

# *Chapter I*

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Literature is the comprehensive response to the laws of nature that hold humanity together. It attempts at assimilating life with reality and imagination in all its forms. It deploys an all-inclusive universe transmitting the philosophies and speculations of one generation to the other. Literature, representative of an era and expounding its ethos, permits identification of divergent patterns in it for appreciation of life. The exemplary writers affirmed this in their works. The literary world was populated by the writings of men which reflected their perspectives, and there was no space provided for women to place their voice on record.

Women's writing began with the articulation of women under male pseudonyms. The female archetypes in the writings were subject to patriarchal restrictions. This necessitated the creation of a feminine discourse that allowed space for discussions on gender related issues. Unlike its conventional precedents that carried the 'feminine self-hatred and feminist withdrawal' (LTO 32), it had to be independent of the dominant patriarchal literary tradition.

Gail Godwin, the writer from Alabama, South, emerged as a 'leading voice' that augured a marked shift in women's writings from feminine conventions to exploring the possibilities of women's liberation that extended beyond the pronounced gender definitions. While traditional ideologies assigned women a domestic role as women were considered to be responsible for the family, Godwin created intelligent women characters. These women characters, not conforming to the patriarchal dictates, discern to 'establish their identity, and successfully pursue their work despite the restraints of male-dominated culture and with or without the companionship or support of men.' (SLJ 86).

The introductory chapter aims at tracing the growth of American literature, the literature of the South and its features. The beginnings of women's writing and various phases of its growth, the feminist literary criticism that ensued are also studied.

The sociopolitical changes that were triggered in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the literary critical movement that followed promoted women to a more dignified role. Eventually some women found the courage to break the shackles of home and childcare to which they were bound for a long time and made encouraging strides in the male dominated world.

Literature, especially novels portrayed women beyond the set boundaries. Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) examines the transformation in women's lives and their progress socially. He captured the internal complexity of women, who belonged to the male dominated tradition on one side and to the feminist tradition on the other. He was considered the first American writer to understand the values of womanhood well enough to create women fiction. Roy Male, in *Hawthorne and the Concept of Sympathy* (1953) observes, "Hawthorne never viewed woman as unimportant or as threatening Eves, but, rather as a man's vital, emotional, intellectual and spiritual partners."(138-149).

American Literature is the literature of the area of the United States and its preceding colonies. Puritan cultural ideals that were in vogue and the invention of the printing press in Cambridge made the New England colonies the center of early American literature. The Europeans, the Spanish and the Dutch have been finding settlements in many districts of North America from late fifteenth century.

The first work printed in Pennsylvania was in German and it was the largest book to be printed in the colonies before American Revolutions. Spanish and French have been

the strongest colonial literary traditions in the regions and the list now includes The United States. Early American Literature includes texts by Awar Nunez Cabeca de Vaca, Samuel de Champlain and and the English language text by Thomas Harriet and John Smith. However, political changes made English the lingua franca for the colonies and the literary language printing was established in American colonies even before it came into England and after entering it was restricted to few cities. This made the colonies enter the world of literature earlier than English.

Captain John Smith could be regarded as the first American author with his publications *A True Relation of such occurrences and accidents of noate as hath happened in Virginia* (1608) and *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles* (1624). Some of the other writers of this period are Daniel Denton, Thomas Ash, William Penn, William Strachey and John Lawson. The religious disputes that led to the settlements in America was one of the topics of discussion in early writing. The other writers of this period like John Winthrop the author of *A Model of Christian Charity* [1630] speaks about the “Puritan Utopia” and Roger Williams and Nathaniel Ward spoke on state and church separation.

Cotton Mather of the second generation of the New England settlers, a theologian and a historian wrote the history of the colonies. *The Biblia Americana* (1720) is one of his best known works. Jonathan Edwards and George White Field stood for the 18<sup>th</sup> century religious revival, the ‘Great Awakening’. Bartram’s *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West* (1791) describes the topography of the Southern Region. A notable discussion of American culture and identity can be seen in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) by the French immigrant writer J. Hector St. John de Creveoeur.

In the 'Depression' that followed the American White community grew disinterested with the African art and artists. But Alice Walker through her work *In Search of Zora Neale Hurston* (1975) brought back the interest of the public towards the Harlem group of writers who were committed to their writings.

