

Chapter III

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Sisterhood – A Shared Commitment

Godwin's heroines grow to be more coherent through constant examination and redefinition of the self, and this refinement is enabled through the humanist concept of a centered identity that extends to embrace the world in which these women live and the diverse voices of their world.

This chapter focuses on the importance of sisterhood and its influence in the lives of the women in the select novels of Godwin. Some of these bonds formed by the women with those of the women outside the family circle provide them the welcome diversion at the time of their struggle and hardships and fill in the emptiness which family connections alone cannot fill. The commonalities which the members of a family share and the evaluation of one member by the other that becomes difficult when all members are similar, is seen in a new light while in the vicinity of the extended relationships.

The major theory of feminism is that gender roles are pre-determined and the women are expected to fit into these roles. According to this theory, 'the roles like 'daughter' or 'mother' are not natural but social' (CLT 83), and the women are trained to act their specific roles. Women's representation as meek, innocent, seductive or sentimental is rooted in the minds of the people and this is reciprocated in the society where they are seen and treated as powerless beings who can only serve as objects of sex and procreation. This has led to the development of inequalities between men and women which are social and are the makings of men who wanted to retain power. Various social and cultural 'structures' like religion, family, education, arts, and the knowledge systems all are the replica of this inequality. These institutions

are active in reinforcing this inequality as they do not appear oppressive. The cultural structure provides a system of belief that makes the women accept the subordination.

Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the first thinkers to propose that gender roles are not natural but social and the features associated with the feminine in women like finery, romance, and beauty are also social and not natural. In her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), she rejected the stance that women are naturally inferior to men. According to her, women's subordination was due to the lack of education and the demands made on them by the social norms, values, laws and cultural practices. 'This shift-from femininity as natural to femininity as social-is Wollstonecraft's major contribution.'(CLT 86).

Margaret Fuller of USA also believed in education as the means of emancipation for women and her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*(1845) was a parallel origin for Western feminism. Unlike Wollstonecraft, she did not believe in specific gender- roles and according to her there were no 'feminine roles' to which the women need to be confined to.

In the twentieth century, novelist Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas*(1938) explored gender roles. To her, it is the sexist language and reading that has prevented women readers from reading as women and so they were made to read like men. The aesthetics, values, literary merits and tradition of men have been promoted as universal and any text that was different from this was rejected as 'minor or domestic without any virtue' (CLT 87). Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* discussed the idea of androgynous creative mind where one attempts to go beyond the male/female binary. Woolf believed that the best artists were always a combination of the man and the woman, or 'man-womanly', and 'woman-manly'(CLT 103). The historical content of the 1960s will provide a better understanding of the issues dealt within the novels of Gail Godwin and will also clarify

the position of the women in her works. There were protests all over the country to curb the humiliating treatment the black citizens were receiving, to demand an end to the war in Vietnam and to demand full equality for women. Godwin grew up in the 1950s and 1960s and the women of this period were aware of the restrictions laid by the patriarchal father figures, the duty bound lives of the daughters and the southern womanhood that was predominant in the late 19th century.

Betty Freidan's book *The Feminine Mystique* on women in modern America was published in 1963 and she had insisted on the necessity of women to identify professional lives of their own. The committee led by Eleanor Roosevelt to investigate the condition of women helped in the formation of new rules and laws to strengthen women. The National Organization for Women was started to facilitate the 1964 Civil Rights Act that guaranteed equal treatment of all groups that included women. The movement for women's equality known as the women's liberation movement started then and the activists of this movement were called "women's libbers" and these women who worked to gain recognition for the members of their gender called each other "sisters."

In late 1960s the Women's liberation movement emerged in the United States and United Kingdom and other developed countries and continued throughout the 1970's. Then came the First-wave feminism, a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands and the United States. It focused on officially mandated inequalities, most importantly on gaining women's suffrage. The term first-wave was coined by Martha Lear writing in *The New York Times* in March 1968, who also used the term "second-wave feminism" at the same time. First-wave feminism in America involved a wide range of women, some belonging

to conservative Christian groups, others such as Matilda Joslyn Gage of the National Suffrage Association resembling the radicalism of second-wave feminism. Most of the first-wave feminists were more moderate and conservative than radical and worked within the political system and were willing to join the sympathetic men in power to promote the cause of suffrage.

Second-wave feminism which began in the early 1960s in the United States and continued into the early 1980s was later recognized as a movement worldwide. It included a vast range of issues like sexuality, family, the work place, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities. The second-wave feminism also concentrated on domestic violence and marital rape issues, establishment of battered women's shelters, and changes in custody and divorce laws.

Sisterhood was crucial to the success of Second-wave feminism. The women who united under this activity of sisterhood had a sense of common cause to work for the equality of women, and working together these women achieved victories like legislation against sex discrimination and the right to vote. Women were committed to their female friends even when they lived with a male partner and had children. Even religious groups that had mostly female believers retained a strong sense of sisterhood. Women spent much time, energy and passion in forming woman-centered relationships and put other women first since the feminist argument for sisterhood has always been that men were put first in society by other men and by women. All what had been achieved by feminism was through the women bound by sisterhood who had been willing to put each other and their shared interests first. This was a difficult feat because it had to work through differences. Trinh T. Min-ha(1989), a Vietnamese writer and literary theorist, pointed out that inclusion of

‘Third-World Women’ in Western feminism often happened instrumentally and such interventions forced white feminists to acknowledge that gender issues were influenced by a variety of social divisions such as race, class and religion and hence the concerns of white middle-class women were not universal. However as in many of Godwin’s novels the protagonist Jane in the novel *The Odd Woman* is not allowed to stop with this understanding, but is seen to work towards identifying similarities in the experiences of women she is with and gather lessons from it for her life.

