

Chapter IV

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Assimilation of The Native Heritage

Gail Godwin was born in Birmingham, Jefferson County and her parents' divorce led her to move with her mother into the home of her grandparents in Asheville, North Carolina. After the death of her grandfather, her family became a small man-less family. Asheville and the South became central to her works and though she never intended to be a Southern novelist, Godwin has been labeled a "Southern" writer. Her works are an exploration of the identities of her protagonists, primarily women, their relationship with mothers and grandmothers. Women who flee South, their return to the South and the idea of Southern womanhood were recurring themes in her novels. The personal past and the regional past form the basis of almost all of her novels. Her works are commended by renowned authors like Joyce Carol Oates, John Fowles, and Kurt Vonnegut, and reviewers claim that she carries forward "the Southern tradition of Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty."

Southern Literature is defined as American literature about the Southern United States or by writers from this region. It focuses on Southern history, the importance of family, and community and the role of the individual in it, the dominant religion of the region which is Christianity, the racial differences, the class consciousness in the society, the importance of place and the Southern vernacular. It is the writings about the American South that comprises the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Kentucky, West Virginia and Arkansas . Pre-civil war South often included Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware as well.

Understanding the culture of the region that forms the setting of a novel broadens the interpretation of its characters, their conduct, their sentiments, and provides the text a consistency that would otherwise leave many questions unanswered. Critical Theory is a school of thought that gives importance to the evaluation of society and culture with the help of the knowledge from the social sciences and the humanities. This theory has its origins in sociology and in literary criticism. Understanding the components of history is a crucial factor in critical interpretation of social life and practice.

Cultural materialism aids analysis based on critical theory, in the tradition of Frankfurt School and it traces its origin to the work of the left-wing critic Raymond Williams. Cultural materialism is an anthropological research orientation first introduced by Marvin Harris in his 1968 book *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, as a theoretical paradigm and research strategy which was further developed by him in his book *Cultural Materialism* (1979). According to him social change is dependent on three factors of the society which are its infrastructure, structure, and superstructure.

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. In the study, attention is given to the developments brought into the society by contemporary power structures that can influence the ideology of the people, such as the church, the state or the academy.

In the light of the theoretical principles of Cultural materialism, an attempt is made at exploring the novels of Gail Godwin through understanding the historical context of the period, its political impact and the power structures of culture that comprises of etic and behavioral Infrastructure, etic and behavioral Structure and etic and behavioral Superstructure. The major factors of these structures like the operating procedures, management practices, development policies, social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs, culture, institutions, political power structures, roles, rituals, state and the family are all studied here in relation to the lives of the women characters in the novels.

The American Civil War played a major role in shaping the consciousness of the South. For the ones who survived, the war was a concrete image that marked them as Southerners and it left with them a myth that was unlike the American myth of ‘continuing national success’ (257). The myth of Southerners was the one that had in it the elements of what might have been if the region had survived. It was also a myth that carried with it the memories of Southern heroism, oppression and desolation which were the materials of every battle. To be a Southerner was being a part of the peculiar history that marked the region that took pride in its peculiar identity . After World War I, the South had to endure the two varied characteristics of its culture- the myth of courageous defeat after the battle fought bravely, and the guilt over the racial discrimination and slavery of the Black people. These contradictory stances left in the Southerners, the indispensable quality of “argument with oneself” (AS 258), as Walter Sullivan observed in his essay *The Fading Memory of the Civil War*.

The ambivalence in the characters of Godwin who engage in the identification of self, that was caught between the feeling of remorse and pride that the people of the

region inherited post Wars cannot be easily neglected. Her characters were representatives of the Southern who dwelt on the glorious past valuing it, but with consciousness of its shortcomings. The past had such a hold over their character formation that Jane in *The Odd Woman* found, understanding and associating with her lover Gabriel to be hard because of the basic difference in their psychology. Value for the past was inherent in Jane while her lover “Gabriel doesn’t go in much for pasts. He stays in the present.”(OW 7). She confessed to her friend Gerda that though she admired the quality in Gabriel, “yet it torments me.” (OW 7). Her student Howard Cecil at the University put her in discomfort as the ‘past held no place of honor for him.’(OW 14). When he asked her “Why this worship of what’s old and established?”(OW 16), She was left to think ‘Is this the first generation to question the entire past...?’(OW 16). This ‘conflict between the past and the present’ (AS 260) and the ‘rich tensions’(AS 260), that prevailed when the old came into contact with the new was a major issue. She also ‘pulled kleenexes’(OW 13) for her student Portia Prentiss who came from Chicago ghetto. Jane’s grandmother Edith was an image of the past and her loss was much mourned by Jane than by her mother Kitty because as Gerda put it “death of a symbol can be pretty disrupting.”(OW 37). In spite of the danger of listening to cynical criticisms from her friend Gerda, Jane wanted to continue her friendship with her ‘to hold on to as much of the past.’(OW 37).

Cate in *A Mother and Two Daughters* was also one such Southerner who battled between the past and the present, the old and new habits of the region. The optimism typical of the South aided her through all oddities in life but the guilt of the probability of having wronged her future through her irresolute decisions hung onto her and made her sound cynical. As in the case of some of her generation, she was denied the wisdom of

choice to come out of the defeat of self-pity to progress. She was mindful of this flaw in her which was also expressed in the choice of the topic for her doctoral thesis which reflected D.H. Lawrence's idea that spoke of people who were 'just ghosts' who followed "the outmoded old dance steps of our civilization."(MTD 393). When her mother's school friend Merle Chapin's husband, Marcus Chapin, a Virginian gentleman asked her what 'designs' the poet had for 'poor ghosts' like him, it was a revelation to her. She was forced to find an answer to save her face as she was intently watched by others around her then but that which well served a solution to the agony of many from the South who were fighting the disappointments of the past. The way out suggested was to " 'give up the ghost' and let the old world die with us."(MTD 393) and people should start from scratch "with what's true and living and indestructible"(MTD 393) in them.

The Southern trait, the remnant of War, was losing oneself in guilt over things undone that might have changed history. Julia, a Southerner herself, identified this trait in her friend that led her fancy that by not caring enough, she had wronged her half-brother Theo who killed himself. Julia told her "You like to dwell on your negative aspects." (SF 341). Clare could not accept Theo telling her once to write something real however unpleasant it may be. But she dealt with only the digestible parts of her experiences and could not bring herself to accept "unwrappable chaos and meaninglessness and dreariness." (SF 382). Humanizing the past was not a habit in her and this ended in her stories featuring her vision and beliefs that did not allow room for 'ugly truths of human existence'(SF 383). She identified in her the 'self-deprecating recounting of the fears'(SF 382) that had become her 'Campion Tone'(SF 382). The Wars and the resultant human relationships were well reflected in Clare's conduct and her fear that it may take a long time for people

to identify the connection between the happenings of wars and the way parents treat their children. The observation of the characteristics of the Southerners at the beach at 'No Saints' by Felix, the German lover of Clare, whom he watched daily was a vivid description of the people of South after the War. He found them living in a country of their own "no matter who happens to be president in Washington."(SF 298). They flew 'confederate flags' and used 'Confederate towels' and 'Confederate rafts'. The men had a 'special ruminative slouch'(SF 298) . To him it was "as if they're heavy with history, wearing it like a sort of romantic robe that other Americans aren't entitled to. They're still carrying a grievance, but it makes them feel separate and proud."(SF 298). Clare who was one among them ensured him parking the car sideways every time so as not to rub the New York license plate in their faces. To him the Southerners were the politest people in America. But, the younger Theo, a Southerner himself, found his people's hypocrisy in appearing polite to be overbearing and he accused them of using their "graciousness' to cover their viciousness" (SF 299). According to him their insane custom of the celebration of their defeat could not be changed because "they enjoy being mad."(SF 299). He identified none of his family members with real Southerners because they were unsure of wanting to be placed alongside the race whose history was one of defeat and they had "wasted too much time being ashamed of the wrong things."(SF 300).

Family is a primary institution in the novels of Godwin and it greatly influenced the members in it and the women of the family were the consummation of its ethos, values and habits. Jane's family in *The Odd Woman* was populated by women with 'crashing, dramatic turning points in their lives.'(OW 22). Her great-aunt Cleva had run away with a 'villain' in a melodrama to return later 'in a coffin'(OW 23). Her grandmother had fainted

dramatically in the hands of a German immigrant, who took a liking to her instantly and married her. Jane's mother Kitty had eloped twice and continued to live with the second man, Ray Sparks, who was younger to her, and her half-sister Emily at fifteen years of age had identified and married her man. From the 'old melodrama'(OW 23) in her family, Jane had to find answers to her queries in life. All her justifications for her love relationship with her married lover Gabriel was nullified in the face of the married lives of the women in her family which were socially acceptable. Her family formed so much of her 'consciousness' that all her decisions centered on them.

