WOMEN'S WRITING IN KANNADA: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECT WRITINGS OF SARAH ABOOBACKAR

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

Ambika Kamath

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

KARNATAKA, SURATHKAL, MANGALORE – 575025

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D E C L A R A T I O N

By the PhD Research Scholar

I hereby *declare* that the Research Thesis entitled, **'Women's Writing in Kannada: An Analysis of Select Writings of Sarah Aboobackar'** which is being submitted to the National Institute of Technology Karnataka, Surathkal, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of ***Doctor of Philosophy*** in Comparative Literature is a *bonafide report of the research work carried out by me*. The material contained in this Research Thesis has not been submitted to any University or Institution for the award of any degree.

Reg. No. 090699HM09P01, Ambika Kamath

School of Management

Place: NITK, Surathkal

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This is to *certify* that the Research Thesis entitled **'Women's Writing in Kannada: An Analysis of Select Writings of Sarah Aboobackar'** submitted by **Ambika Kamath, (Register Number: 090699HM09P01)** as the record of the research work carried out by her is accepted as the *Research Thesis* submission in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature.**

Dr. Shashikantha Koudur
Research Guide

Head, School of Management
(Signature with Date and Seal)

Chairman - DRPC
(Signature with Date and Seal)

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated

To

My Parents and Teachers — the Designers of my Life,

Who have added to my Knowledge,

Fashioned my Character,

Were my Rudder in Times of Distress,

Instilled in me the virtue of Spirituality,

Placed me on the path of Righteousness,

Taught me the value of Self-confidence,

And

Are the reason for what I Am

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Ambika Kamath (Ambika G. Mallya)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyse one of the finest women writers of the Kannada literary world – Sarah Aboobackar. She belongs to the Beary community, a Muslim ethnic minority community, identified with the coastal regions of Karnataka and northern parts of Kerala. Sarah emerged on the Kannada literary scene in the 1980s. She is a gifted writer and has won much acclaim. Sarah is recognized as one of the major literary figures of the Bandaya period (Navyothara or post-modern in Kannada) and is considered one of the powerful voices in contemporary Kannada literature. She is important to the Kannada literary scene because she is the first Muslim writer to emerge in Kannada. The new vigour and energy that she brought into the Kannada context got her wide acclaim and she has been adorned with some of the very prestigious awards.

Sarah's writings are a door opened into the lives of people not only of Beary community, but that of coastal Karnataka. When she focuses on Beary community, she portrays the problems caused by practices like dowry, polygamy and instant divorce (*talaq*). Though the community lives in close proximity, many of the problems faced by the community were not known to the wider public. Sarah's portrayal of her society gives a rare insight into the culture of an ethnic group, thereby providing an exceptional glimpse of the lived-in realities of a people living amidst us, more the reason to take up her writings for analysis. At a time when community relations are under duress in the Indian context, it becomes an issue of equivalent importance that Sarah be read and contextualised.

The current research has research method inputs from Textual Analysis, Autobiography, Ethnographic Method, Quantitative Method, and Interviewing. Therefore, this research is a mix of qualitative and quantitative studies. The study merges both descriptive and exploratory approaches in order to provide a better understanding of literature and culture of the people of a region. Since the study is about the writings of a *woman* from an ethnic community, and since Sarah is an important female voice from Kannada literature, who is assertive on questions of

gender and identity, it becomes appropriate to consider the questions of feminist critical theory, and gender studies, apart from questions of Comparative Literature. Sarah's belongingness and indebtedness to the Kannada tradition is discussed. For a brief comparative study of Sarah Aboobackar, significant Muslim women writers like Qurratulain Hyder, Ismat Chugtai and Banu Musthaq, are selected who are known to be the outstanding voices emerging from the margins. In addition, since the researcher is working on Sarah Aboobackar from Kannada literature, it becomes essential to look at Translation studies and its relevance to Comparative studies.

The qualitative part of the study attempts to analyze the writings of Sarah, apart from trying to understand the lived-in realities and culture of Beary community, represented through the literature of a region. It is believed that a text speaks of the lived-in experiences of the author and gives us a picture of his or her world. We look into her autobiographical writings and identify her distinction between the religious text and the interpretation of that text; we look at her fictional writings and look for patterns of representation and identify Sarah's contribution in crafting out a *New Womanhood* in her fiction.

The quantitative study is exploratory in nature and is more limited than the qualitative part. The data collected using sections of Sarah’s readership is analyzed and interpreted, and the results obtained, not very surprisingly, shows that girls agree more with Sarah as a writer than boys do. This descriptive and exploratory research, it is expected, will throw up new questions in future, with a possibility of opening up new research areas.

Keywords

Women’s writing, feminism, gender studies, comparative literature, Kannada literature, community, religion, translation

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*Literature should not be tainted with religion, be it any. As I see it, in a way, through my writings, I believe I have taken up arms against the Muslim fundamentalists…*Sarah Aboobackar

1.1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This introductory chapter introduces the topic of the research, states the reason for choosing it and explains the research methods used, apart from defining the objectives of this research. This chapter also gives a brief outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis. The current practice, when it comes to research in English is usually to select an Indian English writer or English or American writer and work on him or her, or on topics related to them, befitting the legacy of English literature as it is pertinent to those contexts. Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* speaks about the need to look around us, our lived in realities, when in need of research problems instead of working "on Bacon, or Dickens, or whatever". His argument is that for literary critics as well as for theorists, the most pressing research agendas can arise only out of their lived-in realities (Ahmad 1994: 15). He challenges the very notion of positing a *theoretical* unity or coherence of an 'Indian' literature by accumulating its history in terms of adjacent but distinct histories of the different literatures of the major languages of India. Ahmad argues that the spirit of 'Indian literature' in the pre-modern phase, which gave it its high degree of unification, and was seen as its chief characteristics, was its multilingualism and polyglot fluidity. He states that at present, if one but glances around, one cannot fail to notice that the largest archive of translations has been assembled in English and he feels that if the current trend continues, English will essentially be the official language in which the knowledge of 'Indian' literature is produced. He opines that unlike that of the West European countries, the principle of our unity, for many centuries was civilisational and historical, much before the advent of the 'national' form. The 'national' literature of India finds its principle of unity in civilisational moorings and cultural ethos and not in linguistic uniformity, which he says can be perceived in histories of 'literary' movements and even compositional forms which have interweaved topographical

frontiers and linguistic dissimilarities. Therefore he believes "that an 'Indian Literature' exists, whether definable and quantifiable or not in generic or any other terms, one whose unity resides in the common national origins of its authors and the common civilisational ethos of the Indian people" (ibid: 244-56). Ahmad argues that the only national literary intelligentsia that is in existence in India today, with a shared language, shared body of knowledge, is the one well-grounded in English; apart from the fact that the only literature taught across the length and breadth of the country is English Literature; and that too not the one produced in the country, but borrowed from elsewhere. He says that one has to just glance towards the English departments of the various universities to realise the power these departments wield on their personnel, requiring them to focus their professional attention "*away* from India, on to Dickens or Fielding or, better yet, Sidney's *Arcadia*. It is only by resisting the very thrust of one's education and profession that a teacher of English literature manages to refocus attention on matters closer to home" (ibid: 278-79)[1]. And it indeed becomes very difficult for the English teacher to overcome this. Thinking on those lines, Sarah Aboobackar's writings were chosen for this research. Sarah's writings are in Kannada, the state language of Karnataka. This is a study in Comparative Literature, a discipline that also encompasses areas like translation studies. Since the researcher has taken Sarah Aboobackar, a woman writer and her works for analysis, women's writing in Kannada tradition has been briefly examined. Trends of feminism have also been looked into because Sarah identifies herself with a certain kind of feminism[2]. Therefore, the study also looks briefly into feminism in India and in the Kannada context.

1.2. COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Comparative Literature is a study which is intrinsically interdisciplinary in nature and involves reading texts across cultures, attempting to connect different literatures, spatially and temporally. A part of this study is comparative in nature in a stricter sense, wherein the researcher has done a comparative sketch of Sarah, with prominent

[1]Emphasis in the original.
[2]More on this later.

Urdu writers like Qurratulain Hyder and Ismat Chugtai, as well as Banu Musthaq, a renowned Kannada writer. Susan Bassnett (1993), defining the term comparative literature in its simplest terms, says that 'comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, it is interdisciplinary and it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space' and she quotes Matthew Arnold from his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1857 when he said "everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures", which sums up the idea of comparative literature (Bassnett: 1). Looking back at the turn of the century, Bassnett states that what we have today is a varied picture of comparative literary studies that change according to where it takes place. She notes that while the new comparative literature is "calling into question the canon of the great European masters", it also coincides the process with that of feminist criticism, and that of post-modernist theory. Expanding further she says that while the former questioned the male orientation of cultural history, the latter theorizes in revaluing the role of the reader (ibid: 9). Speaking of the post-colonial world, Bassnett claims that the arrival of the term 'post-colonial' on the critical scene, is undoubtedly one of the most important developments in comparative literature in the twentieth century, and views the post-colonial comparative literature as "a voyage of discovery… towards self-awareness, towards recognition of responsibility, guilt, complicity and collusion in the creation of the labyrinthine world of contemporary writing" (ibid: 90). Sisir Kumar Das argues that every society at some point in time, when it had come in close contact with different cultures and literary traditions, was posed with a challenge to the human exclusiveness. And as a result of these contacts changes took place in the literary activities of the people involved. Das opines that these changes varied from being marginal to profound and pervasive, necessitating a broadening of critical perspectives, apart from the realization that these diversities did not stop one from discovering profounder similarities between them. "The necessity for the study of literature in relation to one another, which is the basis of comparative literature today, was felt very strongly only in the nineteenth century" (Das 2011: 18-19). Deliberating on the opinions of Das it is understood that cross-cultural influences were a direct result of the coming together of the different societies, which did lead to the discovery

of similarities, their exclusiveness notwithstanding. Hence the study of comparative literature gained currency from the nineteenth century onwards.

When one has a superficial look at comparative literature, considering its traditional and historical approach, 'comparing' texts across cultures and languages appears to be the most preferred way of doing comparative literature. But Zepetnek argues that apart from this basic approach, comparative literature also includes the study of the literary texts in its relationship with extra-literary areas such as, for example, sociology, geography, the other arts, etc. According to Zepetnek, the fundamental contribution of comparative literature is the recognition and engagement with the 'Other', irrespective of its standing. "But most importantly – and here the discipline has played traditionally a significant role – Comparative Literature means the recognition of and the engagement with the Other, may that be a 'non-canonical' text (popular literature, for instance) or the literary and cultural aspects of another race, gender, nation, etc…" (Zepetnek 1998: 30). Thus comparative literature also recognises and engages with the question of the 'other', which is important to understand different literatures, in all its exclusiveness. The establishment of the Indian Comparative Literature Association in 1981, Bassnett states, was with the intention of understanding Indian literature, of discovering the greatness of Indian Literature, apart from modernising the departments of Indian literature. And the prime concern of Indian comparative literature was that of asserting the importance of tradition and the creation of a literary history, which was essentially constructed upon Indian models (Bassnett: 38-39). Hence comparative literature is seen as inherently interdisciplinary.

1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The aim of this study is to analyse one of the finest women writers of the Kannada literary world, Sarah Aboobackar. She belongs to the Beary[3] community, a Muslim ethnic minority, identified with the southern coastal region of Karnataka and northern coastal Kerala. Sarah, who emerged on the Kannada literary scene in the 1980s, is a

[3] Spelt Byari or Beary, and henceforth, the latter spelling. A major portion of Sarah's writings is about the Beary community. The word Byari is derived from Tulu, which is a dialect of Dakshina Kannada district. The Tulu word 'bera' means business. Earlier most people from this community were businessmen – from merchants to fishermen (Ichlangod 2011:22).

gifted writer[4] and has won much acclaim. Her writing career started when she was in her forties. Her very first novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli* [5]**,** was prescribed by the Mangalore, Bangalore and Kuvempu University as a text at the undergraduate level, and has been translated into Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Oriya, English and Hindi. The movie *Byari*[6], which has shared the 'Swarna Kamal' award, is based on this novel. One of her short stories "Niyama Niyamagala Naduve" (In Between Principles) is prescribed by the Pre-University Board, Karnataka state and as part of the Kannada text book, for the pre-university course. Sarah is recognised as one of the major literary figures of the Bandaya[7] period and is considered one of the most powerful voices in Kannada Literature today. She has been conferred with some of the most prestigious awards such as Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award, Nadoja Award, Dana Chintamani Attimabbe Award, Vardhamana Award and the prestigious Nripatunga Award, to name a few.

[4] More on this, in the second chapter.

[5] This novel depicts culture and tradition of the Beary community. It highlights strict laws and regulations of marriage in the community, pros and cons of divorce in Islam and how it affects women. More on this, in the fourth chapter.

[6] The 59th National Film Awards, presented by the Directorate of Film Festivals, honored the best of Indian cinema for 2011 and this took place on 3 May 2012 at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. Deool, a Marathi film, and Byari, the first and only film in Byari language till date, shared the award for the Best Feature Film. *Byari* was produced by T. H. Althaf Hussain and directed by Suveeran. More on this, in the third chapter.

[7] The 'Bandaya'/ the rebel / protest movement emerged as a response to the Navya or the modernist movement in the Kannada Literature, rejecting the dominant cultures, asserting their identities and rights. It was sensitive to women's issues, and saw women as rebels and oppressed. Highly influenced by Navya some women writers emerged on the scene. The Bandaya movement is also sometimes jointly referred to, along with Dalit Literature.

The table below has all her publications, which is a part of this study[8].

Sl.no	Title of the book	Year of publication & Reprints	Awards and recognition[9]
1	*Chandragiri Teeradalli*	1984,1985, 1991,1995, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011.	'Best Novel' Award from Karnataka Sahitya Academy and 'Mallika' Award from Kannada Sahitya Parishattu.
2	*Sahana*	1985	'Vardhamana Udayonmukha Lekhaki' Award.
3	*Vajragalu*	1988	……..
4	*Chappaligalu*	1989	…….
5	*Kadana Virama*	1991	…….
6	*Payana (Payana Mattu Ethara Kathegalu)*	1992	……..
7	*Suliyalli Sikkavaru*	1994	'Anupama Niranjana Award' and 'Smt. Rathnamma Heggade Mahila Sahitya' Award'.
8	*Ardha Ratriyalli Huttida Koosu*	1996	……..
9	*Pravaha-Suli*	1996	'De. Javaregowda Dattinidhi' Award
10	*Tala Odeda Doniyalli*	1997	'Shivananda Patil Award' and 'Bhasha Bharati Award' from Central Government.
11	*Khedda*	1999, 2002	…….
12	*Panjara*	2004, 2009	…….
13	*Gagana Sakhi*	2007	…….
14	*Hottu Kantuva Munna*	2010	…….
15	*Illijaru*	2011	…….
16	*Suli*	2011	…….

In her fiction, Sarah reveals the manner in which poverty, illiteracy, religious superstitions and patriarchal values have created unbearable suffering for women. In

[8] The above table is a partial list of her fiction, and is inclusive of only the works which have been analysed in the course of this research. As mentioned earlier, recently Sarah has come up with a novel and some short stories.

[9] The awards and recognitions mentioned here are the ones for her novels/Collection of short stories. Apart from the ones mentioned in the table she has received awards like Nadoja, Nripatunga, and honorary doctorates which were conferred on her for her overall work.

particular, she portrays the problems caused by practices like dowry, polygamy and instant *talaq* (divorce), which she says are endemic in her community, especially among the lower middle classes. Though the community is living in close proximity, their culture is still not known to the wider public, and thanks to Sarah, we are able to have some knowledge of the community[10]. Sarah's portrayal of her community gives one a rare insight into the culture of an ethnic minority community, [11] thereby providing an exceptional glimpse of the lived-in realities of a people living amidst us, more the reason to take up her writings for the study. Hence it becomes an issue of equivalent importance that Sarah be read and contextualised, and for this reason, the researcher has made an attempt to translate some short stories and a part of her autobiography, which will form a part of the appendices.

1.4. RESEARCH DESIGN: CIRCULAR MODEL OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Flick opines that qualitative research fits the traditional, linear logic of research only in a limited way and quoting from Glaser and Strauss, he feels that rather, the circular inter-linking of empirical steps, as their model suggests, does justice to the character of discovery in qualitative research. In this circular model, the central part reserved for the interpretation of data takes into account the fact that text is the actual empirical material and the ultimate basis for developing the theory, since theories are seen as versions of the world, which change and are further developed through research (Flick 2006 : 100-103).

[10] Though they are Muslims and follow the Shari'a and Quran strictly, in many respects they differ from their counterparts elsewhere. They observe a good number of rituals, which are a direct influence of the culture of their surroundings (Aboobackar 2012a,"Abbakkana Nadinalli Byarigalu Mattu Tuluvaru" translated it is "Byaris and Tuluvas in Abbakka's Land").

[11] Minority community, especially Islam has been one of the less understood (and many times misunderstood too) communities in India, as in many other places, though the population is about 15%. The south coastal Karnataka region (i.e. the districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi) have seen sporadic communal violence in recent times, where it has been noticed that Muslims have been greater sufferers than Hindus. Even from this perspective, it is pertinent that a writer from the Muslim community be taken up for the study.

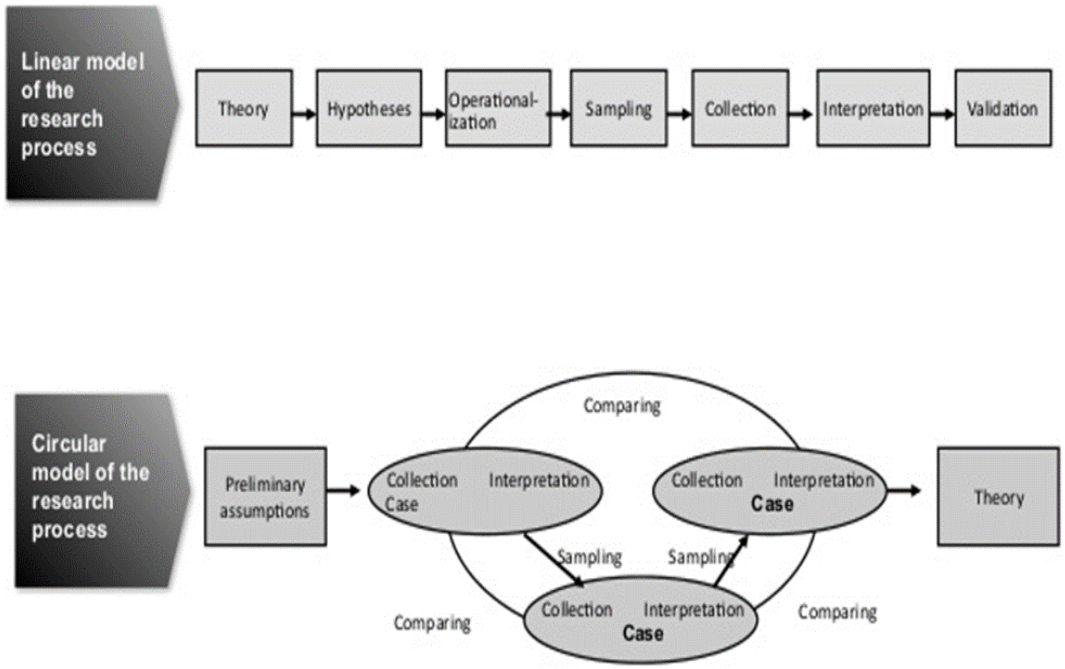


Fig 1: Circular Models of the Research Process (After Flick)

Flick is of the opinion that, the keyword "research design" addresses the questions of planning a study, and that research design is a plan for collecting and analysing evidence, making it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed. The design of an investigation touches almost all aspects of the research, from the minute details of data collection to the selection of techniques for data analysis, apart from linking the theoretical frameworks, questions, research, generalization, and presentational goals with the methods used and resources available, to achieve the goal (ibid: 135-141).

According to Flick, research designs can eventually be described as the means of achieving the goals of the research, which link theoretical frameworks, questions, research, generalization, and presentational goals with the methods used and resources available under the focus of goal achievement. And Flick argues that their realization is the result of decisions reached in the research process. Figure 2, summarizes the influential factors and decisions, which determine the concrete formulation of the research design (Ibid: 140-41).

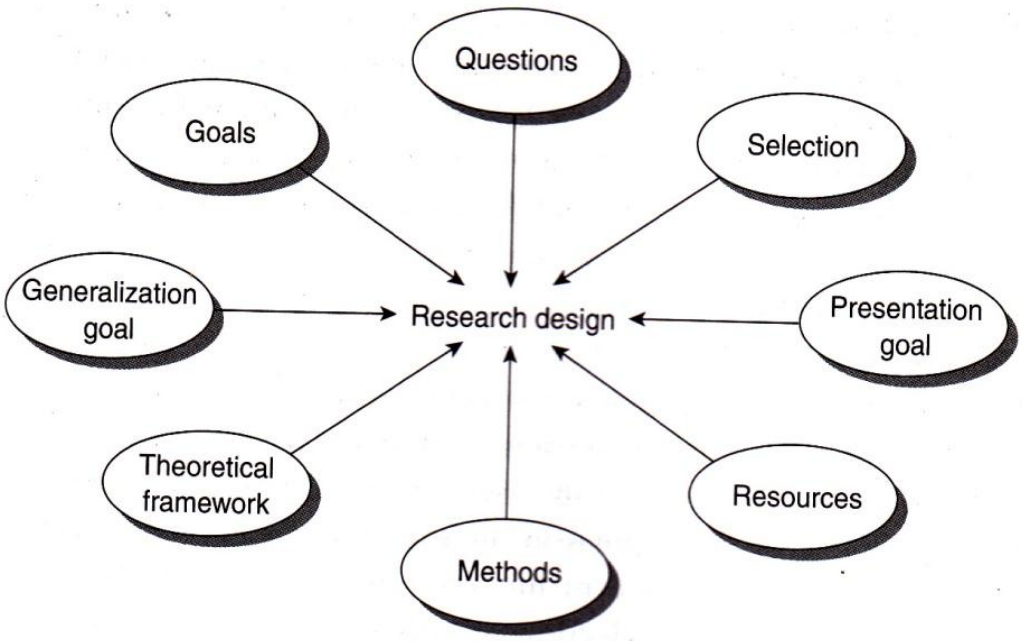


Figure 2: Components of Qualitative Research Design (after Flick)

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study seeks to ask the following questions as part of the research design.

1. How to contextualize Sarah in the Kannada literary tradition?
2. How to understand the culture and the lived-in realities of the Beary community in light of Sarah's writings?
3. To take up certain issues that Sarah addresses and to see if it finds a resonance in the life-world of Sarah's settings.