Godwin had many women around her and she examined their lives to see what she could take. But then she would discard what she did not need. Many people thought that the book ended sadly, but at the end Jane learnt discernment, and that certainly was a promising move in the right direction. Godwin in her interview with Welch stated, “I think women do need to be educated and they do need to know, by reading literature and by seeing good examples, what they can do. And this is happening. I’m very glad to contribute.” (Welch 83).

Godwin’s theme of “wholeness” was in making her women characters free of any guilt through reconciliation with the people around. They revert to close observation of their lives and examination of various literary characters. Many of her women were teachers in English literature at universities which facilitate their studying of works of art and literature thereby conducting self-examination with the people in the works besides them as a measure for analysis.

Apart from the family of the women in the novels of Gail Godwin, the members outside the family form an integral part of the process of self-realization of the women and their development that follow. The author’s narrative is complete only with the

secondary characters that shape the summit of the love of the protagonists' for their society and for their religion which is seen seriously by them and in this way the south is different from the non-south. Though the recent data on the trends in education, occupation and rural or urban residence when compared to the past show change, still there is the suggestion that the religion of the "new South" (AS 31), will be as vigorous and distinctive as that of the old.

Another marked feature of the Southern culture is what has been called "localism" – a tendency to prefer one's own community over the other. This is no parochialism since this trait is the outcome of the 'sense of place' than anything else. This makes the southerners sensitive to the friendship among their native groups and the uniqueness of their society. They need the will and ability to withstand the social changes, and their religion and their fervor for their roots seems to provide in them the understanding of their value as a member of the society and this helps them survive any disintegrative effect of the society.

The restrictions laid on the Blacks in the South in the late 19th century must have led Godwin to bring in some black people in her novels, and she had dealt with them in a way that signified the change in the outlook of the White women at a time when feminism was primarily restricted to white Western women's mobilizations around their rights, starting from suffrage and equal pay to reproductive and sexual rights. Following this Western centric focus, the feminist movement marginalized knowledge production by and about women outside of the West. There was a change in this view of the nature of feminism when a wide range of intersecting feminist strands such as Black feminism, Chicana feminism or Eco feminism came into being with its alternative knowledge. One of the most prominent examples of a challenge to dominant Western feminist perspectives is

postcolonial feminism that expanded the field of feminist theory to include issues of race and post-coloniality within feminism. Godwin incorporates the change in view of the White women in her works that contributes constructively towards understanding among the women of different races.

Lydia's association with Renee who was the descendant of the Black workers of Virginia and Carolina reflected the shared identity among women irrespective of their race and class. These two women who hailed from different races testified the need in women that went beyond social constraints to empower themselves. Such bondage was not an easy one as the women had to work beyond the deep rooted marginalization that had been characterizing the society for long. Those were times when the novelist Eudora Welty, speaking of her place Jackson where she grew up in her conversation with Shelby Foote, author and historian and Louis D. Rubin, Jr, a noted American scholar noted that "There was only one high school where everybody had to go, and one black high school, I guess. It's awful that people of my age didn't even really know the conditions of the black schools." (AS 74).

The promise of a productive and genuine sisterhood was in their union which was irresistible to them and in no way subordinate to the heterosexual romance that was once quoted as the reason for the demise of sisterhood by men. When Lydia was about to call Renee, she thought of their friendship in which there was a 'flirtation going on-as it does even between women-where each delicately tested the other's boundaries and tried to be her best and most interested self.'(MTD 283). Her composure over the tribulations in her life of resistance to the racist society, and later in life her love for 'basketball ball' hero from her school which was damaging as he turned out to be a person who moved 'In and

out of the state penitentiary' (MTD 286), which left her with a daughter to be cared for was in contrast to Lydia's unease in her moving away from her husband Max and her growing interest in Stanley whom she met regularly at the swimming pool. The solidarity among women that was confined to the White women during the second-wave is seen undergoing a beneficial transformation in the growing solidarity among the women of different race here.

Faulkner in answer to a question put to him at the University of Virginia on 8 May, 1958 at Joseph Blotner's Introductory Class in Types of Literature, Frederick Gwynn's Graduate Class in American Literature said if change is not controlled by wise people, it destroys sometimes more than what it brings.

Women in Gail Godwin's novels form relationships with women sharing their concerns, sufferings, and thoughts with them and renovate themselves. Janice G. Raymond in *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*(2001) says:

Female Bonding can be perceived as a harbinger of women's movement as it augurs new social consciousness. This bonding rests on the deep sympathy women have for one another. The impact of Female Bonding induces women to shed all sense of otherness that they have internalized. This bonding provides new avenues for them to liberate themselves from their suffocating conditions and emerge as new beings.(161)

The female friendships and associations formed by the women characters in Godwin's novel *The Odd Woman, A Mother and Two Daughters, A Southern Family, and Flora* are analyzed here for their contribution in realization and development of self by sisterhood.

Jane in *The Odd Woman* had given herself to what the American radical feminist Janice Raymond noted when she said that the women by practice were made to believe

that men were necessary in their lives. The women thus were often left with the difficulty to “choose between loneliness and imperfect coupledness.” as shown in Kristin Aune’s, 16th January 2003 article, *Whatever happened to sisterhood? (the f word)*. Her love for Gabriel Weeks, a married professor whom she met in New York at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association had started being painful. A discomfort crept into their relationship because, Gabriel was too careful in avoiding any commitment to Jane. Her dependence on him had silently worked on his ego and it had swollen to the point where he had the audacity to reply as to why he could not decide on choosing either her or his wife as “I’m not sure I ‘need’ anybody. I am married but I live very much alone. I think you would understand if ... you had been married for as long as I have.”(OW 8) and added choosing one of them will be like “deciding to give up apples for oranges, or the other way round.”(OW 8). It was a huge blow to her who believed in “caring deeply for two people at the same time”(OW 8) to be an impossibility. This made her question the faithfulness between a man and a woman and searched amidst literary models for its possibility.