A Mother and Two Daughters, The Odd Woman and A Southern Family, move around the events in the lives of the members of the family who get together under the roof of the family house to stand by each other at the time of crisis which was usually the death of a member in the family. With her daughters Cate, unsettled in any permanent job and one who moved around much and Lydia, her younger one married with two children and one who was well organized, Nell, the mother, knew that to be in a family was 'always a balancing act.'(MTD 311). A society is formed by the organization of 'individuals into some order'(AS 14), and there is social disorganization when the institutions of the society like family, church, community and law that transfer social values disrupt. The women, the mothers, in the novels of Godwin performed the role of organizers who transmit the values of allegiance to the members of the family. Nell was firm in decisions that involved her family and once when Lydia was reluctant about her elder sister staying in their father's beach cottage as that would cut her mother's tax benefits, she immediately responded to 'set a few priorities straight' (MTD 310), and silenced her younger daughter telling that she can always give up some such benefits if it meant giving her daughter a

place to live. In order to ‘inject some humanity’ (MTD 310) into the thought process of Lydia she reminded her that since she had a place to live, she should allow her sister to have a place. The author’s concern to protect some of the basic rules of the institution of the family under the changing aspirations of some of its members is seen in Nell good humoredly asking her daughter to be friends with her sister because if they are not friends then after her death “there’ll be no two people to get together and talk about me.” (MTD 311). Critics noted that though the Wars brought in changes ‘the Southern sense of family roots, the notion of community coming from where one lived, the complex social patterns, were not importantly disturbed.’(AS 7).

Jane decided to ‘come out of the sky and focus for a while on the needs of her sex’(OW 28) to be like her women who had put to rest the ‘Romantics’ and ‘Visionaries’ (OW, 27) in them to discard ‘uncertainties’(OW 114) in their lives. She hated herself when her friend Gerda was sarcastic about her favorite family stories as ‘something in it was very close to her, very close to her own feelings about the human race.’(OW 233)

The women of Old South were often the victims of myth or exaggeration. The Black women were represented as matriarchal figures and the White women as submissive and idle. In a way, this portrayal was a hurdle in assessing the sentiments, emotions and the contribution of these Southern women. The women of antebellum South lived in relative obscurity and took part in lesser public works than their northern counterparts and was so easily negligible. Only very few among them like Elizabeth Cady Stenton and Lucretia Mott could gain public attention while many women were only able to devote their energy to their families.

The family myths and histories dwelt on by the major characters in the novels like *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *A Southern Family* and *Flora*, were all due to the fact that they were all Southerners who were aware of the change in times and ‘looked backward to tell the truth, to describe with as much accuracy as possible, a civilization they had observed.’(AS 263). Cate’s protest against the invasion of Cambodia, her visit to the castle of Roger Jernigan, Clare’s interest in writing stories with South as the setting and her visit to the deep South to meet her sister-in-law and her observation of their way of living can be traced back to her enthusiasm for the historical and mythical elements in it which was part of her regional history. The framing of myths and storytelling were almost ritualistic and the major characters, the women could be seen involving in myth-making and story-telling out of the materials of their knowledge of the past. In *The Odd Woman*, the grandmother told stories and Kitty, the mother, was a story writer and Jane, the daughter, was a professor in English Literature searching for models in novels. Clare in *A Southern Family* was a writer, and her friend Julia was a teacher in History. The novel *A Mother and Two Daughters* also had a teacher in English as the protagonist. This way the novelist had made it convenient for her Southern characters to indulge in their age old habit of narration.

From the time that the early American republic began to identify their concerns along geographical lines, there was a self-conscious South. In the years that followed, economic, social, political and military developments had taken place which led to the prediction of the definite end of the South as a recognizable entity by some.

The Southern women writers of the second half of the twentieth century also used “creation of community” as their major theme where the Blacks and the whites were

brought together as an antidote to the guilt they suffered due to the racial discrimination that prevailed thereby, seeking an end to the long history of racial conflicts. Lydia's professor at college Renee, a Black with a degree from Harvard university and who was also a sociologist caught her fascination. Renee's voluntary withdrawal into her dialect and her description of the Peverell family is all of the Southern order.

The Southerners are considered as dreamers of an indefinable reality based on unattainable absolute ideals. So this retreat into the characters of South and those who have come from the families of South is an escape from some of the crude realities of the North and on the other hand is also the root of an indecisive perception of an elusive world of artificial conventions which prevents one's happiness. The process of self-realization, of finding the best life often requires a comparison of what people are now with what they were, and what they were raised to anticipate being. In most of Godwin's novels the childhood is a Southern, genteel one which, although rejected by fleeing North, is not easily forgotten. Renee recounts how Reverend Peverell brought her great- great- grandmother in 1810 when she was with a consignment from the West Indies, and was the first female to be sold . Not much of change was anticipated in the lives of the Southern Black even after the civil war and to even dream of any such was threatening. The only possibility to improvement in the conditions of their lives was moving to the North which at a time was only a fantasy. Even to a writer introducing such a change in the works was a problem because of the lack of clarity of portraying such immigrant Blacks and in the significance of the writers observation of their contribution to the society. The Renee Peverell episode and the mention of Palmer Institution where her parents studied, and her family album on the dormer wall to "lie in bed and contemplate my origins at night"(MTD 143) is an instance showing few

of such Blacks who were successful in their pursuit of equality and freedom and thus paved way for others to follow their path. The thoughts on ‘race in America’(109) as Blyden Jackson, Professor of English Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill observed in his essay *Growing up Black in the Old South and the New* was ‘that uncensored level at which I have no secrets from myself and where a single fleeting word or phrase can signify to me a whole sometimes terribly long and all too intricately involved train of thought’(AS 109), and were all the reminder of the hard times the race had sustained . The intimacy between Flora and her ‘Negro maid’ Juliet at Alabama in the novel *Flora* was also significant in recording the change in the times and it is the ‘exclusive function of the writer’ (AS 97) like Godwin since ‘Those present and remaining in the South are, thus, in an excellent position to record the most minute of the continuing changes in the ways the black folk see themselves, in the way they relate to the world around them and the people in it.’ (AS 96). Renee’s social drawbacks cannot however be ruled out and Lydia who later developed a strong friendship with her was well aware of it. She looked forward to learning all she could from her new friend. But though she knew Renee was better than her in many areas the world values, Lydia felt, ‘at bottom, a sweet, secret security in being who she was that all the striving, achieving Renees in the world could not topple.’(MTD 144). Despite this, she was able to admire Renee because she was not ignorant of the fact that ‘in the South there were two worlds, one white, the other black, with all the advantages between the two reserved for Whites.’(AS 112). Lydia tried overcoming some habits of the past to move forward with sufficient pace and to discard some of the tradition that has ties with the racial past. Some of the arguments like that of Gwin who argued that the White women of the South did not display any form of

compassion for the women of African descent and the “sisterhood “ between the Black and White women referred to as a “ violent connection” by her seems to be changing.

Before the formation of the Confederate States of America in 1860-1861, and the secession of the Southern states, it was the institution of slavery that gave the nature of Southern life an uniqueness. The politicians of those regions were thus led to concentrate in retaining the legality of slavery. However, the loss of war and the end of slavery did not destroy the Southern identity which meant its importance did not solely rely on slavery. Even in defeat the South reserved its sense of identity and added to it the mythos of a lost cause, regard for old virtues and loyalties that were the fruits of suffering, and a communion that was the outcome of common hatred and hardship experienced. The Blacks who shared it with the Whites formed a part of South and its community. Black people are recognized by Godwin in her works for what is due them and so are the people from the poor sections of the society. Gerda, Jane’s friend, in *The Odd Woman* was from origins in South that were at times called ‘poor white trash’(OW 37). She, with a degree in economics, ran a magazine for women successfully and had women who have been slighted by their men and few who did not need men in their lives to work for her.

Snow Mullins from Granny Squirrel where her entire family lived and where there ‘was not a single nigger’(SF 220), like her ‘Red neck’ father-in-law Ralph who to remind others that he was basically “a mountain boy with one-eighth Cherokee blood” (SF 21), left the abandoned materials of his building trade along the road that led to the hilltop where he had built his house, hated Mountain City for the town that was ‘spread out every whichaway’(SF 220) with its snobs and niggers. This transformation which was not uniform throughout the region baffled the natives of the deep down South like Snow.

Snow could not identify herself with the rich Whites or the Blacks and her reluctance to be identified with them, and the class consciousness with which she was treated by her mother-in-law, put her in a hazardous situation of being alienated. But later she understood the need to accept the changes around and the necessity to adapt to those which were for good. There was also Jane's German lover Felix, and his daughter Lizzie who inclined towards Jewish ways for her religion, who along with Clare made a family. The author seems to suggest the possibilities of such changes in the habits of the Southerners that broadened the way for New South. So were the treatment of the characters like Renee and her beautiful daughter Camilla of African Origin, whose ancestors entered the South as slaves. They had come a long way from such humiliating history and had established themselves in respectable positions aided by their education. At the end of the novel, Camilla is married to Lydia's son that indicated progress in the once class-conscious society.

