CHAPTER - V

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Relationships are the currency of God’s Kingdom. The one who wins in life is not the one who has the most toys, but the one who has the best relationships. (Boa P59)

Life is an exhilarating experience, a thrilling adventure and a source of infinite joy, surrounded by relationships. John Donne, the poet said, ‘No man is an island.’ People need people, crave for relationships. Their success or failure in life depends upon their relationships. Hence, it is said,

From birth to death a person’s success or failure is measured by the kind relationship he/she has had with elements of this world: people. Nature and beyond it all, with the spirit behind this “relative world.” (Jakes P 43)

The Bible is all about relationships, early from its first book, Genesis to its last book, Revelation. It is a recurring dominant theme and major premise of the Bible. At its centre, the book offers wisdom for relationships and life, providing guidance on how one can relate to themselves, to others, and to God. From Genesis to Revelation, it is clear that the Holy Bible is, in the words of Bishop T.D. Jakes,

The Greatest Love story Ever Told. It is not a book about religion, but relationships—from the creation of a man and a woman and their intimate relationship with God in the Garden through the tragic break
in that relationship at the Fall and the eventual restoration of that relationship through Jesus Christ and His death on the cross of Calvary (P663)

At the outset, God, the protagonist of the Bible, creates human beings in His own image and develops a relationship with them and provides a scope for human relationships. It is through His blessing man and woman are bonded together to multiply and replenish on the face of the earth with their generations with relationships. It is about building relationships, advocate people to move from deadlock to dialogue.

The present chapter endeavors to study on Woman to God, Woman to man and Woman to Woman relationships. Relationships are an important part of woman’s life through which they find identity, definition and purpose.

Of all the relationships, woman to God relationship clings to considerable attention. One of the main foci of the Biblical writers is the relationship between the ancient Israelites and their national God, Jehovah, a number of biblical stories about or concerning women have a theological intent. According to Marble, Annie Russell, an American essayist,

As a result, perhaps, biblical scholars have shown great interest in reconstructing women’s religious lives, including women’s participation in public and private cultic activities and events.(P 3)

Life is so structured with relationship to God, which reflect inherent ecstasies of divine relationship with reality. It is a different perspective and more intriguing of
woman's relationship with God. The present chapter delves into some of the relationships of God with a variety of individuals. From the gamut of the Bible, the women characters with relationship to God selected for the present study are Eve, Hagar, Mary; women with relationship to man are David-Bathsheba, Jephtha - Jephtha's daughter, women with relationship to women are Hannah-Penninah, Naomi-Ruth.

In the beginning, God creates universe with flora and fauna, celestial to terrestrial, and succinctly lays the Garden of Eden, then sets a man, Adam, the first man on the face of the earth. God completes His six days of creation with the creation of Eve, the first woman, in His own image from the rib of Adam. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into deep sleep: and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of man, and he brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:21-22 P7).

The story of Eve, the crowning act of stupendous and astounding creation of God, occupies the primordial position in 'the eternal feminine' recorded in the Holy writ. Paul Heiligenberg, a preacher elucidates on the image of woman as:

God is spirit. But in his nature, in his character, He is both male and female in one, So a woman is just as much as the image of God as a man. (P 124)

Thus Eve is a reflection of God's image, knows her creator intimately, and has direct fellowship and relationship with God. God blesses them and says to them, "Be
fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

(Genesis 1:28 P.4) She has the dominion, power and authority over all of God's creation. God's purpose for creation is fulfilled with the equal participation of 'womankind'. As there is no struggle for equality, but only divine order, she enjoys stability and tranquility.

She is the only woman without a mother and a father. Fashioned out of man, she becomes man's counterpart, companion and complement to man. Woman, the image-bearer of God, the feminine of man develops an intimate relationship to God and man as part of their inmost being. She along with man holds superiority to use and enjoy the creation but also carries the responsibility to uphold and protect it. G. Bilezikian, Wheaton Professor of Theology and founding leader of Willow Creek Community Church views,

Both man and woman share equally the God-assigned task of creation rulership without any intimation of role distinctions. (P 26)

With Eve God brings human relationship, friendship and marriage into the world. The period of time, Adam and Eve enjoy personal relationship with God without sin is unspecified. But for a time, they have walked with God in perfection, uninhibited, freely communicating with Him, free of fear, no sin, no sickness, no evil and no distractions in the Garden of Eden a true paradise, a perfect microcosm of the human race. In a reference in Isaiah 51:3, foretelling the future of the city of God, Zion, it
says that God will make "...her deserts like Eden... Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing (P 1194).

In her original state, undefiled by any evil, she is the flawless archetype of feminine excellence, surrounded by personal relationship with God.

Being the first woman Eve had no inherited sin. Coming from the hand of God, Eve had an advantage no other woman has ever had—she was pure and holy, with the divine image unimpaired. (Lockyer P 57)

Eve violates the rules in the Garden of Eden in response to her God-given drive to acquire knowledge and create life. She eats the fruit of the forbidden tree and gives to Adam. With her transgression, she lost her divine relationship and is sent out of Eden from the divine favour of God into the perplexities of human existence. Eve's entry into the world is perfectly at peace with her God. But after transgression of God's word, she is a woman of anguish. In spite of her close relationship with God, she fails to consult Him when she confronts with Satan's suggestions. She acts impulsively, independent of her authority.