The war of 1812 resulted in the development of a unique American style in literature. Washington Irving was the first to create it and William Cullen Bryant and Edgar Allan Poe and Fenimore Cooper also represented this style. Some of the short stories like *The Masque of the Red Death*(1842) and *The Fall of the House Of Usher* (1839) went further to explore the unknown recess of human psychology thereby taking fiction to the next level.

The Southern literature as history puts it is the literature about the Southern United States or works by writers from the regions of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Texas and few other states. This included common Southern history, importance of family and community, issues related to race, sense of justice and the usage of Southern dialect, slavery, the American Civil War and Reconstruction. What is debatable is whether the birth of the author in the South or the writings by him/her while in South defines the Southern writer. Poe is considered a Southern author by some as he grew up in Richmond, educated at the University of Virginia and edited the Southern Literary Messenger (1835-1837) despite the fact that he never took up any Southern themes or subjects.

William Gilmore Simms among the Southern writers glorified the history of South Carolina particularly in the anti-Uncle Tom's Cabin novel *The Sword and the Distaff* (1852) which portrayed the pictures of idealized slavery and Southern life. When

South lost the Civil War, its literature shifted to themes on “Lost Cause of the Confederacy” replacing anti-Tom literature as an attempt to re-establish South and its culture that was destroyed following the war. This period of Reconstruction included poets Henry Timrod, Abraham Joseph Ryan and fiction writer Thomas Nelson Page.

Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the most influential of the Southern novel of the nineteenth century saw its publication in the year 1884. This novel is profound with issues of race and violence and it pioneered the modern American Literature.

On this novel, Ernest Hemmingway declared in 1935, in a passage in the early part of his *Green Hills Of Africa* that:

It’s the best book we’ve had. All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since. (29)

The Southern Renaissance was the first mainstream movement within Southern Literature in 1920s to address the criticisms of Southern cultural and intellectual life that supported the ‘Lost Cause’. William Faulkner, Allen Tate, Thomas Wolfe, and Tennessee Williams were notable figures of this movement. Many writers of this period expressed the desire of the Southerners turning to leisure complacent for creativity.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century there was rapid change in American South with industrialization, deindustrialization, and immigrants. Some of the prominent writers of the century are Padgett Powell, John Grisham, Cormac McCarthy, Anne Rice, Barbara Kingsolver, Anne Taylor and William Gay.

The genre of novel emerged with the literary experiments by women in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which was the age of transformation. The first writer of importance is Lady Mary Wroth born in 1586, the author of *Urania* (1621) a prose romance, a new version of Sidney's *Arcadia*. It is innovative with its realism of content and with its realistic portrayal of characters. *Urania* is the first example to narrow the gap between fact and fiction. Delariviere Manley (1663-1724) introduced the epistolary form and made use of political satire. Eliza Haywood (1693-1724) established the epistolary novel and is Richardson's forerunner. They are the first representative figures of the 18<sup>th</sup> century women novelists who gave fiction its popular form. Elizabeth Inchball, Charlotte Lennox, Fanny Burners, Maria Edgeworth, Amelia Opie and Sarah Fielding all furthered the development of novel. As Showalter notes in *Debating the Canon: A READER FROM ADDISON TO NAFISI*, "from about 1750 on, English women made steady inroads into the literary market place, mainly as novelists." (87).

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* improved the status of women in the society. But in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the able housewife was no longer a theme in literature. Instead, literature was profound with over bearing mothers and they were seen as problems. But the negative portrayals of women ended soon with the beginning of industrialization in 1860 and new modern science. The division of labor between men and women which was marked, disappeared with the advent of technology. What had been traditionally considered their space, now changed. But still Glenna Matthews in her book *Just a Housewife : The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (1987), mentioned that, while housework filled in a woman's time, it stard her brain. At such a time, home economist such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman wanted women to be saved from domestic work so that they can concentrate on better things. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) wrote a short story, *The Yellow*

*Wallpaper*(1892) based on her experience with 19<sup>th</sup> century cures for depression among women. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, an English novelist and short-story writer questioned the social system under capitalism in her fiction. By 1950s they were no more heard and their work was dismissed as ‘sentimental’ or ‘domestic literature’. The literature of the time also attacked American house wives and they were featured as idle and at times even parasites. Women were expected to transform house into a haven, to meet the needs of men. The suggestion was that the women should not involve themselves with the world outside. In an article published in September 1938, Bruce and Beatrice Gould, Co-editors of Ladies’ Home Journal for nearly three decades gave the following advice citing Glenna Matthews words from *Just a Housewife : The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*, ‘ Be glade you’re dumb about all these earth-shaking questions..... The great problems of the world are all Greek to you-but the problems of your home and family and community are right down your alley. Be glad you’re dumb while your husband is saving the world. Be brave and you can save the home”(198). Yet writing was the only way for women to express their individuality. Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*(1929) became important precedent of feminist literary criticism.