The secession resulted in Reconstruction which however failed since it required a majority of white Southerners to participate in the externally-imposed Reconstruction state governments, for whom it meant consenting to black political equality. When the Southern states got back into the union of their own terms, the black Southerners though were politically free from slavery were left to face tenant farming, share cropping, Jim Crow laws, poll taxes and economic, social, and political discrimination of all natures. This necessitated the Southerners to leave their habits of the past and to work avidly to prosper. Henry W. Grady of the Atlanta Constitution in his speech on 'The New South' on December 22, 1886 "The Old South rested everything on slavery and agriculture, unconscious that these could neither give nor maintain healthy growth". The early 20th century saw a new South that emerged out of the short comings of old Southern establishment with all

of its confined social orders . The developments in automobile industries and the modes of communication made the South better connected to the rest of America. Though the South did not escape its history that was made of poverty, the habits of defeat and failure, and the guilt of racial oppression that bound White and Black in a common tragedy, the South did manage to gather wisdom out of those mishaps. According to the historian F. Nash Boney, among the Southern qualities, this optimism holds the highest position. It is this trait in the Southerners that led to the establishment of “New South” after 1877.

The life of the region was still strongly tied with church going, and the elements of modernism and the social gospel were not allowed into Southern theology. An instance is the conversation between Marcus Chapin and Cate where he mentioned his not returning to his church at Gloucester that was only interested in the removal of the “first settlers’ gravestones in the churchyard”(MTD 395). He did not accept it as the “Elegant Defeatist Attitude” (MTD 396) of the Southerners that Cate blamed him for. Instead, he pointed out to the fact that he had to leave because the church no longer allowed him to work on his unwavering belief in God. Kitty in *The Odd Woman* turned to God and church going to surrender everything that she could not fight any longer before God whom she believed will rescue her like “a father rescuing his child from the jaws of mad biting bears.”(OW 108). Her faith provided her the strength to bear the news of her mother’s death, and even Jane’s friend Gerda who was given to momentary addictions seemed to know that as she asked Jane that it may not be too hard on Kitty as it was on Jane because Kitty is “into religion now?”(OW 37).

The people in the South developed strong attachment to their churches as the primary community institution. A part of the South is known as the “Bible Belt” as there was

evangelical Protestantism in that region and it was a belt of many colors. The Methodist ministers spread the evangelical religion and thereby fashioned the “Bible Belt” during the First Great Awakening “, and the “Second Great Awakening”. The image of the South as a region dominated by evangelicalism persisted into the period following the American Civil War. The common practices of the Protestant churches and the active traveling evangelists who moved across Maryland to Florida to Texas, confirmed the idea. In *A Southern Family*, Lily’s visits to old people at various nursing homes, centers for the ailing ran with support by Medicaid and few other Episcopal nursing homes were all the Southern order of religion

There was also the prevalence of the honor culture of the Old South that valued the masculine dominance in places of worship. There was a reference to this in *A Mother and Two Daughters* where the mother and daughters gathered at the family’s beach house at Ocracoke Island. Cate picked up an argument with Marcus Chapin, the Reverend for not approving of a woman as the priestess at his church. When Cate, always strong at principles questioned him about denying the woman’s right at the church, he tells “She can be a priestess in the Temple of Isis, or a vestal virgin if she likes, or even an Anglican nun if she wants, but she cannot be a priest in the church.”(MTD 399). There were also changes in such ideologies meantime and the Reverend has quit the church because the woman has been taken in as a priest there.

The Black people who were part of the Southern community though moved to the north and west gave Southern life a new tone, and since they formed an integral part, the South was unimaginable without them. Though this was the condition, it was many years later that the Whites witnessed the immense contribution made by the Blacks to the society. The economic and geographical convergence between the North and the South led to

cultural convergence as well. The Blacks and Whites in the novels in *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *A Southern Family* and *Evenings at Five*, attended their own church and savored a unique faith and at the same time regarded the faith of others with respect since, most of them as Southerners agreed ‘on the fundamentals of religion.’ (AS 31). These religious institutions as were seen in the lives of the protagonists of the novels *The Odd Woman* and *A Southern Family*, Kitty and Lily respectively, played ‘an important role in the social and spiritual life of the South.’(AS 30-31).

However, there was the growing opposition to these developments that contributed little to theological fundamentalism and the titled snobbishness which came to be termed ‘Agrarianism’ and this movement had Vanderbilt University in Nashville in Tennessee as its base and comprised twelve American literary men who had their roots in the Southern United States .This was an intellectual endeavor of the learned community who fought against the materialism and had its origins in the humanitarian ideals of the Southern community. Alongside the Agrarians, there were the academics from around the University of North Carolina who worked for the social upheaval of the South. Thus ‘The Tennesseans were aesthetic and moral philosophers; the North Carolinians were social planners’(AS 13). The inclusion of society can be seen in Gail Godwin who took her graduation in Journalism from the University of North Carolina and the commitment to the society and region can be seen in her characters like Clare, Julia and Jane who lived with the consciousness for their region. Godwin, in her interview said that she wants to include the world enough in her works and if not anything else she can at least “write about intense, intelligent characters, who worry whether they’re conscious enough about the world.”(Welch 78).

The South came out of the Great Depression of the early 1930's chiefly through industrialization. It saw a major growth during the Second World War in its defense industries and the towns transformed beyond recognition. There were great many changes in the Southern agriculture and it came to be called agribusiness.

In spite of all these things “ To be a Southerner today is still to be heir to a complex set of attitudes and affinities, assumptions and instincts, which are the product of the history acting upon geography, even though much of the history is now forgotten and the geography modified.” (AS 17). This can be seen in *The Odd Woman* where Jane noted that her friend Gerda, who was once casually remarking that her family was “in tobacco” (OW 37), with the change in time, had started volunteering the information “I’m from lower-class origins, actually”(OW 37). The brothers, Theo and Rafe in *A Southern Family* were subject to this quagmire of customs that expected certain set of behavior from the Southerners irrespective of the generation they belonged to. They could not sever themselves from those expectations as they were like any native from the region who had witnessed and understood the necessity to adhere to those when one was a member of the society. Rafe told the psychiatrist that the reason why he and Theo could not fit in the society cannot be easily explained because the psychiatrist should “have to be from around here to understand all our little stratification systems, all our hidden instruments of social torture.”(SF 274). Among the people of the states there existed a shared identity in the midst of diversities and varied individual experiences and they identified their concerns with those of a particular societal and traditional adherence, though those commonalities cannot be clearly described. Many writers, poets and scholars have tried defining this individual trait of the Southerners and they have been only partially successful and “an incorrigible talent at

individualizing and humanizing its experience” (AS 19), that keeps South an identifiable region. It was possible for the Southern life to absorb and refine the more refractory and impersonal manifestations of the industrial dispensation. Brenda Haynes Brown in *Snuff Jars and Jelly Glasses* quotes the words of Tim Jacobson in his *Heritage of the South* where he observes how the South stands apart from other parts of America. According to him even if thousands of Northerners and foreigners have migrated to the region, they can never be termed Southerners. People should have been born there to feel it was their native soil. Apart from taking pride in being Americans, Virginians, South Carolinians, Tennesseans, Mississippians and Texans, the natives possessed the loyalty that surpassed the usual ties of national patriotism and state pride. They had the loyalty to the place where habits and memories were strong.

Race was the controlling factor in the “old” politics of the south. The racial caste system, the economic class system, the rural and the agrarian pattern of life and economic system underpinned the one-party, single issue politics of the South until urbanization and industrialization on one side and the civil rights movement on the other brought in social changes and broke up the political system which the old social structures had sustained as the public reinforcement for their own preservation. W. J. Cash noted that the Civil War and Reconstruction turned the south back into a frontier that could be exploited by people from the region and outside. The end of Reconstruction meant the abandonment of the former slaves to economic dependence on their former masters, after a period of support that lasted only long enough to confirm Southern Whites in their resentment against both the Republican reconstructionist and those of the blacks who fought for political equality, and to invigorate the will to restore and maintain white supremacy.

The Southern politics from the beginning of the 20th century, until sometime after 1948 saw the reduction of the Republican party to a mere symbol and the removal of black participation by a combination of legal and extra-legal actions left only the Democratic Party as the sole political organization in the region. As long as the Republican Party was the national majority party, Southern Democrats occupied the congressional majority in the minority party. When the Democrats became the majority party after 1932, the southerners continued to hold a majority of the Democratic seats in both houses of congress because the electoral politics of the South bestowed a free mandate on congressional delegations from the south in nearly all matters except the maintenance of the region's peculiar institution of racial segregation, the performance of Southerners in congressional politics was far more skillful that deserves greater recognition.