As the story progresses, she recognizes life is in God's control and hence exclaims at Cain's, (her first son) birth, With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man (Genesis 4:1, P.10). The sibling rivalry between her two sons escalates into murder. She loses both—one in death and the other in exile. Later she gives birth to a son, Seth and views him as a gift from God in consolation of an aching heart.
The character of Eve is portrayed in literature in both positive and negative connotations. In 'Paradise Lost', Milton exalts Eve of her beauty:

Naked beauty more adorned,
More lovely than Pandora, whom the Gods
Endowed with all their gifts, and O too like
In sad event (Paradise Lost 4.713-16)

In the later Middle Ages the theme of Eve's credulity is repeated in the temptation scenes of the mystery plays. But in 'Cursor Mundi' (14th Cen) she is depicted as,

Bitwene satan and his wif
Adam is sett in mychel strif
Bothe thei be on o party
To ouercom man with tricchery.(Trinity MS 725-28)

In Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Prologue, Eve is the first to appear in Jankyn's misogynist catalog, for 'that woman was the los of al mankynde' (Canterbury Tales, 3.715-20). Eve appears in Blake's late vision 'The Ghost of Abel' (1882) as well as in Byron's drama 'Cain' (1821), in which she utters a long and vehement curse against her Byronic firstborn. Visual depictions of Eve are discussed in Robert Browning's Pareleyings with Francis Furini, in which one of the issues is the interrelationship of art and lust (157, 180). Eve's relationship to her offspring is a main theme of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'A Drama of Exile.' The maternal and loving characteristics of Eve receive further emphasis in Christina Rossetti's 'Eve' (1865). In the 20th century, James Stephens, an Irish writer projects Eve in new
dimension in his poem 'Eve'. (The Hill of Vision 1912 P 100-103). In George Bernard Shaw’s 'Back to Methuselah', Eve appears at the beginning of history but reappears far on in time, in A. 31,920, and together with Adam and Cain has an opportunity to evaluate history, once (in Cain’s words) ‘the strong have slain one another; and the weak live forever.’ And although Adam can make ‘nothing of it,’ it is Eve who declares, ‘All’s well.’

Robert Frost’s sonnet ‘Never Again Would Birds’ Song Be the Same’, portrays Adam’s wonder at the voice of the newly created Eve. By contrast, Archibald MacLeish, in ‘Songs for Eve’ (1954) glorifies Eve’s sin as a kind of Byronic rebellion. The ‘Book of Eve’ (1973), a novel by Canadian writer Constance Beresford Howe, suggests too that Eve’s ‘fall’ is guiltless and liberating. Its protagonist, Eva a modern though aging woman, leaves her home and her husband to make a fresh start in life.

Hagar is another woman who has experienced direct relationship with God. God speaks directly to her, forging a relationship independent of God’s relationship with Adam. In this provocative rereading of the Hagar story, she is a woman with new power to a woman often left in the shadows. The book of Genesis records that Hagar encounters the Angel of the Lord twice: once in chapter 16 and once in chapter 21. The angel’s annunciation to Hagar is similar to announcements to Hannah, the mother of Samuel, to the mother of Samson, and to Mary the mother of Jesus; all have children with special destinies, and all are addressed personally, but not through their husbands. Hagar’s story is different focusing on Hagar’s vision of God in the desert.

The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that
is beside the road to Shur. And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered. Then the angel of the LORD told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” The angel added, “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.” (P 25)

She listens to God’s word and returns to her mistress. Hagar is a prophet and a mystic who names God El-Roi, which means ‘the God of my seeing’. God offers Hagar clear and direct guidance. She emerges in the story as a strong woman. She stands heroic for her relationship with God. Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him? (Genesis 16:13) Hagar’s relationship with God is personal, informal, and innate. Unlike Abraham, Hagar doesn’t require signs or reassurances from God, or ceremonies to mark her connection. Hagar’s experience with God qualifies her to be a God’s messenger. While Abraham is the first person in the Bible to believe in God (Gen. 15:6), Hagar is the first person who never doubted whatever God orders her to do. Another singular honor for Hagar: she is the only woman to receive a divine promise of seed, not through a man but as her own destiny.

(Kensky P 230)

She is a slave, a foreigner and no one is on her side. It is God/angel who intervened and conversed with her and showed compassion. In her book ‘Angels in Our Lives: Everything You’ve Always Wanted to Know about Angels and How They Affect Your Life, Marie Chapian comments that the way the encounter begins shows
how much God cares about Hagar, even though other people don't view her as important:

What a way to open a conversation in the middle of the desert! Hagar knew this was no human being talking to her, of course. His question shows us the compassion and decorum of the Lord. By asking her the question, 'Where are you going?' Hagar could vent the anguish she felt inside. Naturally, the Lord already knew where she was heading ... but the Lord, in His exceptional kindness, acknowledged that her feelings were important, that she wasn't just chattel. He listened to what she had to say (P 145).