Women writers had to come out of believing themselves to be passive subordinated beings in the house. They had to end the stereotyped image of housewife and mother. Unsurprisingly most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century writings by the women had women as the subject or expressed female experience to establish their stand against their marginalization both as women and as writers.

Anne Bronte’s *The Tenant of Wildfellhall*(1848) is considered the first manifesto for women’s liberation. In most of the novels ‘house’ was the central image since the



heroines who were female writers were almost exclusively confined to the house. They wanted to use subjective voice which had been difficult because women then were only objects and not the subjects who could participate in the world affairs and so its usage meant a reaction against standard morality. In spite of this, the women writers developed the subjective voice as the only possible form of expression of their subject in process. Eva Figes in *Patriarchal Attitudes Women in Society* states that, “The position of the women isolated within individual households, favoured the development of the subjective voice in a fiction which concentrated on the domestic setting”(151).

The women writers saw the female identity as a continuous process that was becoming. Eliza Haywood, Aphra Behn, Delarivier Harley, Sarah Fielding, Fanny Burney, Elizabeth Inchbald and Maria Edgeworth established a tradition of ‘subject in process’. Jane Austen, the Brontës and George Eliot’s dialectical, appealed to the women’s experience. But they were always subjected to the unjustified claims on their intellectual powers. They were not allowed into the mainstream of literature and society. The women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were considered intellectually inferior and hence were denied importance. Amidst all this, the women writers “felt pressured to prove both their reliability and their physical endurance”, wrote Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (78).

Feminist literacy criticism became a theoretical issue with the initiation of new women’s movement in the early 1960s. Promoting women’s ideal reality within the domestic realm, this mystique movement had reduced the identity of women to sexual and social passivity. Betty Friedan attempted to demystify this false feminine mystique, which she described as “a world confined to her own body and beauty, the charming of man the bearing of babies, and the physical care and serving of husband, children and home”(3) in

*The Feminine Mystique* (1963). With Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) initiated the first modern principles of feminist criticism by embarking upon a critique of sexist assumptions in male-authored texts, introducing some fundamental terms such as "patriarchal." *Sexual Politics* soon became a cult book among feminist critics. By politics Millett means the operations of power relations in society. She argues that Western institutions have manipulated power to establish the dominance of men and subordination of women in society. She also criticizes Freud's psychoanalytical theory for its male bias. It was with Mary Ellmann that modern feminist criticism was initiated in the United States. Ellmann, with her humorous treatment of the stereotypes of women in literature written by men, was one of the pioneers in the development of contemporary feminist criticism. With Ellmann, and more forcefully with Millett, feminist criticism has generated much public debate in women's writings and in their search for equality in society.

Feminist literacy criticism has played a crucial part in breaking the logocentric tradition and challenging the supremacy of the privileged concepts and values in the patriarchy systems. This is its alternative approach to literacy as well as cultural studies. There is a difference between "female" and "feminist" positions in literary studies. According to Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, "Feminist criticism... is a specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism..."(204). Thus the term "Feminist" means a political position. As Sharon Spencer argues, Feminist criticism "attempts to set standards for literature that is as free as possible from biased portraits of individuals because of their class, race or sex"(158). The term "female", does not imply a political or feminist position it rather implies a gender difference. Female writing can be understood as the special female expression of women's

perspective on a variety of social, cultural and political issue without being committed to the feminist positions. The male feminist critic K.K.Ruthven in his *Feminist Literary Studies* (1984) stated that “the aim of feminist criticism as any revolutionary criticism should be to subvert the dominant discourses, not to make compromises with them.” (29). He denied the idea that feminist criticism is essentially women’s work.