One hundred years earlier the contested Hayes- Tilden election was resolved by the "compromise " that ended Reconstruction in the South in exchange for the acceptance of the special election commission's decision that all of the electoral votes in dispute will be cast for the Republican nominee, thus safeguarding the long-term supremacy of the Republican party in politics. The South that was left framed its own "separatist" political position that removed the Blacks from all forms of direct participation in politics and had one-party system in which the Democratic Party established " the will to the white supremacy." (AS 38-39). The Blacks had little to do with politics since legalized segregation of the races, the control of election and all other political decisions were made by the Whites. In national politics the South had played an active role in keeping the Democratic Party alive in the late nineteenth century.

The South had throughout been responding defensively to any threat to its political system. In due course, the Southern resistance eased up slowly, and the obstruction of Black efforts to partake in politics and to influence the course of policy evolved into acceptance and cooperation. In such a situation, the Carter election had brought together the Southern Blacks and Whites under the crest of a party in electing a White man from the hearts of South.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was favorable to the South in laying down severe federal regulation of registration measures in the titled states and counties which almost doubled the number of qualified Black voters in the region. Thus, the race relations in the South, though was not completely averted at least was no longer the major factor deciding the political outcomes. The changes produced by industrialization and urbanization, on one side, and the civil rights movement, on the other side, broke up the political system of one-party, which the old social structures had sustained as a public reinforcement for self-defense, and lead to the evolution of the old to the new Southern politics. This majority of the Southerners aided them in preserving congressional party leadership posts in the party's conclave and also in the House and Senate leadership positions when the Democrats held a majority of seats in those bodies and altogether the work of the Southerners in congressional politics was commendable.

There existed three different social classes in the Southern society which was formed during the years 1800-1860. The then Old South came to be known as the "slave society" since slavery had its impact on all aspects of Southern life and it was a complex system which cannot be confined to having the rich planters and the humble slaves. It had the three divisions namely, the planter elites, the yeomen farmers, and the poor free man.

The planter elites comprised of the traditional aristocrats and the new planters of the cotton states. These Traditional Aristocrats derived their riches out of tobacco and rice chiefly from the tide water region of Chesapeake, and the low country of South Carolina and Georgia; the Capitalist –Inclined Planters of the Cotton State whose chief produce was cotton developed a crude labor system, were inhuman to the slaves and occupied the black water regions of Alabama and Mississippi; the Middle-Class planters owned forty percent of the slave population and most of them pursued dual careers as skilled artisans or professional men.

Men were the head of the household and they had legal rights over their property whereas, the women had little authority. The Southern women were members of churches and they had faith in spiritual equality.

The literature of the period was naturally a reflection of the social systems then, and the southern women portrayed in the plantation novels were as a custom, a consolidation of aristocratic features and the skill in the more genteel recreations such as music and horse riding. Thomas R. Dew, a professor at William and Mary College remarked that the women should use the female “qualities that delight and fascinate “men to ensure the male “protection” and to him what constituted a woman’s power was “grace, modesty and loveliness’ (Reconstructing Womanhood 27). Overt sexuality was attributed to the Black women and when the White masters exploited them “ it was the female slave who was held responsible for being a potential, and direct, threat to the conjugal sanctity of the white mistress”(Reconstructing Womanhood 27).

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, while speaking of the women of Old South in *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women Of Old South* wrote that the women

slaves and the women who enslaved them all were under a single roof that comprised the basic unit of “ a unique form of modern society that no familiar theoretical categorization captures.” (WPH 57).

According to Fox-Genovese, their household was “ a basic social unit in which people, whether voluntarily or under compulsion, pool their income and resources.” (WPH 31). This definition for the “social system” defines the antebellum slavery. All the women, Black and White, lived together as members of “ one family broadly construed” though the differences in race and class kept them wide apart fundamentally. Though they “shared a world of physical and emotional intimacy” (WPH 35), these women did not enjoy a “sense of sisterhood” (WPH 184). She describes slavery as “ a system of social relations of production historically associated with the precapitalist era but nonetheless extruded by capitalism itself and therefore in essential respects congruent with capitalist forces of production.”(WPH 58). To her, slavery was primarily a social system and not a capitalist enterprise. The southern women mostly lived in isolation because “ the region lacked the institutional and social interaction available in urban areas to middle-class northern women.” (WPH 6).

As far as their family structures were concerned, family was of primary importance to them. It was the principal source of strength in the lives of the women of both the race. At the same time it laid great demands on their emotions, time, energy and health. The slave women at Piedmont and Mountain did not enjoy the support of large, stable families and communities. The relationship of white women was similar to the slave women in that they all relied on mental support from extended as well as nuclear families.

When the White men desired the black women, the white women found it necessary to prove to the black women that the true power lied in their hands as in that a white woman “views her husband’s affections for a slave as an undercutting of her power over him in their relationship.” (WPH 133). Such slaves who received the master’s attention were ill-treated as a forewarning to other Black slaves so that they kept themselves inconspicuous except in the fields.

The southern women in the antebellum and Civil War South, irrespective of their color and standing in the society endured difficult and exhausting lives. They struggled to safeguard their families and had to consciously had to maintain balance between work and family and thus were major contributors to the culture of the region. The white women and few free black women entered academics while the women of advantage involved in church, charity and politics to prove their worth.

The researchers studying the lives of white women in the South found it to be a hard task as these women uttered little when it came to their personal life and exceptionally if few did express their views, it was only through letters, journals, oral histories, the family Bible, gravestones, marriage records, church testimonies and diaries and these were the sources through which something of the life of Southern Women could be derived.

The Civil War brought changes in the attitude of the White women more importantly in their outlook towards the slave system. Anne Firor Scott, the historian showed how the aftermath of the war led to the emergence of the matriarchy to power for she pointed out to the “challenges of war’ and “the thorough going social change” that diminished the patriarchy of the South. She wrote “Slavery, which had provided the original need for the idea, was gone, and many men came home to face conditions which proved unmanageable.

Perhaps only on rich land, and with extraordinary managerial ability, would anyone have done farming well in the South in the first decade after the war. It might be argued that, too, that the only men who succeeded in this difficult enterprise were those whose wives were able to contribute skill, energy, encouragement, and perhaps even a little outside income. Whatever the inherent difficulty of the situation, the result was that members of the superior sex, whom women had been taught to lean upon and look up to, were often notably unable to cope with the new life.(96-97). In, *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, Anne Goodwyn Jones said in *Tomorrow is Another Day* how the women, who then were 'strong -minded female', wound up their new responsibilities and the strength they have acquired with the traditional concept of southern womanhood that resulted in the "oxymoronic ideal of the woman made of steel yet masked in fragility" (Jones 13), and added that this aided the southern womanhood in retaining its patriarchal character. The White women redefined their roles as they had additional duties and the Black women though have been freed from their slavery, were now forced into seeking new jobs to lead their lives. But the racial discrimination and social injustices that existed made livelihood still harder for them.

With women irrespective of their race, it was a time for rehabilitation as many had lost their men either in the war or for slavery and these women provided their daughters with education which brought them out of their houses for work. Many women who were educated became teachers and some took up writing as a career. *A Mother and Two Daughters* by Gail Godwin is a social narrative and the story symbolically begins with the protagonist Nell's account of her dependability on her husband Leonard Strickland, a sensible man, to endure the ironies of her community in which she was a member. The unexpected death of Strickland deprived her of the protection that she had been having all these days

and it left her to face the crude realities of life. Henceforth it is the journey of the woman, the head of the family through various societal demands, conscious of not sacrificing her inner self. This narrative holds importance as the society then was an offspring of the culture dominated by men. Timothy C Jacobson in his book *Heritage of the South* (1992) that deals with the history, social life, customs and manners of the Southern States speaks about the loyalty of the Southerners to their place. The culture and custom of the South is generally most conservative than any other part of the country. A strong sense of family and community, the duties and responsibilities of the individual in it and the religious zeal all characterize the South and the literature of the region also focuses on these aspects.

In *A Mother and Two Daughters* the community gatherings are marked and they serve as an introduction to the characters of South. Eudora Welty, the novelist from South spoke of the scene of a novel as being a “gathering place,” and this is characteristic of a person from South and also of a Southern novel where a scene is almost always a gathering place for characters that sets in motion the happenings in the story. Nell, in the party at Theodora’s place, found herself as an ‘unsocialized observer’ since she had ‘masqueraded adequately since puberty as a “Southern Lady.”’ (MTD 8). The Southern heritage formed the lives of women identified carefully by class, age and attitude towards an idyllic womanhood and it included preference to others rather than the self, cultivation and devotion towards tradition and beautiful things, perfection in manners. A host of women in the novel –Nell, Theodora, Sicca, Wickie Lee, Azalea, Renee, Cate and Lydia all retain some Southernness in them and it influences their lives’ decisions.

