CHAPTER - III

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Having written in the male dominated, male identified and male centered culture, the Bible, at the outset presents patriarchal society in general and family in particular. At times the patriarchy overrules and women excel in different roles from home makers to civil judge, prophets to diligent workers, leaders to wise partners in family setting. Hence the Bible clearly elucidates the society in which men and women have different, but complementary roles and responsibilities, as manifested in marriage, family life, religious leadership, and society. Many women emerge from the shadow of patriarchal society and come into forefront capable of doing different careers besides men.

Of all the ancient epics which speak of origins, the Bible presents the creation of woman a good epitome. The very purpose of creation of Eve, the first woman is to be the suitable companion to Adam, the first man as human existence is a partnership of man and woman. Their very careers begin by being associated with each other. The creation of Adam lacks accomplishment but succeeds with the creation of Eve. ‘The world was sad, the garden was a wild, And man the hermit sighed till woman smiled’. (Lockyer P 56)

So begins the story of human race, created by God in His image and humanity is includes both male and female.
So God created man in His own image.

In the image of God he created him;

Male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27 P 4)

As such neither is subordinate to the other, there is no hierarchy, no roles, and no power structure of any kind. They are equally created to procreate and subdue the earth.

In the beginning, God never intended for either gender to dominate or manipulate the other. He intended them to work along side of each other and to help each other. The job was too big for Adam to carry out single-handedly. (Giske, P 89)

Within the context of their equality, God assigns men and women different roles. The role of woman is to be a helper suitable for man. This doesn’t minimize a woman’s role, but it does define it. Adam and Eve are given the command, to take dominion, twice (Gen 1:26 & 28). Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. (P 4)

According to Greenwood human beings are uniquely fitted to rule creation as God’s image bearers and as his representatives. There is no question of domination between them

Notice, that “mankind,” neither man nor woman, appears on this list. They had no dominion over each other. This platform, not dominating each other, was the blueprint of God outlined in the early Hebrew text.
Are you trying to dominate each other? Then may be its time for a revolution. (Greenwood P 11).

In the beginning, the Bible asserts, the creation of woman a specific purpose to carry on as career woman. Hence her role is designated as 'suitable help' to man. The word 'help' or 'helper' is an adequate translation to the Hebrew phrase 'ezer cenegelo'. But English has different nuances than the Hebrew does. In English 'helper' implies someone who is learning or under a person in authority. In the Hebrew 'help' comes from one who has the power to give help- it refers to someone in a superior position. The word for 'suitable' (kenegdo) means 'equal and corresponding to'. Eve has not just to keep the man company and bear his children, but to be an equal partner in ruling and having dominion over the earth. Hence they have equality, mutuality, unity, solidarity and intimacy. Shawna R.B. Atterbery in an article Does it really mean helpmate quotes,

Woman was created to be a power equal to man; autonomous being that God created so that the man would have someone like him and equal to him to share his life with. (P 6)

References are made in English literature about the role of woman as helpmeet. In Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Prologue,' Chaucer's self-serving merchant, however, blithely recalls Eve's role as a 'helpmeet': 'That wyf is mannes helpe and his confort, / His paradys terrestre, and his disport.' (4.1331-32). In the Renaissance, Spenser's Una who represents the true church and within the narrative is literally the daughter of Eve, becomes unequivocally the helpmeet of the questioning Redcrosse Knight (Faerie Queene, 1.1.5; 1.11.1; 1.12.16-41)
Later in the story, Eve succumbs to the guiles of serpent and eats the fruit of
the forbidden tree. She offers Adam the fruit, he too eats. It is only then their eyes are
opened, and they both knew they are naked, and they both feel ashamed. The text
never assigns more blame to the woman; both the man and woman sin, and the
consequences affect them after they both have eaten. Their disobedience results in
enmity between the woman and the serpent; the ground will now be cursed and
require great work and toil to bring forth the food they will need. The relationship
between the man and the woman will no longer be one of equals. Your desire shall be
for your husband, and he shall rule over you. (Genesis 3:16 P 10). This is the first
mention in the text of a hierarchal social pattern. It is here that the subordination of
the woman under the man begins. It is not by divine design or judgment. The
subordination of woman is a consequence of disobedience, and the result of the fall.

The Bible rightly exalts women against cultures that distort, degrade, and
debase them. Women in pagan societies during biblical times are often treated with
little more dignity than animals. Some of the best-known Greek philosophers, the
brightest minds of their era consider that women are inferior creatures by nature. In
the realm of Roman Empire (perhaps the very pinnacle of pre-Christian civilization)
women are usually regarded as mere chattel--personal possessions of their husbands
or fathers, with hardly any better standing than household slaves. That is vastly
different from the Hebrew (and biblical) concepts of marriage as a joint inheritance,
and parenthood as a partnership where both father and mother are to be revered and
obeyed by the children. Each of you must respect his mother and father. (Leviticus
19:3 P 184) Contrast all of that, ancient and contemporary, with the Bible. It exalts
women and often seems to go out of the way to pay homage to them, to ennoble their roles in society and family, to acknowledge the importance of their influence, and to exalt the virtues of women who are particularly godly examples.