Critics like Dale Spender, Elaine Showalter, Juliet Mitchell have investigated the reason why to be a woman writer was a subcategory. Women began challenging the logo centric tradition and this started with the publication of notable books in the 1970s like Meyer Spack’s *The Female Imagination*(1975), Ellen Moer’s *Literary Women*(1976) which discusses the history of women’s writing, Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwomen in the Attic* (1979) which studies the major female writers of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In *A Literature of Their Own* Showalter presents three important stages of women’s writing. The first is the Feminine stage between 1840 and 1889 where there was the imitation of the main stream literary tradition. The second is the Feminist stage between 1890 and 1920 that protested against the standards of this dominant tradition concerning social values and rights and the third is the Female stage between 1920 and 1960’s of self-discovery which aims at a search for identity. Showalter’s contribution towards feminist criticism centers on her re-discovery of the forgotten women writers falling into these stages.

The feminist literary critics Sandra M.Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in their article *The Queen’s Looking Glass* in the book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) that, artistic creativity seen as a male quality within the dominant 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition is a patriarchal superimposition upon the women writers. Associating ‘author’with the father image,

Gilbert and Gubar argue that “ the woman writer acknowledges with pain, confusion, and anger that what she sees in the mirror is usually a male construct, the ‘pure gold baby’ of male brains, a glittering and wholly artificial child”(17-18).From male perspective since the owner of the text is the author he is authorized to have male standards of images of femaleness in his writing.

Showalter’s *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917) records the social history of America from 1850s. She has chronicled how the women writers, influenced by the day, had relied on the realm of words to express themselves. It is exclusive by its nature of women being judged by women.

Of women writers Kate Chopin is noteworthy of post- Civil War Southern literature. Her short story collection *Bayou Folk*(1894) and *A Night in Arcadia* (1897) apart from dealing with a specific Southern culture is also elemental in prescribing the American Short Stories, an exclusive genre of intricacies. Her novel *The Awakening*(1899) is a successful venture into the female sexuality and psychology and held the readers attention with its blatant realities.

Black writing entered early into women’s literature. It flourished in 1960s probably because of the Black power movement in vogue at that time. Gradually the black African American women became visible in the realm of literature. Mel Watkins recollected in her article *Gwendolyn Brooks, Whose Poetry Told of Being Black in America* in The New York Times, December 4, 2000, Gwendolyn Brooks’ observation that ‘ The poets among them felt that black poets should write as blacks, about blacks, and address themselves to blacks ‘, and this expresses the fervor of the days.

In the period following American Independence which was called the Antebellum period, South Carolina surpassed Virginia as the literary community. Essayist Hugh Swinton Legare, poets Hamilton Hayne and Henry Timrod and the novelist William Gilmore Simms produced notable antebellum literature. The first person account of Black slavery in the antebellum South is Frederick Douglass's narrative. The other notable work is Harriet Jacob's account of her bondage in North Carolina in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). And the first novel by an African American is supposedly *The President's Daughter* (1994) by a Southern-born ex-slave Barbara Chase – Riboud.

Harlem Renaissance that originated from the New York city 'Harlem' which was earlier a city of White residents covered a time period of 1918-1937 and laid the foundation for the African American literature that resulted in Black Literature. This saw the immense migration of African Americans from rural South to urban North that was marked as New Negro Movement. Consequently Harlem became the capital of cultural awakening.

The fate of the women writers is peculiar in the sense that they need to transcend the female gender to make their writings heard in the male dominating world of literature. As Joyce Carol Oates puts it in her *Conversations With Joyce Carol Oates*, May 8, 2009, "the woman who writes is a writer by her own definition, but a woman writer by others' definitions".

The women writers fail to record their artistic immortality. They neither identify themselves with the notable schools nor give some names to their generation nor they battle against a female rival that will make them noticeable. In fact they were seen as "damned mob of scribbling women" by renowned men like Hawthorne and he made this remark in his letter to his publisher in the year 1855. Their real value had been kept diminished for a long time. But a basic analysis of the female writers by placing them alongside the features of their generation, can define their writing.

Many of the renowned contemporary women novelists like Jane Smiley, Bobbie Ann Mason, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Rebecca Goldstein, Morrison, Annie Proulx, Joyce Carol Oates, and Amy Tan took various social and political issues like the generation in depression, migrant workers, racial tensions, the symbolic American masculine fantasy, sport-car racing and Marilyn Manroe to their writing. In spite of this they were not given due credit by the male critics. Jane Smiley dealt with feminine themes. *Her Ordinary Love and Good Will* (1989) is about the sufferings and after marriage and parenthood.