This research is mostly qualitative and to a very less extent, quantitative. The qualitative study attempts to analyse the writings of Sarah, apart from trying to understand the lived-in realities and culture of the Beary community, represented through the literature of the region. It is believed that a text 'mirrors' the lived-in experiences of the author and gives us a picture of his other world. Since the quantitative study is exploratory in nature no hypothesis is formed. The data collected using sections of Sarah's readership is analysed and interpreted, and the result obtained provides us a better understanding of the ways texts are produced and

consumed. This exploratory research is expected to throw up new questions, with a possibility of opening up new research areas.

1.6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Considering the framework, pilot study and the observations by the researcher, the following objectives were formulated for the study.

i. To create a richer understanding of social, cultural and historical contexts of literary writings by locating Sarah in a wide socio-historical framework.
ii. To understand the dynamics of women's writing in Kannada.
iii. To analyse the process of evolution of Sarah as a writer, through autobiographical writings.
iv. To identify the literary readership of Sarah.
v. To juxtapose the opinions of Sarah vis-à-vis her readership with reference to issues of women and ethnic minority.
vi. To translate some of the select writings of Sarah.

1.7. RESEARCH METHODS FOR ENGLISH STUDIES

Gabriele Griffin in her introduction to *Research Methods for English Studies,* opines that "until very recently, research methods were not widely discussed in English studies" (Griffin 2007: 1). Griffin, says that when she was a post graduate student in the U.K, in the 1980's, research methods did not figure at all and research was what one did, and the best one could hope for was a brief introduction to the vagaries of the library. She opines that to this day, and unlike research degrees in the social sciences, PhD's in English do not require, a methodology section, something that is absolutely commonplace in other disciplines. According to her the situation began to shift dramatically since the turn of the century, and in 2002, a research report was published, titled *Postgraduate Training in Research Methods: Current Practice and Future Needs in English* (Williams 2003), which she feels was timely, since it followed hot on the heels of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) Postgraduate Review which had appeared in the U.K in January 2002. In English

studies, it is common practice to assume that "in the end it's about reading, about text. Provided you know your way around a library and how to find things out, it is a case of knowing your texts…" (Williams 2003: 12). Griffin opines that such a view admits only to the notion of text-based research and textual analysis as the proper domain of English studies research. But, as the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) panel's definition of its domain makes clear that, English studies is, and can be, much more than textual analysis. Griffin argues that unless this limitation of research imagination is recognised, the possibilities of conducting divergent and innovative research is not possible and this in turn has led to "a lack of engagement with large areas of potential enquiry such as the interaction between texts and readers, for instance, which is much theorised but rarely underpinned by any empirical evidence" (Griffin: 4). She feels that knowing about a broad range of research methods enables researchers to think divergently about research, and states that research skills, methods and methodologies are not the same. Williams says that research skills are those techniques used for handling material, for example the search skills in libraries, editorial skills, bibliographic skills, dissertation skills, IT skills, period-specific skills and presentation skills whereas the research methods are the choice of methods made by the researcher, which depends on the kind of research which the researcher has in mind. And methodologies are the perspectives, for example, feminist, post-colonial, etc., which the researcher intends to bring in his or her work. She claims that it is essential to know the distinction between research skills, methods and methodologies. Because not only is it useful for understanding different aspects of the research process, but it is also a distinction that is in respects artificial since the three are interdependent, and are equally necessary to the successful completion of a research project, ultimately determining the focus and outcome of a research project (Williams 2003).

Though until very recently, research methods were not widely discussed in English studies, the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) panel's definition that English studies is, and can be, much more than textual analysis, has opened up an array of research methods. And as Griffin has argued succinctly, knowing about a broad range of research methods enables researchers to think divergently about research. The

current research has research method inputs from Textual Analysis, Autobiography, Ethnographic Method, Quantitative Method, and Interviewing. Let us discuss these briefly.

1.7.1: Textual Analysis

Catherine Belsey contends that "textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism, where cultural criticism includes English, cultural history and cultural studies, as well as any other discipline that focuses on texts, or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in artefacts" (Belsey 2007: 157). She opines that there can never be any such thing called as 'pure' reading; because interpretation always involves extra-textual knowledge, which could be general, some garnered from secondary sources, and some could be personal (ibid: 160). Talking about the secondary sources she cautions that though they are easily available, they are less productive. She feels that contrary to popular belief, textual analysis is not easy, and the researcher should try to pose questions and be able to answer them instead of relying on secondary sources. Textual Analysis, the staple of English studies sensitizes us to the writer's concerns and brings us closer to the social conditions, the reality of the social fabric in its different shades.

> Textual analysis is done by understanding the process of interpretation as the effect of a *relation* between a reader and a text. There may be a dialogue within a text, but the text itself also engages in dialogue with the reader… Any serious textual analysis depends on a grasp of how meaning works. Meaning is not at the disposal of the individual, and not, whatever common sense may indicate, a matter of intention, an isolatable 'idea', fully formed prior to its inscription… Meaning, subsists in the relation between people, inscribed in sounds or images, including written shapes. It has its own materiality: meaning intervenes in the world, defining our understanding of values, requiring us to obey rules and, indeed calling us to arms. But because it never appears in itself, as pure intelligibility, as idea, but is always ascribed in the signifier, in the sound or the image, meaning is never fixed, single or final.... Meaning is inevitably plural. The text, as a tissue of signifiers, makes certain demands on the textual analyst, and provides the material for analysis. That material is by no means an empty space, a vacancy into which we pour whatever we like; instead, the text itself participates in the process of signification (ibid:163-164).

Hence, any specific textual analysis is always made at a particular historical moment, and from within a specific culture and is not exhaustive, making it possible for new readings to emerge. Since meaning is not anchored in anything outside signification itself, all we can be sure of is the signifier, and this cannot be tied to any unique reading –to-end-all –readings. Therefore meanings are always ultimately undecidable

(ibid: 166-173). Belsey suggests that, while research entails unearthing information, it is the textual analysis that poses the questions which research sets to answer. She says it is not as easy as it seems, because once the knowledge is lodged in your mind, it becomes part of what you bring to the text. Her clue is that it is the text which sets the agenda and has a priority. Going back to the theory of textually, it explicitly states that a text is made up of multiple writings. And according to the theory of language, there cannot be a final signified: no true meaning can ever come to light. In other words, one can never have a definite meaning at any given time. Given the signifier, the meanings will continue to be elusive, and ultimately undecidable, although it always remains the object of any academic effort (ibid: 173). Hence the texts, which are analysed in the course of this study – novels, novellas and short stories of Sarah Aboobackar – are always open to further interrogations, interpretations and are open ended. From Sarah's fiction all her novels (9), novellas (2) and short stories (45), and her autobiography *Hottu Kantuva Munna* (Before the Day Light Wanes) are selected for analysis[12].

Her novels are:

1. *Chandragiri Teeradalli* (On the Banks of Chandragiri – Aboobackar 1984)
2. *Sahana* (Tolerance – Aboobackar 1985)
3. *Vajragalu* (Diamonds – Aboobackar 1988)
4. *Kadana Virama* (Ceasefire – Aboobackar 1991)
5. *Suliyalli Sikkavaru* (Trapped in a Whirlpool – Aboobackar 1994)
6. *Pravaha-Suli* (Floods-Whirlpool – Aboobackar 1996)
7. *Tala Odeda Doniyalli* (In a Wrecked Boat – Aboobackar 1997)
8. *Panjara* (Cage – Aboobackar 2004)
9. *Ilijaru* (The Slope – Aboobackar 2011)
10. *Suli* (Whirlpool – Aboobackar 2011)[13]

Her novellas and collection of short stories are:

1. *Chappaligalu* (Slippers – Aboobackar1989) a collection of ten short stories.

[12] Recently Sarah has come up with one more novel and some short stories, which are not a part of this study.

[13] *Suliyalli Sikkavaru* (1994) and *Pravaha-Suli* (1996*)* was published as *Suli* (2011).

2. *Payana Mattu Ethara Kathegalu* (The Journey and other stories– Aboobackar1992) acollection of nine short stories.
3. *Ardha Ratriyalli Huttida Koosu* (Mid-Night's Child – Aboobackar 1996) a collection of eleven short stories.
4. *Khedda* (A Trap – Aboobackar 1999) a collection of a novella and seven short stories.
5. *Gagana Sakhi* (Air Hostess – Aboobackar 2007) a collection of a novella and eight short stories.

Her autobiographical writings are:

1. "Hejje Hadi" (A Trip down The Memory Lane in *Chandragiri* – Aboobackar 2009)
2. *Hottu Kantuva Munna* (Before the Day Light Wanes – Aboobackar 2010).

1.7.2*:* Autobiography

Mary Evans begins her essay "Auto/biography as a Research Method", by pointing out that "research is not always an entirely voluntary activity because it is an important part of the world of those who research into the lives of others" (Evans 2007: 31). She opines that, the subjects of auto/ biography live in the same way as the researcher, "living in a world where the boundaries of the public and private are increasingly fluid". She argues that in many instances these boundaries are re-written by the subjects themselves, thus making the research about the subject appear meaningless. Because what the research intends to find is already disclosed by the subjects themselves. Evans doubts whether or not auto/biography can actually survive in the twenty-first century, what with the given trend of the Western culture, which increasingly compels an individual towards self-revelation. She argues that,

> In this culture of revelation, the researcher – compelled by the imperatives of her professional life – has to attempt to establish a way of reading the lives of others that does not become simply a collection of information…Where once the search was for greater information about the person, now it has shifted to a search for an interpretation of how the individual could be located within a particular *zeitgeist*[14].The paradox of contemporary autobiography, and research about it, is that the individual characteristics of a person becomes precisely that, and the important question becomes one that is outside the person,

[14]German (noun) for the spirit of the time; general trend of thought or feeling characteristic of a particular period of time.

> namely the puzzle of how a particular individual emerged in particular times. The researcher in autobiography…confronts an individual who is now studied in terms of their own dialogue with their circumstances (ibid: 32).

Evans declares that auto/biography serves as an important reminder of the deep fault lines of social life, exposing the limitations of those subjects, and one cannot fail to see "the human agency at work, in the way in which autobiography documents the individual's progress through the social world". And when one reads autobiography, one realises the dynamics of choices which human beings make (ibid: 34). Citing Frank Furedi (2002) Evans says that, contemporary sociologists have argued that we now live in a 'culture of fear', where individuals are both on their own in a religious sense, and on their own within a social ethic, that of capitalism, which stresses individual achievement and responsibility, i.e. ideas about self-realization, and she says that "part of the psychic restlessness of individualism is to discover the self, it is not an ethic which is content to see the work, the external manifestation of the inner self, but, rather it wishes to see and know the internal self" (ibid: 36). But auto/biography it is just not the discovery of the self. It is much more than that, and autobiography is the literary expression of the reflection on life, a written expression of the meaningful moments of self-reflection, central to experience of life, whether we write it down or not. "This self-reflection is the root of historical consciousness. In other words, this self-reflection is not only a formal category of thought, but is intrinsic to experience, is ongoing and self-adjusting" (McCooey 1996: 12). If McCooey defines this self-reflection of the individual in his progress as the root of historical consciousness, springing from one's experience in life, and is ongoing; Barros states that autobiography is all about change, where change is seen as a metaphor of transformation. A change which relates a series of transformations and as a text of life, it gives us the before and after of individuals, who have undergone transformations. Barros defines autobiography as a recounting of one's life to someone else (Barros 1998: 1-6).

According to Evans, in this culture, autobiography plays the role of offering an insight in understanding and evaluating a particular individual in terms of their achievements, since historically women have been allowed less moral agency than men. Their place was essentially as that of the 'angel in the house', which has long been contested by

feminists, demanding that they give a right to act outside the house. "Much feminist scholarship of the 'second wave' of feminism has been concerned with the documentation of the difficulties which women have had in achieving particular goals, and gaining access to forms of experience conventionally allowed to men" (Evans 2007:37). Evans evoking Foucault says that auto/biography has emphasised the point that "history is not a linear progression but the resolution of competing ideas". Hence the importance of auto/biography, as a research tool for both the humanities and the social sciences cannot be undermined. For example, she says that it can be successfully employed as a tool to unmask the past, apart from the feminist 'project' of using it to uncover the hidden lives of women. Once we recognize this, the author of auto/biography becomes the "hidden subject", as Evans describes it, of the study. The history of science, and indeed the philosophy of the social sciences, Evans cautions us, has taught us that we should regard 'facts' with some scepticism, and auto/biography is essentially a collection of facts, which are often negotiable, as the theory of post-modernism has informed us. Evans warns the writers and students of auto/biography, of the need to recognize the porous boundaries between fact and fiction; that though we are 'individuals' in a factual sense, we are also individuals who construct ourselves, and others, in terms of imagined possibility, but we all have to confront the dynamic between ourselves and the culture. Summing up, Evans says that through an exercise in reading these rich evidences of our world – auto/ biography –helps us 'to establish those fault lines of our culture that enable change and creativity' (ibid: 43-45). Autobiography as a research tool aids to evaluate the individual and the researcher in autobiography confronts an individual who is now studied in terms of their own dialogue with their circumstances. In this instance, it helps to understand the writer, Sarah Aboobackar, intimately, through her autobiography, *Hottu Kantuva Munna* (2010).

1.7.3: Ethnography as a Research Method

Rachel Alsop defines 'ethnography' chiefly as a qualitative research strategy that relies on participant observation and concerns itself in its most general sense with the study and interpretation of cultural behaviour. Quoting Hammersley and Atkinson, Alsop states that fundamentally ethnography is a mode of research conducted in a

natural setting unlike that of other methods, wherein an artificial setting such as laboratory is made use of. The chief task of the researcher (the ethnographer), is to find out about other cultures, and in case of English studies this relates to the cultural dimensions of literature or language. This is done by undertaking prolonged periods in the 'field' by participating and observing certain relevant aspects of social life, which is central to ethnography. Apart from this, interviews, document analysis, consideration of novels, magazines, photography, and even statistical information is used to supplement this mode of research. Alsop says that across the broad reach of ethnographic research there are different emphases and approaches and cites Van Maanen's attempts to classify ethnographic research into five possible types: (i) Ethnographic realism, which refers to the immersion of the ethnographer in the 'field', (ii) Confessional ethnography, where the role of the researcher in the research process is central, (iii) Dramatic ethnography, in which focus is in particular on one episode or occurrence within a specific community, (iv) Critical ethnography, where culture is situated within a wider framework whether that is socio-economic, historic, symbolic or otherwise and (v) Self (auto-ethnography), which Centres on the culture of the ethnographer him or herself (Alsop 2007: 114-116).

For O'Reilly ethnography is an exploration of the social fabric and to quote him, "ethnography is about exploring, uncovering, and making explicit the detailed interactive and structural fabric of the social settings that social researchers suspect to be sociologically interesting" (2009: 14).

Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge and action; expanding our horizons for choice, apart from widening our experiential capacity to see, hear and feel. "Critical ethnographers describe, analyse and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centres, and assumptions that inhabit, repress and constrain" (Thomas 1993: 2-3). For qualitative researchers, who wish to emphasize critical analysis, it is essential to have a good knowledge of theoretical understanding. Because critical analysis is grounded in social theory, which ethnographers need to apply at different levels, while analysing the different cultural codes, specific to the study in hand. Madison contends that "critical social theory evolves from a tradition of "intellectual rebellion" that includes radical ideas

challenging regimes of power that changed the world and as ethnographers, we employ theory at several levels in our analysis" (Madison 2011: 14-15).

It is an undisputable fact that ethnographies are of import to English studies. Ethnographies are both a research process and a research text, and scholars can relate to it in four key ways. First and foremost they are of interest as literary work. Secondly, in English studies, ethnographic research is used as a means of evaluating the extent and the ways in which the narrative in literary works are drawn from ethnographically produced material. Thirdly ethnography in English studies is made use of as a research tool for writers, entailing them to 'people-watching' and or 'participant observation', which is considered integral to the research process. Fourthly, it can be utilized as a method of studying literary or linguistic behaviour, as a means of exploring the social context in which literature is both produced and consumed or the cultural frame work of oral communication (Alsop: 116-118). Alsop, furthering the role of ethnography in English studies, focuses on two specific areas: travel writing[15] and audience response criticism, explaining in detail and giving an in-depth account. She states that audience response criticism is a part of literary analysis concerned with the social consumption of literature, and focuses on the reception and negotiation of texts by audiences, with an established history of using ethnographic research methodologies to explore literature within a cultural context. Here, the concern is not only with how texts are approached and interpreted by readers (individually or collectively) but how the social activity of reading (watching, if the text is performed) links and in turn shapes other aspects of social and personal life.

> …texts are conceptualised as having no pre-existing, fixed or singular meaning. Readings are multiple, differentiated potentially by the gender, age, class, geographical and temporal location and so on of the reader. The body of work forming reader response criticism is broad and diverse… Ethnographic research enables the exploration of the consumption of literature within defined social and historical settings and by specified groups of readers (ibid: 123).

In English studies, as a research process ethnography can be utilized to explore the social context in which literature is both produced and consumed. Though participant observation is central to ethnography, it can be supplemented by interviews, document analysis, consideration of novels, magazines, photography, even the

[15] Since travel writing does not feature in this study it is not explained here.

analysis of statistical information is found to be relevant, although ethnographic research does tend to favour qualitative research over quantitative. This study deploys a mix of ethnographic methods such as dramatic and critical ethnography and audience response criticism.

1.7.4: Quantitative Methods

Pat Hudson, states that currently the research in the areas of literature and literary criticism, is entirely dependent on textual analyses, never mentioning nor using numbers. She finds this quite paradoxical because the neighbouring disciplines of literary studies, particularly the linguistics and sociology, are the most vigorous users of quantitative methods and computer-aided research techniques, which are based on counting and probability calculus. She argues that though the scope for making use of social scientific, statistical and computer applications in literature research is great, in actuality it appears to be negligible (Hudson 2007: 131-32). The first point Hudson makes is that in the text-based humanities the quantitative method is divided into two main categories: computational and statistical. The computational methods concern the computer-aided storage, retrieval, interrogation and analyses of texts, and is largely based on quantification. The statistical methods are those that are concerned with the display and analysis of quantitative data, which could be data on literary output, classification of literature or readership, or readership opinions from questionnaire or interview material. In some instance she opines that computers too are used to facilitate analysis or the presentation of statistical data. Explaining further, Hudson says that,

> Statistical methods employed in the arts and elsewhere can be divided into two distinct categories: descriptive and inferential. *Descriptive statistics* are techniques employed to improve the communication and display of numerical information in an analytical context. *Inferential statistics* are techniques of greater technical sophistication employed to interrogate possible meanings and implications of statistical data, going beyond data rearrangement and display to consider cause and effect, based largely upon probability theory (ibid: 147)[16].

She concludes saying that the reason for the rare use of quantitative analysis in the arts, particularly in literature studies, is largely because the choice of research approach is too often seen as a choice of methodology rather than method, a way of

[16] Original emphasis.

thinking about knowledge rather than a tool to gain knowledge. That numbers and numerical analysis form a language like many others and can be used for good or ill: intelligently, sensitively and reflexively, or crudely and misleadingly. She cautions that only statistical analysis coupled with critical reasoning can give best results, which otherwise might result in excessive quantification, leading to the creation of 'statistical junkies', who abandon critical reasoning while analysing the data. That, in short, both quantitative and qualitative methods are only as good as the researcher who employs them. According to Hudson, "quantitative methods are a research tool: a means to an end rather than an end in themselves, an adjunct to clear thinking rather than a substitute for it" (ibid: 152), and if used wisely in this spirit, she feels that "there is no reason why numbers cannot be a great deal more exploited and valued by researchers of literature than is currently the case" (ibid).

In the course of this study the researcher is concerned with the statistical method which is about the display and analysis of quantitative data, and in this instance specifically readership opinion from questionnaires and interview material would be analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

1.7.5: Interviewing

A significant proportion of current interviewing in English studies research focuses on interview with live authors. Gabriele Griffin is of the opinion that "selecting a research topic, finding appropriate interviewees, conducting effective interviews, and interpreting the material appropriately is not 'natural' but achieved" (Griffin 2007: 176). She contends that though interviewing has been regarded as '*the* central resource' for contemporary social science, it is not a research method much discussed in English studies because the general assumption regarding English studies research is that it is seen fundamentally as textual in nature. A significant proportion of current interviewing in English studies research focuses on interview with authors. Quoting Seale, Griffin distinguishes between two kinds of use of interview data which reflect a common distinction between 'modern' and 'postmodern' interviewing. The first practice is where interview data is seen as resource, and it is regarded as (faithfully) reflecting the interviewees' reality outside of the interview. The second one is where

interview data is seen as topic, and is viewed as reflecting a reality jointly constructed by the interviewee and interviewer (during the interview). It is assumed that in 'modern' interviews the speaking subject will produce a coherent account, whereas 'postmodern' interviewing does not assume such coherence. Instead 'postmodern' interviews are considered as offering a truth of the subject and her discourse. Griffin opines that "within research-specific contexts, interview data should be treated both as resource and as topic but where one puts the emphasis depends on the individual research context" (ibid: 179). Apart from speaking of making proper use of interview data, Griffin also distinguishes interviews among three dimensions: interviews involved (one-to-one versus group interviews, the latter predominantly discussed in terms of focus groups), the format (structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews) and the setting (public or private space, face-to-face, telephone, email, internet). She says:

> All three dimensions, as well as others such as interviewer skills in putting the interviewee at ease and asking appropriate questions, impact on the interview process and outcome. Thus, interview with authors are more likely to be conducted on a one-to-one basis than interviews involving readers which might use focus groups… Structured interviews involve schedules where all questions, fully formulated, are pre-given, and asked in the same order, and ideally in the same manner, for every interviewee …Semi-structured interviews are less rigid in format, involving an interview guide rather than an interview schedule, where the guide acts as a prompt for the interviewer to ensure that all issues in the interview are covered (ibid: 180-81).

Although the phrase 'unstructured interviews' is used in research methods literature, Griffin doubts that there is such a thing as 'unstructured interview' since interviewers always want to elicit a set of responses on a given topic, and the less structured an interview is, the more participatory it can become for both the interviewer and interviewee; and unstructured interviews are commonly called as 'in-depth interviews', which suggests that such interviews actually intended to elicit elaborate and detailed answers 'elaborated and detailed answers' (ibid: 182).

Contrary to popular belief, an interview is anything but an informal chat, having a direction and shape, serving a specific purpose of eliciting responses, wherein both the interviewer and the interviewee are in a dynamic relationship. And it is a 'controlled interaction which uses the verbal exchange as the main method of asking questions'. "…Interviews are used in many different contexts and they should never

be treated lightly; people who give time and effort to answering the interviewer's questions deserve our attention and respect" (Keats 2005: 5-20).