Women play prominent roles in many key biblical narratives. Wives are seen as venerated partners and cherished companions to their husbands, not merely slaves or pieces of household furniture (Genesis 2:20-24; Proverbs 19:14; Ecclesiastes 9:9). The Bible presents divinely ordained role distinctions between men and women, many of which are perfectly evident from the circumstances of creation alone. According to Elizabeth Stanton, The Woman’s Bible,

From the inauguration of the movement for woman’s emancipation the Bible has been used to hold her in the ‘divinely ordained sphere’, prescribed in the Old and New Testaments. (Witte P1)

The present chapter focuses on Miriam, Deborah, Jael, Huldah, Sheba, Vashti, Esther, Phoebe, as women of different careers. They are women from every social status, taken together, the stories cover all of human experience. The Bible never discounts the female intellect, downplays the talents and abilities of women, or discourages the right use of women's gifts. The Bible talks about the remarkable careers of women. The most significant women in it are influential because of their careers and character, which helped them to excel, empower and enrich themselves with decorum and dignity. Their true feminine excellence is always exemplified in their social standing as career women. Far from denigrating women, the Bible promotes feminine freedom, self-esteem, and honor.
Women are not excluded from the prophetic office in the Old Testament, and are honored with the right of prophetic utterance in the New Testament. It is also noteworthy that women like Miriam (Ex 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4) and Huldah (2 Ki 22:14) are not credited with the seer's insight into the future, but are called 'prophetesses' because of the poetical inspiration of their speech. Even during times when women held low standing in the eyes of men, the Bible tells stories of women in God-given positions of power and influence. A vignette or cameo description of these better known personalities serve to remind the world of how the Bible portrays them.

The chapter delves on Miriam, the first of the intellectual women of the Hebrew race. She is the eldest daughter of Amram and Jochebed, and the sister of Aaron and Moses, Israel's greatest leaders. Her name 'Miriam' means 'bitterness' or 'rebellion.' She experiences both bitterness and rebellion in her character as her name connotes. She is a musician, a prophetess, capable leader, devoted daughter, faithful sister and a poet. She is the sister of Aaron, the first high priest and Moses, the legislator of laws. She is a faithful sister and hence all her life Miriam has shared the confidence of her brothers. They have given her a voice in the emancipation of the nation.

As a young girl Miriam shows characteristics of leadership. Her tact, self-control and obedience to her mother save her Younger brother Mose's life who in future becomes Israelites. In Egypt, in the days of Pharaoh's regime, the people of Israel multiplied enormously. They are the descendants of Jacob, the third patriarch. As famine occurs in their native land they come to Egypt and settles there. In an effort to control that Jewish slave population, Pharaoh has given decree that all Jewish baby
boys are to be killed. Sensing that their child is special, Moses parents are determined to protect him from death, regardless of King’s orders. In an attempt to ensure that her child is delivered into the hands of someone who will care for him, Jochebed, Moses’ mother makes a basket boat out of papyrus and allows it to float along the riverbank among the reeds. Miriam stands at a distance to see what would happen to him. With cautious optimism and hope, Miriam crouches on the bank of the Nile River, watching intently as her baby brother Moses, lying in a waterproofed basket, and floats among the reeds at river’s edge. She is anxious, and with good reason tries her best to keep an eye on him. Pharaoh’s daughter comes to the river for bathing, finds the boy and feels compassion for him. Miriam, seizing the opportunity, bravely approaches Pharaoh’s daughter and suggests bringing someone that could nurse the baby. The nursemaid she has in mind is her mother. Miriam’s initiative, forthright courage, faith and ability to think have paved the way for Moses to spend his formative years with his biological mother.

“Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?” (Exodus 2:7, P 91). As a devoted daughter, she obediently listens to her mother and plays a pivotal role as a ‘spy’, caretaker and daring soldier in saving Moses from the decree of Pharaoh. For a right cause she exhibits tactics and scheming.

She is the first woman in the Bible called as prophetess and also the first poetess in the Bible. She leads the women of Israel in exuberant worship after their deliverance from Egypt. Every verse, which describes women going out to sing and dance victory, reflects back to her. The song of Miriam and Moses is referred to as
one of the oldest and most splendid natural anthems in the world. 'Then Miriam, the
prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed
her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them,

sing to the Lord,

for he is highly exalted.

The horse and its rider

He has hurled into the sea. (Exodus 15:20-21, P.111).

This fragment of the Song of Miriam is one of the oldest poetic couplets in the
Old Testament. It is an example of a literary genre devoted to celebrating military
victories with triumphal poems. Lockyer Views,

Both her words and work were full of the inspiration of God and she is
brought as a leader and pattern to the Women of Israel. (P112).

Songs of praise led by Miriam strengthened the hearts of the multitude. She is
efficient and effective worship leader with great commendable character and deeds
early from childhood days.

In the Scriptures, we find Miriam leading all the women in praises to
the Almighty. She was a godly woman and is considered the first
prophetess. No doubt her earlier acts of faith such as facing the
daughter of Pharaoh bravely with a suggestion to provide a nurse for
the little baby in the basket gained her respect at an early age.

(Jes P 93)
Miriam has begun the tradition of celebrating God’s Victories through liturgical dance and chorus song with a power of celebration which later used in shrine worship during the wilderness and wandering.

It was wise in Miriam to begin with that sea and over its prostrate waves to sound her first tumbrel. (Lockyer P 113).

She is a capable leader and talented with exceptional abilities. As commanding figure, she has an equal share with Moses and Aaron after the crossing of the Red Sea and also in exalting worship.