At the time of distress, when Hagar runs away from Sarah's house and is in desert, she is consoled with a promise by the divine interference and asks her to go back to Sarah's house. She is given the promise of blessing as the mother of generations which she believes and obeys without any hesitance. It reinforces her character and relationship with God though she is a heathen woman in Abraham's household. In his book Angels, Billy Graham writes:

The angel spoke as an oracle of God, turning her mind away from the injury of the past with a promise of what she might expect if she placed her faith in God. (P 1)

Hagar's relationship to God is interesting and inspiring. Her response to name him as God who sees is innovative. In the story her character projects herself as a
slave but she is a woman of eminence as far as her relationship with God is considered. It is a personal relationship indeed. Hence it is said,

Hagar is found by God, seen by God and heard by God, even though she was a slave, not a master; an Egyptian, not a Hebrew; a woman, not a man. (Sanger P 70)

The other matriarchs Leah and Rachel have a different type of relationship with God. They show their closeness to God by naming their children- Reuben which means, 'God has seen my misery.' Simeon means 'one who hears.' Etc. God is present in every name. It is God who opens and closes their wombs, it is God with whom they talk.

In the New Testament the notable woman character for her relationship with God is Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. She is better known than any other female character in the Bible, and has been the best known woman in the world. She occupies highest place among women. Her quietness of spirit, meditative inwardness of disposition, admirable self-control, devout and gracious gift of sacred silence, and a mind saturated with the spirit and promises of the Old Testament. She is the first woman of the New Testament who is blessed and praised by the angel.

She is first mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. She is a Jew and her first glance in the Bible is at her first encounter with the divine angel about her miraculous conception. The text says, *In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went*
to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:26-33 P 1680)

She is a faithful woman. She obeys to the will of God to be the mother of Jesus Christ. Her life itself manifests her faithfulness to this covenant relationship wherein she remains faithful and humble, and treasures all these things in her heart. Gabriel's visit to Mary is unexpected and terrifying. But despite her fear and confusion, Mary listens with enough composure to understand the announcement. Then she asks a simple question, How will this be? Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin? (Matthew 1:34 P1680). Convinced by the words of the angel she trusts and accepts to be the mother of Jesus Christ without any hesitation: I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her.

Mary's relationship with God reveals God's call on her life. She desires to understand the mechanics of how something that seemed in opposition to natural law could be accomplished. Once the angel answers that question, she yields herself totally to God's plan. The New Testament accounts of her humility and obedience to the message of God have made her an exemplar for all ages of Christians. Herbert Lockyer says
Highly favoured of the Lord and having found favour with him surely gives her a pedestal all her own. Mary belongs to those grand majestic females inspired with the spirit of prophecy, who is capable of influencing, those who become rulers of men and also the destiny of nations. (Lockyer P 93)

Mary fulfills the prediction ascribed to her in the Magnificat. She says “My soul glorifies the Lord, And my spirit rejoices in God my saviour, For he has been mindful, Of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me, Blessed, For the Mighty One has done great things for me-Holy is his name. (Luke: 1:46-49 P1681).

Mary's special position within God's purpose of salvation as ‘God-bearer’ (Theotokos) is recognised in a number of ways by some Anglican Christians. (Braaten P 13)

Mary appears regularly in Old English literature. A poem ascribed to Cynewulf accords her an elaborate dialogue with Joseph concerning the surpriseful pregnancy, and hails her in an apostrophe, and hails her in an apostrophe as ‘glory of this middle world,’ ‘the purest woman to be found on earth,’ and ‘bride’ Of him that rules the celestial sphere’ (Christ II, 274-80). The ‘Cursor Mundi’ treats an extensive typology for Mary built directly upon Old Testament antetypes. The ‘Corpus Christi’ also deals with Mary’s character. Sir Walter Scott’s ‘Ave Maria! Maiden mild!’ In canto 3 of his Lady of the Lake, and William Wordsworth’s ‘The Virgin’ also projects her character. Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘Mary’s Girlhood:
This is the blessed Mary, pre-elect God's virgin.

Gone is a great while,

and she dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.

Sublimation of Mary in 19th century fiction would seem to account for female figures such as the Madonna figure in George Eliot's novel 'Romola' (cf. Dickens's Ada in 'Bleak House' and Amy in Little Dorrit). Hopkins 'Rosa Mystica' expresses at once both evident devotion and great restraint. Is Mary the rose, then/ Mary the tree? But the blossom, the blossom there, who can it be/ - Who can her rose be/ It could be but one; Christ Jesus, our Lord, her God, in the daylight divine, Shew me thy son, mother, mother of mine.

Mary outshines as a blessed mother in many literary works which elevates her to that position because of she being the mother of Christ. Women to God relationships bring into limelight the enfranchisement of the feminine souls on par with men in word and deed surrounded by divine presence.

The study next delves on woman to man relationships with special reference to Bathsheba and David, Jephtah and his daughter. The Bible presents varied women to man relationships as wife, mother, sister, daughter, mother-in-law, concubine and finally also a relationship with authority figure.