Griffin contends that "interviewing is demanding for both interviewer and interviewee, in particular, in-depth interviewing, which demands significant level of social and listening skills from the interviewer" (Griffin 2007: 186). She concludes saying that, interviewing can be utilized to understand people's views and perceptions as producers and consumers of literary texts, apart from it being a complex process, involving a number of important questions. "Questions such as: what information do I hope to glean from the interviews that I cannot get through another research process? What questions do I need to ask? What kind of interviews should be conducted and with whom, how, where and in what manner? What resources will be needed for the interviews? What will I do with the interview material in terms of transcribing, analysing and archiving it? Rather than merely staying 'loose' and 'flexible' as Turkel proclaimed it, careful consideration of these questions will repay in the use of interviews as research method" (ibid: 192).

Interviews, especially the 'research interview', is a special form of conversation, which aspires to create knowledge necessarily through the 'inter-action' between the interviewer and the interviewed. That the attempt of a qualitative research is to understand the world from the subject's point of view, with an intention of comprehending the meaning of people's experiences. The comprehension thus gleaned is further utilized "to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale 2007: xvii-1).

In the present study, this researcher has made use of three in-depth interviews with the author, Sarah Aboobackar. The first interview was informal; the second one was partly structured, wherein a predesigned questionnaire was given prior to the interview and in the third was semi-formal, and the author was interviewed with open ended questions. A focus group from Muslims and or Beary community was interviewed, separately, in an in-depth, face-to-face interview. The interviews were unstructured and more in line with oral history or life history.

1.8: METHODOLOGY AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The study merges both descriptive and exploratory approaches in order to provide a better understanding of the literature and culture of the people of a region. Since the study is about the writings of a woman from an ethnic community, it becomes appropriate to consider the questions of feminist critical theory, and gender studies, apart from questions of Comparative Literature. Since the thesis relies upon translation of Sarah's work for a non-Kannadiga reader, the interdisciplinarity touches upon translation studies as well. For a brief comparative study of Sarah Aboobackar, prominent Muslim women writers like Qurratulain Hyder, Ismat Chughtai and Banu Musthaq are taken up, who are known to be the most outstanding voices emerging from the margins and, who, like Sarah, have unflinchingly articulated the social inhibitions and cultural taboos laid down by the society. These different perspectives will help in better understanding the literature and to conceptualize Sarah.

Since gender is a social construct, society must find ways to erase discrimination against women, treating them as equals. Especially the gender negative discrimination, as Zepetnek (1998) righty says, has become a characteristic of almost all cultures, and something which we encounter in our daily lives. Sarah too, speaks in no uncertain terms, voicing her concern on the status of women, and argues that women should be treated at par with men.

1.8.1. Feminist Critical Theory

Tuttle (1986) has defined feminist theory as asking "new questions of old texts". She says that "feminist criticism has the following goals: (1) To develop and uncover a female tradition of writing, (2) to interpret symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view, (3) to rediscover old texts, (4) to analyse women writers and their writings from a female perspective, (5) to resist sexism in literature, and (6) to increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style". Reading texts from a feminist perspective can open up new avenues of understanding the production of literature by women towards retrieval of the lost voices of women, apart from understanding the sexual politics in literature**.** Therefore

even as this work undertakes to examine Sarah's writings, it is informed of the politics of feminist criticisms.

Speaking about women's writings, Tharu and Lalitha, opine that instead of reading women's writings as 'new monuments' to the existing institutions and cultures, it should be read as 'documents' that display what is at stake in the "battered practices of self and agency". They believe that these documents arose as a direct result of being placed at the margins of patriarchy, "a patriarchy which was 'reconstituted by the emerging bourgeoisies of empire and nation". For them comprehending the efforts of these women becomes more important. Because, through documenting their life experiences, which were garnered by living in the margins, has helped shape the worlds we have inherited. And therefore they argue that what we claim today as the history is not one of authority, but of contest and engagement (Tharu and Lalitha 1991: 36).

Any reflection, be it philosophical or not, is already entrenched in textual representations, which in turn are biased by the class, race and gender concerns. Philosophy in the West, is dominated by theoretical hierarchies, which are gender-coded, albeit in a covert manner (Bartky1990: 5-6). And feminist scholars need to think from this perspective to come up with meaningful reflections of texts. The researcher has made an attempt to read Sarah's works from a feminist perspective, as valuable documents of contest and engagement, emerging from the margins.

1.8.2. Feminism in India

Sarah, on whose work the researcher is working, is assertive on questions of gender and identity. And that takes us to the questions of feminism in India. The tradition of feminist assertiveness had already been established in India before Sarah began her writing. Therefore she is to be seen as a part of this continuum. Though Sarah refuses to be 'branded' as feminist, we cannot detach her assertive writing from the feminist ethos of a certain kind of women's writing in India.

Feminism, which is a collection of movements and ideologies mainly focusing on women's issues, is no longer monolithic, with a distinct difference in the sensibilities of the Western and Eastern feminisms. Reminiscing Forbes, the heterogeneity of the

Indian experience reveals that there are multiple patriarchies, just like there are multiple feminisms. Warhol and Herndl, in the foreword of their second edition of *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, state their reason for using the word feminisms in the title. They argue that they acknowledge the existence of different strands of feminisms, which speak of the diversity of motivation, method, and experience among feminist academics. They believe that though such multiplicity of approaches and assumptions inside the movement can lead to conflict and competition, such diversity can be a source of vitality and genuine learning, paving the way for cultural heterogeneity. They argue that though feminisms are multiple, feminists do share some common beliefs, and agree that oppression of women is a fact of life (1997: x-xii). Hence, feminism in India as elsewhere is not a singular theoretical orientation; it has changed over time in relation to historical and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women, and women as a group. Like their feminist counterparts all over the world, feminists in India seek gender equality, apart from fighting against culture-specific issues within India's patriarchal society. Gangoli has stated that the main characteristic of Indian feminism is its "passionate allegiance to polyvocality, as well as respect for difference and differences" (2007: 13). The history of feminism in India can be traced to the colonial period, when modernity brought concepts of democracy, equality and individual rights and was initiated by progressive men to uproot the social evils of sati (widow immolation), child marriage, to allow widow remarriage, to reduce illiteracy, to regulate the age of consent and to ensure property rights through legal intervention. Anagol (2005) has observed that "The rise of feminism in India was made possible through a combination of factors: the presence of a colonial economy, the new web of modernizing impulses which interacted with the contending circumstances and criteria of sex, race, status and class, caste and religion", and defines 'Indian feminism' as a theory and practice based on presenting a challenge to the subordination of women in society and attempting to redress the balance of power between the sexes. And she says that by the same logic, the act of empowering oneself by treading on or harming the interests of other women is her definition of an 'anti-feminist' (Anagol: 13-14).The upsurge of nationalism, which marked the struggle against colonial rule claimed Indian superiority as the tool of cultural

revivalism resulting in an essentialising model of Indian womanhood. As in the West, the feminist movements in India have especially been criticized for focusing too much on privileged women, and neglecting the needs and representation of lower caste women, leading to the creation of caste-specific feminist organizations and movements like Islamic feminism. While this is a major advancement relative to other religions in India, it is still not a complete triumph in terms of feminism and relieving oppression. Gangoli argues that in 1987, the formation of Awaaz-e-Niswaan (The Voice of Women), in a predominantly Muslim dominated area in Mumbai, was mainly because the minority communities felt that their issues were not being addressed through Indian feminism, which they saw as 'upper-caste'. The Muslim community has experienced structural, economic and social discrimination, communal violence and is subjected to personal laws that have been considered discriminatory to Muslim women, hence, Awaaz-e-Niswaan (The Voice of Women), emerged from the experiences of Shehanaz Shaikh[17], a Muslim woman, who was an active member of Women's Centre and FAOW[18] in the 1980s (Gangoli 2007: 23-27). According to Anagol "one needs to be informed by a conception of female agency[19] that canters on uncovering the intentions and experiences of Indian women as they asserted their rights, addressed social inequalities and rejected or adapted traditions in an engagement with the world around them in what amounted to Indian feminism" (ibid:10). Though the emerging feminist movement in India was influenced by Western ideals, calling for education and equal rights, the local issues like dowry-related violence, sex selective abortion and custodial rape, were incorporated in this framework. The male and female dichotomy of polar opposites with the former

[17] Shehanaz Shaikh had been married to Abdul Rab Ravish in 1981, who was 17 years older than her, and had subjected her to mental and physical abuse through the course of their marriage. He orally divorced her in 1983, and threw her out of the house without giving her the Mehr (which is an amount agreed upon during the nikah), set at Rs.12,000. She filed a petition against the Union of India, as the first respondent, and Abdul Rab Ravish as the second respondent, laying the responsibility of her oppression primarily on the Indian State, suggesting that the State had failed in its responsibilities to her by not enacting fair laws for Muslim women.

[18] Forum Against Oppression of Women, a feminist organization that was formed in 1982, in Mumbai. This was first known as Forum Against Rape (FAR) and was founded in 1980.

[19] 'Agency' is construed here as conscious and goal-driven activities by women that embrace the possibility of 'change'. Anagol argues that 'assertion' and 'resistance' are the twin aspects of women's agency. Women's will or volition to act in conscious forms to resist, stretch, or overturn structures of power is broadly defined as 'resistance'. 'Assertion' is defined as a form of resistance which use legitimized instruments of agitation that have the blessings of the state (p.14).

oppressing the latter at all times was problematic in the Indian context because it was progressive men who initiated social reform movements against various social evils. Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements, women living in modern India still face many issues of discrimination. Sarah, strongly endorses that women should join hands to fight against these issues, and argues that the patriarchal society has created unbearable suffering for women, and is an advocate of Islamic Feminism. One of Sarah's objections is that, women are taken advantage of, under the guise of the Muslim personal law – the shari'a – in the name of religion. Speaking about her community, she says that if we glance towards their community all that meets our eye is, a situation of exaltation of Islam and exploitation of women in the name of religion; excluding them from education; brainwashing them to such an extent that they comply with everything meekly, so that they never speak openly about these atrocities, which are successfully hidden from the society at large (Aboobackar 2010:149). Her belief is that education creates awareness, which in turn leads to economic independence, and thereby makes the real emancipation of women possible. Sarah echoes Faludi when she speaks of these issues of women, which truly subverts the basic ideas of feminism, forcing women to "choose" between the public justice and private happiness.[20] Sarah invoking Warhol and Herndl (1997) agrees with the fact that gender leaves its traces in literary texts and on literary history, and that feminist literary criticism plays a vital role in the struggle to end oppression in the world outside of texts. She argues that the one major change which is chiefly brought about by feminist literary criticism is that of the increase of the interdisciplinary nature of the literary studies. Sarah opines that feminist literary criticism has indeed helped to lay open the atrocities women face in the world outside of texts, giving them an edge towards their struggle in ending this oppression.

[20] Faludi (2006) in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, believes that, in reality, the last decade has seen a powerful counterassault on women's rights, a backlash in fact, attempting to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women. She argues that this counterassault is largely insidious, and comparing it to a kind of pop-culture version of the Big Lie, says that "it stands the truth boldly on its head and proclaims that the very steps that have elevated women's position have actually led to their downfall. The backlash is at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively "progressive" and proudly backward" (9-10). She states that "Feminism's agenda is basic: It asks that women not be forced to "choose" between public justice and private happiness. It asks that women be free to define themselves – instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and their men" (15).

1.8.3. Gender Studies

Millet argues that because of our social structures male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different. Referring to Stoller's ground-breaking studies on gender, Millet states that the studies offer proof that gender identity that 'I am a girl' or 'I am a boy', is the primary identity any human being holds, which is also seen as the first as well as the most permanent and far-reaching. Continuing, she says that this discovery later enabled Stoller to make emphatic the distinction that though sex is biological, gender is psychological, and therefore cultural. Therefore 'gender' should be understood as a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. (2000: 30-31). Since both men and women perceive the world differently, not to speak of the third gender, the term 'gender' itself becomes highly problematic. Speaking about gender, life itself is gendered, and gender at birth, marks the course of life. That even "if gender is a constant, the ways in which gender is lived are highly fluid, subject to perpetual sociocultural redefinition and to individual interpretation and expression" (Essed et al: 1). Since gender is a social construct, close reading of texts, helps in a better comprehension of gender politics, thereby towards new ways of reading and analysis.

1.8.4. Translation Studies

In the course of this study along with Kannada texts, the researcher has analysed select texts from Urdu, in English translation, while comparing Sarah Aboobackar with renowned writers like Qurratulain Hyder and Ismat Chughtai. In addition, since the researcher is working on Sarah Aboobackar from Kannada literature[21], Banu Mushthaq, a Kannada writer is also selected for the comparative study. Hence it becomes essential to look at translation studies and its relevance to Comparative studies.

'Translation studies' is another rapidly expanding development in literary studies, and has profound implications for the future of comparative literature. Though comparative literature had claimed translation as a sub-category so far, the assumption is now being questioned, because any comparative study is possible mainly because

[21] The sections of Kannada works used in the thesis are translated by the researcher herself.

of texts being available in translation (Bassnett 1993: 10). Translation has to do with authority and with power, and Andre Lefevere looks at translation not just as 'a window opened on another world', but as a channel opened, albeit with a certain reluctance, "through which foreign influences can penetrate the native culture, challenge it and even subvert it" (ibid: 159). Bassnett is of the opinion that "writing does not happen in vacuum, it happens in a context and the process of translating texts from one cultural system into another is not a neutral, innocent, transparent activity; instead translation is a highly charged, transgressive activity, and the politics of translation and translating deserve much greater attention than has been paid in the past", claiming that translation has played a fundamental role in cultural change (ibid: 160-161). Bassnett and Lefevere speaking about the importance of translation, explain three models of translation.[22] The third model 'Schleiermacher' translation model, takes issue with the automatic standardization analogy produces. This model states that translations from different languages should sound different, because if all translations read and sound alike, the identity of the source text has been lost, levelled in the targeted text. This model emphasizes the importance of 'foreignising' translation, denying the receiving language or culture, a privileged position, preserving the exclusivity of the source text[23] (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998). Lefevere claims that "translational practice is one of the strategies a culture devises for dealing with what we have learned to call 'the other" (ibid: 13). Hence translation becomes an important part, in the study of comparative literature, because it is because of translation (studies) that we have an area called 'comparative literature'; a comparative study is possible and not the other way round. Tharu and Lalitha (1991) in the preface to their edited first volume of *Women Writing In India: 600BC To the Present*, speaking about the intricacies of translation opine that the "formulations about translation speak only about its faithfulness to the original, and how well it

[22] The first is the 'Jerome' Model' of translation, after Saint Jerome (c.331–c.420 AD), at the heart of which lies the concept of equivalence; that of faithfulness to the original text, to the exclusion of many other factors, which had reduced translation to the linguistic level only. The second model of translation is the 'Horace' model, associated with the Roman poet Horace (65 BC–8 BC) and which historically predates the Jerome model. Negotiation is the central concept here. In the Horatian model there is no sacred text, but there definitely is a privileged language, namely Latin. This implies that negotiation is, in the end, always slanted towards the privileged language and that the negotiation does not take place on absolutely equal terms, interestingly equating Latin with English of today.

[23]The researcher has adopted this third model of translation.

reads in the target language". This undermines the fact that translation involves the relationships of power between two unequal worlds. They opine that when regional works are translated, the regional culture is represented to a more powerful national or "Indian" one, and when this translation is made available to a readership outside India, a national culture is represented, to the still more powerful international culture, which is the Western one. Keeping this fact of the reductive process of translation in mind, they claim that they have restrained from domesticating the original works either into a pan-Indian or a "Universalist" mode. Hence, they, in the course of editing the said volume, retain the essence of the original works, "necessitating the reader to translate herself into another socio-historical ethos, with the hope of opening up the texts for a materialist and feminist reading. To *live* a mode of life and not just read about it" (xxii).[24] Speaking about the importance of translation in the context of the Kannada Literary world, Vishwanatha (2009) states that "transcreation model is the dominant model governing all notions of 'good translation'…putting in place a new word 'Kannadisu', which literally means 'to make something in Kannada' as an equivalent word for 'translate' (into Kannada). This hoary and respectable history of translation as re-writing puts the translator at par with the 'creative' writer. It valorises translation as a masculine act of asserting Kannada identity, giving the translator a pride of place and his/ her cultural project of mediation tremendous legitimacy" (33). In this thesis it is a reverse act of translating from Kannada to English, and the researcher in her translation, as explained earlier, has tried retaining the regional flavour and 'to translate herself into another sociohistorical ethos'.

1.9: STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis has six chapters and an annexure. The first chapter which is an introduction, states the reason for taking up the present study and briefly outlines the research methods used in conducting this study, as well as sketches the remaining chapters of the thesis, giving a bird's eye view about each chapter.

The second chapter briefly traces the history of women writing in Kannada. Writing is seen as an expression of freedom, and in several cases it is also seen as a site of

[24] Italicized words are the original emphasized words from the text cited.

retaliation and resistance. This chapter also tries to place Sarah in a tradition taking into consideration some of her viewpoints regarding religion, race, ethnicity, state, human rights and women, in an effort to appraise her with select Muslim women writers of postcolonial India. Prominent Muslim women writers like Qurratulain Hyder, Ismat Chughtai and Banu Musthaq are taken up for a brief comparative study; who are known to be the most outstanding voices emerging from the margins and, who have unflinchingly articulated the social inhibitions and cultural taboos laid down by the society. Sarah identifies herself as a humanist first and then a feminist. This chapter tries to create a richer understanding of social, cultural and historical contexts of literary writings by locating Sarah in a wide socio-historical framework.

The third chapter analyses her autobiography and helps us to understand her better, as a woman in her different roles, as a writer, playwright, and a rational thinker, to name a few. In addition three in-depth interviews will be used as a research tool. To critically analyse the process of evolution of the Self in Sarah's autobiographical writings, is the endeavour of this chapter.

The fourth chapter makes an attempt to study her writings – ranging from short stories, novels, novellas – to analyse her women protagonists, trying to place them as traditional or modern. Traditional are those who are fatalistic and bow down before the forces of Patriarchy. Some valiantly try to fight but fail, and could be cast as those trying to break out of the traditional mould, while only a few are successful in attaining what they sought to achieve and can be labelled as modern. Interestingly their success or failure has nothing to do with age, education, or social background and depends solely on their personal grit and determination to succeed, coupled with clear insights and help from their family members. The aim of this chapter is to understand the dynamics of women's writing in Kannada, with special reference to Sarah, as well as to critically analyse and juxtapose her literary representation with reality.

The fifth chapter deals with Sarah's representation of women, with the realities seen around us today. The empirical study is exploratory in nature and is done with the help of questionnaires; the sample group will be of women/men in the age group of

16-25. In addition, some respondents [25] belonging to the Beary community are interviewed. The statistical data is analysed to obtain a better picture of the lived in reality of the women of this region. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country. An effort has been made in this chapter to identify the literary readership of Sarah in relation to issues in Women's Writings and to juxtapose the opinions of Sarah vis-à-vis her readership with reference to issues of women and ethnic minority.

The sixth chapter concludes the aim of this study, which is to create a richer understanding of social, cultural and historical contexts of literary writings, about the lived in realities of women of coastal Karnataka, their daily lives, their ambitions, aspirations, dreams, the oppression and suppressions faced by them. And hoping that the understanding thus created may be used to leverage the situation in favour of women, trying to mitigate gender inequality, which has made their lives dreary. To empower them with human rights, which are fundamental to a decent living, helping them to lead a life of dignity. The situation is not very different globally, if we go by what Susan Faludi has to say. Faludi (2006) believes that the last decade has eroded the hard-won margins, however insignificant they might have been, berating the feminists' movements with a sophisticated counterattack. Literature and writing have vested women with a voice, the power of which cannot be undermined, and it is time that we retrieved these voices from the margins, towards a more meaningful feminism.

The appendix consists of bibliography, three transcribed Interviews conducted with Sarah, transcription of the life/ oral histories (impromptu interviews) with people from Beary community, two sample questionnaires (pilot study and main study), 3 short stories and a part of her autobiography in translation by the researcher.

[25]Belonging to different age groups, depending on their consenting to be interviewed.

"I didn't have the necessary means and power to unite the Muslim women to take up arms for their cause or to create awareness in them. The one and the only path that was open to me, to create awareness and to put up a fight, was through my writing"

…Sarah Aboobackar

2.1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This second chapter attempts to locate Sarah in a tradition of women writers in the Kannada literary world. Kannada literature has been enriched by women poets in a long tradition stretching beyond eight centuries. The chapter also briefly discusses the different movements in the history of Kannada literature. Moreover, Sarah, on the other hand, is one of the assertive Muslim writers, whose contributions to Indian literature has been noteworthy in twentieth century. Therefore, the chapter also makes an attempt to provide a comparative sketch of Sarah with select post-colonial Muslim women writers.

2.2. THE TERRAIN OF KANNADA LITERATURE

Kannada is a Dravidian language, spoken today in the south Indian state of Karnataka and is second only to Tamil in antiquity of literary tradition, with a vast history of more than one thousand and five hundred years. Kannada is also seen as one of the important modern Indian languages. Pollock in his introduction to *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia,* speaks about how the vernacular writers from south Asia, in search of an identity, developed new forms of writing, which he terms as hybridity, as a ploy of confrontation, that he says, can be traced in the works of the postcolonial Indian novelists:

> Vernacular writers, for their part, in some sense resisted the cosmopolitan and thereby avowed a different, if never an ethicised, self. They developed new ways of inter-mingling the local and global, indeed, remarkable new forms of hybridity, if we can use this term without implying that purity is anywhere or ever pre-existent. These forms, as yet untheorized, often appear far more complex than the "shadows" of Indian languages (Pollock 2003: 32).

Going back, in the eighteenth century writers began to show stronger preference for prose forms. It is significant that this trend manifested itself before the impact of

English literature. Kannada entered the mainstream of Indian literature, and through its contact with the West, it has joined the ocean of world literature. Amur opines that the democratizing process which gathered force in the twelfth century Kannada Literature, a healthy phenomenon, has almost reached its point of culmination in the twentieth century, with new generations of writers from social groups which were at the margins, joining in (Amur 2001: 325-327).

