooth talk. In essence, she traps him. The man who follows her goes foolishly to his own self-destruction. She is referred as ‘strange woman’, ‘immoral woman’, ‘seductress’, ‘adulteress’, ‘loose woman’. The word ‘strange’ indicates a deficient quality in a relationship. It represents something that is lacking or incomplete in comparison to an ideal or a standard. This woman is not living up to the standard or ideal of a godly wife, and so the Bible brands her as strange. Hence Young men of all times are warned to be away from immoral ways.

Fleshly lusts are called youthful lusts, not to extenuate them as tricks of youth, and therefore excusable, but rather to aggravate them, as robbing God of the first and best of our time, and, by debauching the mind when it is tender, laying a foundation for a bad life ever after, and to intimate that young people ought in a special manner to fortify their resolutions against this sin. (Henry III P112)

These nefarious femme fatales in proverbs signifies a type of ‘real woman’ who is immoral that the intended male addresses are taught to avoid. They emerge as a distinct literary character that is dangerous and promiscuous.

Proverbs 11:22 describes a woman with beauty and no discretion. The text says, Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion. (P 1034). By contrasting a beautiful woman who lacks discretion with the most
unclean of animals, the Bible makes a clear point: A woman who is considered beautiful by society's standards is not considered beautiful in God's eyes because she does not live by the standards that He has established for women in general, and specifically for a wife. Pastor Kelly Sensenig

This ancient Bible verse is certainly up-to-date with our modern society and present-day culture. It applies to every woman in a specific way since every Christian woman is to possess discretion in the way she lives out her life in relationship to others. We live in the midst of a moral crisis in relationship to women's dress. The word "discretion" actually means to live in good taste and figuratively suggests a woman who has good moral judgment and behavior in relationship to her dress and presentation of herself in society. (P 85)

This simply means that she must revolve her life around modesty, purity, and proper conduct in life. Her discretion should apply to every area of her life, such as her dress, talk, and the overall way she presents herself within society. The seductive woman's dress and decorum (Proverbs 5, 7) is not acceptable to womanhood.

Proverbs 12:4 describes a disgraceful wife. *A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones* (1035). The text makes it clear a wife who pursues wisdom and godly character has the most important influence in her husband's life and a wife who doesn't has his downfall. A vicious woman in the marriage relationship becomes like a disease to her husband. Such a statement as this is implying that a wife, who is out of order within the marriage relationship, is comparable to a physical disease that inflicts her husband. She becomes like bone cancer to him.
Proverbs 19:13 describes *a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping*.

A woman’s angry, resentful, and quarreling spirit can create great problems for a man and the marriage relationship. It can drive a man to total unhappiness within the home life and cause him to seek pleasure and happiness outside the home and marriage relationship. It’s a real tragedy when the home turns into a place of turmoil and bitter rivalry. A woman can become blight to her husband. She can become a continual rainstorm of howling and torrential winds within the home setting and drive her husband to the heights of despair.

The ‘annoying’ woman has no deadly sins but she is irritating, nagging, bothersome and trouble. She is a fault-finder. All in all, not a nice character. (Sobrero P127)

Proverbs 14:1 says, *The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down* (1038). The woman who tears down her house has been called the demolition queen. It’s sad when some other people outside the family unit causes conflict and tears down the home life. However, it’s even sadder when a foolish woman “plucketh” or tears down her own home with “her hands” or by her own selfish, rebellious, and carnal practices (Proverbs 14:1). When a mother or wife neglects her responsibilities and roles as a woman within the family setting (Prov. 31), when she is not walking the spirit-filled life (Eph. 5:18), she becomes the sole responsibility for tearing down her own home. By her worldly actions, unspiritual living, laziness, lack of commitment and carefree attitude, the wife can become a destructive force within the ranks of the home life. Proverbs 14:1 calls her a fool.
A great deal of proverbs has women as their subject matter. A virtuous woman is a woman who has strength or excellence of character. She is a woman who excels in her spiritual life, and who does not become a nagging burden to her husband. She is a woman who respects her husband, and who does not chide him, derail him, and become argumentative, or offensive to him. She does not have a short fuse and quick temper. She does not have a sharp tongue and critical spirit about her. Rather, she possesses a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is a great price. The vicious and disgraceful woman brings shame and reproach upon her husband and household because of the way she conducts her life.

The study on these negative women shows that they are united by the fact that they appear on the scene to act powerfully in negative roles that affects Israel's destiny. They have had a tremendous impact during those times. They either stupefied the minds of people during their time, or befuddled them with their actions and reactions. In the Foreword of his Studies of Famous Women, H. T. Sell remarks that—

Of the worst Bible women "human nature does not change—save to mark the dangerous shoals, quick sands and rocks of life, where their lives are wrecked, and which still exist as death traps. (P 270).

Having made discussion on the nefarious femme fatales of the Bible in the light of English literature in reinterpretation feministic perspective, the research proceeds to study on Women relationships with special reference to Women to God, Women to Man and Women to Women in the next chapter.