Bathsheba is one of the wives of King David and the most powerful woman during the period of monarchy. Bathsheba has six scenes and appears briefly at the end of the two more, but all of them have chiefly to do with men, either with David and her husband Uriah, or the prophet Nathan, or David's son Adonijah, or the son
born to her and David, Solomon. Her first scene is short and remarkably unadorned and sparse in its presentation. Her entry in the scene has romantic appeal. She is very beautiful and attractive. Her name 'Bathsheba' means 'the seventh daughter' or 'the daughter of an oath.'

David, the king of Israelites and Bathsheba's first encounter is that of a relationship between authoritative figure and his subject. David has power but she is powerless. Her first experience with him is a brutal and demeaning one. She is the wife of Uriah, a dedicated soldier. One day David sees from his top a beautiful young woman bathing. King David inquires after her and finds her to be Uriah's wife, a general in his army. And though he is normally a righteous man, with a harem already full of wives and concubines, the king succumbs to his overwhelming desire. He sends his minions to bring Bathsheba to the palace. *One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite? (II Sam 11:2 P 489)*

Her nakedness is exposed. Unknowingly, even before she is summoned to the king's presence, she is thus humiliated and put to shame. She is seen, desired and taken. She comes to David and surrenders herself. As a woman of victim she has no choice except to act as the king wishes.

There was no mention that Bathsheba resisted David. Bathsheba probably did consent, or did she? Whatever happened, there was a tussle between remaining a faithful wife or an obedient subject to the
great King of Israel who was known to have loved his country and his God supremely. Also at the time of the king's summon, it was most probable that the real intention was not made known to her until his advances were made and hard to refuse. Let's not forget that she was dealing with the champion who had subdued even powerful armies and succeeded in all his endeavors (Isleo P 20)

David thinks all is squared away, when Bathsheba sends word: 'I am with child.' Bathsheba's role is part of a larger narrative plan. In contrast to David, Bathsheba's thoughts and her character are in most circumstances mute, well cloaked in the sparse lines of the Hebrew text. Some biblical scholars describe Bathsheba as articulate and willful; while others say those accounts consist of unsubstantiated speculation. But one thing about Bathsheba is clear: It is she alone who sparks a sudden transition in David's life. The implications of their affair will dominate his remaining years. Through the life of David and into the life of her son King Solomon, Bathsheba plays many roles: object of lust, wife, mother, and influential queen.

Her relationship with David at initial stage is of illicit union. As David knows that Bathsheba is pregnant, he hurries her husband Uriah from the battle field to go home. Being a devoted soldier Uriah refused to go home and stays in Jerusalem. Again David plots against him and sends a letter with him to be placed in the forefront in the battle field thereby causing his death. After the accustomed period of mourning, Bathsheba becomes the wife of David, and their child of an adulterous union is born without disgrace but dies within a week of his birth.
She is an influential wife. Her relationship with David has exerted a great influence till the end. He trusts Bathsheba's political instincts in key decisions in the latter years of his reign. This is reflected in the deep relationship which they shared till old age, or the whole affair would have been over before its time. Clearly the relationship that has begun as an act of lust and the victimization of a woman by a man with power has become a loving and caring marriage.

She is the most powerful of all David's wives. She intervenes to have their son Solomon succeed his father as king. So Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room...bowed low and knelt before the king. What is it you want? the king asked. She said to him, My Lord you yourself swore to me your servant by the Lord your God: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.' (I Kings 1:15-17 P 521).

Her relationship with the authoritative figure like David extols her as the most honored queen mother of the Bible. When Bathsheba went to king Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king's mother and he sat down at his right hand. (I Kings 2:19 P 524)

She is not the first wife, nor the favorite wife, nor even the mother of his favorite son. But her relationship with David made her to come in to lime light in the history of Israelites and her name is included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

References are made about Bathsheba in English literature. In the 14th century 'Cursor Mundi,' Bathsheba is given considerable space as a sophisticated rhetorician whose advocacy, 'sli knot....on skil knyt (8411), ensures the ascendancy of her
Solomon to the throne. George Peele's 'The Love of king David and Fair Bathsheba' depicts her role as radiantly beautiful and chaste wife. Dryden's 'Absalom and Achitophel' mentions only her name, Duchess of Portsmouth, a mistress to the promiscuous Charles II: the king 'Is grown in Bathsheba's embraces old' (710). In Hardy's Far from the 'Madding Crowd', heroine, the enticing Bathsheba Everdene (in a manner suggestive of her biblical namesake) grows through suffering and misfortune into a wise woman. In 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles', Angel Clare reflects belatedly on his desertion of Tess because of her past relations with another man, remembering 'the wife of Uriah being made a queen,' Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter' also represents the story of David and Bathsheba (chapter 9 good widow gives her brooding to pastor Dimmesdale). In 20th century literature Stephen Philip's pseudo-Elizabethan drama 'The sin of David', Gladys Schmitt's 'David the king,' David Robert Perry Marquis's 'David and Bathsheba' presents her story in different interpretations.

Jephtha's daughter is another character selected for study for woman to man relationships. She is known for sacrifice with regard to her relationship with her father. Instead of a strange tale of human sacrifice, this is the story of the love between a God-fearing father and daughter for each other and together for their Lord. Her story is as brief as it is tragic. She is regarded 'female Isaac' of the Bible.