The modern phase in Kannada literature is a recent phenomenon of the twentieth century. L.S. Sheshagiri Rao, in his *Hosagannada Sahitya Charitre* (History of Modern Kannada Literature) opines that what is today known as the Modern Kannada literature is a product of just eighty years. He states that, in 1921, the publication of B.M. Shrikantiah's *English Geetegalu* (English Lyrics), paved the way for the modern Kannada literature. According to Rao, though the modern literature had emerged with Muddanna's *Ramashwamedha*[26], and M.S. Puttanna's novel, *Madiddunno Maharaya* (1915), it was the spirit of *English Geetegalu*, which through its experimentation, approach and influence had turned the tide in favour of modern literature (Rao 2011: 11). The significant trends of Kannada literature till the nineteenth century were set by the Brahmanas, Jainas and the Veerasaivas. Kannada literature underwent a subtle change of different dimensions in the nineteenth century, influenced by the ideas of the reformist movements, coupled with the linguistic and standardizing works of Christian missionaries. The central themes of the time were Nationalism, women's education, portrayal of the nation as Bharatamatha or Mother India and Karnataka as her daughter. 'Karnataka Ekeekarana Chaluvali' (Karnataka Unification Movement), was an attempt to unify the Kannada speaking populace, and was an offshoot of Indian nationalism. Rao, opines that 'Navodaya' (New Awakening), a literary phase marked by romanticism, was a result of two opposite cultures coming face to face with each other. He states that today this is also known as the colonial phase. This was followed by the 'Pragathisheela' (Progressive) movement. Common people and their lives was the subject for the literature of this period, apart from supporting women's cause. The main feature of this movement was the portrayal of unvarnished truth (ibid: 68-70). Education of women had already gained prominence and women were

[26]A nineteenth century work; exact date not available.

being educated, which was one of the main reasons for the emergence of women writers, expounding their opinions daringly. The opening up of literary spaces, saw several women writers on the literary scene, with novel as their main forte. They examined the plight of women elaborately, expressing them only as women can, and in most of the cases having experienced them personally. This invested them with an undeniable authenticity, conferring them with a voice, which could not be neglected and denied anymore, and their preference to prose over poetry could be viewed as a form of resistance. The next to emerge on the Kannada literary scene in the late sixties was 'Navya' (Modernism). It ruled the intellectual scene, and influenced as it was by the literary modernism of the European literary tradition, its dominant themes were individualism, individuality, disillusionment, alienation, and pessimism. Modernists saw literature as an independent entity, leading them away from what was happening outside literature. Around the late sixties and early seventies women's movement started taking shape. Women started getting organized which resulted in creating organizations, a platform to voice their protest against the atrocities against women. Seventies was the golden era of Kannada theatre, apart from literary criticism which flourished during the Navya reign. The 'Bandaya' (Rebellion) and the 'Dalit' movements emerged as a reaction to the Navya or the modernist movement, rejecting the dominant cultures, asserting their identities and rights and were sensitive to women's issues, and saw women as either rebels or dalits. The word 'dalit' originally meant 'oppressed', and was devoid of any connotation of caste. Jugal Kishore Mishra observes that 'oppressed classes' was a term used by the British to denote the scheduled castes and tribes, which in Hind or Marathi translation, would translate as 'dalit'. The term 'dalit' did not refer to caste, but was perceived as a symbol of change and revolution.

> Dalit (Oppressed or broken) is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes', a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. In 1970s the 'Dalit Panthers' revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. So Dalit is not a caste. It is a symbol of change and revolution. The primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of dalits. Dalit struggle against caste oppression derives inspiration from history (Mishra: 1).

With the advent of Bandaya and Dalit movements, the early and late eighties saw the emergence of new class-caste alignments, when various small groups – women, dalits, minorities – both linguistic and religious, started questioning the notion of Indian nationalism and its literature. Instead of monolithic nation and literature, diverse ways of understanding the society and culture gained ground. The period of post eighties witnessed crucial changes in women's writing in Kannada. The women's writing oriented towards women centric issues and gender politics, cutting across barriers of caste, creed and religion, drawing attention towards gender inequality. This can be understood as a reaction to the marginalization that they have experienced all through the history of Kannada literary tradition. Women's literature has emerged as an important form in Kannada with critics trying to understand this through a feminist perspective. Only in recent years has Kannada literature come out of its literary shell and has started relating itself with Kannada history, politics and culture, made possible by some very notable cultural theorists [27]. Kikkeri argues that the acceptability of literary production in each language is marked by its own socio-political and religious attitude. Continuing, he adds that the Vachana literature in Kannada had to wait for eight hundred years to be known as a distinct genre of literature.

> Literary production in each language has its own socio-political and religious bearing upon them. Unless they are properly contextualized and connected to the literary production it is difficult to assess them. Acceptability of a text by the culture as a literary text or not, poses another problem… Vachana literature in Kannada had to wait for 800 years in Karnataka to be called a piece of literature (Kikkeri).

D.R. Nagaraj says that one of the fascinating themes of Indian history was the emergence of a new literary theory form the 'womb of an old power structure'. He believes that the universalizing cultural order of Sanskrit, has played a crucial role in the making of vernacular traditions, the structure of which is over determined by a 'complex interplay of a variety of forces', the foremost being the political power (Nagaraj 2003: 335).

[27] K.V.Subbanna, and D.R.Nagaraj, for example, were widely read, and did some exemplary works in the Kannada context. Subbanna experimented with Kannada theatre set in rural background, but with a global outreach. Nagaraj, a vibrant critic in Kannada, brought western academic knowledge further near the Kannada academia in a very proactive way.

2.3: EARLY WOMEN POETS: FROM TWELFTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Women writers writing in the vernacular were sensitive to women's issues, questioning the relationship of power vis-à-vis gender. Almost every Indian language has to its credit some remarkable women writers, who were outspoken and critical of the state of affairs in the country. Working with and through gender issues, they had questioned the complexity of power and patriarchy. Prioritizing family relationships over individual concerns, they wrote from the margins, of caste and class, not to mention gender. "Women wrote from their positions of exclusion and marginalization and, even as they worked within a male tradition, managed to forge one for them, rendering the question of role models considerably irrelevant. Caste and class had also greater visibility in the writing in the *bhashas*" (Jain 2003: 28). The most surprising factor was that they managed to forge a female tradition, irrespective of the existing power structures of patriarchy.

The most intense and significant period of Vachana poetry[28] was a span of two centuries between the tenth and the twelfth. The poets were called vachanakaras[29] and expressed themselves through 'Vacanas'. Though the Vacanas are literature, they are not merely literary. "That they are a literature in spite of itself, scorning artifice, ornament, learning, privilege: a religious literature, literary because religious; great voices of a sweeping movement of protest and reform in Hindu society; witnesses to conflict and ecstasy in gifted mystical men" (Ramanujan 1973: 11-12). Ramanujan views Vacanas as 'our psalms and hymns', apart from being 'our wisdom literature'. He states that they have the distinction of being called the 'Kannada Upanishads' (ibid). Basavanna was the founder of this new school. Radicals in their thoughts and deeds, they were the first to profess equality and freedom for women and the downtrodden of the society. They brought about enormous change in the Kannada literary field, usurping the hold of the stylistic '*campu*'[30] with their 'Vacanas' and

[28] A Vachana is a religious lyric in Kannada free verse; and is a rich source of the lived in realities of common people (Ramanujan 1973: 11).
[29] Masculine, plural.
[30] Nagaraj states that Kannada literature for the first four or five centuries of its existence was dominated by a mixed prose verse literary form called *campu*, which was 'a truly royal genre, the

came to be known as 'Vachanakaras'. The birth of 'Vachana' which was in *desi*[31] Kannada, the language of the commoner, led to the erasure of *'campu'* and with it the stronghold of Sanskrit. Literature was no longer the right of the people belonging to the higher echelons of the caste ridden society. Literature, from the royal courts, moved to the doorstep of the commoner. The Vachanakaras, who were also considered as Bhakti saints, traveled within and across regions. They were called the 'great integrators', because they brought literature, and the word of god to the doorstep of the common man. "…bringing the high to the low, esoteric paradox to the man in the street, transmuting ancient and abstruse ideas into live contemporary experiences; at the same time, finding everyday symbols for the timeless" (Ramanujan: 39).

Bhakti was instrumental in deconstructing the idea of high literature and was an enormous influence on the literary language, bringing it down to the level of common man. "Bhakti had been associated, on the whole, with an enormous democratization of literary language; had pressed the cultural forms of hegemony in favour of the artisanate and peasantry; had been regionally dispersed on both sides of the Vindhyas; was ideologically anti-Brahminical; had deeply problematized the gender construction of all dialogic relations, whether of love or worship or speech itself; and was highly ecumenical in its philosophical inspirations" (Ahmad1994:273). Ramanujan opines that linguistically, the Vacana poets were the first to use the local spoken dialects of their birth places in poetry, in place of the highly stylized artificial language of the contemporary poets. "Such untrammeled speech in poetry has a fresh 'modern' ring to it in imagery, rhythm and idiom-a freedom that modern literary writers in Kannada have not yet quite won" (Ramanujan: 46).

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discursive equivalent of a crown', and the poets who practiced it were awarded the state title of "poet emperor", as was the case of Ponna, Pampa and Ranna, who were also called "poet-jewels", who elevated the genre to its glory. And he opines that the formal complexity of this genre, which consists largely of grand, Sanskrit-derived verses interspersed with often very convoluted art-prose, had distanced itself from everyday speech (Nagaraj 2003: 344).

[31] Nagaraj explains that in fundamental ways, *desi* is one of the defining features of Indian literatures, but it is difficult to define what exactly is meant by *desi*. He states that a simple or straightforward answer is just not possible, and an informed response itself will be a theoretical position on the problem. Apart from it being everyday speech, *desi* is also a cluster of metrical forms and poetic structures. And to know the relationship between everyday speech and poetic forms, to translate this question into familiar Western categories, he says that we should refer to oral poetry and poetics (2003).

Amur is of the opinion that the emergence of the Vachanakaras and the Virashaiva[32] revolution symbolized two important trends. Firstly literature became more democratic in the sense that all classes of people were involved in literary activity, and the desi forms like *Ragale*, *Satpadi*, *Sangatya* and *Tripadi* became the preferred style. Secondly the conception of literature also underwent significant changes, and the new idea of using literature for self-expression came into being. Experimenting with language naturally invested it with an explorative quality (Amur 2001: 318-325). Now, let us go through some early women writers of the Kannada literature.

Akka Mahadevi (C1150): Mahadevi, was a younger contemporary of Basavanna and Allama in the twelfth century. She was born in Udutadi, a village in Sivamogga, near the birthplace of Allama. At ten, she was initiated to Siva-worship by an unknown guru, which she considered as the moment of her real birth. The form of Siva at the Udutadi temple was Mallikarjuna or Cennamallikarjuna, translated by Ramanujan, either as the 'Lord White as Jasmine' or as 'Arjuna, Lord of goddess Mallika'. 'Cenna' means 'lovely, beautiful'. She fell in love with Cennamallikarjuna, betrothed herself to him and took his name for an *ankita*[33] in all her Vacanas. The rivalry between the Divine Lover and all human loves was dramatized by the incidents of her own life. Kaushik, the king of the land, saw her one day and fell in love with her. He sent word to her parents, asking for her hand. In addition to being only human, he disqualified himself further by being a *bhavi*, an unbeliever. She was never his wife in the true sense of the word, spurning him for her divine lover, 'Cennamallikarjuna'.

Significantly she is known as Akka, the 'elder sister'. Like many another saints, enacting his true homelessness by his wanderings, she left her birthplace and parents. It is believed that she had thrown away even clothing. "…in a gesture of ultimate social defiance, and wandered about covered in her tresses". She journeyed towards Kalyana, which was the centre of Virashaiva saints, where Allama and Basavanna had established *Anubhava Mantapa* (Hall of Experience). She was accepted only after being 'tested', which was through a remarkable conversation. Many of Mahadevi's

[32] Virashaiva means heroic Shaivism or faith in Shiva. They speak to Shiva and of Shiva. Hence they are known as Virashaivas. Followers of Virashaivism they are also known as lingayats: those who wear the *linga*, the symbol of Shiva. For more on Virashaivism, see Ramanujan (1973).
[33] Signature

Vacanas are placed by legend in this famous dialogue. When Allama questioned for her husband's identity, she replied she was married forever to Cennamallikarjuna. He then questioned about her nakedness: "Why take off clothes, as if by that gesture you could peel off illusions? And yet robe yourself in tresses of hair? If so free and pure in heart, why replace a sari with a covering of tresses?" she replied that "Till the fruit is ripe inside, the skin will not fall off". This honest reply gained her acceptance into *Anubhava Mantapa*. From then the second lap of her journey began in search of her Lord. In this search, unlike the other saints, she involves all of nature, a sister, bird, beast and tree. Like other bhaktas (devotees) her struggle was with her condition, as body, as woman, as social being tyrannized by social roles, as a human confined to a place and a time. Through these shackles she bunts, defiant in her quest for ecstasy. According to legend, she died into "oneness with Siva" when she was hardly in her twenties – a brief bright burning" (Ramanujan: 112-114).

Kottanada Somavve (C 1160): Somavve was a Vacanakarti from Kalyana and belonged to Basavanna's period. Her guru was Nirlajja Shantayya. She earned her living by pounding rice and worshipped the Virashaiva saints. She wrote Vacanas with 'Nirlajjeshwara' as her *ankita*, and through her Vacanas, expressed herself by using her work of pounding rice as a metaphor to describe life as she experienced it. Only one single Vachana of hers is available today in a section called 'Sheela sampadaneya Vachanagalu' along with the Vacanas of sixteen Shivasharaneyaru[34] of 'Sarvapuratana Vachanagalu'. Her intricately woven Vachana around her occupation of pounding rice speaks of the spiritual heights she had attained through her physical labour (Nayak 1979: 394).

Sule Sankavva (Twelfth century): Sankavva was a prostitute (Sule) and only one of her Vachanas has survived. She too uses the *ankita* 'Nirlajjeshwara'. Although many of the poet-saints of the Bhakti movement were artisans, lay men and women, Sule Sankavva was a prostitute, who dared to express herself through Vacanas, her lowly trade not being any hindrance. This example itself speaks of the freedom of expression that was achieved by women, as early as twelfth century in India (Tharu and Lalitha 1991:81).

[34]Servants of Shiva, feminine Plural.

After Vacana poets, for a long time we do not get any account of women poets. Even the renowned Vijayanagara period could not document a woman writer. The next couple of names we get to hear are Sanchi Honnamma and Sringaramma, who were poets and well known during the reign of Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar (1673-1704) of Mysore and his period is famous as the golden era when fine arts and literature blossomed.

Sanchi Honnamma (1673-1704): Honamma is known for 'Hadibadeya Dharma' a very celebrated verse, written in the 'Sangatya' style and in which she has extolled the duties of a married, righteous lady. She begins her verse by eulogizing Lord Paschima Ranga Dhama and Ranganayaki. Very briefly she traces the lineage of the Wodeyars of Mysore. Poet Alasingararya, a renowned poet has admired her verses and is all praises when he says "This Honni is a goddess of lyrical literature and is adept in the nuances of figures of speech, hyperbole and drama". Here is an example of the exquisite beauty of her creation:

Pennallavetammanellapadedataayi
Pennallaveporedavalu
Hennuhennendekebeelugalevaru
Kannukaanadagaavilaru (Rao 1989: 116-117).

Translated it means:

Isn't it a woman who has borne you?
Isn't it a woman who has nurtured you?
Then why is it that they look down upon women,
The blind fools?

Sringaramma (C1685): Sringaramma was a Vaishnavaite poet. Vaishnavaites worshipped Lord Vishnu. She was the daughter of Chintamani Deshikendra Guru Shrinivasacharya. She belonged to the court of Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar (1673-1704). *Padmini Kalyana*, written in the 'Sangatya' style, is her magnum opus, which contains 180 poems. The theme revolves around the wedding ceremony and celebrations of Tirupati Lord Srinivas and his consort Padmavati, extolling the event (Nayak 1979: 1438).

Helavanakatte Giriyamma (Eighteenth century): Giriyamma was a Bhakti saint. She was born in Ranebennur in North Karnataka and though married, her marriage was not consummated and she did not lead a normal life with her husband. She was an ascetic and lived like one. She was 'amma' (mother) to all. Giriyamma loved to write and sing lyrics in the praise of the lord. Her song 'Sita Kalyana' and the stories like 'Chandrahasa', 'Kaleeyamardana' are all very popular in North Karnataka. Her pen name was 'Helavanakatte Ranga' **(Rao 1989: 98).**

Harapanahalli Bheemavva (1822-1902): Bheemavva was a famed poet of Haridasa literature.[35] Her birth place is Narayanadevarakere of Hospet taluk. She faced a lot of troubles and tribulations. Her house was burgled and after a year of being impoverished she lost her husband at the age of thirty five, which lead to a completely different life style. She independently started writing poems and singing them, after the celestial sage 'Narada' is said to have visited her in her dreams, bestowing her with the penname 'Bheemeshakrishna', and all her songs end with this assumed name. 'Rakshisabekenna Lakshminarasimhana Bhaktane' is her very first verse. 'Subadra Kalyana', 'Mayyada Haadu', 'Nala Charitre', 'Rati Kalyana', 'Pati Daana Kotta Haadu' and 'Shakuntalana Haadu', are her larger-than-life poems apart from some 150 small verses. The specialty of her works is that she has written in a mixed style of Vachanas and songs, which remind us of the *campu* tradition. Viewed from a literary aspect her work stands apart as traditional and religious corpus of songs, which are hallmarked by her exquisite explanation and her gifted storytelling, though she had not received worldly education. Thus, her works speak volumes about her lyrical prowess. It is to be noted that in Kannada she was the one and the only woman who had written a large amount and it is to her credit that with her creative works she has enriched the Kannada literary field (Nayak 1979: 1570).

Though most of these women poets lacked formal education they were versatile enough to compose Vacanas and songs on their daily vocations, citing their daily work, pounding rice, for example. They daringly interrogated the gender inequality, questioning the double standards in the treatment meted out to women. They simply

[35]Haridasa literature is a corpus of songs called *Padas* in Kannada, having allegiance to Vaishnavism. Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa, for example, are important poets in this tradition.

asked whether one's mother – who was a life giver, nurturer – was not a woman? That being the case why did they – the fools that they were – look down upon women? As early as the twelfth century, visionary saints like Basavanna and Allama Prabhu, advocated equality to women. Virashaiva women poets were assertive, claimed equality in society and were independent. Lay-men and women from common background participated in the discussion at *Anubhava Mantapa* (Hall of Experience) and all were allowed to speak, and speak they did, voicing their opinions from their experiences in day-to-day life. In modern times they have been the source of strength for women activists, writers and intellectuals to claim equality and seek justice. They recur frequently as metaphors for women's emancipation from the past in both speech and text.[36]

2.4: THE ADVENT OF FEMINISM

The term "feminism" was coined in 1837, by Charles Fourier, a Utopian Socialist and French philosopher; and "feminist" first appeared in France and the Netherlands in 1872. Depending on historical moment, culture and country, feminists around the world have had different causes and goals. Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience.

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights for women, inclusive of equal opportunities for women in education and employment. Feminist theories have been developed in a variety of disciplines, in order to respond to issues such as the social construction of sex and gender. Feminist campaigns have changed societies, particularly in the West, by achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality,

[36] Sarah Aboobackar, speaking about one of the literary conferences (date not mentioned) she had attended says that the programme was inaugurated by the Jnanapeet awardee Mahaswetha Devi and many renowned writers like Nabanita Sen and Krishna Sobti from Bengal, Rati Menon from Kerala, Neeraj Mattu from Kashmir, Volga and Jayaprabha from Andhra Pradesh, Mrudula Garg and Qurratulain Hyder from North India, and Nirupama Borgohain from Assam, to mention a few. Sarah says that all these women spoke about their work and about the different shades of women's oppression that they had witnessed. But the element of surprise was that almost all women writers who attended this particular conference spoke about, the twelfth century Kannada poet, Akka Mahadevi. This in itself vouches for the influence of Akka Mahadevi and her Vachanas that have found an echo in the later generations of women writers (Aboobackar 2012b: 161-167).

equal pay for women, reproductive rights for women (including access to contraceptives and abortion), and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Feminists have worked to protect women from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. They have also advocated for workplace rights, including maternity leave, and against the different forms of discrimination against women. The history of the modern western feminist movements is divided into three time periods, or "waves". Each wave dealt with different aspect of the same feminist issues. The First-wave feminism of the nineteenth century, focused particularly on women's suffrage. The Second-wave feminism (1960s-1980s) with Carol Hanisch's slogan "The personal is political" broadened the debate to include cultural inequalities, gender norms, and the role of women in society. And the third-wave feminism (1990s-2000s) is a continuation of, and a reaction to, the perceived failures of second-wave feminism, focusing on "micro-politics", challenging the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for women, and tend to use a post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality. Since the 1980s, Standpoint feminists have argued that the feminist movement should address global issues (rape, incest, and prostitution) and culturally specific issues (female genital mutilation, glass ceiling practices) in order to understand how gender inequality interacts with racism, homophobia, classism and colonization in a "matrix of domination". The term Post-Feminism, first used to describe a backlash against second-wave feminism, is now a label for a wide range of theories that take critical approaches to previous feminist discourses and includes challenges to the second wave's ideas. Ifeminists, or individualist feminists, say that the feminist slogan "a woman's body, a woman's right" should extend to every peaceful choice a woman can make; and believe that freedom and diversity benefit women, whether or not the choices that particular women make are politically correct, respecting all sexual choices, from motherhood to porn. Feminism is no longer monolithic and abounds with multiple versions of feminisms and aims to examine women's oppression, expose the dynamics of male domination, and fight for women's liberation.

Feminism essentially decentres the assumptions of the mainstream in terms of centre (men) – periphery (women), and of the norm in relation to sex and power. Apart from

decentring the usual assumption about what is central and what is at the margins, feminism also shifts the subject of the analysis, placing the woman centre stage, despite the very important question about the validity of this sexed identity. In short feminists focus, on that which is deemed marginal/peripheral (Beasley 2005: 16). Let us now, look briefly into the different waves of feminisms, and the changes brought about by the noted feminists of that particular wave. The feminist writers opened up new avenues for discussion, creating awareness with their ground breaking theories and perspectives; which in itself was laudable.

2.5: FEMINISM IN INDIA

Forbes, speaking about the first historical accounts of Indian women which date from the nineteenth century, says that they are a product of the colonial experience. According to these narratives new ideas were introduced by the Europeans about women's roles and capabilities, which were adopted by enlightened Indians. Acceptance of these new ideas was seen as a slow but progressive march towards "modernity" following a long period of stagnation and decline. Forbes declares that both the Indian texts and the European-inspired histories shared a common belief, conferring women with a unique female nature. Indian texts saw women as devoted and self-sacrificing, though occasionally unruly and dangerous. If texts on religion, law, politics, and education carried different pronouncements for men, based on caste, class, age and religious sect, women's differences were overshadowed by their biological characteristics and the subordinate, supportive roles they were destined to play. Occasionally Indian texts and historical narratives singled out one woman for special attention because her accomplishments were significant by male standards. Issues that were closely linked with women's lives – fertility, household matters, inheritance, marriage, divorce etc. – were ignored. Feminism, which seeks to address these issues sees patriarchal society as responsible for this oppression (Forbes: 1-9). If Forbes contends that the patriarchal society is responsible for the oppression of women in Indian societies, Padma Anagol prefers to use the term subordination instead of oppression. She explains the reason she has used the term 'subordination' instead of 'oppression'. Invoking Offen's clear-cut separation of the two: the former she argues, is 'verifiable' and can be located historically by examining laws,

institutions, practices and customs of any society, whilst the latter is a 'highly subjective and psychological response' (Anagol 2005: 13-14). Anagol in *The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1850-1920*, defines 'Indian feminism' as a theory and practice based on presenting a challenge to the subordination of women in society and attempting to redress the balance of power between the sexes. And she says that by the same logic, the act of empowering oneself by treading on or harming the interests of other women is her definition of an 'anti-feminist'. Anagol says:

> The dominance of the 'constitution and reconstitution of patriarchy' paradigm in Indian gender history has created and helped to spread certain myths about women's participation in modern movements in India…if one examines Indian women's contributions to the making of modern India, in terms of their perspectives and participation in the religious and social reform movement, such a picture is shown to be highly misleading. In fact, if anything, Indian women were not only actively attempting to enter and legitimize their presence within the public sphere, but, more importantly, they were blurring the divide between the two. The women's movement of the nineteenth century studied in its own terms shows that not only women were *recasting themselves* rather than *being recast*, but also that women were engaged in contesting patriarchal discourses on womanhood and were creating roles for themselves that often differed from male perceptions and aspirations for them. While the quest for understanding how patriarchy works in the subordination of women is an indispensable project, it is essentially an incomplete one. It obscures the way in which women resist patriarchy, construct their identities, assert their rights and contest the hierarchical arrangement of societal relationships between the sexes. Women's agency is subsumed and side-lined in favour of the theme of the 'constitution and reconstitution of patriarchy' (Anagol: 5-14).