This was Miriam’s great hour. She was the new Israel’s most renowned woman and her people held her in high regard. She had filled an important role in the founding of the Hebrew Common Wealth. (Deen P 59).

Micah, the prophet of the Old Testament writes, I brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery, I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. (Micah 6:4 P 1523). Micah speaks of the leadership role she shared with her brothers in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. Numbers 12:1,2,6 states that God Spoke to Miriam in visions and dreams. It is a time, when leadership roles are reserved for men. Her ability to inspire her vision and mission and galvanize others into action is unparalleled and paved the way for her to project herself as an efficient leader.

When her brother Moses, marries a foreign woman, she outbursts against him and holds a secret conference with her brother Aaron and is struck with punishment, leprosy by God. When the cloud lifted from above the rent there stood Miriam-leprous, like snow (Numbers 12:10 P 228).
Later she overcomes her jealousy against her brother and cures of her illness after seven days. Miriam has moved on to travel with Moses and Aaron and the Israelites for almost 40 years in the desert. She dies near the end of Israel's wanderings, at Kadesh (Numbers 20:1). Sheila Graham, in her article, Miriam: The first lady of Exodus states that

Like her brothers, Miriam did not enter the Promised Land, and was buried in the wilderness. Thus end the life of this multitalented woman of courage, faith and firm resolve, who, alongside Moses and Aaron, rejoiced in the triumphs and suffered the trials and dangers of God's calling in the wilderness of Sinai.

Miriam's responsibilities and resourcefulness are strongly built on her firm attitude. Many splendid traits of character are revealed in the story of Miriam. Miriam's life had been one of service and leadership. She expressed all the robust qualities that are best: courage and ingenuity in a dangerous situation, loyalty to her family, a love of music, story-telling and dance, and intellectual enquiry into questions about authority and social responsibility. She remains a model for women and men today. (Fletcher 45)

Miriam's career projects her, what it is to experience hope and despair, terror and deliverance, slavery & freedom, unimportance & prominence. At the outset Miriam is portrayed in her role as protective sister & stood between life & death.
Miriam is single all her days. George Matheson says,

there is neither marriage nor courtship. Her interests are not matrimonial! They are national. Her mission is not domestic, it is patriotic..... Miriam the unmarried is a heroine in an age when female celibacy was not a consecrated thing, in a Book where the nuptial tie is counted the glory of womanhood. (P 111).

Another notable, prominent prophetess is Deborah, a woman of different careers. She is the wife of Lappidoth. She is the multi-talented women of the Bible— a wife, mother, poetess, prophetess, Judge, singer, warrior, and charismatic leader. Her name ‘Deborah’ connotes a ‘bee’ and is emblematic of industry, patience, sagacity and usefulness. She stands true to it.

Deborah, the only recorded female judge of ancient Israel, is described in book of Judges 4 and 5 as the deliverer of Israel for 40 years from Canaanite oppression. She is the spiritual, judicial and military leader of Israel. Of all the leaders of the book of Judges, Deborah is presented as a versatile that is sought for her decisions. She is honorably called ‘a mother in Israel’, she boldly speaks forth God's commands, and honors God in a song of victory.

It is a time of anarchy. The Hebrew tribes have settled among the Canaanites and began to worship their gods. The people of Israel fail to stand apart from its pagan neighbors, as their God commanded them. Instead of being righteous examples to the surrounding cultures, they took part in customs loathsome to their God. The people of Israel have suffered cruelly for twenty years under the oppression of Jabin king of Canaan, the tyrannical despot and his military commander Sisera.
Deborah is different from the most women in ancient Israel. In a faithless world she stood apart and distinguished herself as woman of faith and influence.

Different from the normal role for women in her culture; different in values from the pagan beliefs surrounding her; different in the way she handled her success. But the most important different was that she committed her life to God. Deborah was different not for herself but for him. (Couchman P 20)

The Bible presents her, Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. (Judges 4:4-5 P 378) She is portrayed as 'good little wife' as the wife of Lappidoth. He supported his wife's ministry and had no trouble with her being a judge over Israel and a prophet. Her myriad-minded roles remind the role of a modern women as home makers to career oriented, whose balance of things efficiently surpass even men. Her story elucidates that women juggling their callings as wife, mother and leader have existed from the beginning. She is shown that family and career can be juggled successfully.

As a judge of Israel, Deborah has a wide range of responsibilities including: deciding controversies, giving verdicts, and executing judgments. She is the first woman judge and fifth judge of Israelites. In those days of distinctly subordinate character is the position of woman, she successfully fulfills her role as eminent judge. Hence the Israel nation is under her jurisdiction and she dispenses righteousness, justice and mercy.
As a leader and warrior, Deborah advises her people, plans a military strategy against the Canaanites, appoints a general and then led the victorious battle. She is a visionary to discern the mind and purpose of God and declare it to others. She is the dynamic prophetess chosen by God as his counterpart on earth. Deborah summons Barak, an Israelite General, to go to war with 10,000 men against Sisera. She prophecies about God’s promised victory to Israelites.