She is unnamed in the story. Her identity is as the daughter of Jephthah. Her character and story thrives mainly in her relationship with her father. Like many nameless women of the Bible, she has her own impact in the history of Israel as daughter of commendable character.
On nameless women's role in the Bible George Eliot remarks that,

The happiest women, like the happiest nations, have no history.” But many of the happy-and unhappy-unknown Bible women left their impact upon history. They played their part in important events, but their signatures are not attached to their service. Surely, it was not the oversight of Bible writers to omit the names of those in female biography whose deeds are published. What many of them did is history, but history without a title page. (Lockyer P 170)

Jephthah, a mighty warrior, in one of his fights makes a vow to his God “If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord’s, and I will sacrifice it as burnt offering.” (Judges 11: 30-31 P 393). Jephthah wins a great victory and returns home with pomp and glory. His daughter comes out to celebrate her father’s victory by dancing to the sound of tambourines. She is his only child whom he dearly loved. Horrified by this sight, Jephthah grieves for his only daughter and the vow he has made.

She is a model daughter, prepared to give herself up for the sake of her father. She is willing to die for her father’s integrity. She is a responsible daughter, courageous and dedicated woman. She responds with dignity and restrains anger. She accepts her fate, but on her own terms: My father, she replied “you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the ammonites. But grant me one request,” she said. “Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.”
Herbert Lockyer elucidates her response to her father about the vow as,

Her answer was most heroic. There were no resentful or rebellious tones in it. She shed no tears, nor shook with despair after her father with a crushed spoke of his vow. There was the quiet acceptance of the tragic fact that she was to be the burnt offering her father had promised. (Lockyer P 183)

Regretting his vow but unable to go back on it, he allowed her, upon her request, two months to bewail her lot, and then he sacrificed her. Her story is a terrible story of human sacrifice. Flavius Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, writes that

he sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering: offering such an oblation as was neither conformable to the law, nor acceptable to God; not weighing with himself what opinion the hearers would have of such a practice. (Josephus Pp 117-18)

This story stands in stark contrast to the Binding of Isaac in Genesis, where an angel of God directly intervenes and stops the sacrifice. Isaac is completely unaware of his own sacrifice by his father. But Jephthah’s daughter knows the situation and willingly comes forward to keep her father’s vow. She is a woman and daughter, yet exhibited dedication, devotion towards her father and maintained family standards as a dutiful son or even excelled more than a son. It is true in the words of Tennyson, the 19th century poet, on Jephthah’s daughter’s sacrifice and perfect love,
It comforts me in this one thought to dwell,
That I subdued me to my father's will;
Because the kiss he gave me, ere I fell,
Sweetness the spirit still. (Dream of Fair Women)

This tale of Jephthah's rash vow, regret, grief, and remorse and of his daughter's acceptance of her fate has inspired a variety of artistic treatments, including more than a hundred musical interpretations, and numerous paintings and etchings (including those by Lucas van Leyden, William Blake, Edgar Degas, Gustave Dore, J.E.Millias, and Benjamin West), and sculptures ranging from 15th century Florentine Lorenzo Ghiberti to 20th century Nahum Aronson and Erinco Gilcenstein.

Chaucer refers to the story of Jephthah's daughter in 'The Physician's Tale' (Canterbury Tales, 6.238-44), and his contemporary John Gower, in the 'Confessio Amantis' (4.505-1595), elaborates the narrative in great detail. Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' (2.2.410-25) refers in the scene between Hamlet and Polonius on paternal tenderness,

Hamlet: O Jephthah, judge of Israel what a treasure hadst thou!
Polonius: What a treasure had he, my Lord?
Hamlet: one fair daughter and no more,
The which he loved passing well.

Scottish humanist George Buchanan's Latin drama 'Jephthes' (1540) translated six times into English and exerted great influence throughout Europe.
English humanist John Christopherson composes drama on this both in Greek and Latin and explains the theme is similar to the Euripidean play: Jephthah, like Agamemnon, father of Iphigenia, is caught in a conflict between his duty to God and his fatherly love. An English Jephthah drama is written by Thomas Dekker and Anthony Munday in 1602. Francis Quarles On Jeptha's Vow, in his Divine Fancies (2.4), Robert Herrick's The Dirge of Jephthah's Daughter (1647) recounts the annual lament of the young women of Israel over the plight of Jephthah's daughter.

Byron's 'Jephthah' poem, James Campbell, 'Jeptha's Rash Vow' (1826), and Hartley Coleridge, 'On a picture of Jephthah and his daughter' (1851) Tennyson's Jephthah's daughter in his long poem 'A Dream of Fair Women' and in Aylmer's Field and The Flight Among American poets', deal with her character.

The chapter finally proceeds to study on Woman to Woman relationships with special reference to Sarah and Hagar, Ruth and Naomi, and Hannah and Penninah. Of all the relationships of the world, woman to woman relationships are fascinating as they focus on deep bonds of love and hatred. The Bible presents multitudinous woman to woman relationships which expose loving bond and loyalty, bonds of servitude, dueling motherhood, jealous rivalry and so on.