Indian feminism centres on uncovering the experiences of Indian women as they asserted their rights addressed social inequalities and rejected or adapted traditions. Many varieties of Indian feminism in the twentieth century have been studied and are now developing a critical body of thought in its own right. They range from the feminist nationalists of the National movement to Gandhian feminism, Eco-feminism, to name a few. Anagol opines that in the Indian context the rise of feminism, as noted earlier, was the result of various factors. And the term is not viewed favourably, and to a large extent has a negative connotation. Anagol says:

> The rise of feminism in India was made possible through a combination of factors: the presence of a colonial economy, the new web of modernizing impulses which interacted with the contending circumstances and criteria of sex, race, status and class, caste and religion. From the 1920s onwards Indian women active in the nationalist movement vehemently opposed the use of the term 'feminist' as understood in Europe and America on the grounds that it propounded and projected an anti-male ideology. Contemporary feminist scholarship emanating from the so called Third World has been burdened by 'sanctioned ignorances' skewed knowledges that have percolated down from the early twentieth century about what constitutes Western feminism…The terms 'feminist' and 'feminism' have evoked and continue to evoke strong response in a variety of settings and incorporate imagery

> which vary dramatically from the aggressive 'man-haters' to more benign and sober assessments which include individuals and movements that support the goal of women's emancipation. Stereotypes therefore abound and the term has no self-explanatory quality (Anagol: 10).

In the Indian scenario feminism and feminists were viewed suspiciously, with differing interpretations. The Nationalist movement gave women the impetus to emerge from their state of subjugation, made easier by Mahatma Gandhi's call to join in the movement. He took up the cause in an extremely pragmatic manner, saying that it was man's injustice to label women as the weaker sex. Strength to Gandhi meant moral power, and he believed that women had in abundance, given their greater intuition and sacrificing nature. This inevitably made woman more superior. For Gandhi, if non-violence was the law, then the future belonged to women. Conscious of the potential of women, Mahatma Gandhi made a laudable contribution in liberating Indian women from exploitation by extending their field of activity and involving them in the freedom struggle. Sarojini Nayak agreeing with this says that "The independence movement gave a definite impetus towards bringing a change in the attitude towards women. The participation of women in the movement partly drew its inspiration from the Jain and Bhakti ethic which stresses the equality of women. He provided Indian women with an opportunity to break free from tradition" (Nayak 2005: 139-40).

The declaration of 1975, as International Women's Year, and 1975-1985 as Women's Decade, the United Nations, concentrated on the status of women, and the systematic study of women's past began. The students of history recognized they were witnessing a revolution. Gerda Lerner, an American pioneer in the field of women's history and the first person to hold a chair in women's history, said: "Women have a history; women are history." Her words became a manifesto. A new way of thinking about gender emerged. "Instead of accepting feminine identity as natural and essential, historians and other social scientists treated it as constructed. This liberating hypothesis stimulated questions about women's unequal position" (Quoted in Forbes 1996: 2). Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, in her challenging article *Can the Subaltern speak?* states the problem of writing the history of colonial women. According to Spivak:

> As object of colonial historiography and as subjects of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow… In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual *systematically* "unlearns" female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized (Spivak 1988: 278-306).

Spivak argues that in the patriarchal system, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant, and the third world woman, who is in between tradition and modernisation is thrice silenced.

New theoretical frameworks, questioning power relationships, language, the observer's gaze, and the dominance of positivist notions, have found gender a compelling subject, becoming a tool of analyses. When informed by a feminist perspective, this scholarship, contributes significantly to the production of women's history. Recent scholarship on women, whether it is women's history or a new questioning of the documents of history, is fuelled by the work of archivist and historians *locating and saving women's writings* and material objects. Sound and Picture Archive for Research on Women (SPARROW) in Bombay is a recent and heroic attempt to preserve women's documents, especially photographs, films, and recordings (Forbes 1996: 3-4).

Tharu and Lalitha (1991), in their introduction to the two volumes of *Women Writing in India-600 BC to the Present*, say that they were under the impression that they might not come across much of women's writings. But they acknowledge their surprise to come across a virtual treasure trove of women's writings in the vernaculars. Their ground breaking work has succeeded in retrieving women's' voices, which for all purposes were lost. They have made an attempt in these two volumes to bring to light some significant women's writing in English translation. This illuminates the condition in which women wrote. Their fond hope was that it would help to re-evaluate writers who were reasonably well known but had been ignored, as well as give a sense of the themes and literary modes women drew on and made use of. They have gone on record saying that they were warned that they would find few significant women writers in Marathi /Kannada /Urdu Literature, but were hopeful and had started their work tentatively. And to their surprise, found that the

early twentieth century, commonly considered a period when the women‘s movement was at a low ebb, had been a high point of women’s journalism, in every region, and hundreds of women wrote during that time. Their two volumes are considered seminal, when one speaks about women’s writing.

The feminist literature that is developing in this country is another genre of literature which is raising its voice, and needs a careful consideration. It is essential, because feminists are trying to re-write their history by evoking not only the present but also the past of this country through mythology, religious practice and the classical texts to understand the dynamics of gender (Kikkeri).

2.5.1. Noteworthy Indian Women Writers

Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910): Shinde was a feminist activist who protested patriarchy and caste in nineteenth century India. She is known for her published work, *Stri Purush Tulana* (A Comparison between Women and Men), originally published in Marathi in 1882. The pamphlet is a critique of upper-caste patriarchy, and is often considered the first modern Indian feminist text. It was very controversial for its time in challenging the Hindu religious scriptures themselves as a source of women's oppression, a view that continues to be controversial and debated today.

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922): Ramabai was an eminent Indian Christian social reformer and activist. She was a poet, a scholar, and a champion of improvement in the plight of Indian women. As a social reformer, she championed the cause of emancipation of Indian women. She wrote many books including her widely popular work titled *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1886), which showed the darkest of subject matter relating to the life of Hindu women, including child brides and the treatment they receive by the government.

Kamini Roy (1864-1933): Kamini Roy was a poet, teacher, social worker and feminist writer. She was the daughter of the poet Chandi Charan Sen, was taught by him at home, learning lessons he set for her from his collection of books until she was old enough to use his library. She published her first collection of verse, *Alo O Chhaya* (1889) and her last major collection was *Malya O Nirmalya* (1913).

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1945): Sarala Devi, an educationist and feminist, was the daughter of Rabindranath Tagore's older sister, Swarna Kumari Devi. She was the founder of the first women's organisation in India, the Bharat Stree Mahamandal in Allahabad in 1910. One of the primary goals of the organisation was to promote female education, which at that time was not well developed. Growing up in the Tagore household, she had the benefit of the cultural and political milieu of that environment.

Roquia Sakhawat Hussain (1880-1932): Hussain was a prolific writer and a social worker in undivided Bengal in the early twentieth century. Her important books are *Sultana's Dream* (1908) and *Padmarag* (1924). She is most famous for her efforts on behalf of gender equality and other social issues. She established the first school aimed primarily at Muslim girls, which still exists today. She was a notable Muslim feminist; modern feminist writers such as Taslima Nasrin cite her as an influence. Begum Rokeya also wrote short stories and novels.

Malati Vishram Bedekar (1905-2001): Bedekar was a Marathi writer from Maharashtra, India. She was the first prominent feminist writer in Marathi literature. Bedekar wrote *Kalyanche Nishwas*, a collection of short stories, and *Hindolyawar* a novel – both in 1933 under the pen name *Vibhavari Shirurkar*. In the two works, she discussed issues such as extramarital cohabitation, a woman's right to set up her own household alone, and dowry. In 1950, Bedekar's effective novel *Bali* (1950) was based on her observations for three years about the extremely harsh daily lives of the so-called "criminal" tribes confined to the "settlement" area behind barbed wires by the British government in pre-independence India.

Lady Durgabai Deshmukh (1909-1981): Deshmukh was an Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, social worker and politician. She was a public activist for women's emancipation, also founder of Andhra Mahila Sabha, Congress. She was also the founder chairperson of central social welfare board.

Lalithambika Antharajanam (1909-1987): Antharajanam was often considered the "First Woman" of Malayalam Letters. She belonged to the elite Namboodiri community of Kerala and has played an important role in the social transformation of

the community, and of Kerala society in general. Antharjanam's writings captured the spirit of this period and the struggle of the young generation. The name Antharjanam itself meant "those inside". Although her only novel *Agnisakshi* (1997), became her best work and won the prestigious Kendra Sahitya Academy Award (also turned in to a successful film by Shyam Prasad), the short story remained her chosen form of literary expression. It was, in a way, the short story rather than the novel or poetry that defined the renaissance in Malayalam literature in the middle of twentieth century (Chandran 2010).

2.6: FEMINISM – THE KANNADA EXPERIENCE

By the third decade of the last century the Kannada novel committed itself firmly to the path of social realism. The main reason for this development was the influence of the nineteenth century European novels. The impact of the National movement for freedom had forced people to search for an identity through an awareness of cultural roots and a new mood of self-criticism had set in. The tremendous change that the forces of industrialization and urbanization had brought about in the agrarian and feudal society had made its impact on institutions like family and marriage and sensitive writers felt compelled to take note of the change and record it in their writing. The age of realism produced works of lasting value as these writers had great faith in the power of language to capture reality – the outer world of things and the inner world of feelings and emotions. The ideology that most of the novelists of the realistic school shared was humanism in a variety of shades. Inspired by the humanistic ideal these writers explored remote corners of society and affirmed solidarity even with the underprivileged writers. But the more sensitive of them were aware of the limitations of humanism both as a philosophy and as a way of living. Amur opines that women writers emerging on the scene started writing novels. "Women have been writing novels in Kannada since Tirumalamba's times and almost all the phases of the Kannada novel have produced a few good women novelists – M.K. Indira, Anupama, Triveni, Veena Shantestwar, B.T. Lalitha Nayak and Sara Abubakkar (sic) to name a few" (2001: 28-31).

In the recent decades, though a number of women's organizations have emerged, struggling for the redress of their grievances, their activities have remained confined to the urban middle classes. The neglect of the vast majority of women in the rural areas as well as those belonging to the poor classes in urban areas is a matter of concern. This is an indication of a lack of consciousness regarding the actual problems of Indian women (Nayak 2005: 97).

The inception of the 'Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha' in 1978, a women writers' organization, provided the much needed space for women writers. It played an important role in giving a feminist touch to social values, mirroring them in the writings of women. Most writers agreed that an actively supportive network at the district, state and national levels would go a long way towards reducing the threat of gender-based censorship. Many women writers wrote books on different fields from women's' points of view. Prominent among them are Hemalatha Mahishi (Law), H. Girijamma and Leelavathi Devadas (Health), Anupama Niranjana (Maternity & Women's Health), Vijaya and S. Malathi (Theater), Nemichandra (Science and Fiction) and Vaidehi (Fiction). B.N. Sumitra Bai, Vijaya Dabbe (Feminist Criticism), to mention a few, along with a large number of feminist poets. This has led to the recognition of women as national assets. "Over the years there has been a shift in the perspective of women, from treating them as welfare targets to recognizing them as a critical group in the national development process" (Nayak 2005: vii).

Following this movement, discussions, seminars, workshops and conferences were held on the questions of women and feminism at all levels in the State. 'Women Studies' was introduced as a subject for students at degree level, first in NMKRV College, Bangalore and then in almost all Universities of the State. "The contemporary feminist movement, beginning in the late 1970s and still alive today, has brought women's issues to the attention of all Indians. Feminists galvanized by endemic violence against women, developed new organizations and new institutions in the 1980s" (Forbes 1996: 253).

Women writers strongly advocate the need for gender equality and speak of the numerous untold sufferings endured by women in patriarchal society. As mentioned

earlier, a classic example of this is the successful silencing of the two voices, belonging to two different women writers by male critics, though they were living in separate times. In the first instance the woman was Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba, who had just started experimenting with her writing, which had lots of potential to flourish, if only she was given the chance. But in the second instance the woman was, Anupama Niranjana, an established writer, and yet critics turned a blind eye, followed by an eerie silence, to one of her major, path breaking works. These instances will be described in detail later in this chapter. Walia in *Women and Fiction*, reminiscing Virginia Woolf, says that at the present, women's fiction is gutsy and written as a woman would write it. And one can sum up women's fiction as courageous and sincere, apart from having the feel of a woman having written it (Walia 2001: 1).

Despite the many strong voices of women, which for all appearances seem to have been heard, there is still an unprecedented gender inequality, a gaping void, and one wonders whether there is any effort at equality at all. A cursory search on the internet on 'Kannada Literature' does not return a single woman writer's name.[37] The rich sensibilities that the women writers have brought into literary field (be it in any language) are priceless, and yet it is surprising that there is not a single reference about them. If this could happen in an educated and cultured domain, one is forced to ask, what about the less fortunate facets of society? Even a search with the phrase 'women writing in Kannada', returned with lots of information about the male literary figures. Contrary to popular belief, women have not managed to get equality, though they have carved a niche for themselves in almost all fields, and the following quote by Forbes sums it up "Indian women at the end of the twentieth century would argue that they still have a long way to go to attain gender justice" (Forbes 1996: 254).

The hardest challenges for most women writers come from within their families and often from themselves too! As Du Saraswathi observes that for her, what is most interesting is "the censorship which is present within us, the cultural policeman who is

[37] The search engine was Google, and not even a single woman was mentioned on the entire webpage (The search was done on 15 October 2010). The domain of Kannada literature has scores of noteworthy women writers, as we shall see, in this chapter. This speaks about the prejudicial attitude towards women's writing. It is not that women did not or do not write, it is just that they and their writings are ignored, and their voices go unheard. Tharu and Lalitha's (1991, 1993) ground breaking compilation of Indian women's writings, in two volumes, has proved this beyond any doubt.

inside us”**.** Nayak (2005) says that women who write are ‘anomalies’ in society. She believes that this is mainly because years of subjugation and reinforced stereotypes of women’s roles in society have paralyzed most women writers’ tongues. Despite changing attitudes, most families keep an iron clasp on women who write, and force them to conform to rules. Tharu and Lalitha, speaking on the recovery of a tradition of women’s writing, echo Elaine Showalter’s sentiments when they state that by studying the stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited role women play in literary history, one is not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be. Continuing, they argue that Showalter believes, that it is possible to retrieve a tradition of women’s writing, with the help of the newly visible world of “feminist culture” (Showalter 1993: 21). Of course, men too have written on women and their plights, but it lacks sensibilities particular to the female experience, that are only a woman’s prerogative. The handling of sensitive issues like dowry, pregnancy, childbirth, and a host of such lived in realities add a hitherto unfound depth and reality to a narrative. According to Tharu and Lalitha women’s writings are seen as realistic impressions of their lives. “Today feminist critics, choose to read women’s writing as a transparent expression of women’s authentic experience, to the stereotypes of mainstream, often spoken as “male” literature, which is regarded simply as distorting the reality of women” (ibid: 32).

2.6.1: Noted Kannada Women Writers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century

2.6.1.1. Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba (1887-1982): Tirumalamba was born at Nanjangoodu in Mysore district. She learnt more in the ‘school of life’ rather than in a formal school. Married at the age of ten and widowed at the age of fourteen, she was faced with a harsh life which was common in those days. It was considered a sin if women as much as even glanced at books, and for a widow, who was seen as the greatest evil on earth, the situation was further hopeless. But thanks to her father’s support, she continued her education at home. With determination she studied Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. Literature and studies became her companions for life.

The lot of the widows in those days was only the accessibility of religious books like the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, that too if they were fortunate enough to have had an education to read them, which were meant to comfort and soothe. But in the hands of an intelligent reader like Tirumalamba these very books opened a vast vista of knowledge. She started gaining from these books and decided that instead of self-pity, working for the betterment of the unfortunate women like her was the need of the hour. She was strong willed enough to make a resolution that if at all she was going to shed tears it was only for the sake of less fortunate women than her. She began to reach out by giving tuitions to the neighboring children, and women started joining their children and gradually her house became 'Matrumandira', which in later years became the base to publish *Sanmarga Darshini*, a magazine for students. Whenever she came across some interesting paragraphs in her course of reading she would write it down for future reference. Her early writings were modeled on these styles. However, later on as she matured as a writer, her writings took a turn for the better. She would read out whatever she had written in the assembly of Matrumandira and to read more she would again write which in itself was cyclic. As a consequence she had a desire to publish her writings. At that point of time *Madhuravani*, amonthly magazine from Mysore had advertised a story competition. For Tirumalamba, this was a god sent opportunity. She sent her entry and won, surprising not only herself but also the editor of the magazine, who straight away visited her and was pleased to find an excellent writer with lots of finished material. He selected a lengthy article *Vidhava Kartavya* (The duties of a widow) and published it. When women folk were not even supposed to recognize the alphabet, when eyebrows were raised if females were taught to read and write, when a female writer was an anathema, Tirumalamba, with her father's staunch support and steadfast love swam against the tide. She believed that education was a compulsory requirement for women and strived hard for the noble cause (Rao 1989: 196-197, Vaidehi 2010: 3).

She started writing articles, essays and novels for magazines. She even published magazines like *Karnataka Nandini* and *Sanmarga Darshi* which were in circulation for a few years in addition to *Sati hitaishini* which was a book series. In 1916, her very first work, an article "Sadachara" won a prize. This fuelled her passion for

writing and with added enthusiasm she wrote many books. From 1917, almost for two decades, many of her books won not only prizes and acclaim from the governments of Mysore, Madras and Bombay but were also the prescribed texts for many school and college syllabus. Seven and a half thousand copies of her first novel *Susheele* were sold, thereby creating a record, a testimony to her writing ability as a novelist. Her other works were *Nabha, Vidyullata, Viraagini, Dakshakanya, Vikrama, Matru Nandini, Poornakala, Nilakanta, Vivekodaya, Girijabai, Raviverma, Manimala (novels); Chanravadana, Bhargava Garvabhanga, Ramananada* (plays); *Bhadra Geetavali, Sumukhi Vijaya*(a collection of poems), apart from many of her essay collections. Totally, thirty of her books are published. She has also written some traditional songs – "Beegara Haadu", "Urutane Haadu" – sung during wedding rituals. She died in 1982 at the age of 93, and a prize in her name is given every year to a woman writer. In 1979-80, Kannada Sahitya Parishad and in 1980-81 Karnataka Sahitya Academy honoured her with awards. This exceptionally gifted lady, who dreamt and strived very hard for the upliftment of women, the first woman writer, editor, publisher of the modern Kannada world, with an unsurpassable fortitude, passed away on the 31st of August 1982, creating a void in the Kannada literary field (Rao 1989**).**

Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba was a popular writer who published 28 books within 20 years at the beginning of the twentieth century.[38] In one of her stories, a woman reforms her philandering husband, who then apologizes to her. The famous writer Masti Venkatesha Iyengar[39] objected to the idea of a husband apologizing to his wife, which was not surprising during that time (His essay criticising Thriumalamba's story finds a place in Volume IV of *Vimarse*, a collection of Masti's critical writings). Her work was criticized on the flimsy reason that she had used strong language. His objection was that she had used "bad words", which was not a desirable trait in women, apart from the fact that it was in favour of women, wherein the errant husband apologizes to his wife, and turns on a new leaf. In another instance his

[38]Her creativity, the speed with which she published caught the attention of some established male critics. As it was true with a few other women writers in Kannada, there were efforts to stymie her voice. Unfortunately, one such incident silenced her for long.

[39]Masti is regarded as the 'Father of Short Stories' in Kannada literature and went on to get the Jnanapeeth award in Independent India.

objection was to a man seeking relationship with an invalid woman, which was unbelievable according to him. As a result of Masti's criticism, Tirumalamba was ostracized by the literary world and Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba, as a writer, was virtually unknown from around 1917 until the late 1970s. Chi.Na.Mangala, who was no less than a visionary, resurrected her works, thereby contributing immensely to Kannada literature (Krishnamachari 2011). Padikkal is of the opinion that since Masti was a writer who portrayed realism, it was difficult for him to see the view point of Tirumalamba's melodramatic narration. Though the term 'reality' itself is problematic, Masti could approve the episodes portrayed in a realistic novel, but not the ones from a melodramatic novel. He had a problem in accepting her women protagonists who bordered on radicalism. Her representation was not of middle class modern housewives but of powerful and courageous 'Indian Women', *Aryakulanganeyaru*. These female characters of Tirumalamba even ventured out of their normal home boundaries, if need be, to reform their errant husbands, which Masti found problematic to accept (Padikkal 2001: 135-136). Sarah, speaking on this issue says that Masti had criticized Tirumalamba to such an extent that the power of his criticism had permanently stalled her pen and her writing. It is said that, at a later date, Masti had repented his harsh criticism, saying that if he had not been so harsh, probably Tirumalamba might have come out with much more valuable writings. But by then it was too late and the writer, who resided in Tirumalamba had wilted to such an extent it was impossible to revive her. People had forgotten her, and many had not even heard her name! And the eerie silence was broken by Tirumalamba herself, that too when she had the misfortune of reading the misreported news of her own death! Ironically enough she herself wrote a letter, saying she was very much alive (Aboobackar 2012 b: 23).

2.6.1.2. R. Kalyanamma (1894-1965): Kalyanamma is known as a legendary writer who fought for the welfare of women and children. Her birthplace was Bangalore and in 1906, she passed the Mysore secondary examination and as was the custom of those days she was married at the tender age of ten. Within three months she became a widow; but thanks to her father's influence she had developed a lively interest in literature at a very young age. Instead of lamenting over what had happened she

started working for the cause of literature, as well as women and children in particular. She started a monthly called *Saraswathi*, which was in circulation for three decades and was well-liked. This magazine helped her to forward the cause of literature. With 'Sharada Stree Samaaja', an organization, established in 1913, she toiled for the upliftment of women and through 'Akhila Karnataka Makkala Koota' she worked for the cause of children through her unselfish social activities as a member of Mysore Prajapratinidhi Sabhe, Kannada Sahitya Parishat, theosophical society. She rose to become the first woman member of the Bangalore City Corporation and later on she became the first vice-president of the same too. This was a highly commendable feat for a widowed woman in those days and virtually unheard of.