Theodora, the “Maiden Queen” as Nell observes, was an epitome of the womanliness expected of a woman from South exhibiting the qualities she had adopted from the

culture. The ceremonious gait with which she conducted herself exemplified the conservativeness of the then South. Linda Tate asserts in *A Southern Weave Of Women* that, “the matrix-as womb, as community, as source of creativity-becomes an apt metaphor for understanding the many layers of southern women’s experience and offers a more positive and empowering vision of home and family in the South”(22) .In *The Odd Woman*, Kitty was the representative of Southern belles and she ‘was the belle of the family, the archetypal belle’. (OW 94). The Southern belles were expected to marry respectable young men, and become ladies of society dedicated to the family and community. The “Southern belle” archetype is characterized by Southern hospitality, a cultivation of beauty, and a flirtatious yet chaste demeanor. Godwin had brought these characteristics in her women, where for instance Jane wonders at her mother Kitty who always has an elusiveness about her that had never let anybody possess her and she even doubted her relationship with God that she must be flirting with God too and ‘kept a little doubt in His mind.’ A certain amount of secrecy must be maintained by these women even with the most intimate people and Kitty in *The Odd Woman*, Nell in *A Mother and Two Daughters*, and Lily in *A Southern Family* all have some part of their demeanor that can never be seized by anyone.

Kitty’s daughter Jane comes back home with the determination not to be pulled back into misgivings but ready to be compassionate towards her family without compromising herself, to be impartial with her half-brother and to empathize with others around . There is abundant usage of family histories and reflections that is a reminiscence of spirit of a family, beginning from the curtains and bed spreads that Kitty embroidered for her daughter’s room to the mirror of kitty’s mother Edith.

The male-dominated culture engulfed the women in solitude and restricted them from attaining their freedom from the sense of insecurity that was its result. Susan S. Kissel in *Moving On*, maintains that “in work after work, contemporary white southern white women writers reveal the horror of female dependence and passivity of grown women trapped in nightmare houses of the past where they have been unable to lead full lives, grow into mature adulthood, move out from under male rule, or make their own contributions to the larger world”(159-60).Of all the characters in *The Odd Woman*, Jane’s lover Gabriel Weeks was the least spoken about though he was primarily the reason for her problems. This married lover of Jane was a professor of Art History at a university four hours away from her place. He was attentive and reliable but never once expressed his love for her. According to him, art alone was permanent and love, of all things, was transient. Jane, having been tired of her relationship with her former lover in England found this love affair with Weeks, who was inexpressive about his feelings, to be painful. This increased her sense of loneliness and oddity that she had been feeling for some time in her life. The novel spans around Jane’s uncertainty about her future as she had been filling only the two successive sabbatical vacancies in the English department, and there was no teaching job available for the next academic year. She cannot depend on Weeks as he had never once expressed his love for her thereby blurring the possibility of a happy future with him.

When Godwin was eleven years old, her mother married Frank Cole, with whom Godwin never developed any close relationship and when she turned a writer and set to write in the autobiographical style, she made her stepfather a character in her novel *The Odd Woman* and gave him the name Ray Sparks making him the stepfather to Jane, and Lily’s second husband. Godwin’s mother and father were divorced shortly after she was

born, and she was brought up by her mother and grandmother. While Godwin was in her young adulthood, her mother remarried. According to Godwin it was a unhappy wedding and she had unpleasant and bitter experiences with her step-father. It was during this period that she moved from two unsuccessful early marriages through insecurity and doubts about her abilities as an author to increasing confidence and success in her works. Godwin always mentions that much of her writings are autobiographical in nature. For her fiction of the early 1970s, Godwin used these unhappy marriages where women become captives. She as well used hopeless love affairs in her novels. Francesca Bolt in *Glass People*, Kitty Sparks and Jane Clifford in *The Odd Woman* were all victims of such relationships.

Women formed a considerable part of the demography of the nation but, their position in the society was confined and they were not allowed the independence to choose their life, power in the public sectors and career. William H. Chafe in his essay '*Women and American Society*' observed that the social evil that prevailed saw the women as 'dependent, weak, and submissive by nature.' (Luther 258). The 'Colonial daughters' (Luther 258) were also expected to be subservient like their twentieth-century counterparts. Some of Godwin's women however refused to be restricted by such cultural norms and they who were from the ' "respectable" classes also departed substantially from what the dominant culture defined as their proper role.' (Luther 259).

Cate, a twice divorced college professor, and Lydia, a mother who had left her husband to live her life to her capability were the two of three protagonists of *A Mother and Two Daughters*. These women moved away from men with whom they could not identify their lives.

A Southern Family is the story about the emotional trauma of the two women Lily and Clare, the mother and the daughter, who passively fight against the domination of the 'Redneck' Ralph who is Lily's second husband and Clare's step-father.

Glass People also has the protagonist Francesca, who fled her house for freedom from her stifling marriage to a husband who by being too admiring allowed no opportunity for her personal growth. Although faced by unexpected events that brought her back to her husband, her return was as a woman who was growing towards being worldly wise. This novel is the beginning of Godwin's attempt at making her heroines identify themselves through their understanding self and the people around and the world community at a larger extent. Her return to the taciturn safety of her husband was not the end but was in a way the beginning of the women to come out of the closed houses to the wider world that had resources in it to allow them the freedom and protection they seek. In the novels that were published after *Glass People*, the author makes a positive shift in the presentation of the protagonists who are women by making them find means to lead a meaningful life without dependence on men.

In *Violet Clay*, after the sudden death of her uncle, Violet Clay came out of her city life which had been a bad dream of failed aspirations and decided not to be a 'mere copyist of externals.' She wanted to 'take off 'from those to find her way to the 'most urgent mental forms' of hers. She was so much prepared to advance in life that she concludes, "If it meant invoking demons, let them come."(VC 267).

Lucinda H. Mackethan observes in *Daughters of Time*, "breaking away from parental or communal expectations creates a rupture for these women characters, not only between themselves and their families, but within themselves. Descent into self -doubt, experiences of

separation from family and from self, lead to discoveries that enable these women to identify within themselves the source of their creativity”(66-67). Place is very important to the Southerners and when they move farther from their place, they faced difficulties. Exposure to the outside world temporarily changed their attitude towards their region. The daughters in Godwin like Clare, Jane, Cate, Julia and Lydia were all caught between the old and the new customs and were stifled by the tradition and culture of the native place which required all their rationality to return to their own habits which were valuable.

Carson McCullers in her interview with Ralph McGill about her book *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* said:

All of us seek a time and a way to communicate something of the sense of loneliness and solitude that is in us...but the search of us Southerners is more anguished. There is a special guilt in us, a seeking for something had and lost. It is a consciousness of guilt not fully knowable, or communicable. Southerners are the most lonely and spiritually estranged, I think, because we have lived so long in an artificial social system that we insisted was natural and right and just- when all along we knew it wasn't. (217)

The issues of body such as the White body, the Black body, and the female body have always been the core of all issues related to race and 'the very notion of woman in American culture is dependent on race'.(50). This was more in the South because they were bound by the traditional history of the homeland where slavery on the basis of race was crucial. In *Glass People*, Francesca's beautiful White body was the root cause to her problem as it denied her the independence. The Black women's body came to acquire importance for the very reason that it was not confined by any of the conventions that

restricted a white woman (her body), and the same qualities that were ascribed femininity by the society, now denied the White women the hierarchy which the privilege of her physique had granted. Under these circumstances the White middle-class southern women negotiated a great deal to preserve the illusion of home as a place of refuge. Francesca in *Glass People* tries to make sense of the world in which her marriage had placed her. It had been a strange marriage for her that left her ‘frozen, or hypnotized.’ It had brought in a state of immobility in her and she could see that she “can sit around for hours and do nothing” and that she was “slowly turning into a stone.”(GP 63). Deep inside she could also see that she had a husband who ‘preferred his wife’s silences.’ Cameron Bolt, her husband wished for more of her silences since it was then that her ‘ineffable beauty shone out and she was his mysterious, beautiful woman again.’(GP 45). In this early novel of hers, she has created her protagonist who is recognized for qualities that lie outside like as in her female body. This book centers on female body and how the self and the others incarnate its importance. The female in the novel is identified only for her female body. The heroine Francesca is examined for her female identity, the one that is solely formed of her body, where she had to be mindful only of keeping herself flawlessly beautiful for her husband as he required nothing but that from his wife. Also to be considered is the fact that, Godwin does not make any mention of Francesca being learned or artistic.

Home was a concrete institution that could save society, and the literature of the time focused on this aspect of the Southerners’ strong identification with their home and homeland, so as to prevent the impending danger of the commercial world from disintegrating the social order. While many of the writers from South were leaving the region, Gail Godwin suggested staying in the South and working towards betterment. She concentrated

on her characters who had left their native and created occasions that brought them back to their family homes like Quicks Hill, Ocrakoke and Mountain Hill. The typically Southern family names like the Richardsons and Stricklands were all presented in all their richness in her novels.