Barak, however, is reluctant to go to war against Sisera unless Deborah goes up with him because General Sisera has 900 chariots of iron, a formidable military power of the times. However, Deborah is unfazed because her trust is in almighty God. Barak says to her if you go with me I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.’ ‘Very well’ Debora said ‘I will go with you. (Judges 4:8 P 378) So, Deborah accompanies the troops to the battleground at Mount Tabor to fortify Barak’s wavering courage. Her clarion call rejuvenates and reinforces Barak and others to go further to the war. She is a female figurehead who is gifted and an intrepid woman who rose to the occasion against fear and complacency. She has no qualms about ordering the attack when it looked like a sure disaster. Thus she gains an undying fame as the female warrior who rescues her people from their cruel foes.

Among Old Testament women, she stands for ever as the prototype of powerful career woman. Just as Deborah prophesies, God miraculously gives complete victory to Barak and the Israelite army. She is a great ruler. During her regime the nation of Israel enjoys rest from war and captivity for forty years. Her authority and administration establishes a serene and peaceful life to the people of Israel.
She is humble and forthright. She frankly admits of her victory over the nation's foes is really owes to the almighty. Deborah concerns about the things that needed to be accomplished than about the glory that would come to her. (Judges 4:1-10.) In a Church News interview, Ardeth G. Kapp, Young Women General president, commented on the examples set by Deborah.

I believe that a lot of good can be accomplished when we are not so concerned about who gets the credit. (P 27)

She is a poetess. After the victory, Deborah composes a song, which is regarded as one of the finest specimens of ancient Hebrew poetry. The prose and poem of Judges 4 and 5 are associated with the same historic event of the victory and it reveals that Deborah can not only prophecy, inspire, rule and fight but also sing poetry. She is adorned as maternal figure. she is called 'Mother of Israel' in the song, for she, like a mother has led the suffering children of Israel to victory. She is a mother not only to her children, but to Israel- a mother to comfort, to encourage, to challenge, to train and to give birth to faith.

Both her words and work were full of the inspiration of God and she is brought as a leader and pattern to the women of Israel (Lockyer P 112).

She is a woman of wisdom with keen sense of discernment, strong-mind and self-esteem. She has authority rather than power, and people respected her for the qualities she has, rather than for her military might or physical strength. Her life is a wonderful illustration of the power that womanhood has to influence society for good.
Her example admonishes to remember and respect the power of woman. She has exhibited womanly excellence with power, passion and purpose. Her story reveals an arduous adventure of challenges, triumphs, and rough terrain of relationships and the refreshing responses of righteousness finally resulted in the melody of music birthed in the midst of opposition and persecution. As warrior, ruler, prophetess, poetess, wife, mother and judge, her challenging mission is worthy of praise.

In all her roles, first that of counselor to her people, next as judge in their disputes, and finally as deliverer in time of war, Deborah exhibited womanly excellence. (Deen P 70).

Her story remains an answer to those who advocate that the ‘biblical’ place for women is in the home and not the workplace. She attains public dignity and supreme authority. She is like Joan of Arc, who twenty-seven centuries later rode in front of the French and led them victory.

She was, of course, an exceptional woman and she reminds us of Boadicea and of Joan of Arc. She had the fury of the one and the divine conviction of the other. (Morton P 73).

Deborah’s story throws light on the fact that she is a great woman nationalist. Her religious zeal and patriotic fervor armed her with new strength. As a freedom fighter, she inspires and led the army with dauntless courage, fortitude, free will and heroic temperament. In a way she becomes the magnificent personification of the free spirit of the people of Israel. To her credit adds the power of woman who stood firm among men, when they are not dared to be heroic. She steps outside of that day’s
common cultural position for women. She doesn’t quibble or quake but stood heroic to the core. She is the ‘female Oliver Cromwell of ancient Israel.’

Deborah, an eminent women character of the Bible is presented in various English literary works. Poet Critic, Philip Sidney, judges the song to be one of the best antique imitations of ‘the inconceivable excellencies of God’ (An Apologie for poetrie). Spenser makes Britomart more stout-hearted than “Debora (who) strake/Proud Sisera” (Faerie Queene, 3.4.2-3). In Shakespeare’s ‘I Henry’ 6 (12.105), the Dauphin Charles cries out that his female victor fights “with the Sword of Deborah”. Robert glosses over the songs violence in favour of its striking picture of maternal solicitude” and praise of Israelite Liberty (Lecturers on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (1753), Chaps 13, 28) Enmyson’s The Princess (5.500-501) places Ida ominously “Between a cymballed Miriam and a Jael”. Daughters of Dawn, by Bliss Carman and Mary Perry King (1913), considers her a powerful career woman as she rouses an oppressed nation, as one of a dozen characters ‘typical chiefly of the liberal and beneficent power of woman’s nature in her leadership and ascendancy in the life of the spirit and the destiny of the world.

On par with the situation, women in biblical times stand in the forefront and even surpass men in all spheres. Hence it is more accurate and apparent in those times that women extolled heroically with their deeds and dynamism in a time when men wrote about all the deeds of men. The best example is the story of an ordinary woman, Jael who dares to kill the tyrannical ruler, not by might but by right. The study proceeds with the third character Jael, whose heroic deed places her as a career woman.
Jael is the wife of Heber, the Kenite. Her name denotes 'wild or mountain goat' or 'gazelle.' Her family has cordial relations with King Jabin. Her story projects her as energetic woman with inner strength and sense of helping suffering Israel at large. She is cited in Deborah's song.

Most blessed of women be Jael,

The wife of Heber the Kenite,

Most blessed of tent-dwelling women.