A different and successful attempt was made by Marilynne Robinson with her first novel *House Keeping* (1980) which was entirely on female relationships that changed the American themes where one sex dominated the whole scene. Contemporary women novelists like Julia Alveriz, Edwidge Dandicat, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Gish Jen established their contribution to the American experience rather than dwelling on their alienation from it.

The White middle-class Western feminists who took only the White middle class ideas into consideration were ignorant to the condition in which the other women lived. They combined “the condition of one group of women with the condition of all” (3), as observed by Elizabeth V. Spelman, the philosopher from United States in her book *Inessential Woman* (1988). The false faith that the ideas of the White women belonging to the middle class represented the whole group of women irrespective of their class and race rooted in the minds of the public was broken by the emergence of African American women into literature. Theirs was the voice of the race who were ‘outsider-within’ with a different view from the one prevailing.

There is a notable change in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century American women. They have extended their territories from mother, wife and daughter to women of substance. To Nella

Larsen, free woman is the one who is freed from the responsibilities of motherhood and with Willa Cather a woman's freedom is decided by the happiness of the individual woman. Her character Antonia in the novel *My Antonia*, finds happiness not by detaching but by associating herself with the family and the society. According to her, harmony is not in alienation but is in identification with the society.

To these contemporary women writers belongs, Gail Kathleen Godwin. With keen insight into the psychoanalytic study of characters mainly that of women, her works stand out, setting a separate standard for the classification of women's novels.

Gail Kathleen Godwin, the novelist and short story writer was born in Birmingham, Alabama on June 18, 1937. She has one non-fiction work, two collections of short stories and thirteen novels to her credit. Of her novels, three were finalists for the National Book Award and five have made it to the New York Times Bestseller List. She was raised in Asheville, North Carolina. Her parents were Mose Winston Godwin and Kathleen Karahenbuhl Godwin. After the divorce of her parents, Godwin who was two years of age and her mother joined her grandparents in Asheville. After her grandfather died, Gail Godwin's house was a three women household. Godwin describes this as "small man-less family."

Godwin studied at a private school, run by progressive group of nuns that encouraged deep thinking. She read widely and always remembered her family's lower class standing. She could be identified with the heroines of 19<sup>th</sup> century British classics who are intelligent but of limited means. In her writings she also incorporates the traditions of Jane Austen and George Eliot into the era of women's liberation, psycho analysis, sexual freedom and existentialism.

In the patriarchal times, growing in the matriarchal household, Godwin was greatly influenced by the women at home and this is reflected in her writings. Her grandmother was a conventional Southern woman and her mother was unconventional, ambitious, and of a dynamic nature. Godwin's mother made her living in multiple ways but all of her profession were related to language and writing. She taught poetry, drama, was a reporter for the Asheville Citizen-Times and was also a writer of romantic fiction under the pseudonym Charlotte Ashe. She was also a story teller and could narrate personal anecdotes to completely fictionalized tales. Godwin inherited this trait of her mother and she makes note of it in her essay on her mother, *My Mother: Master of A Thousand Disguise* (1989), as to how under the disguise of a story teller she brought the autobiographical elements into her fiction by assigning part of her characteristics to her characters.

In her conversation with Rob Neufeld, the book reviewer for the *Asheville Citizen-Times* Godwin on her novel *The Odd Woman* said, "When I started *The Odd Woman*, my grandmother was still alive. The novel was going to be the grandmother's story..."(OW 427).

Godwin has sent "A long list of questions-everything I needed to know" (OW 427) to her grandmother but then, she died. Her grandmother was a person who sacrificed her interest for others. She is the grandmother Edith in *The Odd Woman*. Godwin bringing in the autobiographical elements begins her novel with the protagonist Jane Clifford attending her grandmother's funeral. Godwin records this in her interview with Rob Neufeld, the book reviewer for the Asheville Citizen-Times. Her mother Kathleen is Kate in *The Glass People*. This list is lengthy with *A Southern Family* based on the suicide of Godwin's half-brother; *Father Melancholy's Daughter* on her father's experience with depression; and *The Perfectionists* on her second marriage which was very brief. Asheville and South



was generally the central part of her work. But her intention was not to be a Southern novelist. Women protagonists of her works are found in complicated relationship with mothers and grandmothers and are women who flee South.

Godwin's uses her autobiographical fiction in the creation of her protagonists, themes and dramatic design. She is interested in exploring the intricacies of personality and the being. For this she brings in her personal experience which alone could provide the required material.