The first chapter ‘Old Friendships’ of *A Southern Family*, the Asheville based story, begins with Julia visiting her friend Clare at her home in the typical Southern hilltop, the Mountain City. It was to this place Clare returned to be with her family. However congenial or noxious a place may be, to any native it is of irreplaceable value carrying with it its own zest. Now grown into a woman, Julia understood the perpetual wrath of her teacher, the Prussian nun, Mother Von Blucher at losing her German city Leipzig in the war. She who was now a professor of history could ‘better comprehend the irreplaceable loss of certain continuities. That the city where Luther argued and Goethe studied and Bach and Mendelssohn wrote music...not to mention the personal achievements of your family...should have come to such an end,’(SF 16).

Godwin believes in women’s ability to change the conventional South while retaining the characteristics of the internal South. Eudora Welty in *Place in Fiction* notes “ the art that speaks most clearly, explicitly, directly and passionately from its place of origin will remain the longest understood”(132).

In the preface to *New Stories from the South: The Year’s Best*, (1990) Shannon Ravenel speaking of the Southern literature of the times made a list of its features “ A strong narrative voice. A pervasive sense of humor even in the face of tragedy, Deep involvement in place, in family bonds, and in local tradition. A sense of impending loss, Celebration of eccentricity. Themes of racial guilt and human endurance”(viii-ix). The novels *A Mother*

and Two Daughters, The Odd Woman, A Southern Family, Evenings At Five, and Violet Clay all share the common theme of loss and series of events that follow the tragedy which ultimately culminates in the transformation of the chief characters influenced by those incidents.

The central character of *The Odd Woman* Jane, started her trip to the South to attend the funeral of her grandmother Edith who had been a link between her and her mother Kitty. While not all of Gail Godwin's novels are set in the South, her southern upbringing has its impression in the settings, actions, cultural references, or characters struggling with Southern traditions and stereotypes.

Their family carried habits what could be termed typically Southern, like Cate making mint juleps for her sister Lydia, and the Southern Kitchens Cooking show by Calvin for his television channel where Miss Mary from South cooks Captain Soufflé and other such typical Southern dish.

Southern fiction when taken together could be grouped under "family" novels and history and sense of community have been the traditional support to Southern families. The writers of the South keep to the realistic, vernacular voice, a strong sense of place and a clean narrative idea. The economic life of the cities was a threat to the congenial life of Southerners and some of the women in the novels like Cate, Clare and Lydia are subject to it and are caught between the tipsiness of the cities and the habits of the South. However, family is almost always the center stage on which all the dramas take place. There could be other themes that is taken up for the novels but as Robert F. Kiernan writes "families of all kind and of whatever dysfunction count in the southern novel rather more insistently than they count elsewhere." (16). He also adds "some of them

generational sagas, some of them smaller, domestic tales, some of them New South accounts of quasi-familial units like the town, virtually all of them respectful of the family matrix that is opportunity for black humour and bitterness elsewhere in the house of fiction.” (16). In the novels *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *A Southern Family* and *The Odd Woman*, the women, who pursue independence, reunite with the family having come to terms with their lives. “Re return home after many years elsewhere tends in the southern novel to be an act of signal importance; it constitutes usually a confrontation with family demons, sometimes a reconciliation; it is almost always the occasion of coming to terms with who one is.”(16). Godwin focuses on the generational family in her works which leaves scope for studying the psychological portrait that hung deep within the family shadows but without appearing overtly psychological. *A Mother and Two Daughters* is the story where a funeral brings together a widow and her daughters to ruminate on lives that involve bi-racial marriage, divorce, abortion, and other crises of contemporary experience. *A Southern Family* concentrates on every member of the Quick’s family and with several persons outside the family, as they deal with a violent death and the visit of another family member from New York. This Asheville writer from N.C.,wrote many novels before she could write a fiction that was purely South in *A Mother and Two Daughters* in 1982. “I realized society and the class system interested me,” she said in a telephone conversation from Asheville.

“I got my first taste of blood with that book, and I went all out in this one. To me, one of the killers of this boy was the social system.” Theo, who kills himself in the novel, was created after Godwin’s brother who died at the same age and circumstances as the character. She held on to “the insoluble part” of this incident in her novel and to her it is in her own words “The only solving is that people are forced to think, and they end up knowing him-and themselves-better.”

There is also the tales that is rooted in human realities and in cathartic aspects of the Black experience that evokes sympathy for the predicaments of Black men and women. Godwin does not anyway let those incidents of the past to be overshadowed and the impulse to understand the Blacks who were mired in the storm of slavery remains strong in her narrative. Her sensibility to the racial issue could be seen in her narration as in *A Southern Family* where Lily looks for a congratulations card for Thalia Claudine, the Black woman to whom she goes for body massage. When she could not find one with a Black baby on it and was about to enquire the druggist about it, she realized that she would not have bought it if it had been available since that would have offended Thalia. It struck Lily ‘for the first time that what a no-win situation these people were still in because they had internalized white people’s devaluations of them.’(SF 173). But the author does not lose hope which is typical of any Southerner. The Neville Richardson episode is rampant with the rich Southern trait of hopefulness that is the produce of suffering and distilled wisdom born out of what could be termed the burden of Southern history that has in record various crusade at times of wars, reconstruction and racial rigidities. The realization made Theo Quick to remark to Felix that his family which is Southern was perhaps doomed as they have wasted too much time “being ashamed of the wrong things” (OW 321). The growing friendship between Neville Richardson and Mrs. Evans, the wife of the black doctor has a noticeable influence over the ideals of the former regarding the blacks which does not escape his daughter Julia . When her father asked her “Do you remember the Robert Jones incident back in November?”(SF 325), she was quick to observe his ‘scrupulous use of the man’s name’(SF 325), for whom before his meeting with Mrs. Evans and his growing respect for her would have been simply “that brazen darky”(SF 325). This is an allusion

to the faith in the constructive relationship between the two races and as F. Nash Boney suggests in his article *The South's Peculiar Intuition*, “ This vibrant optimism absent from so many cultures in history, was always present in America and was especially obvious in the South.”(AS 172).

Slavery in the American South had a lasting impact on the region and there was a long struggle to end slavery. Nearly four million Black slaves toiled in the American South before the Civil War. Slaves were the personal property of their owners legally in all states of the South except Louisiana. Slaves were denied any constitutional rights and they cannot testify against the White person; they were rented out, used as lottery prizes, and as wagers in card games and horse races. The hardest of fears the blacks faced was separation from the family. When the master died, his slaves were often sold for the benefit of his heirs.

The Black people who were slaves in the South were under a set of rules and laws known as “slave codes.” They needed a written pass for their travels and were forbidden to learn how to read and write and were subject to curfew every night. Rebellion by the slaves was not possible in a situation where, the Whites could take the government’s support to curb it.

Finally it was the 13th Amendment in 1865 which stated ‘Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, nor any place subject to their jurisdiction.’ (9). Jane Hill puts it that in Godwin’s writings those who seek to live carefree lives have to free themselves from the clutches of the negative forces that keep them down and this is true even with the community of slaves. There is a reference to Ralph who narrates the incident that he witnessed as a small boy with his father in one of their pleasure trips

where his father's black slave was mocked ruefully by them all. The recent history shows how the race of those underprivileged had fought and have been successful in finding their best selves. There is the vision of promising future in Lily's extended family that includes the masseuse, Thalia, and Theo's friend Leroy and in the entry of Renee and Camilla into Nell's family.

Southern culture has always been socially conservative than the culture of the rest of the cultures of the country and the churches were the primary community institution to which the communities associated strongly. The Black churches apart from being a political force were central to the Black community in both urban and rural areas. Paul Harvey in his *Redeeming the South* (1997) has made his observation of the White and Black Baptists from the end of the Civil War to the 1920's. They were bringing in new orders and worked towards professional status in the churches which led to contradictions as the rural church members continued with the old orders. The tension that prevailed at this time can be seen in the Marcus Chapin, the Anglican priest husband of Nell's friend Merle, who in the course of his conversation with Nell's family mentions that he is "a priest without a church", and added "I took a leave of absence, for personal reasons. They've got themselves a nice young rector for the interim. He's full of schemes and dreams." (MTD 391).

The veterans of the Confederate used religious rhetoric to move forward their basis and left tributes that spoke of the cause that "goes with God", which became a habit in the "Southern way of life" (Wilson 1980). Lewis Simpson saw defeat in the war leading White Southerners to clarify their understanding of Southern civilization and found the necessity to free themselves from the growing supremacy of modern materialism.