He asked for water, she gave him milk

In a bowl fit for nobles she brought

Him curled milk.

Her hand reached for the tent peg,

Her right hand for the workman's hammer

She struck Sisera, she crushed his head,

She shattered and pierced his temple.

At her feet he sank,

He fell, there he lay.

At her feet he sank, he fell;

Where he sank, there he fell-dead. (Judges 5:24-27 P 381)

Two women are mentioned in the Bible as the most blessed of women – Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and Jael in the Old Testament. Virgin Mary is praised as she is the mother of Messiah (Saviour), on the contrary Jael is being blessed for killing a man. In an article Your Daughter shall prophesy Shawna R.B. Atterbery quotes that
Most blessed of women be Jael, a woman of the Kenite community of tent-dwelling most blessed. (P 99)

She is a woman of tent. She knows the things involved or related to tent. In those days everything connected with a tent is a woman’s job and the women expertise in making, pitching and striking tents (Judges 5:10). She devises a plan to kill Sisera within the tent without leaving a chance for him to escape. At the outset, she acts as a perfect hostess and invites General Sisera into her tent. She tenderly covers the tired warrior offers him milk to drink. When he is in vulnerable condition, she takes a tent peg and hammer—both domestic tools with which she is familiar and strikes him at his temple. Instantly General Sisera dies.

She is all alone, without the encouragement of company and risking her husband’s wrath. She drives the nail which made certain that her motive is patriotic, and her action resourceful and prompt. She tries to finish the battle Deborah has started and help to insure 40 years of peace in Israel.

She is a woman in a very tough position. Having heard of Sisera’s reputation and the Holy war, she considers herself to stand between God and the people to intercede. Jael knows well if Sisera were to escape, he would continue his reign of terror and bloodshed. Knowing well of Sisera as a tyrannical commander, She plans what to do and figures out how to do it. Having no weapons, she uses what she has at hand, a simple tent peg and hammer.
Jael was a realist, a woman who had lived close to nature all her life, and knew that a tired tiger will rise refreshed and be a tiger again, that sleeping adder is a matter, not for sentiment, but for self action. (Lofts P 75)

She plays the role of a king in a battle field to kill the enemy but being a woman she does it with a trick and tactics. She has no specific career, but has made a valiant effort as a career person to defeat the mighty tyrannical warrior. Far from being a woman, cultural conditions of time, for a cause she rises to the occasion and tries her best to the fullest extent and achieved the goal. Need of the hour demanded her to equip herself with duty conscious than being a tender sensitive lady. As all is fair in time and war, Jael’s role is rightly commendable as the savior of Israelites in that era.

In English literature Jael’s story is often referred. In the prologue of Chaucer’s ‘Wife of Bath’s Tale’ Jankyn’s litany of treacherous wives oddly includes Jael. “And somme han dryve nayles in hur brayne / While they slept, and thus they had hem slayne” (Canterbury Tales, 3.769-70). Caliban, in urging Stephano to usurp Prospero, offers to put the magician asleep “Where thou mayst knock a nail into his head” (Shakespeare, The Tempest, 3.2.64). In Milton’s ‘Samson’s Agonistes,’ Delilah declares that she wants someday to become famous like Jael (988-90). In Christopher Smart’s Hymns for the Amusement of Children the story offers a moral:

Sleep not—but watch the chamber well,
By sleeping Holofernes fell;
And Jael’s memorable nail
Did o’er a sleeping king prevail. (20.17.20)
In Sir Walter Scott’s ‘Old Morality’ the incident is recalled in conversation between Morton and Mistress Maclure, the kindly covenanting widow. Charlotte Bronte’s narrator in Vilette speaks of certain longings which she feels obliged ‘to knock on the head,’ which she says she did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Hardy describes Anne’s suspicion of Manston in Desperate Remedies as Jael’s sizing up Sisera for ‘thin tent nail’ an allusion which recurs in reference to the betrayal of Stephen in his ‘A Pair of Blue Eyes.’ Lamb in his essay ‘Imperfect Sympathies,’ claims to be at once attracted to and intimidated by Jewish women: ‘Jael had those dark, inscrutable eyes.’ John Halifax, in Mrs. Dinah (Mulock) Craik’s novel of that name (1856), can think of no higher praise for a woman than to say, ‘Bravo, Jael,’The wife of Heber the Kenite was no braver woman than you’.

J.B.L. Warren (Baron de Tabley) published in Poems, Dramatic and Lyrical (1893-95) a poem on ‘Jael,’ which sees her as a sinister violator of universal hospitality codes:

She stood, the mother-snake, before her tent,
She feigned a piteous dew in her false eyes,...
Slid like a snake across the tent-struck twice-
And stung him dead. (P 566)

The chapter further throws light on the character Huldah a prophetess. She is contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah in the reign of King Josiah, a righteous ruler. She is an obscure character and hence no high profile but has played a significant role in revealing God’s word. She is self-evident professed prophetess. She is a woman
of God who possessed knowledge and understanding of God's laws. She operates a private ministry not a public one of proclamation. Modern readers, unaccustomed to thinking of ancient women in positions of authority, find Huldah's story remarkable.

Huldah is the wife of Shallum, son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas. She is the keeper of the wardrobe. She lives in Jerusalem, in the second district. The word 'Huldah' signifies 'weasel.'