Commenting on such novels where autobiography is used as a medium for collective history by Gail Godwin, the critic Michael Sheringham while reviewing the writings of Annie Ernaux's in *Ecrire la Vie* in his *We write, she writes* (2012) notes, "the intertwining rhythms of collective and individual experience" and how she has "exemplified the advent of a new style of Life-Writing." Godwin's writings follow the same pattern of intertwining collective and individual experience.

The plot in her novels has ideas that develop into finding associations. The organic foundation of the work is brought out through elements like flashbacks thus, set one above the other, the final structure achieved is similar to Henry James' house-building analogy. Speaking on "the finer vibrations" and "Henry James", Godwin noted in her February 17, 1964 journal entry, the words of Henry James in his *Preface. The Wings of the Dove*, (1909) "But that loving patience it takes to record, probe, circumvent-build not only in layers but in spokes." These finer threads collectively render splendid architecture to the stories. Hugo Henry, a writer in Godwin's 1994 novel, tells a student to find connections within the information they have already given to the readers and then set about making them resonate and thus could create little string quartet of meanings.

The list of works by Gail Godwin are *The Perfectionists* (1970), *Glass People* (1972), *The Odd Woman* (1974), *Dream Children* (1976), *Violet Clay* (1978), *A Mother and Two Daughters* (1982), *Mr. Bedford and the Muses* (1983), *The Finishing School* (1984), *A Southern Family* (1987), *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (1991), *The Good Husband* (1994), *Evensong* (1999), *Evenings at Five* (2003), *Queen of the Underworld* (2006), *Unfinished Desires* (2009), *Flora* (2013), and *Grief Cottage* (2017) .

Her other works are *The Southern Belle* (1975), *Being on Everybody's Side* (1979), *Becoming a Writer* (1980), *Becoming the Characters in Your Own Novel* (1982), *Introduction to The Best American Short Stories* (1985), *Heart: A Personal Journal through its Myths and Meanings* (2001), *The Making of a Writer* (2006), and *Publishing: A Writer's Memoir* (2015).

Godwin's characters live in societies that struggle for normal life while the heroes do not prefer the ordinariness that comes with it. Jane Clifford's step-father in *The Odd Woman* and Cameron Bolt in *Glass People* are such men. Her fiction deals with women from the South, mother-daughter relationship, the step-family dynamic, suicide, divorce and the experiences of an artist.

The themes of some of her works help in understanding her writings. *The Odd Woman* features Jane Clifford who examines the concept of 'self' and how drama is related to the lives of people leaving them to decide whether the roles were creating people or the people were creating the roles. In *A Mother and Two Daughters* Godwin analyses relationships, Southern stereotypes, the New South and issues such as abortion. *The Good Husband* is the story of a dying woman, a charismatic as well as a visionary professor, and the people who gather at her bed side and it is a close study of two marriages. *The Perfectionists*,

places a woman who has a bad marriage on a sun-drenched island with many strong characters pulling at her. *Glass People* is about a beautiful woman married to a master egoist, who bolts into the outside world for liberation. *Father Melancholy's Daughter* is about the daughter of an Episcopal priest who grapples with the legacy of her visionary mother and her spiritual life. *A Southern Family* deals with the story of a North Carolina family that is shocked by the unresolved death of a son and a brother. *Flora* is about a ten year old Helen Anstruther and her guardian Flora Waring. *Evenings at Five* is a moving story about Christina, the protagonist living in the presence of her recently deceased long-time partner, Rudy.

*The Finishing School* is on how an actress looks back at her fourteenth summer when she befriended a passionate, tragic woman. *Violet Clay* is a moving story of a gifted young woman who makes the vision of her greatest self, come true. *Unfinished Desires* exposes the personal politics which is the outcome when the girls, nuns and girls' parents test their artistic religious powers. This study is limited to seven of her novels- *The Odd Woman*, *A Southern Family*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *Glass People*, *Evenings at Five*, *Violet Clay* and *Flora*.

The identity of women is created by everything and everybody around them and this is integral to any deliberation on feminism. This thesis attempts at recognizing the inclusive structures within the society that complements the liberation of women. The study necessitates the identification of the inclusive structures available in the society of women and the ensuing interpretation of those structures. A further analysis on why these structures are important to women in their evolution, and how they complement the already available institutions is also required and the study proposes to concentrate on this aspect as well. To expound on this theory where inclusion is recognized as the essence of women's

evolution, the women in the select novels of Gail Godwin have been studied taking into consideration the five factors that may possibly support them as they pace towards reclamation of self : the immediate family, the women in the extended family, the arts, the South and the author's writing style that contribute towards women's evolvment. The exploration of seven novels by the author Gail Godwin is attempted which presumably has her autobiographical elements and shows the role played in the lives of her women characters by the environment that encompasses family, the relationships formed outside the family, the culture in which the women have grown and the art forms that is a part of them.