Ralph Quick's inability to belong to the changed society was a common difficulty for most of the 'rednecks' like him. These people who represented the rural poor White of the Southern United States and who typically have a working class job were conscious of their humble origin and were supposedly opposed to modern ways that normally made their opinions and attitudes offensive. They were holding a solid part of the Southern community and *A Southern Family* delineates the desperate attempt by Ralph to mend things that had gone astray because of him. His step daughter Cate's antipathy, his wife Lily's growing reluctance, his elder son Theo's disintegrating married life and his own inadequacy at combating with all these is because of his precarious position that he has placed himself in. His life style hints at the 'Tobacco road' and 'The Stock Car Culture' of the region and it is this that makes him identical with his 'hillbilly' daughter-in-law Snow, and his younger son Rafe mentions it to Dr.Blake to whom he goes for counsel. He tells "Also some part of him clings to his humble origins. For instance, he built us this real nice house on top of a hill with our own private road, but the sides of the road look like a garbage dump. And our carport isn't too many degrees removed from the way Mom described the mess Snow's people keep around their shack in Granny Squirrel. We even have the prerequisite redneck car cemetery" (SF 286). Everyone associated with Ralph interprets his actions as they view it, and all reasons are satisfying. Clare felt that all the debris left by Ralph on the road to the hill, who acknowledged his Cherokee blood was a menacing way of reminding his wife Lily of his origin there by making a statement that he will be "damned if you(Lily) can cover up all our rot with manners."(SF 20). To Julia, the historian, his conduct was the result of any "arrested civilizations" like that of his that was left with little energy of having responded to a severe challenge. The economically

down trodden Whites of the South were separated from the others of the same race based on social hierarchy and were subjugated by the White elite lot who marked them undesirable and this exclusion was most prominent in the South than any other region of the United States. Having its foundation in the institution of slavery, the antebellum South had to balance between rich and poor, free and enslaved, and White and Black which resulted in the growth of three significant classes, the White land owners who formed the planter class, the free laborers who formed the Negro class and the White who owned no land formed the working class. In due course these poor whites had to move towards hills when the planter class started expanding. The rich white to establish their supremacy undermined the poor whites and the Negroes also looked down upon them. "In the past, white men have hated white men quite as much as some of them hate the Negro, and have vented their hatred with as much savagery as they ever have against the Negro." (John T. Campbell 13)

When the hillbillies had to leave their mountain side, they were taken in for auto assembly lines and to them the open roads and cars signified freedom and thus for the working class, a fast, powerful automobile was 'a way to express itself'(AS 144). Stock car racing was a 'speed sport for the rednecks, not the Southern gentility'(AS 144), as it had 'hard-hat, blue collar association'(AS 142). Ralph, the redneck, and his son Theo, are similar in their attitude towards the rich men of their race and both enjoyed annoying them with their unexpected gestures. While venting his heart to the doctor Rafe, pointed out how his elder brother and father had the same attitude like Ralph relishing the irritation of his wife's rich friends at the sight of his littered driveway home and Theo faithfully wearing the particular suit to those 'once -a -week meetings' that his boss could not stand, "He and Theo were alike in a lot of ways. Theo made it his goal to shock the bourgeoisie every

chance he got.”(SF 286). It was their expression of bent up emotions of the savage history and in this “ The real interest of the poor whites and the Negroes were the same, that of resisting the oppression of the master class.”(13).

The Southern Family opens with the Quick’s family regrouping at the loss of a member of the family at the small town of Mountain City, which presumably is Tennessee. The wife of the deceased is Snow Mullins who is scorned by most of the other characters in the novel and the place Granny Squirrel is also seen with contempt. Exhibiting the savage poverty of its people the place stands as a witness to things which any development or technology could not alter for good. Clare wished to see Snow in her own territory, where she was living with her son Jason in the trailer that belonged to her uncle, which she thought would facilitate her understanding of Snow better. Clare’s friend Julia winding her way to Snow’s place to bring her friend back was not prepared for “the demoralizing impression of the junkyard radiating from the center of the patriarchal compound” (SF 346) of Snow’s grandfather’s house with asphalt shingles, and could see that such a scene can interest only the ‘sociologist types or rural snoops’(SF 346) who want to substantiate the ordinariness of the ‘hillbilly’ and the sickness that accompanies poverty. Those ‘tar-papered shacks’ and the ‘striking aesthetic deterioration’(SF 343) of the region exposed the greediness of the political power structures that resulted in mills and factories that exploited the “cheap and contented, 99 percent pure Anglo-Saxon labor.”(SF 343). Julia understood that this scene will be hard for Lily to take in as she was not one of those people and probably will be ‘a nightmare of regression’ for Ralph who though from among them had outgrown the ‘insolent ugliness’ of the place and had achieved a place in the vicinity for himself and his family in his Quick’s Hill, had not yet removed himself internally from his origins.

An outsider to the family of Quicks, she was capable of impartial analysis of its members and after observing Snow for a while recognized the likeness between Lily and Snow, for they shared the 'Remote Princess quality' (SF 356), each in her own territory who re-evaluated their lives and desires when faced by an adversity. It was a rendition of the stark realities of the nature and livelihood of the people of the areas deep South, and also the dreariness that engulfed the Southern mountain life .

In a way Ray in *The Odd Woman* was similar to Ralph of the Mountain City. Ray who had worked his way up from the humble origin of the working class Whites possessed their egoistic pride in his growth. Ray had developed hatred for the rich Whites who do not understand the difficulty in rising up the ladder through all odds that is before a poor White. He also despised the Negroes who had killed his father for a petty sum of money and also some of the Southerners whom he considered to be the representatives of the artificial conventions of the Old South. His quick tempers and hasty actions are the reflection of the psychology of a race " who have been deprived early in life...and can never get over the feeling of being slighted."(OW 105)

Even the name of the town, Mountain City, is the same in *The Odd Woman* and *A Southern Family*, and it serves as the setting for all family happenings. Guilt is a big issue both at the personal as well as regional level as it could be comprehended from Clare and Julia's talks about Southernness. Clare's self-flagellation at not taking Theo seriously continues throughout and his chastising of her style of writing as that wraps up everything made her to discard the novel she was writing and begins with a new novel that sets to deal with the life of a Southern family.

The nature of the Southerners and the aftermath of their war history and the struggle between the Southern past and the New South is noticeable in Clare of Quick's family who is a novelist, and in her books she tries to maintain "a heedful balance between satire and loyalty." (SF 24). Her Southern family was intriguing with their eccentricities and dramatic bearings. Julia, close to the family of Quicks, through her intimate friendship with Clare observed that "They didn't give life a chance to express itself, they were busy making it over into what they'd rather see, what presented them in a more intriguing light, what felt or sounded better."(SF 35). Felix, Clare's lover from Vienna was fascinated by the lives of the Southerners which was undisturbed by the transformations around. He told Theo "I get the impression that they're living inside a country of their own, no matter who happens to be president in Washington."(SF 298). He found them to be very cordial, carrying with them the heavy burden of their history which at the same time has made them take pride in that. But Theo, the member of the Quick's interprets their politeness as "a very effective form of aggression" (SF 299), and it is their hypocrisy that "weighs" him down.

Even the cuisine of the South is an important part of the Southern culture and is marked as its most distinctive trait. The South has developed its own customs, literature, cuisine and some parts of the South, especially the Southeast, is characterized by the presence of oaks, Magnolia trees, and flowering dogwoods. There is an elaborate chapter titled *Magnolia Leaves in A Southern Family* where Ralph and Miss Alicia go to find some Magnolia leaves for Theo's casket. These leaves made Ralph reflect over his later years of his life and thought of the guilt and fear he may suffer at the 'outraged feeling of loss.' This sense of guilt is again a typical quality of a member of a Southern family.

The Southerners had a natural expertise in narrating stories. There is a lot of storytelling in the novels of Godwin. Many characters who are writers of stories is in itself the representation of the rich culture of story formation among the Southerners. The long history of the South must have formed the basis for this narration.

The setting of her novels varies and not all have South as the place of action. Nevertheless, the Southernness of the author penetrates each work and can be seen in nature of the events, the references to culture or in some of the characters who struggle with Southern traditions and its stereotypes.

Southern family structure has always been used as an influencing force by Godwin. This has a positive impact on the lives of people who shelter under it and it draws the straying spirit of her characters towards home. Cate and Lydia returned to their mother and family members and with them around they continued their search for self. Clare and Julia also arrived at their homeland, each for different reason but still formed a part of the family communion. It was with their family that they were identified, be it a fragment or a complete whole and what was important was not the decayed or the flourishing family, instead it was the Southern family with its traditional and novel cultures that materialized. Godwin consciously makes her characters to be influential in deciding their lives as well as that of the lives of the others with them. There is Jane's grandmother Edith, a traditional Southern lady, who finds children growing up with their "real fathers and mothers" to be the right way. Her preference for 'nice boy with manners' and 'real lady' all speak for the social and moral values that were the deciding factors of any typically southern household. Jane inherited this taste for refinement and order in all walks of life from her grandmother who wanted to keep up with the changes in fashion, a fashion that "decreed beauty, good

manners, and dutiful, womanly behavior.”(OW 172), who as Kitty puts it was lucky to be born with “a thoroughly contemporary soul”, What she tells of *Violet Clay* is, “I think the structure of the book is almost like an allegory and everyone in it is either a threat, a foreshadowing of the bad way Violet could go, or an example for what she could do.” (VC 82). As mentioned by her, all those influential characters are the representations of some complexity in the personality of the protagonists in the tale which the author skillfully places apart and in understanding and responding to those, the protagonists find answers to those questions that were in them. This is an effective method of self-appraisal. Edith, Kitty, Gerda, Sonia Marks and Emily were all manifestations of Jane’s psyche and this way her conversations with them were conversations with her. The author’s words to Kathleen Welch in her interview “I think women need to be educated and they do need to know, by reading literature and by seeing good examples, what they can do” (83) is likewise applicable to her women characters, and which they appear to be.