The story of Sarah and Hagar is surrounded by a single man. Their relationship is identified as a sad story because it concerns itself with mistress and maid with the master. Sarah has the sun on her; and in contrast Hagar's shadows fate shows darker. Sarah is married, rich and free, but old and barren. Hagar is single, poor, but young and fertile. They are both feminine women, and both have faults; out of their femininity and their characters the details of the story take their shape.
Hagar's story is a story of exploitation and persecution of an Egyptian slave woman at the hands of her Hebrew mistress. Ethnic differences separate Hagar and Sarah, between an African woman and a Hebrew woman, a woman of colour and a white woman, a Third world woman and a First world woman.

They have damaged and broken relationship. Their disparities are centered in their contrasting economic positions. It has led to thwarted coalitions and frustrated friendship between these women. However, both women are neither angels nor villains, but women who are hurting albeit in very different ways. They are both losers, both victims of the patriarchal environment in which they live.

The study then focuses on Ruth and Naomi’s relationship. Their story demonstrates an exciting, wonderful narrative with special meaning to woman to woman relationships. It transforms the life of one woman from hostility to abundant and highlights the relationship between older woman and younger woman, a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. Ruth's story begins with loss and disappointment in relationships and then takes a radical turn with a renewed commitment to relationships. It talks about female companionship. Their story appears in the book of Ruth. Its title shows preference for female experience. Hence

the book of Ruth is the women’s book of the Hebrew Bible. (Meyers P 234)

Naomi, an Israelite and her family are in Moab. As there is a famine at Bethlehem they migrated to Moab. Ruth, a Moabite, marries Mahlon, one of Naomi’s sons. The first verse of the book of Ruth introduces a woman, together with three men. The wife Naomi, is first characterized as Elimelach’s wife, a common definition
of women's identity in patriarchal society. After about ten years, Mahlon dies, as does his brother, Chilion. Naomi then decides to return to Judah. Ruth and Orpah (other daughter-in-law) accompany Naomi as she sets out. Naomi tells them to return, each to her mother's house and says, *May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.* (Ruth 1:8-9 P 413)

Naomi dissuades to follow her as she is an “embittered and depressed old woman who feels her life has neither purpose nor value because she is no longer the mother of sons.” (Aviva P 75)

Orpah cries and kisses her mother-in-law but Ruth clings to Naomi. Naomi tells her to return as Orpah has done. But Ruth replied, *Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.* (Ruth1:16-17 P 413)

Ruth's clinging to Naomi makes clear that rivalry is not necessarily a predominant feature in relations between women, even in types of relationships which are particularly prone to conflict. (Pardes P 102)

Thus she pledges herself to care for her mother-in-law as long as she lives, and returns with her. She shows willingness to leave her own life context and to integrate herself into foreign situations. Ruth and Naomi have lost everything, except their care
for each other. They are unlikely friends: one young and strong, the other past middle age. The loving bond which thrived in suffering between them is the root of the story.

The story center on the life journey of two women in desperate straits in a male dominated society and Naomi and Ruth's ingenuity and assertiveness propels the story line. It includes both sides of feminity, sexuality and motherhood. Together, both establish one whole female personality. They are different from each other, they both emerge from the story as unique individuals. Naomi characterizes herself with emptiness, renaming herself Mara which means bitterness; Ruth shows characteristics of fullness. She readily accompanies her mother-in-law to a foreign land and together they live as a family unit. She becomes the bread-winner in the family. It is the time of the barley harvest, and in order to support her mother-in-law and herself, Ruth goes to the fields to glean. She also carries a spirit of determination and commitment to Naomi strong enough to face the challenges of living as an ethnic minority.

On getting permission from her mother-in-law Ruth gathers leftover stalks in the harvest fields of Boaz, a relative of Naomi. Ruth takes her gleanings to Naomi and recounts to her the day's events. Her good character is easing her into her new surroundings. Naomi's concern for Ruth extends beyond her physical needs of food and safety to Ruth's deeper need for a husband and, hopefully, a son. Bush views,

Naomi's concern appears to have been primarily for Ruth's welfare in marriage because Ruth has proved to be such a blessing to her. (Bush P 147)

Upon Naomi's advice Ruth uncovers the feet of Boaz at night in his fields and lie down there at threshing floor. She asks him to be her redeemer. This is a custom
still practiced in some Middle-Eastern Cultures. Ruth carries out her mother-in-law’s instructions exactly, further demonstrating her loyal love to Naomi and encourages Boaz to pursue the possibility of marriage. Her decision to conform to the customs of the day, which makes her a servant of the dead husband’s family, wins her lasting renown. Boaz awakens and finds Ruth at his feet. She expresses her desire for him to become her kinsmen-redeemer and hence to cover her with the corner of his garment. It is a symbolic way of requesting Boaz’s protection as her husband.

Boaz marries Ruth and she bears a son. The town elders bless the union of Boaz and Ruth and say For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth. (Ruth 4: 15 P 417) Naomi feels extremely happy and takes care of the little boy.

Ruth presents the noble qualities worthy of a paradigm of an ideal daughter-in-law. She is devoted and dedicated woman. Her piety, her spirit of self-sacrifice, her moral integrity places her as a great woman worthy of exemplary model.