As a writer, Kalyanamma displayed an immense creativity and added to Kannada Literature in its various forms. Her very first novel was *Priyamvade.* Her other novels were *Nirbhagyavanithae, Sukhalatha, Bhakte Meera, Madhavi, Nirmala, Satee Padmini, Ranakesari,* and *Shahajahan.* She wrote six plays and they were *Yaduraya, Barrister Ramachandran, Varadakshinae* and *Daridranarayana.* The theme of her works centred on women, their trials and tribulations. For children she wrote *Panchakajjaya, Putani Kathegalu, Namma Hindustana* and *Vikatakavi.* The king of Mysore recognized her good deeds and honored her by conferring her with 'Sarvajanika Seva Padhaka' in 1938. During the silver jubilee of her magazine *Saraswathi* in 1949, the people of Karnataka handed over a cash award to her, towards her welfare activities. She passed away at the age of seventy one on February 24, 1965. 'Akhila Karnataka Makkala Koota' instituted a trust in her honor. Though she became a widow at a young age and suffered atrocities widows of her time endured, Kalyanamma worked hard to advance the status of women in Karnataka (Nayak 1979: 288). Padikkal, speaking about Kalyanamma, says that though her themes too were women centred, like that of Tirumalamba's, the likeness stopped there. Kalyanamma's themes were not adulatory, nor did they have a dream like quality of Tirumalamba's writing. Kalyanamma portrayed the problems women faced in the society of her times, mainly centring on how to surface from difficulties in life.

Kalyanamma's writing was never sensational, but depicted identifiable, simple family life (Padikkal 2001: 136).

2.6.1.3. Tirumale Rajamma (1900-1984): Rajamma was born in November, 1900 in Tumkur. She was a very good artist and musician and at the age of thirteen, she was married to her relative Tirumale Tataacharya Sharma (Ti.Taa.Sharma), a famous journalist. Her passion in music made her study the 'Veena' – the instrument, under the able tutelage of the legendary Veene Sheshanna, and it is to her tribute that she performed in front of Mahatma Gandhi to his delight. Her penname was 'Bharati'. *Sukha Marga* was her first work, a play in three acts, which was written at a young age. Her first love was drama and some of her notable plays were Kapata *Naataka, Tapaswini, Mahasati, Swarga Nirasana, Dhundhubi*, and *Unmatta Bhaamini. Bindusundara* is a collection of children's poems. Her other works include *Vatsalya Tarangaleele, Jwalamukhi, Divyateya Darshana, Vedane-Nivedane, Jeevana Jijnyase, Lokhabhiraama. Arya Kailasam*is one of her last works, a brilliant critique on Kailasam's personality and his views. Rajamma had even written in Telugu language. In 1969 she was honoured with the most coveted 'Rajya Sahitya Academy' award **(**Rao 1989: 406-407).

2.6.1.4. Belagere Janakamma (1912-1948): Janakamma was born to Chandrasekhar Shastry and Annapoornamma, in Belagere of Challakere taluk. She was a famous poet of her times and many of her poems were published in *Jayakarnataka* and *Prabuddha Karnataka*. Though she was a prolific writer, it is a pity that most of it was not published. But in spite of it her efforts were commendable. *Kalyana* was her first collection of poems. As the first woman poet of the Navodaya she wrote poems invoking Kannadaness and Kannada identity. *Sirigannada* is one such poem imagining Kannada nation as the mother of Kannada children and emotionally expressing that Kannadaness is part and parcel, of the life of a Kannadiga (ibid:467).

2.6.1.5. Kodagina Gouramma (1912-1939): Gouramma was born in a Brahmin family in Madikeri, where she had her schooling. In 1928 she married her relative B.T.G. Krishna and in 1931 became the mother of a son. She was a daring lady and a gifted writer who had brought laurels both to Karnataka state and Kannada language

and is known for her short stories, the themes of which always centred on the joys and sorrows of women's lives. If Tirumale Rajamma had enchanted Mahatma Gandhi by her Veena recital, Kodagina Gouramma donated all her jewelryto Gandhi, for the upliftment of 'Harijans', the outcasts and untouchables for whose cause Gandhi was fighting. She always was an audacious enough writer to speak her mind without the least fear of consequences and she never minced her words. *Punarvivaha, Kelavu Kagadagalu, Manuvina Rani, Kousalya Nandana* are some of her works which are highly moving. Her depictions of women's lives in these stories are true to life and a mirror held to the then society.*Kambani, Chiguru, Gourammana Kathegalu* (collection of stories) are her other works. It is indeed unfortunate and a huge loss to the Kannada literary field to have lost this creative writer, bubbling with vitality and a rare talent at a very young age of twenty seven, in a swimming accident (ibid: 208, Nayak 1979: 204, 395).

2.6.1.6. Saraswathi Bai Rajawade (1913): Saraswathi Bai Rajawade (pen-named Giri Bale), was born in Maharashtra, and later the family migrated to Udupi, in Karnataka state. Though her formal schooling was only till the second standard, and her mother tongue Marathi, she mastered Kannada language enough to be able to write in Kannada. Her family was poor and the young Saraswathi of fifteen years had to marry a much elderly man of fifty one. Life in her marital home was very restricted and conditions worsened after she was widowed at a young age. Most probably her sufferings gave her the courage to write daringly, at a time when women were seldom heard. She became the voice of the widowed women like her. She passed her school-leaving examination when she was twenty-five. But, by then her preliminary writings had appeared in print. Her first story 'Nanna Anjana' appeared in 1929. She has to her credit seventy stories, some plays, poems, articles and reviews. Some of her better known works are *Badavara Kannira Kathe*, *Kulavadhu*, and *Kali*. She had also translated stories from Marathi, Hindi and Tamil into Kannada. She also edited a magazine *Suprabha* for some time and was a regular columnist for *Kathavali* and *Nisarga* (Tharu and Lalitha 1991: 506). Sarah Aboobackar, speaking about Saraswathi Bai Rajawade says that like Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba, she too was harshly criticized by the noted male writers of the period. She was a contemporary of

Tirumalamba and wrote about controversial issues of the time like inter-caste marriage, widow re-marriage, and the emancipation of Harijans (Dalits), which Sarah believes was the reason for the displeasure of the critics. Sarah says that even the renowned writer Shivarama Karanth harshly criticized her. But it is to the credit of Rajawade that no criticism had the power to stop her writing. Unlike Tirumalamba, who had wilted up, Rajawade turned a deaf ear and instead of putting a full stop to her writing, she wrote all the more on issues that needed to be written till about 1950s. Sarah believes that both Tirumalamba and Rajawade could not attain the heights, due to the neglect and animosity of the male writers, and though those, the patriarchal society effectively curtailed the growth of these two notable women writers, which is a great loss to Kannada literature.Sarah argues that at a later date, Triveni and Anupama Niranjana continued in the path, taking up on these issues, from where these two stalwarts had left off (Aboobackar 2012 b: 23-24, 53).

2.6.1.7. H.V. Savitramma (1913-1995): H.V. Savitramma is truly one of the pioneers of women's literature in Kannada, and can be placed along with Kodagina Gowramma, in the matter of education and literary criticism. As early as 1931, when girls hardly had any education, she secured a B.A. degree, with three gold medals. She was more catholic in her tastes and opted to translate from Bengali and English. She did not confine herself to fiction either. 'Life of Mahatma Gandhi' by Louis Fischer is an illustrious example among her translations. However, she is better known for her translations of *Gora*, (3 volumes), *Naukaghaata* (The Shipwreck) and *Mane-Jagattu* (The Home and the World) all by Tagore. She has also translated a number of short stories by Anton Chekhov. Though she was a translator par excellence, she was a writer too and wrote on diverse themes. She is remembered for her novel *Seethe, Rama, Ravana*, wherein she probes into the psyche of the mythological characters of Seethe, Rama and Ravana (Rao 2013). Viswanatha (2009) argues that though Savitramma was denied the power of re-writing as a translator[40], it was re-claimed in the context of her own writing. She adds that Savitramma appropriated "the agency of a writer in an act of radical mediation to re-write the

[40]A translator usually remains 'faithful' to the original, and we seldom come across translations which are daring. A case in point is Mahaswetha Devis' short story "Stanyadayini", translated by Spivak as the "Breast giver", which was a bold translation.

ultimate text of Hindu patriarchy, the *Ramayana*, as a feminist narrative…" (40). Sarah argues that in this very significant novel of Savitramma, which gained recognition, much later after it was written, she daringly raises a question as to what is wrong if Seetha had loved Ravana. This probably was blasphemous at a time when women worshipped Seetha, trying hard to emulate her. Sarah believes that this did not get noticed then because, it was written by a woman translator, because Savitramma was essentially seen as one, and the critics did not think her writing merited a review. It is only after women critics and researchers started unearthing and resurrecting the lost tradition of women's writing that these gems were reinstated, enriching the Kannada literary world (Aboobackar 2012 b: 25). Vanamala Vishwanatha too seconds these arguments. She states that many women translators were ignored, though they were excellent translators, compared to men (translators). The male translators' work did get recognised. She names many prominent women translators as part of her argument who were not known to the public. Savitramma, became known not because of her impressive lists of translations, but for her own writing (Vishwanatha 2009: 35-37).

2.6.1.8. M. K. Indira (1917- 1994): Indira was born in the town of Thirthahalli. Her formal education lasted for seven years before she got married at the age of twelve, as was the custom of those days. She is a well-known novelist in the Kannada language. She ventured into writing novels at a late age of forty-five. Her first story was 'Hettodalu*'* and the first novel *Tungabhadra* (1963). When she sent her first novel *Tungabhadra* to the publisher, he lost the original manuscript and she had to rewrite it from memory. This novel won her acclaim as a novelist and acted like an inspiration laying the foundation for her later works. It not only won the Triveni award but was also translated to Telugu and later Bangalore University accepted it as a text for its degree programme. She has written 41 novels, 11 collections of short stories and an autobiography. Her popular novels *Gejjepooje* (1966), *Phaniyamma* (1976), *Sadananda* (1965), and *Hoobana*[41] have been made into movies which have won her much acclaim and recognition. She studied Kannada poetry and also had a good

[41] The first three novel, with the same title as movies, and the last one with the title "Muttu Ondu Muttu"

knowledge of Hindi literature. Indira's novels, *Tungabhadra*, *Sadananda, Navaratna* and *Phaniyamma* have won her the Kannada Sahitya Akademi awards. This annual award is given to the best Kannada literature of the year. In view of her contribution to literature, an award is constituted in Indira's name and is given to the best women writers. Tejaswini Niranjana has translated *Phaniyamma* to English, and this translation has won her the Sahitya Akademi of India award. Phaniyamma, the protagonist of the novel is a child widow, and the novel depicts the harrowing life of the Brahmin widows in the first half of the twentieth century. It is essentially a feminist perspective which is presented in this novel. It is to the credit of the author, this novel created an unprecedented awareness in the minds of the general public. Her novels have captured the essence of rural life, simple yet highly cultured and reading them one gets an idea of an era that has been lived and is almost extinct now. The renderings are picturesque in nature, and unfolds beautifully before the reader's eyes a scene unparalleled to any. Her simple and lucid style of writing captivates one for life, making them an ardent fan of hers. Indeed, Indira was a force to reckon with and is an outstanding novelist of the Kannada literary domain **(**Rao 2007: 118-119).

2.6.1.9. Anasuya Shankar (1928 - 1963): Triveni[42], as she was popularly known, was a writer of modern Kannada fiction. Her schooling and college was done in Mandya and Mysore. She graduated with a gold medal in Bachelor of Arts from Maharani's Arts College in Mysore. She later married an English professor named S.N. Shankar. With psychology as one of her subjects she shed light on the little known aspects of human mind and its way of dealing with the troubling situations in life, at a time when the subject was relatively unknown in Kannada fiction. Triveni published her first novel *Apasvara* in 1953. After that, she published 20 novels and 3 short story collections, in her short literary life that lasted only a decade. Her novels mainly contained stories based on issues related to women. Her novels discussed the psychological issues faced by women, their emotions and frustrations. Some of her best known novels are *Sharapanjara*, *Bekkina Kannu* and *Hoovu Hannu*. Her novels

[42] Her pen name. Triveni got her pen-name by accident. She always made two plaits (in Kannada, veni means plait) in her hair. A friend told her she had enough hair not just for two, but three plaits. Anasuya thought that tri-veni was a nice name and started using that as her pen-name.

like *Bekkina Kannau, Sharapanjara* and *Mucchida Bagilu* were essentially psycho-analytical.

Triveni's novels have been made into popular movies, most prominently *Sharapanjara* and *Belli Moda* – both directed by Puttana Kanagal and featuring talented Kannada actress Kalpana. Her novel *Avala Mane* earned the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award in the year 1960. Triveni cherished motherhood and in spite of having three miscarriages managed to give birth to a daughter the fourth time but unfortunately could not fulfill her ambition of rearing up the child with all the motherly love she was capable of, that she wished to lavish on her baby daughter. She was suffering from asthma and her death at the age of 35 on July 29, 1963 shocked the Kannada world. Her untimely demise created a void which none other could aspire to fill and it was indeed a loss of huge magnitude to the Kannada literary field. She holds a niche which is still hers thanks to her radical ideas, her path breaking, unique novels which portrayed the necessity of delving into one's own psyche and looking for answers. Triveni advocated the power of auto suggestion, and most importantly the power of positive attitude which women and the society at large needed to cultivate in order to improve the quality of life (Rao 2007: 154-155). Sarah says that Triveni was a writer par excellence and in her short story titled "Athithi Baralilla", which is autobiographical in nature, she had written her experiences of motherhood – the desire to have a child, the excruciating shock of having miscarriages, the states of pregnancy and the pains of delivery. Sarah says that no man can ever write such a poignant tale, as written by a woman, which is crafted on one's own experiences (Aboobackar 2012 b: 24-25).Sarah proudly acknowledges that she was much inspired by reading Triveni's novels, and she realized that the possession of Jinn (evil spirits), with which the women of her community supposed to have ailed, was nothing but a mental disease (Aboobackar 2009: 3-4).This is explained in detail in the next section of the chapter, where Sarah speaks about the influence Triveni had on her, and which indirectly placed her on the trajectory of writing.

2.6.1.10. Anupama Niranjana (1934-1991): Anupama's father was a school inspector and one of her relatives D.C. Subbarayappa had close ties with Kannada Sahitya Parishath, which was one of the strong influences on Anupama when she was

a young girl and had a reading habit even at a very young age. She graduated in medicine from Mysore and joined Cheluvamba hospital as a house surgeon. She married Kannada writer Niranjana, a leading novelist of the Pragatisheela Movement of modern literature in 1956, and started her practice in Dharwad. She had a column "Swasthya Samasye-Salahe" (Suggestions to Solve Health Problems) to her credit in *Prajavani*, a daily, which had wide circulation. She advised people on their health queries. Later on, the couple moved to Bangalore. Anupama was a writer of modern Kannada fiction. While she was yet a student she had published *Kanmani*, a collection of short stories and around 1954, her first novel *Anantageetha* was published. She advocated the woman's point of view and was one among such writers in Kannada, as Triveni and M.K. Indira. Her novel *Runamuktalu* has been made into a successful film by Puttanna Kanagal. Anupama took to writing early in life and wrote several novels and stories dealing with social issues, particularly women's issues. She has explored the different genres from short stories, novels, travelogue, autobiography, children's literature, and books on health issues. *Angaiyalli Euro America, Snehayatre* are her travelogues. She stands out prominently when it comes to books on health issues in Kannada. Her books like *Kelu Kishori, Taayi-Maagu, Dampatya Deepike, Vadhuvige Kivimaatu, Stree Swasthya Samhite, Shishuvaidya Deepike, Arogyabhagyakke Vyaayaama, Otthadada Benegalu, Cancer Jagattu, Aaharadinda Arogya,* range from simple tips towards good health to counselling young brides and young mothers and are very much appreciated. She dispensed her knowledge freely for the good of the society, dispersing many foolish myths about marriage, pregnancy, child birth, pre and post-natal care, diseases etc. In a country like India, where medical facility is a luxury, Anupama did her best through her books and lived by her Hippocratic Oath. She has published 9 collections of short stories and 24 novels apart from her books on health issues. Her novel *Madhavi* was a path breaking novel in more ways than one, where she speaks on behalf of Madhavi, the protagonist of the novel, from a Feminist's perspective. *Nenapu Sihi Kahi* and *Barahagarthiya Baduku* are autobiographical. Anupama Niranjana drew themes from her rich experience as a medical practitioner and was a writer par excellence. She has won many prestigious awards like Sashwati, Soviet Land Nehru Award, Rajya Sahitya Akademi Award and

Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba Award. An award has been instituted in her name for women writing in Kannada (Rao 2007: 172-173).

Anupama Niranjana's novel *Madhavi* (1981) has a unique plot. It is about a minor character from Mahabharata. In it the writer has sensitively portrayed the feelings and trauma of the protagonist Madhavi, who is a princess. Madhavi undergoes inexpressible trauma, when treated like chattel, changing hands to fulfil her father's promise. It vividly evokes untold images of the degradation, helplessness, rage, fear, and the hopelessness of being treated like a pawn, having no say, faced by women from all walks of life in the system of patriarchy. Though gender identity is assumed to be natural, in actual fact, it is a process of socialization where since birth every individual is made to fit into male or female categories adopting masculine or feminine roles, qualities and behaviour at any cost. When viewed from a feminist perspective, human bodies are shaped and controlled by the norms and expectations of the social order, which is gendered. The gendered bodies are thus produced for a social world creating identities and self-definitions (Sabala et al 2010: 44). Though Anupama was not obscured quite the way Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba was, the novel *Madhavi* almost vanished from the literary scene, thanks to the silence of major critics. The reason was that Anupama had portrayed 'Madhavi' as a woman having an independent thought processes, which highlighted the evils of the patriarchal society. This new 'Madhavi' challenged the traditional image of Madhavi as a paragon of "womanly" virtues such as obedience, submission, patience, endurance and sacrifice, which was the grouse of the literary establishment. The novel signaled a new direction in Anupama's own work and represented a turning point in women's writing in Kannada.

Sarah opines that though the face of literature had seen such a sea change, women's writing was still labelled as 'kitchen literature', and the critics most of the time, never thought highly of women's writing. Anupama, though a very noted, versatile writer was always depressed on the account of her writings not getting the desired reviews. But, Sarah is full of admiration for Anupama, that did not stop her from writing, and write she did, till the nineties, expressing her views, and always fighting for equality, and for the emancipation of women **(**Aboobackar 2012 b: 24).

2.6.1.11. Janaki Srinivasa Murthy (1945): Janaki, born in Kundapurain coastal Karnataka is popularly known by her pen name Vaidehi. She is a commerce graduateand she published her first book of short stories *Mara Gida Balli* in 1979. She has since then established herself as a significant presence in Kannada literature and has many awards to her credit. A versatile writer, she writes short fiction, novels, essays, children's plays and poems. She has two collections of poetry to her credit: *Bindu Bindige* (1990) and *Parijatha* (1999). Her stories and poems have been translated to different languages like English, Marathi, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, and Gujarati (Rao 2007: 202-203). Sarah, reviewing one of Vaidehi's short stories 'Shakutaleyodane Ondu Madhyanha' (An Afternoon with Shakuntala), says that Vaidehi portrays Dushyanta as a man sans principles. That he had never really loved Shakuntala. His love for her is all a part of his devious plans to deceive her into having a physical relationship, and later his memory loss about her as the cause of the sage Durvasa's curse, is all a grand plan of deception. Vaidehi suggests that in the original Shakuntala, written by Kalidasa, he had purposely concocted the curse and later the amnesia was all to safeguard Dushyanta. Later for his memory to be revived, Shakuntala had to show him the ring given by him. But Vaidehi has given a twist to the tale, portraying an assertive Shakuntala, who thinks that there is absolutely no need for her to jog his memory, with the help of the ring, because she recognizes him for what he is, an opportunist, a cad, who professed love to have his way, a person who really does not love her (Aboobackar 2012 b: 79). This feminist perspective has definitely given it an edge, making it a feminist reading of women's assertiveness.

2.6.1.12. Sudha Murthy (1950): is a widely published writer and chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, involved in a number of social development initiatives. She is the recipient of many awards: Attimabbe award for her technical book in Kannada Shale Makkaligagi Computer (computers for schoolchildren), Karnataka Rajyotsava Award for the year 2000 for achievement in the field of literature and social work, among many others. Sudha started writing about a decade back. In this period 15 books of hers are published. Four of them are on computers, some others are travelogues, novels and collection of articles written periodically for columns. She writes both in Kannada and English. Almost all her works are translated into other languages. Some

of them are translated into as many as fourteen Indian languages. One of her books, Wise and Otherwise (2006) which is a collection of column articles, is translated into 15 languages and more than 10,000 copies are sold in one year. Sudha Murthy's writing captivates us by its simplicity, minute observations, and wide knowledge of human behaviour (Satyamurty: 366-367).

2.6.1.13. Nemichandra (1959): Nemichandra is a popular writer in Kannada language. Her novel *Yad Vashem* (2007) is about a Jewish girl growing up in old Bangalore in a Hindu family. It is her search for her lost family in later years, which takes her through Germany, America and ultimately lands her in Israel, in the middle of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Nemichandra is the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Karnataka Sahitya Academy award for *Belakinondu Kirana* – a biography of Marie Curie, Gorur award for *Ondu Kanasina Sanje* – a collection of short stories and Ratnamma Hegde award for *Ondu Kanasina Payana*. Nemichandra's genre also includes songs that she pens on social issues. Critics have hailed her as one of the finest exponents of the Navya movement and lauded her lyrical style and honest writing. Her works have been hugely popular among Kannada readers. She is a regular contributor to and is on the editorial board of *Achala,* a magazine devoted to women's studies (Rao 2007: 226-227). Sarah states that Nemichandra is one of the best writers of the current generation. Analysing one of her short stories titled "Nannolaginondu Bindu", Sarah says that in this story Nemichandra has argued about the right a woman has in having a child. The story is about a young scientist, who after having two children, realises that she has conceived for the third time. She does not want the baby and she thinks of expelling it from her body. She justifies her thoughts saying that a woman is more than a delivery machine, that she needs time which she can call her own, in which she can realise her intellectual dreams, that she does not want to become helpless like her mother, who was no better than a machine, delivering babies, and bedridden with arthritis at the age of thirty five, that whether to have or not have a child should only be a woman's prerogative, and decision. Sarah says that anyone who believes that aborting a foetus is murder and sin should read this well-crafted story by Nemichandra. It is not that she endorses abortion, but Sarah says this story portrays the various nuances of a woman's plight, wherein the evocation of

motherhood, instead of being a blessing, ends up as a curse (Aboobackar 2012 b: 10). Nemichandra and Sudha Murthy, who are also highly qualified engineers, and multifaceted personalities, write with a very life-like precision.