Jane’s bonding with her family members was also under strain after her mother’s marriage to Ray Sparks, the step-father, to whom Jane could not develop any convincing relationship. Her mother’s attention was divided between her husband and her children and Jane felt not cared for by her mother. At such a time when all doors seemed to have closed for her, she identified a companion in her colleague at the college where she was teaching English literature. Sonia Marks, her colleague proved to be one who relieved her of her anxieties through meaningful conversations and analysis of literary characters. Both were nervous about meeting each other as they did not know what the other person was looking for in the other. But when they touched upon common topics for conversation that began with literature and later moved on to love, marriage and family they were comforted

by mutual companionship. Jane's guilt over her love for Gabriel was pacified by Sonia stating, "Most women can identify with heroines who learn to live without marriage; but not so many want to live without love of any kind." (OW 55). At the same time her belief in her personality that was shown when Sonia marks imagined literary characters for Jane, "Heathcliff has pizzazz, but I don't think you'd fall for someone that unstable. Then there's Rochester, but there's also his wife in the attic, and I'd wish you better than that." (OW 66), when Sonia Marks and Jane had lunch together. She was bereft on hearing this as she was with a man who was already married. But when she realized how highly she was valued by Sonia Marks with whom she identified herself, it strengthened her belief in herself and made her realize the ambiguity of her relationship with her lover Gabriel.

Jane placated her 'mythmaking' quality by finding an interesting audience in Sonia who was convincingly appreciative of the symbols and its implications in her narration that too often spoke of strength derived through relationships. These myths were very important to her since she was at the verge of her decision to terminate her unreliable love affair with a married man and she was "looking for myths that support the possibility of happy long-term relationships." (OW 171).

Jane found an alternative for her mother Kitty in her friend who was capable of accepting her for who she was. Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Stacey in their review essay, *Second Thoughts on the Second Wave* wrote:

Feminists must...renew our efforts to develop cultural forms that fill some of the same longings for intimacy, interdependency, and emotional security that most heterosexuals try to satisfy in marriage, however oppressive to women its unequal relations of power. (41)

Sonia's classes made her think of what some women in the society had lost to men. Discussing Hawthorne's works with Sonia she expressed her agony, 'Now I can't get out of my mind the possibility that over the centuries we may have abandoned certain human qualities, too: "left them to the men," (OW 53). Once she identified her flaw, she worked towards not letting her weakness overpower her. She maintained her composure while with Ray and Gabriel, the two men who could test her emotions. Jane in a way represented the women in the world who resisted common oppression. In her interview with Kathleen Welch, Godwin, while speaking about her character Jane Clifford said, "I really did think that I was creating a character who was unlike anyone else. I thought I would put all my oddities in her. Then I got all those letters. It seems as if there are thousand Jane Cliffords." (79).

While Sonia with words of reassurance was a consolation to Jane's growing guilt, Gerda Mulvaney, her feminist friend who ran 'Feme Sole' a magazine for women was merciless in her criticism and observations which brought her face to face with the reality which she was evading. When Jane threw all her questions about Gabriel never discussing his wife or his leaving her for Jane, Gerda pointed out to the irrationality of their love affair –"I don't understand how two people can go two years without discussing anything." (OW 6-7). She also made Jane see that she and her lover had never shared anything of their past which meant he was not thinking of any long term relationship with her. Gerda also made her accept the 'romantic'(OW 41) in her that enveloped the facts like the matter-of-fact attraction that Gabriel had for her with her idealism that believed in "each experiencing more because able to do it through the mind and body of the other,"(OW 41). As a final shot, towards the end, Gerda exploded at her with her crude remarks "I'm so

sick of your avoidances and evasions and illusions and your cringing little refusals to see the truth, to see things as they are!”(OW 401). Jane saw that her friend’s words were partially out of her narrow views on love and life but otherwise were to be accepted for their truth as ‘her life did seem one long string of “avoidances and evasions and illusions” at this moment.’(OW 403) and decided to be real in her actions which she doubted had not been so far in matters she had been partial about. Jane put an end to the anxiety that had been clouding her love life by moving away from Gabriel.

Meantime, Godwin had used the character of Gerda to show how the women found their own means of bonding with other women and carried themselves through disappointments and loneliness. Gerda and her group of women who worked for the magazine ‘Feme Sole’ represented one of the various forms through which sisterhood represented itself in the 1970s America when women, redefined their roles as wives, mothers, workers and lovers considering their own experience and it was this period that saw the abundant growth of feminist literature. Gerda’s group that comprised ‘one very young, the other two middle-aged’ (OW 386) also symbolize the generation differences that ended the Second-wave due to the diversity in the priorities.

It was when the news about Jane’s grandmother Edith Dewar Bernstorff reached her that she realized how much she meant to her. She held on to the phone not wanting her mother to end the call. She hated her stepfather who interfered and asked them to shorten the phone call and in agony and anger, Jane immediately turned to her friend Gerda to be relieved by her words “I understand.” She felt grateful to Gerda with whom she had shared all her family stories in spite of a little strain in their relationship then, it was Gerda who was able to console her for she was able to understand Jane’s feelings.