The second chapter 'From Withdrawal to Familial Attachment 'analyses how the familial cord of women is a major factor contributing towards the sustenance of the self. Godwin's women protective of the structure of the family shoulder the responsibility of carrying the tradition of interrelations forward. This is a mutually benefitting process where the women understand that they are remnants of the members of their family. The new women in her works specifically experience within themselves the bearing of their mothers they had sprung from, and their self-designs nurtured by the valuable ideals of the culture inherited by them from their mothers turn reciprocative of the expectations of others in the society. The protagonists in the novels *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *A Southern Family* and *Glass People* are analyzed for their relatedness with their family, more specifically with their mothers in the light of Object Relations theory.

In the third chapter 'Sisterhood- A Shared Commitment' the importance of the relationships formed by women outside ones family is traced. From the time when people left their homes for education and jobs in the other regions they have been building relationships with others outside their family. These relationships turn out to be surrogate

to one's family and are a part of the formation of the self of a person since these associations have the advantage of not being influenced by the habits of the family of the other. The objective view of the person by the one disconnected to the family is beneficial and this is an enriching experience to the subject who can learn from their unreserved criticism. The novels *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *A Southern Family*, *Glass People*, *Flora* and *Evenings At Five* have been studied to find the influence of the main characters by the members of the kinship group and their discernment in choosing the relevant material for their betterment of the self. The theory of Sisterhood is used here for the study which concentrates on the relationship of the women protagonists in the stories with the women outside their own family.

The fourth chapter 'Assimilation of The Native Heritage' attempts at substantiating the influence of the native region in the lives of its people. Family, race and social class had been compelling issues of the literature from South and the society and the significant culture of the region are important parts of any work that is produced here. Any person is a product of his or her culture and the traditions and habits of the place are consciously or unconsciously imbibed by its people. A sociological approach is given to studying the influence of the regional past in the lives of the women characters in the novels by the author from the South and where South forms the center of major happenings.

The fifth chapter 'Women and Therapeutic Art' studies the effective usage of arts by the women for their sustenance. Women make their art forms like writing, painting and music a means for connecting themselves with the people who have been rendering them strength. The painstaking vacuum left by them is filled in by an art form which they have been sharing mutually. The art practiced by the women in the novels are more convincingly an

orientation of the living to the dead. The art forms thus connecting the living and the dead bridges the gap between reality and the innermost longings and thus result in wish fulfillment. The experiences the women shared with the other are as personal as the arts to which they have intimate association. The art forms also carry with them the richness of the tradition of the form that has been carried forward through generations surpassing time and space. The novels *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *The Odd Woman*, *A Southern Family*, *Evenings at Five* and *Violet Clay* have been considered here for the various forms of arts that serve as therapy to the protagonists.

The sixth Chapter 'Mechanics of Writing' analyses the writing style of the author, her themes, choice of words and the other prominent features in her writing that support the topic under discussion.

The concluding chapter analyzes the contribution by the various factors that are rewarding in the evolution of women.

There were considerable number of discussions on the topic of gender inequalities between men and women and all were placing women alongside men for comparison. They tried analyzing how the society had induced the women to believe in its description of femininity. This was noted by Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and she for the first time proposed that the gender roles that differentiated men from women were social. Certain values set by the society as characterizing the feminine in the women were assimilated by them. Thus she diverged from seeing gender as a product of biology to seeing gender as a social one.

Following Wollstonecraft was Margaret Fuller of USA, the writer of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*(1845), who questioned the categories of gender stating that there is

no 'completely 'masculine' male', and similarly there is no 'feminine' female' (86). Thus she propounded the concept of androgyny and the transcendence of gender.

The twentieth century novelist Virginia Woolf explored gender relations in her writings *A Room of One's Own*(1929) and *Three Guineas*(1938) pioneering a women-centric notion of reading and education. She argued that women were practiced to read and write like men which influenced their writings. Following Woolf and the rise of the Women's Movement in the 1960s started Second Wave of feminism that was concerned with bringing in independence to women through economic equality . During this period of feminist activity the association between and among women were deemed important resulting in the rise of women's cooperative living communities.