Under the leadership of his godless ancestors, Judah, the king of Jerusalem turns to idolatry and forgets God. Josiah attempts to rehabilitate the nation's standing with God. A major aspect of his reform is the repairing of the temple of the Lord. During these renovations of the temple, Hilkiah the high priest makes an amazing discovery by finding the Book of Law. Astonishingly, Judah abandons God to the point of being completely ignorant of the Law. The book of the Law reveals that covenant curses will fall down on the nation because of its many years of evil and rebellion against God. When the book is sent to the king and the contents read to him, he rips his robe in anguish and weeps. King Josiah commands five of his top leaders to go and inquire of the LORD, and see if judgment is indeed going to fall. So the five officials, including the High Priest, go and seek out the counsel of the Prophetess Huldah.

Huldah authenticates the book and presents a grim prognosis. She doesn't sugarcoat her response but plainly and truthfully presents God's verdict. She is not moved by big titles or intimidated by the power of men. This attitude is affirmed by the way she responds confidently and with authority to the high ranking government
officials. She refers to the king as just any other man by saying in an uncere\nonious manner to 'Tell the man who sent you to me'. (IIKings 22:15 P 615).

Her career as prophetess receives recognition for her proclamation of their God's word.

The research further proceeds to study on the lives of the Royalty and Reality of Queens as career women. They take the spotlight in many of the Old Testament's most memorable stories as effective and efficient role models. The queen of Sheba, Vashti, Esther are some of the queens chosen for study as women of dynamic careers.

The first queen mentioned in the Bible is the Queen of Sheba, a woman of enterprise, culture and wealth. She is not named. She is from the nation Sheba. Her story is a short narrative and her brief portrait is full of charm. She is a mover and a shaker, a ruling monarch of a prosperous nation. Her visit to the court of King Solomon, is to know his grandeur and international reputation for extraordinary wisdom. She traverses a long and weary distance, probably thousand miles with a great caravan on camel back, to prove for herself the profound Wisdom of Solomon.

In the words of Herbert Lockyer,

She was not only a woman of enterprise and affluence but also of a penetrating mind. Cultured, she had a thirst for wider intellectual pursuits, and therefore represented the desire in the hearts of all princely characters for a deeper understanding of the true knowledge. (P 198)

The Bible elucidates Sheba's trip as, When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the Lord, she came to test him with
hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a great caravan— with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had in her mind. And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. Hiram’s ships brought gold from Ophir; and from there they brought great cargoes of almugwood and precious stones. (1 Kings 10:1-3, 10, 11 P 543-544).

The journey from Sheba, a great trading nation and Southwest Arabia to Jerusalem is long and arduous. Her curiosity is certainly a factor, for rumors of Solomon’s great wealth and wisdom has spread throughout Arabia. As a queen or administrator, she tries to carry trade and commerce, the result of which witnesses their relations with Israel, for her ships and caravans and Solomon’s both do commerce throughout the known world of the day.

Learned herself, she finds Solomon’s knowledge supreme. She is inquisitive, wise and generous. She is the first biblical brainteaser. She sincerely praises Solomon’s tutelage and returns with her retinue to her country. Centuries later, Jesus commends her for her passion for truth. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom. (Matthew 12: 42, P 1601). She typifies the ‘outsider’ female who has more good sense than ‘insider’ men.

This illustrious queen’s renowned visit is one of the most romantic trips in the Bible. As a seeker of wisdom, she comes with a mind adorned not only with great
intelligence and acuteness, but intent upon the lofty purpose of her visit. According to Edith Deen,

The Queen of Sheba, who came to prove, lives on now, nearly thirty centuries since her visit, as a woman whose spirit of adventure and whose resourcefulness, courage, and curiosity have not been surpassed by any queen in history. And certainly her sense of good public and international is unparalleled among women of the Bible. (P 198).

The Bible, one of the greatest wisdom literatures in the world explicitly views, 'Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding. for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold (Proverbs 3:14-15 P 1021). Queen Sheba is a blessed woman who establishes herself as a career woman to find wisdom and to gain understanding. Her portrait is brief but exemplifies the power of womanhood as seeker of knowledge.

Another notable Queen of royal lives is Queen Vashti, the one who precedes Esther. She is a Persian princess, wife of King Xerxes. She is a beautiful woman of nobility and honor. King Xerxes rules the mighty land of Persia. During his reign, he celebrates a sumptuous festival at his royal palace. He entertains the royal guests with pomp and glory. His wife also arranges a grand feast for women at her chamber. To entertain his royal guests, the king orders the queen to be present herself before the drunken royal dignitaries. For the reasons known only to queen Vashti, she refuses to display her beauty before the guests. The king becomes very angry for not complying
with his orders. She is so courageous to refuse an unjust command from her husband, the king.

_on the seventh day, when the king Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him... to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger._

(Esther 1:10-12 P.784)

The king consults his council of ministers to discuss and to take action on the queen's disobedience. On their advice, he passes a decree that all women in his kingdom should honour their husbands. He banishes her as the queen. As a woman of self-respect she refuses to lower her womanly modesty and accepts disgrace and dismissal. The king gets angry and issues an order that her royal position be given to another.