2.6.1.14. Mumtaz Begum[43]**:** Mumtaz Begum, is the first Muslim woman writer in Kannada. She portrays not only the Muslim women and their world, but also her desire that people should live amicably, irrespective of their caste, creed and tenet. She was a qualified lady with a BA, B.Ed., and LLB, who had made her debut in 1965, when her short story was published in the Kannada magazine *Navabharata*. In1985 her first anthology of short stories *Adhyaksha* was published. She had more than 300 short stories to her credit. Though the manuscript of her first novel *Tapaswi* was lost, her second novel *Paradeshi* was published in 1985, in 13 serials in the Kannada Magazine *Taranga*, which was later translated to English. Her third novel *Vartula* was the one which was published as a full-fledged novel and is about the medical world. To write this novel, she had researched to such an extent that she was a regular visitor to a hospital, its wards, operation theatres; libraries, classes and hostels. From 1965 to 2000, when she was visiting Dubai for professional reasons, she had given the entire corpus of her manuscripts to an editor for publishing. But unfortunately he lost her manuscripts and apologized for the loss. The injury was not just personal but a great loss for Kannada literature too. Mumtaz Begum sadly blames the system, which was successful in curtailing her growth as a writer (Niketana: 347-349).

The above example is symptomatic of a pattern of suppressive strategy deployed against upcoming writers from a less privileged or downtrodden communities or groups of people even from precolonial times. For example, Tukaram, who belonged to non-Brahmin caste, lost all his manuscripts of songs that were thrown into Dehu River, which he could never recover (Chitre 1991: ix). Coming to the present times, we have several occasions when manuscripts of women writers have been lost. M.K. Indira, had lost her first manuscript of her debut novel *Tungabhadra* which she had given to a publisher. But when she was told that it was misplaced and could not be found, it is to her credit that she wrote another copy from memory within 15 days.

[43]Date not available

The novel later went on to become a best seller. Sarah also records an instance wherein an emerging young writer had given the manuscript of her debut novel to an established, noted writer to review[44]. The theme of the novel was the love between a Brahmin girl and a Dalit boy. But the manuscript was never returned and when enquired, she was told that it was lost. All this by a celebrated writer comes as a surprise. Sarah says the girl never attempted to write anything further. It effectively ended her career as a writer (Aboobackar 2012 b: 263). One can definitely find a pattern here of restricting the growth of women writers. Sarah places on record some of her own experiences, wherein in the first instance the copy of an article which she had prepared painstakingly for a seminar, was lifted from her handbag. In another instance a last copy of one of her books was borrowed, on the pretext of reading, never to be seen again.

Forbes is of the opinion that the attitude of the critics and readers has been a major challenge to women who write in the vernacular. Her belief is that this attitude is a direct reflection of the societies in which they live and for whom they write. "Critics who review their work still treat women writers as 'outcasts'. Literary critics, mostly men, ignore the dynamic vitality in women's writing and treat it as recreational and decorative. The scholarship on women in South Asia is almost all interdisciplinary and increasingly influenced by post-modernist theory. This has led to a spate of collected works which include articles written from different points of view and on different periods" (281).

2.7: SARAH ABOOBACKAR (1936): A PROMINENT VOICE FROM THE MARGINS

Sarah Aboobackar is a popular Kannada novelist, short story writer, essayist, and a translator. She is a prominent voice from the margins as a Muslim woman, who started writing during the Bandaya period, i.e., Sarah is considered a voice from the margins because as said earlier in the first chapter, she belongs to an ethnic minority – the Beary community. She is from an ethnic minority, she is a Muslim and a woman. However she is a prominent voice. Prominent because she is the first Muslim woman

[44] Sarah never mentioned the name of either the reviewer or the young writer.

to have passed matriculation with a first class, the first Muslim woman to write in Kannada whose books are available. She has experimented across the genres; she is assertive and does not hesitate to speak the unvarnished truth. And she has paid the price for being so daring. She has been manhandled on certain occasions; she has been threatened to be ostracised from her community; she has been taken on a ride by unscrupulous people; and in all these instances she has hit back by suing them in the court of law. In one of her interviews she remarked that she was not invited to any of the Beary Sahitya Sammelana. She candidly remarked that she did not wish to be identified with neither the Beary Academy nor their politics and said that she would rather be known as a 'Mapilla'[45] than a Beary (III interview data). They treat her with derision because she had dared to portray the shortcomings of her community, and the way the women of her community were exploited, without mincing her words, much to the displeasure of the fundamentalists of her community. Hence she is not accorded the respect she deserves. But it a paradox that what the community failed to recognise, the Kannada world has done. The Kannada literary world has conferred her with many prestigious awards. Two universities have honoured her with honorary doctorate. Hence her voice is reckoned as one of the prominent voices from the margins.

As we observed earlier in the first chapter, Sarah belongs to the 'Rebel' (Bandaya) movement; which emerged as a response to the Navya or the modernist movement. The Bandaya and the Dalit movement in Kannada literature had simultaneous beginnings. These movements rejected the dominant cultures asserting their identities and rights. They were sensitive to women's issues, and saw women as rebels. Women writers who emerged during this time were highly influenced by Navya. Sarah is one such gifted writer who believes she can create awareness solely through her writings.

> I did not have the necessary means and power to unite the Muslim women to take up arms for their cause or to create awareness in them. The one and the only path that was open to

[45] A sect of Muslims belonging to the region of south coastal Karnataka and northern Kerala. Ichlangod is of the opinion that Bearys and Mapillas as two distinct sects, with different traditional backgrounds, varying from their mother tongue to their culture. The Bearys follow the clan system, but the Mapillas do not have a clan system. The Beary language has more of Tulu words, and has no definite script. Whereas the language of Mapillas, has more of Malayalam and they use the Malayalam script. Both Bearys and Mapillas differ in their rituals, dressing style and ornaments (Ichlangod 2011: 22-26).

> me, was to create awareness and to put up a fight through my writing (Aboobackar 2009: 7-8).

Sarah was insulted several times for her Muslim identity. She has gone on record citing many instances, wherein she was insulted by her fellow women writers. High caste women writers have insulted her publicly, in conferences, questioning the reason for her being conferred with so many awards, questioning the legitimacy of her being a writer. In such cases, others had just looked on. Even when she was a guest on some occasions, such instances have taken place, all of which has saddened Sarah immensely.[46] But she has taken everything in her stride and her ardour has anything but diminished. In such a backdrop we find a writer like Sarah Aboobackar (1936) taking shape, in between several challenges: from community, patriarchy, and literary fiefdom.

Sarah states that Muslim portrayals were very rare in the stories or novels till the seventies. If they appeared, it was in the works of men as minor characters like Jatka Sabi (coach man), or Jatka Sabi's wife, fisherwomen or as prostitutes, never as major characters or protagonists (Aboobackar 2001). And even these minor characters were glaringly absent in women's writing! Sarah is surprised that though the Muslim population in Karnataka is twenty percent, they were hardly represented in Kannada literature. Sarah proudly claims that she was once complimented in Bengaluru, by an elderly person, who had said that she was the first woman writer in Kannada, who had placed Muslim women on the map of Karnataka! And her debut novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli* (1984) was hailed as the very first novel to evince Muslim sensibilities in the domain of Kannada literature (Aboobackar 2012 b: 40).

Sarah belongs to Beary community, who speak Beary language, which is closer to Tulu and Malayalam, than is to Kannada. Sarah's mother tongue is Malayalam because she hails from Kasaragod, a Malayalam speaking area. But she prefers writing in Kannada.[47] In one of her autobiographical short stories, "Muslim Hudugi

[46] More of this, in the third chapter.

[47] When questioned on her choice of language, she candidly remarked that Muslims, speak the language of the region they inhabit, except in the case of Hanafis, a sect of Muslims, who strictly speak only Urdu as their mother tongue, irrespective of the region. As for her choice of language, she simply replied that owing to the circumstances, it was but natural that she should write in Kannada (III interview data).

Shale Kalitaddu" (A Muslim Girl Goes to School) she fondly reminisces how she was encouraged to go to school, much to the displeasure of their society, with its rigid religious practices. She attended a Kannada medium school in Kasaragod, in Kerala, and later when she married and moved to Karnataka, it only strengthened her earlier ties with the Kannada language. Though she has translated some Malayalam novels into Kannada, she admits that she prefers writing in Kannada. "It is a choice of affiliation, though it might not be the language of filiation in a sociobiological sense" says Pollock, talking about the choice of language, reminiscent of Saidian categories (Pollock: 329). The reading habit, because of which she could develop a taste for the finer aspects of literature, and which has become a tool in her hand to draw attention towards the much neglected issues of women of her Muslim community, is all thanks to her grandmother and mother. She remembers the uphill battle her father, who was a famous lawyer of the region, had fought for the sake of his daughter, in the matter of schooling. She says that the moment she had passed from the second to the third standard, he came to fetch her from her grandmother's place. She was then admitted to a Kannada medium school in Kasaragod. The intention of her father was to provide an opportunity for his daughter to acquire a good education. Sarah declares that her father was very much concerned about the education of girls of their community and probably he had decided that his daughter should be the one to set an example. She candidly admits that If her father had not taken such keen interest regarding her schooling most probably today she would have been like all those Muslim women of their hometown, completed fifth standard in Chamanad, married at the age of ten and living in some remote corner of Kasaragod (Aboobackar 2009: 5).

She admits that she was profoundly affected by Triveni's novels and short stories, with its psychological themes, the first of its kind in Kannada literature, and how she gained an insight of the different maladies that were rampant in their community which were looked upon and treated with superstition.

> I distinctly remember Mariyamma, a maid who would at times behave rather strangely. She would start laughing and singing loudly, and used to mutter, god knows what. She had neither husband nor children, nobody to call her own, and my Umma [mother] had told us that a jinni, an evil spirit has possessed her. Mariyamma would recount very famous Mapilla paat, folk tales of "Badarul Muneer, Husanul Jamaal", during bedtime. But Umma was scared to retain her because of her jinn problem, the belief that she was possessed by an evil spirit. My Umma was terrified that the jinn might trouble us! However it is true that

> without her tales I had to spend some sleepless nights, mooning around, long after she had left us. When I started reading Triveni's novels, I realized that Mariyamma' jinn was none other than her psychological imbalance, a mental disease.Even then I did not feel I ought to write something. The urge to write had not yet descended on me. Only at a later phase, reading renowned books written by well-known authors, must have awakened the novelist within me (ibid: 3-4)

She admits that her stories are about the trials and tribulations faced by women and are embroidered around real life instances. She states that one of the main reasons for these women – who later went on to become the protagonists of her fiction – to linger in a nook and corner of her mind was their visits during the month of Ramzan, when a horde of poor women from her mother's native would come over seeking donation. Those women, in their younger days were either maids or had been companions to her mother. They respected her mother a lot for the reason that she would have small talk with them enquiring about their lives. She also helped them by giving off coconuts, rice, and old garments never sending anyone empty handed. Sarah recalls how her mother would be all ears and compassionately listened to their problems, which was more than their expectations. Having the very rare luxury of someone listening to and sympathizing with them, they would pour out all their woes, and be lighter by the exercise. She remembers that their woes ranged across a wide spectrum. From *talaq*, their poverty, the problem of dowry, the sickness of their children, to their husbands' polygamy; there were innumerable issues to be told (ibid).

Her protagonists are real life heroines, because her writings centre on women and the problems they face. "There was absolutely no need for me to go in search of themes for a story because I had grown up listening to and seeing hundreds of tales, filled with woes and sufferings that the women folk of our community had to endure" (ibid: 6).

Her works deal with the complexities of life in middle and lower middle class Muslim families in south coastal Karnataka and north coastal Kerala. In her fiction, she reveals the manner in which poverty, illiteracy, religious superstitions and patriarchal values have created unbearable suffering for Muslim women. In particular she

portrays the problems caused by practices like dowry, polygamy, *talaq*, and 'marriage for a day'[48], which are endemic among Bearys.

> In Kerala a powerful movement has been initiated opposing this 'marriage for a day'. A professor from Kerala is heading one such movement. He has authored a book called *An Application of Anguish for Mothers* which speaks about the heartrending suffering women face due to social evils like polygamy, purdah and the easy procedure of *talaq* system. I believe that I too have a share in his outlook (ibid: 12).

Though there has been a never-ending talk of changing social attitudes towards women, in reality nothing much seems to have happened. Reports like that of the Committee on Status of Women in India (CSWI), the Bhor Committee report on health and the Durgabai Deshmukh Committee on women's education will remain relevant for many decades to come. They had stressed the need for the eradication of polygamy and changes in Muslim law to put all women on an equal footing before the law. That would have been the first step towards social justice and equality for all women (Nayak 2005: viii). But despite all the efforts, Muslim women are made to follow the rules of the Shari'a, polygamy and instant divorce is still practiced, and most women do not have the privilege of education.

Sarah's stories are a door opened, into her Beary community which was hitherto a terrain untrodden, which is doubly the reason to read her work. She candidly admits that when she started writing novels, short stories and articles, three main themes of hers were: the education of Muslim girls, the exploitation that is perpetrated on Muslim women in the name of religion and communal harmony. "As I see it, in a way, through my writings, I believe I have taken up arms against Muslim fundamentalists. At the time that I started writing or in all probability a decade earlier, when our people had just learnt to raise their heads, and were inclining towards

[48] 'One day's marriage' or 'marriage for a day' is literally what it means. According to the rules of the shari'a, the personal law of Muslims, if the husband divorces his wife, uttering three *talaqs*, they are not man and wife anymore. In case the man wants his wife back, then, she has to go through the inhuman custom of one day's marriage with someone else. As the term suggests, the woman in question, should marry and the man divorces her the next day. Only then is the woman in question eligible to marry her former husband. However she has to wait for a period of three months, just to make sure that she has not conceived in that day's marriage, and only then she can marry her former husband. In case she conceives, then the waiting period will be for a year, wherein she has to deliver the baby and hand over the child to its father. This is a strict rule which is laid down in the shari'a, very humiliating for the woman and for the abolition of which feminists are fighting.

progress and advancement, the Muslim fundamentalists had silently begun to propel and push our community backwards, to the seventh century" (Aboobackar 2009: 6).

In her much acclaimed debut novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli*[49], she has portrayed the anguish of a young woman, going through the trauma brought about by instant divorce and 'a day's marriage'.

She recreates women's world with enormous details drawn from daily life situations and activities of women. In fact, she first became known as a writer thanks to her rebellion against gender inequality and religious fundamentalism, an attitude that she retains even today despite sustained attempts by fundamentalist groups to silence her. "I have suffered in many ways for being a woman, and that too for being a Muslim woman" (Aboobackar 2009: 11).

Sarah argues that literature should not be tainted with religion, be it any. She endorses her work saying that they are not fiction but based on reality, real life instances that she has witnessed around her and her objective is to portray the lives of women with the hope of changing their conditions, improving their lot in life. Women's empowerment is to give women the power to act, participate, make decisions, raise voice against social evils, and fight against injustice, to become aware of their rights and privileges, to sensitise both men and women to recognize their potential. Sarah Aboobackar strongly advocates that education is the way towards emancipation, which can liberate women from their pathetic lethargy and rejuvenate them. Her conviction springs from her firm belief that 'if you educate a woman you educate a family', thereby contribute to build a better nation.

Sarah remembers that with the publication of *Chandragiri Teeradalli*, it was rumoured that the author was a man masquerading as a woman. But when it became known that it was a woman the tone of accusation changed. The rumours that circulated was that she was not an authentic Muslim, did not know what she was writing and she was writing to make money. They blamed her as voyeuristic. They even stooped to the level of pelting her house with stone and eggs. But Sarah recalls that she was unperturbed and nothing could stop her from writing, which she took up

[49] Translated into English by Vanamala Vishwanatha as *Broken Ties* (Aboobackar 2009).

as a challenge. C.S Lakshmi, an independent researcher and writer, who writes in Tamil under the pseudonym Ambai and the founder-trustee and director of SPARROW says "Sarah began to write at the age of 46 and the response to her writing from her own community must have upset her and at the same time made her take up writing as a challenge" (Lakshmi 2009: 77). In one of the interviews Sarah laughed when she recalled several incidents regarding the controversy about *Chandragiri Teeradalli*. That at one point of time they had accused her of being a 'Namadhari'[50]. She says she has stopped being upset and goes about her duty now, her duty of creating awareness in the young minds, through her writings (II interview data). Tharu and Lalitha believe that "through these texts, we look back to a feminist inheritance more powerful and complex, but at the same time more troubling, than narratives of suppression, and release might allow us to suspect" (Tharu and Lalitha 1993 : 40).

Sarah is a very versatile writer who has experimented across genres, from novels, novellas, short stories, essays, plays, translations, to her very recent autobiography. She has to her credit 9 novels, 2 novellas, 5 collections of short stories, 3 collections of essays, a collection of stories for children, a travelogue, 5 translations and an autobiography.[51] Lakshmi speaking about the profound influence that Sarah's works create says that her depiction stays with one forever, making one ruminate on the life like rendition. "Books are read in so many ways. Some books make you want to read certain portions again and again; some travel with you wherever you go and some you put next to your pillow when you sleep" (Lakshmi: 76)

Literature and writing have vested women with a voice, the power of which cannot be undermined. Sarah candidly remarks "Muslim women in Mangalore have become second grade citizens. They drape themselves from head to toe in black. They have lost and forgotten their own human form. There is no freedom of expression here" (Srinivasraju: 101).

[50] Not a real Muslim, but a convert, a non-believer.
[51] Recently she has written one more novel and some short stories, as mentioned earlier.

2.8: A COMPARATIVE SKETCH WITH OTHER MUSLIM WOMEN WRITERS

Till now we saw the emergence of Sarah in a tradition of Kannada women writers. Sarah was the first Muslim writer in Kannada language. This entailed certain implications on her writing.[52] In this section of the chapter an attempt has been made to compare her with select Muslim women writers of postcolonial India like Qurratulain Hyder, Ismat Chughtai and Banu Mushthaq. If the first two were Urdu writers, the last one is again from Kannada. These writers too dared to write about things that people thought was indecent for a lady to talk about and were sensitive enough to portray the reality that they were witnessing around them: of real women and their real problems, which the literary world in general churned out. The issues that were thought to be taboo were portrayed delicately.

The main reason to select these women writers was that all the writers share comparable socio-political ethos in a post-colonial country like India and have faced the wrath of community, society and establishment in somewhat similar ways. They dared to portray the corruption rampant in their respective societies in an unflinching manner. They took up controversial issues, at a time when women never dreamt of writing anything so explosive. In many instances the books were banned from circulation. In some instances these writers had to face insult and infamy from the society. There were instances where the system tried hard to put a full stop to their writing, but to no avail, because all these women writers were assertive and self-confident, armed as they were, with a rare determination of 'come what may'. All these writers have touched upon various themes in the course of their writing career, but for this study only those stories are selected which portray the different shades of exploitation of women, and their suffering, in many instances, veiled from public gaze. Yet another reason for this particular selection is that all of them are renowned Muslim women writers and have the distinction of being conferred with many literary awards, and all four are, more or less, on the same level of distinction, and are prominent voices from the margins. However, all these writers portray stories set in

[52] We shall see more of this, in fourth chapter.

differing backgrounds, which is a curious and interesting fact. This really debunks many myths as to only women from a certain background are exploited.

2.8.1: Qurratulain Hyder (1928 - 2007)

Hyder was an influential Indian Urdu novelist and short story writer, an academic, a journalist and one of the most outstanding literary names in Urdu fiction in India. A prolific writer (she began to write at the young age of 11), her literary works include some 12 novels and novellas and four collections of short stories. Hyder has also done a significant amount of translation of classics. Her own works have been translated into English and other languages. She received the Jnanapeeth Award in 1989 for her novel *Aakhir-e-Shab Ke Hamsafar* (Travelers unto the Night). She received the Sahitya Akademi Award for her collection of short stories *Patjhar Ki Awaz* (The Sound of Falling Leaves) in 1967, Soviet Land Nehru Award, 1969, Ghalib Award, 1985. The Urdu Academy in Delhi conferred upon her the Bahadur Shah Zafar Award in 2000. She was conferred Padma Shri by the Government of India in 1984, and in 2005 she was conferred the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian honor awarded by the Government of India, for her contribution to Urdu literature and education. A trend setter in Urdu fiction, she began writing at a time when the novel was yet to take deep roots as a serious genre in the poetry-oriented world of Urdu literature. She instilled in it a new sensibility and brought into its fold strands of thought and imagination hitherto unexplored. She is widely regarded as the "Grande Dame" of Urdu literature.

After graduating from Lucknow University's Isabella Thoburn College, Hyder migrated along with her family members to Pakistan in 1947 at the time of independence, but some years later decided to go back to India, where she had since lived till her demise. She was a fellow of the Sahitya Academi, had travelled widely and worked as a journalist and broadcaster. The stories selected for the purpose of analysis are from *A Season of Betrayals* (1999), which consists of a short story "The sound of falling leaves" (1963) and two novellas, "Sita Betrayed" (1960) and "The Housing Society" (1963). Originally published as "Patjhad Ki Awaz", "Sitaharan", and "Housing Society". The stories explore the disastrous events that have unmoored

the lives of women and how each in her own way, battles with a state of exile that is more internal than external. Together they unfold a series of betrayals and their struggle to overcome them, coming to terms with reality.

The chief protagonists of the three works are women: Sita Mirchandani, a Hindu refugee in India from Sindh; Salma ('Choti Bitiya') and Surayya, Muslim girls from very different social classes from the state of Uttar Pradesh (U.P) and Tanvir Fatima, also born in U.P. But, the main thread that is common in the lives of all these women is that they live within a patriarchal society, exploited and betrayed, time and again by the men, in whom they have placed their trust. Though at times Hyder's female protagonists might even seem to be ineffectual and condemned for their behavior, they fight back to live according to their will, which is not an easy task in a male dominated patriarchal society. If her protagonists do not assertively challenge patriarchy, they are not its eager accomplices either. When they make any compromise with it, as Surayya does for example, near the end of "The Housing Society", it is for the sake of survival, the most basic of all human needs. It appears that they have resigned themselves to a life of suffering, and suffer willingly. Against all odds they refuse to relinquish the most elementary of human emotions – trust, the fundamental cement of any and every relationship – in fellow humans, in spite of being taken advantage of. Sita Mirchandani in "Sita Betrayed", despite betrayals by a series of men, must remain alive to her own essentially felt need, because she feels that if her search for love stopped, that would be a fate worse than suicide. She is driven by her own need to find reassurance, longing for that elusive emotion 'love'. These feelings are mirrored in "The Housing Society"when Surayya quotes a line of verse: "But for this endless illusion, man would die" (Hyder 1999: 224).[53]

Sita Mirchandani, the protagonist of "Sita Betrayed" is a well-educated, beautiful woman belonging to the elite class. She is independent and is not outweighed with the usual norms and customs that mark the daily lives of Indian women, so much so that she marries a Muslim. Though she loves husband passionately, she lives separated from him. Her beauty draws men to her. Her semblance to 'Sita' ends there. She is a modern woman, and she searches elusively for 'love', which eludes her. At times one

[53]Emphasis in the original, in all the italicized quotations in this comparative section.

wonders as to why Hyder named her 'Sita' at all, if not for the reason that she was betrayed by men, whom she trusted and were the reasons for all her heartbreak. …"All my life long I've been preyed upon…" she says (Hyder 1999: 172).