Some of the situations which both the women travelled through were similar and so she started alluding some of Jane's stories to her life in fact, and she could identify herself and all her dilemmas with those of Jane's. They felt an affinity towards each other. They even exchanged thoughts that lay hidden in the dark recesses of the mind. Each in her own way was able to see the other one clearly for what she was. They understood each other better and as soon as Gerda heard of Edith's death, she told Jane that she knew how difficult it must be for her since Kitty's and Jane's psyches were terribly bound up with Edith.

And it was also Gerda who was Jane's critic, pointing out to her drawbacks, reservations and oddities. She was one who made Jane realize her precarious position in her relationship with Gabriel. Though not a person to appreciate men, in Jane's case she never hesitated to tell her that she was deceiving herself.

Theirs was interestingly a friendship between two opposite poles. Jane was an emotional academic type living her life more in the nineteenth century amidst books and Gerda was a person who swiftly moved from one to the other, be it people, lovers or causes trying her hands at everything and getting easily bored with it. Even Jane was surprised by Gerda's ability to 'recreate herself'.

Each tried to justify her own beliefs. Jane's love episode and her interest in family myths were all means to escape the reality of her true self just like Gerda's 'causes' that she switched over constantly. Thoroughly understanding the other, they criticized each other. In fact this ended in Jane's self-analysis, and in seeing things as they stood in reality. Gerda gave a clear shape to all thoughts that Jane was struggling with. Though Jane and Gerda were different, still they were bound to each other as women. As bell hooks in her article "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women" (1986) states, "it is not necessary

for women to eradicate differences or to pretend to share all the same oppressions in order to feel solidarity with one another”. In spite of the difference in the ideas they shared, they still managed to understand each other.

To Jane, in fact, Gerda was a symbol of women’s solidarity. Gerda ran a feminist news paper titled ‘ Feme Sole’. She had a group of women to work for her. The women had a common cause of exposing the evil men of the society. This was their unifying force and Gerda was their leader. Their association was beneficial to Jane and to a person like her who was indecisive, Gerda’s firm faith in things even if it was short lived was great attraction.

A Mother and Two Daughters is the story of three women who try to renovate their lives through extending their faith in themselves to those in the immediate family, the people in the neighborhood, their town, and to the homeland. Their vision of communion with people around provides answers, solaces and builds their trust in themselves and in others. The women turn out to be more admirable with their independent perspective on life that is the end result of the vibrant knowledge they gather from people around. Though the opening of the novel is with the demise of Leonard Strickland, the head of the Strickland family, there is still the hope that there is life around and the family members have to find ways to continue with their lives.

The opening of a chapter in the novel with an epigraph from the I Shing reads, “The Chinese character Ku represents a bowl in whose contents worms are breeding. This means decay. It has come about because the gentle indifference of the lower trigram has come together with the rigid inertia of the upper, and the result is stagnation. Since this implies guilt, the conditions embody a demand for removal of the cause. Hence the meaning

of hexagram is not simply ' what has been spoiled'' (MTD 83).The epigraph symbolizes the conflicts in the lives of the women of the Strickland's and how they arrive at solutions to clear those complications through formulating a new sense of self with the concrete foundations of trust, understanding and forbearance on which family and society is built.

Nell is "observant and occasionally satiric" (MTD 3) and Cate is like her mother in her ability to remain an outside observer in most cases. But Nell's years of conscious effort in making herself sociable to others continued to protect her from being judgmental of others. Being much of an outsider to the lineage of the Stricklands and their circle of associates, she gradually learnt to accept people with their imperfections. When Nell's self-restraint was put to test, by her daughters while at their family cottage at Ocracoke, her reunion with the old school mate in the cottage beside theirs and the renewal of their friendship offered her the sense of belonging and she utilized the opportunity to involve herself in something concrete, be it like nursing her ailing friend or inviting her friend and her husband for dinner. This companionship was vital in helping her renew her interest in life. The idea of being required by someone outside the family relations gave her the liberty to see for herself who she was and what she was capable of and this served as an remedy to the trauma in her that followed Leonard's death. It opened possibilities to live a life that was not forced by the family ties and signified far reaching association that kept widening.

Nell, a nurse by profession, was compassionate towards people and was committed to assisting people to live life comfortably and die peacefully. She was also the respected wife of the respected lawyer of Mountain city Leonard Strickland, and the social propriety she had to adhere to had made her to control her judgmental views on some of those

community rituals in which she has to play her part. These qualities made her to involve in the lives of others who looked towards her even when she was tempted to move away from all the things around after her husband's death. It was the people around who brought back Nell actively into social life, relieving her from her personal grief.

Nell's involvement in the book club of Mountain city which had diverse members in it was an instance of her loyalty towards her associates. Despite their dissimilarities these were all women who were assertive and self-affirming that created bonding among them. Nell, Theodora, Sicca, Jean Lewis, Gertrude Jones, Azalea and Wickie Lee all recognized the unique qualities in the other and though with some people like Theodora, it was pretentious, they were conscious of the other's need of a company in the other woman. Such constructive interconnectivity between and among women stabilized the whole of the community of women.

At their beach house at Ocracoke, Nell renewed her friendship with her school friend Merle of Farragut Pines who remembered her as Nell Purvis. It turned out to be an unanticipated source of consolation to her at the time of her mourning for her husband Leonard.

The cottage at Ocracoke where Nell bid farewell to her dead husband, ended up to be the place where she met Marcus Chapin whom she married later. The lively Merle Chapin with her effusiveness made Nell comfortable. The deep emotional bonds that she developed with her, freed her from the mundane life she had started experiencing after her husband's death. Her friendship with Merle Chapin and her faith in her made her decide against her desire to alienate herself from everything in the vicinity and she continued with her role of a nurse.