Families of all kinds find a place in Southern novels as in Godwin’s novels where all incidents have family as its stage. The people of the South spent most of their waking hours with ‘families and communities organized around sentiments and presuppositions somewhat different from those found elsewhere.’ (AS 27). The story of *A Mother and Two Daughters* starts with the funeral of the head of the family, the father, but then moves on to the major issues in the lives of the members of the family like divorce, abortion, a breakthrough in the career and bi-racial marriage. The author widens the family circle by taking the story beyond the nuclear families to extended families that prove to be equally supportive. Lydia and Cate did not just hover in the family shadow, but found others around them to be valuable. Theodora, the godmother to Nell and to Cate is a vital influence on the

emotions of the people in the novel; critical on everybody else with the arrogance to be demanding is seen remaining an integral part of the narration. She and her book club friends, Cate's lover Jernigan and his two sons from different mothers, Theodora's 'new protégée', with a child whose father she never reveals, Nell's marriage to Marcus Chapin, the Episcopal priest, who is glad to have his "new daughters" in Cate and Lydia are all the author's documentation of the possibilities of forming family structures different from the traditional one that has the father, mother and their children. Godwin's discernment that does not limit relationships to members within the same family can also be seen in *A Southern Family* that has in it the members of the Quick family and several persons outside the family who have strong association with them. The death of the son of the Quicks leaves Julia Lowndes, family friend to them, distraught. Mindful of all their peculiarities, yet, she is always available for them. If not completely distressed by Theo ending his life, Cate's lover Felix, still did spend considerable time and thought to understand the family of his woman better. Outside the family, Godwin's characters certainly identify support that is credible.

Various things like the events and institutions responsible for specific views on race, relative unfamiliarity with and hostility to the economic artifacts and entities of the machine age, a rural or village environment from which a person comes, and an energetic and pious concern for confederate military history signify a Southerner. A Southerner of 1900's is a heir to a peculiar set of attitudes and affinities, assumptions and instincts, which are the products of history acting upon geography, though much of its history has been forgotten and the geography modified. It is still to a notable extent as Quentin Compson, in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, responded to his Canadian roommate at

college when asked what it was that made Southerners into what they were: “You can’t understand it. You would have to be born there Or else have lived there for a long time. And this whether one is Black or White, for the same heritage, however markedly and in part even cruelly different in its impact, formed from both.”(AS 17).

Despite the differences in the individual experience, that has in it the characteristics of both good and bad, worthy and unworthy, the southerners have a shared identity. The features that make up this identity, work in direct and palpable ways to cause its members to identify their concerns with those of a particular social and cultural allegiance. The southern entities however cannot be precisely defined. But its existence that can never be denied has kept itself alive in the middle of all social and economic change. It has been parodied, sentimentalized, and also exorcized as if it were the foul fiend incarnate. Unheeding to all the abuses and misuses, it has grown successfully ‘oblivious to all the developments that supposedly were to bring about its demise.’(AS 18).

The historians, novelists and poets of the South, have made South known throughout the world. Godwin, for her novels brings in characters who had to struggle in the shifting society of South due to the differences in the concept of family, race, and class of the late twentieth-century.

South, to preserve its status as an identifiable region and the community affiliation of its citizens, is facing many odds like the industrial culture of the 20th century. In this survival against the changes, the ‘survival’ which is an old Southern habit, the region possesses the most valuable weapon ‘an incorrigible talent at individualizing and humanizing its experience.’(AS 19) . This is an understandable attitude as much of what South had experienced in its long history in its battle against all odds has left the region growing

more strong. The novel *The Odd Woman* has different individuals of a family coming together at the time of crisis in the family: Ralph Quick, the head of the family who from the 'hillbilly' origins of his had climbed up in the social order; Lily Quick, a member of the middle class Southern White who has taken to spirituality to preserve her deteriorating marriage from crumbling down entirely; Jane Clifford, Lily's elder daughter who retains her biological father's name as her surname, a victim of the changing times struggling to choose between the sanctity of the old traditions of the South where her roots lie and the sagacious new orders of the transforming South; Edith, Lily's mother, the stoical woman of Old South, dead at the opening of the novel for whose funeral the family assembles. These characters are the representatives of their era, carrying with them the burden of the saga. They live through the repercussions of their times, cautiously moving alongside the tide.

In this tantrum for mechanization, the boats and canoes parked in the driveways, the grills in the side yard, the baseball diamonds and basketball courts, the family dog snoozing in the sunlight by the front steps, the home workshops in the basement, the Ping-Pong table in the corner were sidelined. Ralph's dogs, his workshop and the Ping-Pong table at Ray's house are all the symbols of the Southernness that the natives wish to retain as a remainder of the nostalgic past.

It was believed that the South can win the onslaught of mass industrial society on it, not by avoidance of the artifacts of the computer age and mobile home but, by controlling, gentling, and humanizing them. Stark Young wrote in *I'll Take My Stand*, "We can accept the machine, but create our own attitude toward it." (AS 410-411).

Some of the Southerners like Henry W. Grady, the available option for the South to retrieve its fortunes was to 'throw off the habits and attitudes of the defeated past and

set out to pursue commerce and industry. TV station is a quasi-familial unit and Julia's work as an anchor at a Southern cookery show on television and her friendship with Calvin who works for the TV station are the Southerners' association to family of some kind.

The arrival of cities and factories could not displace the Southern community that remained viable. The native of the region did not merely live there, but "belonged" to the place. The First World War brought in considerable change, without disturbing the Southern sense of family roots, the sense of identity coming from where one lived and the complex social patterns.

Though the cultural differences between North and South were narrowing, there were differences between southerners and other Americans and 'there seems to be something southern about Southerners that causes them to behave in a Southern manner.' (AS 27). Southerners, whether educated, urban or factory-working, remain southerners always holding on to their habits, values and tastes.

The Southerners spend much time at jobs indistinguishable from those of other Americans, but they spend more time than people from elsewhere in families and community gatherings 'organized around sentiments and presuppositions.' (AS 27). Urbanization and industrialization could not take any distinctive turn in response to the South's culture. The South has some cultural and institutional resources that the North lacked, that helped it in domesticating and assimilating industrialism and urbanization. The nature and extent of religious belief and practice, and a relatively great attachment to local communities are two of those resources that helped the South sustain all the new transformations that posed threat to its origin. Godwin starts her novels with a ritualistic funeral that brings all

of its members under the same roof. It was there all her characters assembled together and it was from there they set off in pursuit of a clearer self and it is in the same place they identify themselves.

In fact, to understand the region, one has to understand the role religion plays in its life. Ninety percent of the Southerners identify themselves as Protestants, and they were mainly Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian. This accounted for the major contribution by religion to the public life of the region. According to the polls ‘southern Protestants are more orthodox in their beliefs than non-Southern Protestants.’ They were less likely to let the modern world dominate religion and to them churchgoing is an essential part of the Christian life. Most Southerners accept on the fundamentals of religion and were satisfied with their churches. Outside the South, the educated professional people from the cities are less likely to be churchgoers than their White collar employees. In the South, on the contrary, it is the educated professional people who make up one of the most churchgoing groups in the region. Kitty in *The Odd Woman*, Nell in *A Mother and Two daughters* and Lily in *A Southern Family* were avid worshippers and going to church was a holy ritual to them.

When the Southerners were asked about whom they admire most in the world ‘southerners are twice as likely as non-southern Americans to name a relative or some local notable’(Rubin 33), and when they were asked where they would like to live if they could live anywhere they wanted, Southerners are most likely to say “right here.” Southerners name their own as the “best American state.” All these demonstrate the Southerners’ affection for their region and their communities. To cope with the social changes, they need the assurance of the personal worth and the importance their religion provides, their

taste for rootedness and their sense of community that will help them to withstand the disintegrative effects of the society where localism and southern churches will provide the means for it. Their localism will find ways to preserve the things they value in their communities. It is seen that ‘ South is fortunate indeed to have such mighty institutions dedicated to what is seen as community well-being, and to have a tradition of voluntary and relatively selfless support for those institutions.’(AS 35).

The next chapter ‘Women and Therapeutic Art’ sets to identify the intimate relation between the women in the novels studied and the various art forms practiced by them that serve as a therapeutic tool enhancing their process of evolvment.