Her conscience, personal dignity, Self-reverence, self-discipline occupies upper hand and hence for this ideal she is dethroned. Though she is a distinguished personage in a renowned position, with great courage and commitment she rejects to be at the drunkards,

_Her noble scorn at her threatened indignity deserves finer recognition_

( Lockyer P166)

Vashti as a queen knows well the consequences she has to experience for her actions. She never bothers about queen ship, cadre and prominence as a wife of a
mighty king. Her decision led to lose the royal place but makes to remember and recognize her as a woman of powerful career woman for the generations to generations. She plays the role of a sacrificial trendsetter to the women folk who give more prominence to self dignity than self degradation. Her self-confidence, darencss, and dynamism to violate the supreme authority make her a career woman. Vashti's refusal opens the way for the coming of Esther. Her role is only incidental to the story, but sets the stage for Esther. Beautiful but banished, Vashti exits the story with her dignity and intact. Her portrayal is short but speaks of heroic temperament.

The next character chosen for study is Esther. Of all the women characters in the Bible the most lovable character is Esther, the queen of Persia. She is a young virgin of Jewish origin. She is an orphan in the kingdom of Xerxes. Her name 'Esther' stands for 'good fortune', 'star of hope', 'star of joy', 'star of superiority.' Her character and her name truly match as her story progresses she experiences fortune, hope, joy and superiority.

Esther's beauty and character makes her supreme saviour of Jews during that time. She is a great woman of noble qualities. She is bold and beautiful, courageous and confident. The story of Esther presents two sides of the treatment of women. The first queen, Vashti is deposed because she has not acted as the king wished. Esther is chosen as the new queen because she exhibits certain qualities that the king values. She assumes the role of a career woman as a savior of her nation. She uses this position to get justice for her people, Jews, when they are humiliated. She serves with fearlessness, intelligence, deep insight and prudence. Esther as heroine saves her people and thus a role model for Jews in the Diaspora.
The King Xerxes reckons her to be the most beautiful of the maidens presented to him as a successor to Vashti. From humble origins she rises to queenly heights with good fortune. Added with simplicity, her beauty and modesty attracts the king to select her as a queen. Edith Deen quotes,

like many great characters in history, Esther makes her first appearance as one of the humblest of figures, an orphan Jewess, but four years later she rises to the position of queen of amazing power, a power which she manages to use wisely (P147).

She is a true patriot. In the hour of crisis she takes a career role of a savior to save her Jewish nation. Having realized the severity of the situation, she determines herself and says, “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the Law and if I perish, I perish.” (Esther 4:15-16 P 788).

It shows her courage, sincere faith, and devotion to the cause of her people. Esther’s admonition to fast for three days and three nights, and her determination to endanger her life reveal her character as daring and decisive woman. Her words are an expression not of despair but of resolution in light of what she has determined to do. The lines of Donne ‘courage was cast about her like a dress of solemn comeliness’ is so expressively true.

Going into the king’s presence without permission attracts capital punishment. Esther’s life is truly in jeopardy. She ventures to do the risky act of going into the
presence of the king without permission for the sake of her people. King loves her and agrees to her proposals. Finally her nation is saved by her.

Her tremendous role inspires many in early modern literature. Esther's story at once challenges and supports women's traditional roles in society and on the other hand she comes out of the conventional form and exhibits commendable character traits at the cost of her life. She is at once a model of wifely submission in the private sphere and female governance in the public sphere. She is celebrated for her modesty and chastity as well as her initiative and heroism. When a scheming courtier threatens to annihilate all the Jews in Persia, she cleverly devises a plan to expose his treachery to the king, emerging, finally as an effective leader in her own right. Because of this multiplicity of roles, Esther exemplifies a dutiful daughter, a submissive wife, a strong and decisive leader, and a faithful Jew who prefigures Christian obedience and faithfulness. The character of Esther could be appropriated to serve a variety of purposes ranging from the didactic to the political to the inspirational. She is revealed as

a woman of clear judgment, of magnificent self-control and capable of the noblest self-sacrifice. (Gustafson P 56)

Submissive yet courageous, yielding yet faithful, she is able to avert the intent of evil men determined to destroy her people. In short, Esther’s unique character elevates her into the position of Queen. She is above all a national heroine. Esther rejects the social roles of women that define their place, she violates protocol and court taboos for a higher purpose.
She combines courage with careful planning. She is open to advice and willing to act. She is more concerned for others than for her own security. Among Jews, women are expected to be quiet, to serve in the house, and to stay on the fringe of religious and political life. But Esther broke through the cultural norms, stepping outside her expected role to risk her life to help her people.

The book of Esther and her character is depicted in many works. In Windsor castle also are fine Gobelin tapestries depicting Esther's dramatic story. In France, ten plays based upon the Book of Esther are written between 1556 and 1689. Dramatic adaptations in England ranged from an early interlude, to a lost play recorded in 'Henslowe's Diary' in 1594, to a pageant performed for Queen Elizabeth during a royal progress. Rabanus Maurus, the Bishop of Fulda has written commentaries on the Book of Esther as well as the Book of Judith. He has dedicated both works to the Empress Judith, the controversial wife of Louis the Pious, the son of Charlemagne. In the preface to each commentary, he encourages the Empress to imitate the noble Queen Esther. In his dedication to 'Expositio in librum Judith' (834), Rabanus extols Judith's virtues, adding,

"Also Queen, always place Esther, likewise a queen, imitable in every action of piety and chastity, before the eyes of your heart, until, equaling the merit of her sanctity, you are able to climb from the earthly kingdom to the peak of the celestial kingdom." (Summer Saralyne P 34)

The contemporary writers interpreted Esther's story in three different literary genres - drama, prose, and poetry - indicates the popularity of this Old Testament narrative in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Among the poets who
paraphrased the narration in Esther were William Samuel, Michael Drayton, and Francis Quarles. While Drayton translated only the prayers of Esther and Mordecai; Samuel and Quarles both paraphrased the entire Old Testament narrative, though in considerably different styles and to very different effect. Samuel’s poetic rendering of the Book of Esther consists of nine stanzas that correspond to the nine chapters in the Bible, along with a final stanza that looks ahead to the Book of Job.