The women in the novel are all women of intellect and they cannot be confined by simple paradigms. All these characters work towards reintegration of the self and acquire wisdom through the community.

Leonard Strickland, before his death speaks of a passage from Montaigne “To storm a breach, conduct an embassy, govern a people, those are brilliant actions. To scold, laugh... and deal gently and justly with one’s own family and oneself... that is something rarer, more difficult, and less noticed in the world.”(MTD 18).

Nell, Lydia and Cate were women from three different cultures; Nell, widowed recently and filled with unsentimental grief for her husband; Lydia with her too sensible husband, her new lover and her desire to be recognized and Cate, a teacher in English Literature whose college was closed and who had to find a new job. These women dealt with their lives differently, but always in association with people around.

The South is different from the North in various aspects that help it in the assimilation of the changes that followed industrialization and urbanization. “In particular, two enduring aspects of Southern culture may be useful: the nature and extent of religious belief and practice, and a relatively great attachment to local communities.” (30), as noted by Louis D. Rubin. Jr. in *The American South, Portrait of a Culture*.

Most of the Southerners turned to religion seriously at some time or the other in life and the religious institutions form an integral part of the social life of those who were associated with them. They spent valuable time and money at the churches and derived spiritual fulfillment. Kristin Aune examined the concept of sisterhood and found female friendship grew in some female dominated professions and while speaking about female friendship in religious gathering in *the f word* contemporary UK Feminism, a feminist

website, she wrote in her 16 January 2003 article, *Whatever happened to Sisterhood?*, ‘Religious groups, because they tend to have mainly female adherents, still retain a strong sense of sisterhood.’ Kitty, in *The Odd Woman* took to religion to cope with her disintegrating marriage to Ray and was seen visiting churches ‘breathing in the incense like oxygen and lighting candles herself.’ (OW 202). Lily, in *A Southern Family* was also into religion and its ceremonies that helped her in retaining her strength even when she was left to face an uneven marriage and loss of her beloved son which made Father Zachary tell her daughter, “Your mother has remarkable inner resources” (SF 89).

Another aspect of the southern culture that is more striking is “localism” which could be defined as ‘a tendency to see communities as different from each other, and to prefer one’s own’. The “sense of place” noted by many observers have a hold on the sentiments of the Southerners and they are more inclined to form friendship or kinship with the members of their own community.

The people of Southern cities are more localistic. Though South has accepted industrialization it has still retained its “traditional philosophy.” These aspects of the south permeate the life of the women in the novels of Godwin who have the traces of South left with them, and some men in her works are also no exception in retaining a part of South in them.

Speaking about the writings of Ring Lardner who is not a southern writer, Eudora Welty tells Foote “And he wasn’t interested, as you said, in the place as a place, as I think perhaps we are.” (AS 61). She adds, “And I do think that a good deal of what southern literature is today is built on a particular time and place and a particular change. But nevertheless a sense of change.” (AS 83).

Much of the stereotypes about the writings of Godwin and the old habits of the south prevail in the scenes in her works with a sensibility that allows for a ‘universal sisterhood’.

Lydia was fascinated by Renee Peverell – Watson, her teacher in History of female consciousness in her freshman semester. She had never met a black person like Renee and their friendship grew gradually. Renee’s great – great – grandmother had been a house servant on the famous Peverell plantation up in Halifax county in a time when being a ‘house nigger’ was a position of pride. And for generations Renee’s mother’s side had been using the name Peverell with their names. Renee, a North Carolian, turned out to be the person who brought a new interest in life to Lydia. She desired to develop friendship with her teacher by proving useful and she discussed many things with her that she could not discuss with others, and gathered experience and this made her more matured in her approach towards everything and everybody around.

Renee’s was an entirely different society and Lydia’s introduction to her when racial prejudices were not completely out of people’s mind, enhanced Lydia’s understanding of her fellow beings like how Renee had to overcome ‘all sorts of sociological nuances’ even in keeping a dog owned by a White judge.

With Renee, Lydia could see the beginning of a complacent life that she had wanted when she decided to separate from her husband Max Mansfield like “Everybody has her own starting point.” (MTD 133), as Renee remarked. Lydia even after proving herself successful and efficient, felt inadequate while facing her elder sister.

Audre Lorde writes in *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference*:

By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class and age. There is a pretense to homogeneity of experience covered by the word "sisterhood" that does not in fact exist.(116)

As a reconsideration of this theory, the author notably has worked towards building a bond among women that attempts at narrowing the gap between women of different class and race that had so far mitigated them from deriving strength from their own gender. Almost all of Godwin's women are White who have clearly come out of the shackles of these dissimilarities that had kept them apart for long.

George B. Tindall in his essay *The Resurgence of Southern Identity* pointed out that When Jimmy Carter, the Southerner became the President of America, cartoonist Oliphant in his cartoon rendered the White House as Tobacco Road where there were the unfashionable remnants of the southerners represented through litter which was a mixture of a broken car, a pickup truck, old tires, huge hound dogs. Even Jimmy Carter's religious conviction was a revelation to the people.

The 'perfectionist streak' that Cate had inherited from her father, which according to her mother had been misdirected in her criticizing people around, but then as her mother wished, she analyzed her and her immediate surroundings and altered many of her short comings and this helped her grow.