The piety and fidelity of Ruth are early exhibited in the course of the narrative, in that she refused to abandon her mother-in-law, although thrice exhorted to do so by Naomi herself, on account of her own great age, and the better prospects for Ruth in her own country. (Lockyer P 146)

She is praised for her extraordinary piety and spotless reputation as a model widow. She is devoted to her family, delighted in her work, delighted in her labor, dedicated to Godly speech, dependent on God, dressed with care, discreet with men, delivered blessings. Several beautiful character traits are evident in the personality of
Ruth- Love, commitment, steadfastness, humility to glean, industrious, respect for elders and culture, temperance, accountable, obedient, submissive, concerned about the appearance of evil and hence she left home before the daylight, patient above all an honorable daughter-in-law.

Her character reveals her to be a woman capable of rare friendship. With her devotion to family, and dependence on God she could deliver blessings to herself and to her family. Her faithfulness and integrity lifted her from abject poverty to plenty and prosperity. Even then she showed her piety and obedience to her husband. A great theologian H. V. Morton praisesthat her outstanding quality is

a beauty of heart, a generosity of soul, a firm sense of duty, and a meekness which often goes hand in hand with a gift of decision.

(Morton P 78)

Naomi, her mother-in-law in a sense surrounds her. And guides the destiny of Ruth and thus facilitates the solution of the story's central problem, and in her turn, she personifies the subject of the story, Elimelech's family. The relation between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is presented. Naomi and Ruth's relationship is different. She is prospective daughter-in-law. She accepts the way of Naomi and goes with her. She dwells with her and become settled and stable. She aligns herself with her mother-in-law in terms of her people, precepts, position and problems. Ruth, the Moabitess, exercises faith in her mother-in-law but Naomi, the Israelite lives by sight. The biblical writer highlighted Naomi and Ruth's vulnerability by featuring women prominently.
Throughout the story the narrator has deliberately cast the characters as stellar models of hesed, of deep and sincere devotion to God and one another, expressed in self sacrificial acts of kindness toward one another. (Block P 736)

The final parallel to draw out of the story of Ruth and Naomi and relate it to the present situation as women today is women's relationship with each other. Both come from different understandings of what it means to be a woman. Naomi sees herself within fixed boundaries; she cannot conceptualize having any worth without association with male authority. But, really standing right beside her showing great loyalty is her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

Naomi has a woman in her family who is pushing the boundaries of what a woman can and cannot do and she is doing it successfully. Naomi at first has not recognized how gifted she is to have Ruth's loyalty; her need to find identity through male presence makes her unable to recognize this blessing. It is not until later on in the story when Ruth associates with Boaz that Naomi perks up. Again Naomi becomes an active player in the story as she helps Ruth scheme to appeal to Boaz. This story of the deep bond between two women is unique in the Old Testament. She stands as a brilliant, exceptional role model for the present day women where in healthy equation and harmony with the mother-in - law, a rarity. In the words of Thelma Johnson, a famous theologian, who succinctly emphasizes the need to take lessons from the characters like Ruth as:
In an age like ours with its ever growing number of strained relationships, broken homes and loveless lives, it is most refreshing to go back to the charming picture of loyalty and love found in the story of Ruth....No bright visions of hope or better prospects allured her to forsake everything she had held dear, except to be the sole companion to an aged, desolate and lonely woman. (P 43)

Ruth, the woman of noble quality is a subject of literary appreciation which finds in many works. In his Ode to a Nightingale, keats immortalizes the feelings of alien Ruth in the fields of Bethlehem.

‘Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Thro’ the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.’

Ruth, the exile prompts the most evocative of all the allusions to the story. Keats elaborates his theme of the bird as a symbol of the immortality of nature by asserting that the song which he is listening is seen in the sadness of Ruth in the fields. In Milton’s Sonnet IX ‘Lady in the prime of Earliest Youth,’ Ruth appears with Mary, sister of Martha, as a norm of true spiritual virtue. Thomas Hood in his poem Ruth says,

She stood breast-high amid the corn,
Clasped by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won. On her cheek an autumn flush,
Deeply ripened—such a bish,
In the midst of Brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.

In lines which anticipate the image of Keats, St. Jerome writes to a female Christian convert: ‘My soul rejoices, yet the very greatness of my joy makes me feel sad like Ruth, when I try to speak I burst into tears’. Dante’s Ruth is a model of modest faith, seated on a petal of the white rose with two other mothers of Israel, Sarah and Rebecca. Blake in Jerusalem follows Dante listing Ruth with Bathsheba and other as the ‘Material line’ culminating in Mary. Another iconic representation frequent in the 19th century shows Ruth gleaning, as in The Solitary Reaper. Byron compares himself and his readers searching after truth to Ruth and Boaz gathering grain. Whittier remembers Ruth at the feet of Boaz when he says regarding a mountain lake under the moon that is ‘Sleeps dreaming of the mountains, fair as Ruth/ of Boaz.’ If not for her strong character, Ruth would not have been so frequently referred in Literature.