Geoffrey Chaucer refers to Esther as sensus literalis four times: predictably, in ‘The Book of Dutchess’ and ‘Legend of Good Women.’ she is a model of womanly and saintly virtue. Prudence advances her as an example of woman’s good counsel in ‘The Tale of Melibee’ and In ‘The Merchant’s Tale’ the beautiful, loyal Esther of medieval legend is contrasted with January’s treacherous bride. In a rare application of the Esther story as political parody, the anonymous ‘New Entclude of Godly Queene Hester’ (1560/61) coyly invites the audience to identify Ahassey, and Esther with Catherine Parr, emphasizing the conspirational features of the narrative (cf. the contemporary 16th cen play Queen Esther and Proud Haman).

Post-Reformation references to Esther, such as Milton’s in ‘Reason of Church Government’ (3.1.188) or Gray’s in his Extempore on ‘Dr.Kcene, Bishop of Chester,’ conventionally allude either to Esther’s extraordinary beauty or to her virtue, themes which persist in the few Joycean references to her (e.g., Finnegans Wake). An exception to the pattern of casual allusion in Browning’s reversion in ‘The Ring and the Book,’ he cites the Queen’s defiance of royal courtly protocol, at risk of her own life, in order to treat it ironically in terms of masculine dreams of power over women. The relationship between the orphaned Esther Summerson of Dickens’s ‘Bleak
"House" and her guardian-wooer John Jarndyce, is suggestive of the somewhat mysterious connection between the biblical Esther and Mordecai. Esther's memory is romanticized by a variety of 19th century authors (e.g., Tennyson's The Princess, Melville's The Bell Tower.) as well as in a modern and more cynical vein by the poet A.M.Klein in Five Characters. Klein's "Esther," like a 'new star's sudden naissance, walks moonlit in the palace garden, her pardon the sequestered token of her gratifying the 'Persian-hot passion' of Ahasuerus.

When early modern writers refer to Esther, they frequently associate her with Deborah and Judith, notable women of the Bible. For example, in 'The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine the most worthy women of the world' (1640), Thomas Heywood designates Deborah, Judith and Esther as the three Hebrew Women Worthies. Such connections are not surprising, for all three women perform heroic deeds that save the Jewish people from certain annihilation. Mentioned together, they present a forceful argument for female courage and resourcefulness and, more importantly, they demonstrate the providential selection of certain women to positions of authority. However, the biblical depiction of Esther in both the private sphere as a wife and the political sphere as a queen distinguishes her from Deborah and Judith.

The final character delves special attention is Phoebe of the New Testament. The Bible presents her, 'I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.' (Rom 16:1 P1870)
Paul, the most influential early Christian missionary introduces Phoebe presumably as the bearer of his epistle to the Romans. In choosing Phoebe to carry him an epistle, Paul conferred a great honour upon her. To be a Christian at Cenchrea is no easy matter, for ports at this period are extremely wicked places. Phoebe is the only woman recorded who traveled hard way to Rome and delivered the epistle to Romans as his representative.

At that time the imperial post of Rome was not available for private correspondence, and such an epistle would have to be sent by a trusted friend or a private messenger. (Deen P 230)

Her cameo is brief which states her name and service. She has exemplary life style. She is wealthy and prosperous to afford arduous journey. She is kind, a patron of the poor and also helpful to many.

She has been described as the first visiting nurse. (Susan P 1)

Her goodness, sympathy, loyalty, industry and trustworthiness mark her as a woman of career whose ministry inspired all who came into her presence.

This prominence of women is something definitely new to Jewish culture. Jewish gatherings has separated men and women and assigned them different roles. By contrast, Jesus has raised the women who followed him to new levels of visibility and responsibility. They have formed a unified group of dedicated followers: They are disciples, fellow workers (Romans 16:3), even apostles (Rom 16:7). They have prayed (Acts 1:14), received the Spirit (Acts 2:17), met regularly and hosted churches in their homes (Acts 2:46-47; Col 14:15), thrown into prison (Acts 8:3), traveled

The Bible’s impact and influence has made the society to define the role, place and career of women since times immemorial. Its actual implication is not the suppression of women rather to empower, ennoble and even to surpass men in times of need as dynamic and vibrant women of careers. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe’s states:

Because of its religious and cultural authority, the Bible has been one of the most important means by which woman’s place in society has been defined. Throughout the centuries, of course, the Bible has been invoked to justify women’s subordination to men. But it has also played a role, sometimes in surprising ways, in empowering women.

(P 327)

Having discussed on different career of women which reinterpret the identities of biblical women, along with their experiences and empowerment, the research further purports to study in the next chapter, some women characters as nefarious femme fatales of the Bible.