Nell was weary when she spotted a dark brown splotch on the back of her hand, her first age spot and it filled her with helplessness about her old age but then she had her husband who protected her from many things including such worrying thoughts. When

such a companion was lost and she was left with two daughters who were extreme poles in temperament and difficult to manage and where she herself was her crude judge, it was her society of women, their acquaintance and their Book club that kept her engaged.

Be it Theodora Blount with all her pretensions, her ward the defensive Wickie Lee, or Grace Hill who worked hard or the amusing Sicca, all were there sharing her time and thoughts. Their society which though had some stereotyped oddities like social conceits, was in no way harmful. The monthly book reviews and the customary arrangements required for that, the phone calls from the members were all a welcome diversion from the vacuum created by Leonard's death.

In one of the meetings of the club, its President Theodora's suggestion to increase the members of the club was unanimously accepted and there was the positive note of confirmed comradeship in future to all. This seemed to answer Cate's reverie 'can the individual spirit survive the society in which it has to live'(SF 18).

Lydia and Renee's friendship exemplified that humanity supersedes race and more than anything it is the human spirit that strengthens associations. Human intelligence and emotions all culminate at comprehending the superior human values.

Cate had great ideals for which she shunned people as in the case of an argument on Cambodians in which she set her godmother in a rage and disrupted her rapport with her. As a dutiful mother Nell wished her daughter not to sacrifice herself and others around her for the sake of her ideals and wanted her to have concern for her own happiness.

Maybe it was fear for the "Elegant Defeatist attitude" that southerners were adept at according to Cate, that gave her condescending, arrogant approach that made her offensive towards many things in life as in the case of moving with people, in her arguments with

others and in her general bearing. When the novel ends, Cate could be seen mellowed down by her introspection of self and exhibiting growing reciprocation of care and affection towards those who really desired her well being.

Merle was the person who could ask Nell about how it was like to be the ‘one who’s left?’ and in her Nell, found solace from the personal tantrums that brought her spirit down. On the other hand, Merle, who was waning gradually because of her illness, found a place in Nell to rest her sorrow.

In the middle of various hardships that came in their lives like divorce for Lydia, and Cate losing her job, and the death of her husband in the case of Nell, these women still ‘shaped themselves into the next pattern’ (MTD 416), to move on.

All new experiences gathered in the face of acknowledging familial bonds, new acquaintances made, illness, death, all made Cate understand that however ruined a person’s life may be, it still moved on opening up new possibilities by changing the perspectives. All her robustness at her Aunt Theodora appeared unnecessary when set beside serious concerns of life and she voluntarily made amends with her by conversing with her in the phone call that she received from her while at Ocracoke cottage. Listening to uncle Osgood and his friend who almost ruined each other’s life once, now exchanging Christmas card, Cate assured herself that it was no use carrying old differences for long.

It was to Renee to whom Lydia confessed her newly growing love relationship with Stanley and also of her dilemma in continuing it. When she explained her thoughts to Renee, it helped her to be relieved of the confusions that were weighing her down. This friendship that permitted non-intrusive observation, and that which explicitly valued the other person for who she was, suited Lydia’s temperament which always remained

well organized. Renee's knowledge in various subjects, her southern upbringing, all had affinity with Lydia. She acknowledged her black friend surpassing her in many of the areas which the world valued high and their intimacy complemented each other and they saw an understanding person in the other.

Having lost Leonard Strickland, the widowed mother Nell and her two daughters had to come together to overcome their grief over the loss. In the battle for independence, recognition, acceptance and reconstruction of their lives these women realized the importance of being with each other, and Cate and Lydia moved out of their illusion of intellectual vanity and excessive love respectively. Their faith in the individual extended beyond race and class and there was a complete core of reliable relationships developed.

The precarious lives of her daughters Lydia who decided to divorce her husband Max for want of independence, and Cate who was twice divorced and had an unsettled career disrupted the usually settled life of Nell. But the passage of time, age and its illnesses, care and patience that it brought with it made them lean towards the others with them.

The narrowing of the differences between races exemplified in the wedding of Renee's daughter Camila, a black intellectual woman and Lydia's son Leo, the brilliant young White man. Lydia was too careful about her respect in the society and in the family. She was not prepared to meet her mother with her lover Stanley as she may not approve of her affair with him who was simple and moreover it was a time when she had not legally separated from Max.

When Nell promised her friend Merle who was recovering from illness that she will be with her if she were to be ill again, Merle remarked noticing how much Nell had changed from the person who she knew in her school days "... back then you had a shell

around you a foot thick. Nobody could get past it. And now you're just as warm and loving and natural as can be. I think you must have had a wonderful marriage.”(MTD 439).

Even when Cate mortified Lydia with her merciless criticism of her systematized life as ‘table-model kingdom’, Lydia left the cottage to be away from her sister and relied on Renee for solace and in her phone call told her “you're closer to me than my own sister.” (MTD 441). Cate on the other hand was ashamed of herself for ‘proclivity toward belittling others’ (MTD 443). In remorse and rage Lydia and Cate left the cottage leaving the fireplace in simmer which eventually burnt down the entire cottage. As Nell thought then “Nature is a humbling force” (MTD 451), it brought down Lydia's anger on Cate and Cate's critical arrogance. Nell had her friend Merle, whom she had hardly given a thought in all her married years, who stood by her if she was helpless to undo things at least to stand by her while her house was burnt down.

The fire at the cottage brought Cate to realize the truth which she was evading all these years and told her mother that she will look for some job and will not get on the nerves of her mother and added, “It will do me good to get down to the realities. I've done too much sitting up in my ivory tower complaining.” (MTD 451).The last part of her daughter's statement Nell could not help but accept as true.