The chapter further proceeds to delve the relationship between Hannah and Penninah. Their story is recorded in I Samuel of the Bible, which accounts the life in the days of Judges and narrates the transition of Israel from theocracy to monarchy. The introduction of Elkanah’s wives, Peninnah and Hannah, provides the tension and focal point for the story by contrasting the issue of childbearing versus childlessness: Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none(I Sam 1:2 P421) These juxtaposed realities point to the idea of rivalry and echo the contention between other pairs of biblical women such as Leah and Rachel and, to a lesser extent, Sarah and Hagar.
Hannah, with her husband Elkanah, a wealthy Levite, lived in the hill country of Ephraim, during the time when Israel lapsed to follow the high spiritual and moral standards set up by God through Moses, the Israelite leader. In those hard times she exhibited her patience and holiness diligently by following God devoutly. Her life is said to be "a harp-note of the immortal triumph of patience". (Lockyer P 65)

But Hannah had no children. Elkanah married other woman Peninnah, because in those days polygamy is an accepted social custom to continue a man's family line.

Hannah's marriage to Elkanah is described against the brutal background of women being taken against their will. For Elkanah the marriage to two women is most likely a sign of great prestige, but for the two women, it is a source of great bitterness. . . . Whatever the reasons for the taking and possessing of two women, Hannah and Peninnah are pitted against one another in a desperate effort to claim their self-worth. (Fewell and David M. Gunn136)

The Bible paints the images of Hannah and Peninnah in high contrast. Hannah is sad and disheartened at not having a child, while Peninnah is prideful and provocative in her criticism of Hannah. Peninnah, who has children, taunts and reproaches Hannah for her barrenness. Their husband endeavored to keep the peace at home between them, while remaining spiritually devoted to God.
In this account, we will see an intense, competitive relationship between the two wives, Peninnah (who had children) and Hannah, who did not. (Guzik P 465)

Every year Elkanah takes his family to Shiloh, the religious centre of the nation, the place where Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle symbolizing the presence of God rested, to worship the Lord Almighty and offer sacrifices. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord has closed her womb. (1 Samuel 1:5 P 421).

Penninah’s provocation becomes intensified because of Elkanah’s love and tenderness towards Hannah whose heart often smarted from Penninah’s jealous thrusts. For a woman to be childless in the Bible is to be ‘barren’ of life - to lack identity. Hannah is cruelly taunted by her husband’s more fecund wife Penninah.

It’s likely that the problems in their relationship were heightened at this time of annual sacrifice, perhaps because they were together more than usual or because it was when Elkanah showed his affection more to Hannah. (Watton I will never be the same again Web. 4 Nov 2009.)

The source of rivalry between Hannah and Peninnah stemmed from the actions of Elkanah. He has given Peninnah and her children the necessary portions, but the barren Hannah received a ‘double portion’. It is not surprising that such blatant favoritism arouses the jealousy of Peninnah. Elkanah imperceptively magnified Hannah’s suffering even as he sought to console her. Hannah lacks children, yet she receives Elkanah’s generosity and affections. On the other hand,
Peninnah is fertile, but receives nothing. Thus, Hannah's infertility and Elkanah's favoritism evoked Peninnah's persistent provocation. This unrelenting torment continued 'year after year.' Peninnah's implied accusation is that Hannah lacked value due to her barrenness. Recoiling from her own sense of 'valuelessness', Peninnah projects the same to her rival: they both lack value and thus they cancel out one another. There exists enmity or adversary between Hannah and Penninah. Her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat (I Sam 1:7 P 421). She is in a state of frustration and hence laments of her childlessness.

Childlessness was looked upon as a curse and could frustrate a woman because of her consciousness of impotence, worthlessness and insincere. (Van Zyl 155)

The story is narrated from Hannah's point of view and Penninah's role and dialogue is very scant. The conflict between the two women is aptly described by Robert alter as 'so eminently the stuff of dialogue'. (Treevor P 121)

In one of her visits, Hannah goes into the sanctuary to pour out her anguish in the presence of God. She finds refuge in prayer. The bitterness of barren life besieges her. She hasn't complained against Penninah and moreover she poured her anguished heart to God and makes a vow.

"Hannah, though, manifested the poise of self-control, became miserable, but without retaliating she meekly took everything to god in prayer" (Thelma P 48) and believed with all her heart that it was only in the hands of God to bless her with children.
In the process of time, God remembers her and blesses her with a son. Hannah, as promised brought her son to Shiloh to lend him to God to serve Him all the days of his life. She articulates her gratitude to God for His goodness in hearing her prayer and answering. Hannah's sacrifice is the greatest sacrifice ever made by any mother. Her son, Samuel becomes the greatest prophet of Israel who anoints kings of Israel.

These are relationships that endure, encompass the ups and downs of everyday living. In all these relationships women occupy centre stage. They are all short narratives and the stories are very fragmentary, presenting only episodes from their lives. The study on these relationships probe reinterpretation feminism within the biblical text in order to uncover both the relationships and the women involved, as well as to trace their identity concerning these relationships.

Having examined and reinterpreted women relationships, a glance of the reality of a woman's experience under different circumstances in patriarchal scenario, the research sheds light to study on women imagery in the subsequent chapter.