Simone De Beauvoir agreed that a woman is made by society and men but she refuted that concept to be used as a reason for injustice and inequality against the gender. She advocated certain socialization among women that will make women responsible for themselves and this Sisterhood was crucial to the success of the Second Wave Feminism of the 1970s.

The women who united under Sisterhood though did not involve in any extraordinary feat like campaigns for equal pay or fought for rights, they did still manage to stay united and achieve some victories like bringing in legislation against sex discrimination. Female friendship grew in work places and religious groups and this notable theory of Sisterhood is to be used for analyzing how women in the society of Godwin's novels taken for the study support and influence the other women protagonists.

Cultural materialism emerged as a theoretical movement in the early 1980s along with new historicism, an American approach to early modern literature, with which it shares much common ground. The term was coined by Williams describing it as a theoretical

blending of leftist culturalism and Marxist analysis. Williams viewed culture as a “productive process”, part of the means of production, and cultural materialism often identifies what he called “residual”, “emergent” and “oppositional” cultural elements. Following in the tradition of Herbert Marcuse, Antonio Gramsci and others, cultural materialists extend the class-based analysis of traditional Marxism by means of an additional focus on the marginalized. Here attention is given to the developments brought into the society.

Some literature made considerable contribution towards deciding the area of research, the topic of the study and the factors to be accounted for the clarification of the analysis.

The text *The American South-Portrait of a Culture* (1979) edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., provided reliable evidences supporting the proposed territory of research that considered the status of American South as an entity that needs special attention. The present study continues from the book’s traversal of the social characters of the region and the transformation in thoughts of its inhabitants that is reflected in the Southern literature that documents its identification of involvement with what is outside alongside individual solidarity.

Jean E. Friedman’s book *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (1985) that traces the evolution of Southern women’s identity and the critique by the writers Elaine Showalter, bell hooks and Betty Friedan on various phases of feminism and the reviews on the fractional aspect of feminism noted down in the first and the second wave that dwelt on suffrage, economy and other absolute rights and also on the third wave that took feminism beyond the classifications based on gender and sexuality led the focus of the research towards women’s growth that was possible when they accommodated society.



The book on *The History of Southern Women's Literature* (2002) edited by Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks aided in tracing the diverse tradition of Southern women's literature.

The article *The Narrative Shaping of Meaning in Gail Godwin's A Southern Family* by Elaine Lux speaking of the similarities in life and fiction has contributed to the analysis of the women characters in the fiction of Gail Godwin, and their evolution that represents the evolution of women in the society.

The interviews by the author Gail Godwin, most importantly the ones to Rob Neufeld, her publisher and book-reviewer for the Asheville Citizen-Times, were useful in understanding the nuances of her works.

The novels taken for the study have been analysed through close reading methodology and also have been viewed from literary approaches related to society, culture, art and writing. Electronic resources have been generously referred to. Owing to the busy schedule of Godwin, the attempts at contacting the writer through e-mails have not been helpful. However, the author's various interviews to her publisher and book reviewer Rob Neufeld on her themes and her methodology of writing were sources of valuable information. American Information Resource Centre, Chennai provided relevant resources for the study.

The aim of the research is:

1. To study the plausibility of liberation of women even when they do not withdraw from society.
2. To recognize the inclusive structures that complement the evolution of women.

3. To interpret the resourcefulness of the structures that support the evolvement of women.
4. To propose participatory approach as a means to women's liberation.

The objective of the thesis is:

1. Analyzing interconnectivity between women's identity and their environment.
2. Recognizing individual factors in the family, society and culture that support evolution of women.
3. Identifying the resources within the women that aid their sustenance.
4. Establishing the effectiveness of interrelationship over seclusion in women's liberation.

The Hypothesis of this study is that if a woman perceives the distinct establishments existent in her environment, that complement her evolution and discerns to move beyond the socially construed norms - where liberation corresponds to isolation, then her means for liberation broaden.

Gail Godwin shifts the outlook of her women of liberation from isolation to inclusion by unifying the familial, social, cultural and creative factors that contribute towards their evolvement.

The next chapter 'From Withdrawal to Familial Attachment' is an attempt at studying the identification of resources available within the family by women in the novels that aid them in their process of evolution.