When Cate was indecisive about her career and her future, Nell put an end to it stating “when you're alive, you do what you can do. That's the duty, that's the privilege of the living. I'm not sure the rest matters very much.” (MTD 451).

It is worthwhile to ponder over Cate's thought that ‘one person couldn't do it at all, but two persons might do a lot for each other, even in a week.’(MTD 465). bell hooks in *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center* speaks of women suppressed under the banner

of their gender and this sexist oppression is caused by the social structure by “individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo.”(43). The women are taught that the other women are “natural enemies” and thus they are prevented from making cohesive bonds with each other which if formed will be an effective tool that “strengthens resistance struggle.”(44). The author bell hooks even calls for the feminist movement to align under a common banner which will strengthen women.

Renee was a good conversationalist and Lydia found in Renee a companion with whom she could converse on topics that were difficult to her like her divorce, her love affair with Stanley and her conflicts with her sister Cate. It provided solutions to her problems and served as a tool for self-examination. She found a job of appearing on the TV show ‘southern kitchens’ with the old lady Mary Mc Gregor Turnbull from the south, thus fulfilling her desire to be famous, through Renee’s lover Calvin who worked at the studio and Lydia’s hometown being Mountain city added essence to the program. Considering Turnbull’s words “If you get into the habit of retreating from challenges, you’re just a sitting duck for regrets.”(MTD 305), she rejuvenated her fervor for life. Minrose C.Gwin in *Black and White Women of the Old South* states that the women of the Black and White race:

Often viewed one another as missing pieces of a female identity denied to them by the patriarchal culture. Female narrators of the slave narratives reveal their yearning for the chaste respectability of their white sisters while the diaries and memoirs of the white women show their intense jealousy of the stereotypical sexuality of the slave woman. Each is only one half of a self. (11)

Lydia's friendship with Renee was the result of her admiration for the commanding elegance and temperament of the Black woman. Renee also valued the association with Lydia who was well organized and one who shared common characteristics with her. Their love, marriage, children and individual traits ran parallel which they understood through their conversation and finding out the similarities in each other's lives, they grew close. This was suggestive of possibilities of harmonious relation between people of different class when they allow space for the other. As Audre Lorde puts it, if these interracial friendships serve as "patterns for relating across our human differences as equals" (355), by breaking the invincible differences that existed for ages. Above everything Theodora Blount, who according to Cate was "the nearest thing we have to a reigning queen." (MTD 516), approved of Camilla, Renee's daughter as a 'perfect lady' and one suitable to be Leo's wife and Lydia's daughter-in-law. And the snobbish Theodora too turned to Azalea, her black companion for comfort when Wicky Lee left her to live away from her. In the southern society where the racial differences exist, this was a promising sign for betterment of the society.

The inscrutability of human relationships makes it essential to reflect over its importance in life. *A Southern Family* starts with the self-inflicted violent death of Theo the elder son to Quicks and there rose so many changes in the lives of the survivors of the family. The lives of the inmates of the Quicks Hill at Mountain City was in decline just like the lives of its people, and it necessitated immediate actions to protect it from destruction. The family set to understand Theo and his actions which ultimately led them to realize the aspirations, desperation of its entire people and the social intricacies.

Speaking about this book where Theo's character was inspired by her brother who met with a similar tragedy, Godwin said that she will stick to the "insoluble part" that follows his death and "the only solving is that people are forced to think, and they end up knowing him and themselves better."(*New York Times*). The character of Clare was mostly Godwin herself and many other characters possess elements of people who were around her, which in fact reassures the author's faith in human relationships that uphold civilization. Tracing back the relationships and the family history the Quicks come to terms with reality that life is all about shared commitments.

Julia Lowndes, a forty two year old history professor who lived at Mountain city, North Carolina and Clare, Theo's half-sister and a novelist were childhood friends. Julie who released Clare out of her fantasy of defeat while in second grade at St.Clothilde's stood by her at all times from then. "She continued to rely on Julia to reason her out of her expectations of failure and convince her of her own worth."(SF 16).

When the atmosphere at Quick's was too stifling, Julia saved Clare by taking her out and released her of "an invisible load." Clare too with her 'penetrating insights' had provided Julia with confidence and courage at the most needed times. They reciprocated their love for each other and Clare herself was astonished when she thought of how much she 'liked this other person, not a member of my family'(SF 52), to protect her from hating herself. "Their friendship had lasted thirty-five years"(SF 17), in which they had passed through the various stages from girlhood to adulthood. They shared their reflections on aging and the fears and sense of insecurity that came with it. It was at such a time Julia said "I look forward to reaching the age when I don't care what people think, when I will say what I damn please and live how I like. But you have to have a power base to do that from."(SF 53).

Clare found in Julia an ideal friend who chose her native place as her power base to work from, and came back to her home leaving behind a promising teaching career at a college, to take care of her mother whom in fact she never liked,. She left her husband and all his Lowndes family's wealth when she was exposed to Lowndes family's inhumane practices of slaveholders. She was successful in her choice as she turned out to be a 'Beloved Local Person'(SF 56), sought after by her students and friends. It was her friend's life that showed her that 'there are moral natures outside of books that are inherently superior to mine'(SF 57). She could never imagine sacrificing her luxuries like Julia to come home to take care of a mother like that of Julia's. She admired her friend for those noble qualities, inwardly fearing the meager possibilities of her being successful if she was put to handle some of the tests that Julia was going through be it returning to the native land leaving the job or putting up with a difficult mother. Though she did not have the courage to live her friend's life, she did her best by deciding to sprinkle 'a little of her integrity, here and there, upon the personalities of my [her] sturdier fictional heroines.'(SF 58). The 'fine moral nature' was passed on to her readers and to the society this way. She was encouraged by Julia to continue firmly with her power base of fame based on art and Julia's words "It's not going to matter how old you get or what you look like, because people will be able to connect it with being you, and with the work you've done."(SF 54) subdued her anxiety over her future.

Julia valued her togetherness with Clare and savored the times spent with her. She thought fondly of Clare, 'As long as I have Clare to compare notes with at least once a year... nothing's going to be unbearable. Not even obscure old age.' (SF 59).

When the tragic death of Theodore struck the family, Julia was there to shoulder Clare's misery. She shared her pain at the loss and confessed how all including her did not understand Theo.

Lily's closeness with a Black woman Thalia was equally interesting. Each had tender regard for the other and there was so much in each for the other to learn from. Thalia could even read the mind of Lily and could initiate conversation on topics which Lily would never think of making a mention even to any of her family members.

Clare's attempt at getting along with Snow and "to go and see Snow, Theo's widow in her own territory and understand her on her own terms."(SF 336) was a good sign of making amends for the mistakes committed knowingly or unknowingly by her while Theo was alive, and it made the relationship between the women respectable.

When Clare felt that she had deserted her brother by not sparing her time to sit with him or listen to him, Julia was the one to help her out of her guilty conscience pointing out to the fact that Theo always tried to impress his half-sister Clare and asked her the question "Didn't you often love the same people you tried hardest to impress?"(SF 34) to ponder over and made her realize that Theo loved his sister till his very end, which was a great consolation to her. Julia consented to Clare's plan to pick her up from Snow's place, Granny Squirrel and drove all the way through the mount of debris, tar-papered shacks and dirt yards swallowing hard 'the peculiar character of Southern mountain life' (SF 345), which John. C. Campbell visited once to study its realities, and played her 'role of Supporting Friend' (SF 348) whole heartedly. Clare, unhesitatingly could tell her all her troubled thoughts, mixed-up dreams in which she searched for some meaning and consolation and she could trust her bosom friend with it.

Julia suggested that Clare reply to one of Theo's letters, though he was no more, which could be termed as self-indulgence on the part of the living, or could be seen as a therapy. Clare, who was going through a phase of disgust for everything physical, saw her mother as 'a prisoner of her body', and concluded that her body has betrayed her mind and decided she could never bring herself to marry.

From the family of Helen's mother, Flora was a source of consolation to Helen in the novel *Flora*. She brought with her memories and habits of Alabama which connected Helen to her dead mother. She and Helen's grandmother Nonie were in regular correspondence till Nonie died and to Helen, being with Flora was like re-living her best times with her grandmother as Flora regularly recollected Nonie's words of advice and at one point Helen started speaking like her grandmother.

Helen Anstruther's relation with Flora, her mother's first cousin, began when she came to Helen's place as her summertime companion. Flora, at twenty-two, was 'ready to spill her shortcomings' (F 2) and 'less restrained in her emotions than some children' (F 2) and was a welcome company to the ten year old Helen as she felt superior to the older woman. The intriguing bonding between the orphan Flora and the quasi-orphan Helen, whose father in the Summer of the action in the novel had gone off to Oak Ridge in Tennessee for some secret war work, is universal and one of empathy since the loneliness that marked these orphans is felt by every person in this world some time or the other, and within every individual there is a soul that is left alone that yearned to be cared for. Helen reflected on Flora's companionship, "This had its gratifying moments but also its worrisome side." (F 2).

Flora's habit of not forcing herself on her, and her respect for Helen's independence though she was a small girl was a relief to her and she called her 'literal- minded cousin' (F 46), because in her ten years she had 'come across few people who can keep their personalities out of your business.'(F 46).

Helen had her sentiments towards people and place and Flora was also attached to people and place which made them understand the need of the other. While Flora spoke a lot about Alabama 'okra', 'icebox in the cellar'(F 63), and Juliet Parker 'part owner of their house'(F 115), Helen gathered respect for her native house 'One thousand Sunset' and for her valuable moments with Nonie from her companion Flora. Foote, in his conversation with Eudora Welty, makes mention of Welty's words "gathering – place" to speak about the scene of a novel and he adds "That's what the scene in a novel is: a gathering place for characters, where something's going to happen. I think that's characteristically southern, the notion of it."(AS 61).

Flora realized that her little cousin did not like everything about her and especially of the place she had come from, as she thought it was 'beneath' her for some reason just like how Helen's mother Lisbeth thought while she was alive and did not hesitate to point it out to her when situation arose. Later when Helen thought of her days with Flora saw how better she had turned out.

As Clare thinks 'What of me is singularly mine and would be so regardless of whom I was born to and how or where I grew up? What of anybody's was purely her own or his own, if you look away family and region and upbringing and social class?(SF 424).

First wave feminism saw a majority in White, middle class western females. The second-wave famously united from developing nations and women of color. The possibility

of solidarity among women of different class, race, religion, marital status and psychology may appear a far-fetched image, but history has enough factual evidences and literature of various periods as in Gail Godwin's works too picture women who complement each other through their emotional bonds in resisting common oppression, shared victimization and the evils of the male supremacist society. These women overcome race and class privileges to unite under 'sisterhood' that is at once gratifying and empowering as Janice Raymond, the radical feminist puts it in her words- 'Female friendship takes our original sight of our Selves and each other seriously. It is always a dual vision that is exercised with tension, but also with thoughtfulness and passion. It gives women a world in which we can be happy.'(61).

'Assimilation of The Native Heritage', the next chapter, analyzes the contribution of the regional factors of American South in shaping the women in the novels taken for the study.