Surayya and Choti Bitiya of "The Housing Society" too are women who have faced a lot of upheavals in their lives. If Surayya, coming from a middle class family has scaled the ladder, it is because of her education and art. She lives the comfortable life of 'noveau rich', all thanks to a fairy godmother, Choti Bitiya's mother, who had taken Surayya and her mother, under her wing. But the irony is that Choti Bitiya's affluent family, her father being nothing less than 'Collector Saab' of the British Raj, is in dire straits, the tables being neatly turned, all thanks to the partition of India. They live in genteel poverty, and Choti Bitiya is the sole bread winner. Her father has passed away and her brother Salman is in prison for supporting the left wing. She hates her life, the pretty young girl who had lived a fabulous life, akin to a princess. Even the better job which she gets as a secretary is based on her physical appearance, than her brains. "Two flowers bloomed together, but each with a different fate. One was placed in a wedding garland, the other upon a grave" (Hyder 1999: 203)

Tanvir Fatima, the protagonist of "The Sound of Falling Leaves" belongs to a respectable, upper middle class, orthodox, zamindar family and she is given a very good college education. The story opens in the present and Tanvir goes back into the past, reliving her glory and wondering what went wrong! Tanvir was a beauty and dreamed that she would marry into a royal family, with her good looks and background. But as always, she was chased by eligible men and she loses her sense of balance and falls for the life of gaiety, which she thought was 'fun'. She starts going around with men which becomes the reason for her downfall. One of the reasons was that she had an exaggerated opinion of herself. "I've never much liked girls. In fact, I don't like most people…I felt quite superior in those days. Physical charms can do that to anyone; they turn your head in no time. And I was a rare beauty, as they say, one in a thousand: fair, translucent skin; reddish blonde hair; tall and slender. When, on occasion, I'd put on a brocade sari, I looked like a Maharani" (Hyder 1999: 5). She has her first affair with Major Khushwaqt Singh. Though the young man professed to love her, his treatment to her was not one of tenderness. "Khushwaqt used to beat me

up quite a bit; he also loved me more intensely than any man could have ever loved any woman" (ibid: 8).Though Tanvir's behavior was scandalous, she never cared about anything. Her second affair is with Farooq, a married man, fortyish and not at all like her first love, who is Khushwaqt's millionaire friend. One feels as if he had palmed her off to his friend. She becomes his mistress but is introduced as his fiancée. For her, the rich live in a permissive society and can do anything they like. "In any case, anything goes among the rich. It's only us the middle class, who insist on dos and don'ts" (ibid: 11). When all this whirl-wind romance is on she is still a student. She returns home to her worrying father, to whom she had been telling a tissue of lies all these years. The trouble had broken over and her father wants them to migrate to Pakistan. Farooq visits her five or six times a year and she lives in a dingy house with an old lady, who is supposed to be his aunt. Being the fiancée of a millionaire she never looks for a job. She seems to be perpetually bemused. "Before going back to Delhi, Farooq had deposited ten thousand in a bank in my name. Only ten thousand. When he himself was a millionaire! But at the time I was too numb to think. Even now few things make sense to me" (ibid: 12). The liaison peters out and her next and final life is with Sayyid Vicar Hussein Khan, a much married man, a veritable giant of a man, very dark, about forty five, an old friend of Farooq's. One cannot help but feel a sense of déjà vu; as if Tanvir is not a human being but an article to be used, discarded and handed over to the needy. He is from a good family, though not rich. They eke out a living running a dance class, living in a rundown flat, which is the beginning of the story which started Tanvir on her trip down the memory lane. The title "The Sound of Falling Leaves" is suggestive and eloquent of the theme. A promising young girl going down the hill, it is like the tree shedding its leaves and becoming bare, when winter approaches. Tanvir can feel her youth slipping through her fingers; it is like hearing the sound of falling leaves. Time and again she wonders why is it that she, who had everything going well, is living the life she lives. She is as helpless as the tree, which cannot help shedding the leaves either. One cannot help but notice that her good looks, education, family background, intelligence, was not of any help to her, as she was sliding down the slope to her destruction, a destruction which was 'fun' and 'full of gaiety'. Society does not take to such women kindly and she is like the proverbial flotsam, devoid of agency, carried out in the eddying waters

of destiny. It is always women who have to pay the price, and Tanvir pays an overwhelming price for her folly. She does not appear to be whole but a refracted image of herself. "I'm insignificant, not worth much talking about. Nobody gives a damn for me. Neither do I" (ibid: 4).

A curious factor which comes to the fore in these works of Hyder is the fact that, women are supportive of each other, and that is the main reason their lives become bearable, contrary to the catty women characters, who bitch about each other, as we come across in stereotypical fiction. It is reminiscent of Hooks (2000) and reiterates the fact that 'the strongest fabric that women can aspire to have when fighting against patriarchy is that of women supporting women'. Because it is an undeniable fact that the women in the patriarchal system are equally responsible for the status quo as its male members, since they are part of the system. Patriarchy does not teach us to build alliances between and among women, rather it teaches us to see other women roles as enemies. The classic examples are that of the mother-in-law, sister-in-law and daughter-in-law, in the Indian or even south Asian scenario. Hooks states that the main reason for this is the male supremacist ideology which conditions women to view each other as natural enemies. To overcome this Hooks suggests solidarity and sisterhood should be internalised.

> Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are "natural" enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of sisterhood (Hooks: 43).

Yet another interesting detail is the level of emancipation the female protagonists of Hyder have achieved. They are a jet setting lot, having had a good education, they vacation abroad, attend parties, clink their glasses of drinks and dance at parties. Without a doubt, Hyder has given us a picture of the elite women, who did enjoy a modicum of freedom, their being Muslims not hindering them in any way.

2.8.2: Ismat Chughtai (1915– 1991)

Chughtai was an eminent Indian writer in Urdu, known for her indomitable spirit and aggressive feminist philosophy. Considered as one of the prominent writers of Urdu

fiction, Chughtai was a Muslim writer who was outspoken and dealt with themes of feminine sexuality, middle-class gentility, and sexual exploitation of women. Her stories caused a furore and created a lot of controversy. Chugtai claims that the progressive writer and political revolutionary Rasheed Jahan was a significant early influence on her. She states that after reading and hearing the earthy Rasheed Jahan all the rosy pictures of her own stories vanished into thin air, with 'life staring at her stark naked', her ivory idols crashed forever (Tharu and Lalitha 1993: 126-128). Chugtai was awarded the Ghalib Award for *Terhi Lakeer* (Urdu drama) in 1974, Filmfare Best Story Award for *Garam Hawa*, with Kaifi Azmi in 1975 and Samman Award for Urdu literature in 1990.

In her career, many of her writings including "Angarey" and "Lihaaf" were banned in South Asia due to their reformist and feminist content offending conservatives.[54] Many of her books were banned at one or other point in time. Chughtai's most celebrated short story, "Lihaaf" (The Quilt) published in 1942 in the Urdu literary journal Adab-i-Latif, was levelled with charges of obscenity and she was summoned by the Lahore court in 1944. Many angry letters were sent to the editor of the journal demanding why a blasphemous short story like this was published. Chughtai chose to contest this case instead of apologizing and won it. Her lawyer argued that there were no explicit references to homoeroticism and hence she could not be accused of the same. The stories selected for the purpose of analysis are – "Gainda", "The Quilt", "The Wedding Suit" and "Touch-me-not" – from the anthology '*Lifting the Veil: Selected Writings of Ismat Chughtai* (Chughtai 2001).

"Gainda" deals with sexual awakening. The story opens with two girls playing in the garden, amidst the shrubbery; but one is shocked to know the game that they are playing- a game of marriage, playing the roles of the bride and groom! "After a brief tête-à-tête we began to play our favorite game, dulhan (bride). Gainda drew her smelly red dupatta over her face and sat huddled like a real bride. I lifted the veil gently and had a glimpse of her" (Chughtai 2001: 1). It needs no explanation. Suffice to say girls are born and bred to marry and be wives and mothers. Gainda, is the name

[54] Such as her view that the hijab, the mask forced on women in Muslim societies, should be discouraged because it was oppressive and feudal.

of one of the protagonists, a very young girl who is already widowed. As the story develops, it becomes clear that she is taken advantage of and ends up being a mother, the man in question escaping scot free. The story is narrated through another girl, younger than Gainda, who belongs to a family of higher status. She sees Gainda entering her brother's room carrying his ironed clothes and spying through a chink in the door, is shocked to see Gainda slap her brother playfully and he grabbing her. "He grabbed her two hands and pulled her towards him" (ibid: 7). But not understanding the implications she is terrified of the consequences and runs away, her heart pounding, trying to unravel the mystery. "I sat there lost in thought – first with eyes closed and then, with eyes open. But I could not make head or tail of it. Why didn't I understand a lot of things?" (ibid: 7). She thinks it is a game and tries her best to make Mewa, her neighbour, notice her, the way her brother notices Gainda. Later she is sent away to stay with her sister. When she returns two years later it is to find a lot of things have changed at home. Her brother is sent to Delhi; Gainda has had a baby and was cast-out, for in all probability she was a maid of the family and her name is not to be mentioned. Notwithstanding, she hears some whispered snippets and past incidents flashes through her mind, though the meaning is not clear. "She tried hard..... but… I sent him off to Delhi immediately. A studious boy…these low-caste bitches! Trap...the nobles" (ibid: 9-10). One feels sorry for Gainda, a girl hardly fourteen or fifteen, who already is a mother, and has to face the stigma, hardships, and innuendoes of the society. Not to forget the fate of her child and herself, who is but a child.

"The Quilt" is one of her most controversial story which speaks about lesbianism. It subtly puts across the sexual awakening in a young girl and her apprehensions when she sees the quilt shaking vigorously, not knowing its implications. But since the entire story is narrated through the eyes of a child, far from being obscene, it is a masterpiece of restrained interpretation. Begum Jaan, the lady of the house is married to a rich guy, who seems to be more interested in young nubile boys than her and she resorts to Rabbu, her maid, who spends the entire day scratching, kneading and oiling her body to relieve her of the elusive itch. "I woke up at night and was scared. It was pitch dark and Begum Jaan's quilt was shaking vigorously, as though an elephant was

struggling inside" (ibid: 17). Apart from lesbianism, this story also speaks about the gay tendencies of Begum Jaan's husband, the Nawab. "Nawab Saheb kept an open house for students – young, fair, slender-waisted boys whose expenses were borne by him…But the Nawab didn't have a moment to spare for her. He was too busy chasing the gossamer shirts" (ibid: 14). The story created controversies because of its theme of lesbianism, but nothing was said about the gay relationships of the Nawab. The theme was not just about lesbianism, but about the sexual tendencies of adult humans. If one but analyses, the main reason for Begum Jaan's strange behaviour was her husband's neglect of her. Though portrayed as seen through the eyes of a child, the story in the end again tells us, now through the same narrator who has grown up, that Begum Jaan has married again and seems quite happy having children. The story implicitly blames patriarchy and men in particular, implying that the peculiar behaviour of Begum Jaan is the direct result of the Nawab's behaviour, and if anyone is to be accused it should be the Nawab. The story created huge uproar and was banned for all the wrong reasons.

"The Wedding Suit" speaks about the problems a mother faces to get her daughter married. The mother with her two daughters ekes out a living with tailoring as her means to survive. "As for cutting and measuring cloth was concerned, Kubra's mother's skill was undisputed" (ibid: 23). BiAmma, Kubra's mother had started to prepare her dowry at an early stage because girls really grew up fast 'like a cucumber'. But one day after the sudden death of her father, her marriage proposals somehow lost their way. Kubra's sweet years gave way to sour ones, and finally they became bitter. " It was as if no one ever knew that behind the sack-cloth curtain someone's youth was at its last gasp" (ibid: 27). To make matters worse, her younger sister Hamida was coming of age. "And there was another whose youth was raising its head like a serpent's hood" (ibid: 27). Suddenly during the month of Shab-e-baraat, a telegram arrives announcing the arrival of Kubra's maternal uncle's son Rahat. A flurry of activities starts taking place, with her mother confiding and whispering with one of her neighbours and well-wishers. Kubra is jittery because she knows that they are putting up a show for getting the proposal from Rahat. BiAmma pawns what little she has and feeds her nephew royally when they themselves eat their usual meagre

food of dried rotis. Kubra even goes to the length of washing his soiled clothes. Hamida, the younger sister of Kubra, sulks looking at all that is going on: "so we have to starve to feed the son-in-law, Hamida thought" (ibid: 29). But Rahat has the guts to comment ill on the lovingly prepared food and Hamida, against her wish, is asked to keep him in good humor, talking to him. BiAmma thinks that her ploy had worked and that Rahat might propose any moment, because he had started taking an interest in enquiring who had cooked the food. But alas! All her hopes are dashed to ground when he says that his marriage has been fixed and rushes home. Even a sacred incantation at the mosque and prayers could not get Kubra a proposal. She succumbs to Tuberculosis of which she was suffering from a long time. One cannot help feeling that if only Kubra was fed all the rich food which had gone Rahat's way, she would have recuperated and survived. The story asks a very important question i.e., whether a person's life is of secondary importance than the obligation of getting married.

"Touch-me-not" evocatively portrays the harrowing lives of the poor women, that even a phenomenon like delivering a baby is a common incident to them like visiting toilet; they are like the denizens of nature, giving birth like animals, which in itself is horrifying, to say the least. The story is narrated by a young girl. Her brother's wife, Bhabhijaan is unable to deliver a child, having miscarriage, one after the other. She is scolded that her husband will beget another wife to continue the lineage. She is terrified and next, when she conceives and is with child all treat her like delicate porcelain, lest some mishap take place. She is declared out of danger by doctors and is given permission to travel to Aligarh, for confinement. While travelling by train, in one of the stops a heavily pregnant woman enters their carriage and gives birth in their presence, not caring for the threats and abuses.

> As the train chugged off, the coach door opened and a peasant woman moved in. The coolie tried to pull her away but she stuck to the handle like a lizard and would not budge. Slowly she dragged herself to the bathroom door, despite Bi Mughlani's constant chiding and leaned against it panting…the intensity of the pain made her restless and she clutched at the bathroom door with both hands. Her breath came in gasps and perspiration appeared on her forehead like dew drops on cool ground (Chughtai: 97-98).

After delivering the baby the peasant woman covers it in a rag and starts cleaning the blood from the coach. At the next station she calmly gets off the train and when confronted by the ticket collector 'she holds out her apron with the baby in it as if she

is showcasing some jamuns plucked by the wayside'. The ticket collector is too shocked and whilst he stands transfixed she makes easy her escape. Witnessing all this Bhabhijaan's frail system receives a massive shock and she has a miscarriage. "The unborn child got cold feet and wilted away before its entry into the world. My flower-like Bhabhijaan felt so unnerved after witnessing the bizarre delivery in the train that she had a miscarriage once again" (ibid: 100). The story raises the very crucial question about human rights, women's rights and dignity in particular. If a woman has no place to call her own, nor any helping hands, when she is about to give birth, it is evocative of what rights have we vested our women folk with. The pitiful living conditions, the lack of sanitation and education all compound the difficulties. This is a story not written during the dark ages but very much in the twentieth century, which we call the age of great scientific discoveries.

2.8.3: Banu Mushthaq (1948)

Mushthaq, a lawyer by profession, was born in a liberal Muslim family. She has established herself as a progressive writer and is one of Kannada's most prominent women writers of contemporary literature and a social activist from Karnataka. She has won numerous awards for her literary works and social activism, including the International Women's Award for Radio and Television, Karnataka Women Writers' Association's Gudibandde Poornima Best Poetess Award, Karnataka Women's Writers' Association's H.V. Savitramma Dattinidhi Award, Karnataka Government's Rajyotsava award for Literature, Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award, Akhil Bharatiya Jain Women's Mahastambhshekha Award, Karnataka Kalpavalli Award and B. Sarojadevi Award. The Kannada film Haseena, based on a story of a Muslim woman written by her and directed by the well-known Girish Kasaravalli, won many national awards and was screened in international film festivals. Author of many short-story collections, novels and poetry anthologies, Banu has served as member, Karnataka Sahitya Akademi; advisory board member, Central Sahitya Akademi, state secretary, Kannada Sahitya Parishad; and secretary, District Committee of Kannada Developmental Authority. The Karnataka State Information and Publicity Department has produced a documentary on Banu Mushthaq's life and achievements (www.samanvaya)

The short stories selected for the purpose of analysis are: 'Rahila Emba Kanyeya Kathe', 'Sarida Karmoda', 'Shahista Mahalna Kallu Chappaligalu', and 'Parakeeya'froma collection of short stories '*Hejje Moodida Haadi'* (Foot Prints, Mushthaq 1990).

"Rahila Emba Kanyeya Kathe" (The story of a Maiden Named Rahila): This has a common theme of the difficulties young women of marriageable age face. Rahila, the protagonist, is the second daughter in a family of four daughters and a son. An educated woman, she works for a pittance, as a primary school teacher in a respectable convent, to help her mother make ends meet. Her father is retired and though her mother, Jainabi, too is working as a school teacher, the family is impoverished because most of their earnings go towards the payment of the loan, incurred during the two eldest daughters' marriages. Though Rahila is a pretty, good natured, cultured person, her mother finds it hard to find a suitable groom for her, due to their lack of finances. Rahila is nearing thirty and is a sore thumb to her parents. Once her mother tearfully makes her understand the difficulties parents have to face when they fail to marry off their daughters at the right age, and Rahila tries to console her mother.

> Ammi, please don't cry, I can't see you like this, I feel sad, haven't you provided us with everything we need? You have educated us; we have enough common sense now to understand the troubles and strain you have undergone for us. That you should weep like this for some silly reason…..please let it be…" to which her mother replies "I agree with you dear, yes we can console ourselves. But what about the people around us? ….what do we reply in answer to their questions? Isn't it that these people are the ones who analyse your age… telling me that your daughter's age is so much and why isn't she married yet? What shall I say? Do I say that she is a cripple? Or blind? Or do I tell them that we cannot procure a groom, cannot afford to buy one by paying thousands of rupees? (Mushthaq: 10)

One fine day, a proposal is at hand, via her mother's colleague. Rahila is dressed up and the groom's party comes, have a good feast and Rahila is scrutinized minutely for any defects. Rahila's family is shocked to see an aging groom, with thinning hair, but if that wasn't enough he is handicapped with a deformed arm. All of this because they are in no position to 'purchase' a better person! Not that this man comes in cheap. He too has his price in the market, what if he is deformed? Is he not a man? Rahila's young brother and sister are not happy and advise her to turn down the offer. Since they do not consent quickly the groom's aunt, Rukiya, who is the colleague of Jainabi,

is sarcastic, thinking how dare these people, poor as the proverbial church mice, humiliate her nephew, Shaukath, who is a compounder in a hospital.

Ironically a few days before Rahila had received a proposal from an educated person, her best friend Hema's brother, Prasad, who is an officer and well placed. But she turns down his offer saying that if she agrees to marry him, who is not of her religion, then in all probability, her parents will commit suicide by consuming poison and in no time her two married sisters will be back home with their *talaq* in hand. She cannot imagine herself sacrificing her family for her betterment in life. Now all this comes back to her in a flash and Rahila resigns herself to her fate and agrees to marry the deformed Shaukath. When her mother Jainabi queries Rukiya when they can have the engagement, Rukiya rudely tells her that Shaukath is already engaged, hinting that he has got a better bargain than Rahila, in terms of dowry.

The story ends with Rahila resigning to her life of drudgery, all her hopes dashed. One is astonished that a pretty girl like Rahila cannot find a suitable match. The one who could have been a perfect match was rejected on the grounds of religion. One is haunted by the evil practice of dowry, these rigid rules of religion and the plight of young women, not to mention their parents and family members, who are all a part of this vicious cycle. One is haunted by the fact that women have absolutely no value in the patriarchal society, which is all about power equations and struggle and about marriage, which is the be-all and end-all of life for girls. The title is suggestive in its starkness and implies that it is the story of most young women who are poor.

"Sarida Karmoda" (The Shifting of the Dark Clouds): Jabeen is a beautiful young bride and is blissfully happy with her husband Nawab, who earns his living as a taxi driver. He is part of a joint family consisting of four brothers and their families, the members of which were not less than fifty in number. The family was ruled with an iron fist by his eldest brother, who is addressed as Dada. The women folk were not to be seen in their own compounds in day light and had to visit the only toilet only when dusk had fallen, which was obeyed by all, unquestioningly. The punishment for an impertinent woman was that her husband was married again, so that she had to share her home, hearth and husband with the second wife. Already Nawab's third brother

had two wives, the second one brought in to punish his headstrong first wife. But fortunately for them each family lived separately, though under the same roof, in the same compound. Nawab loved his wife dearly, was crazy about her, whose crowning glory was her lustrous long hair, and liked to parade her around. Once it so happened that they had gone to visit their family and there Jabeen's beauty had been appreciated. While returning home, Nawab had requested her not to wear the burka, because he wanted to admire her loveliness sans burka. Unfortunately Dada noticed them coming in and that Jabeen had dared disobey the rules laid down by him. Nawab was thrashed soundly for what had happened and when a shocked Jabeen questions about the brutal act, she is reprimanded in no uncertain terms by Nawab, who adores his eldest brother Dada, who had raised them like his own offspring, after their parents' demise. Jabeen, by this time had conceived and for her confinement she was sent home, to her parents. Her father was a poor maulvi and there was many a time when Jabeen had felt elated because she had been blessed with a loving husband. But unknown to either of them Dada had decided to punish Jabeen and Nawab was not allowed to visit his wife. She sends her brother to him, but he was nowhere to be seen. Jabeen became distressed when the news reached her that Nawab was marrying again. The shock of listening to this piece of unpleasant news was enough to upset her, sending her into labour.

With great difficulty they manage to reach the hospital and she delivers a daughter and slips into unconsciousness. She in her unconscious state hears him and upon regaining her consciousness is bewildered to find Nawab at her side, dressed in the finery of a groom. She feebly asks about his new wife, when he reassures her telling her that he was under home arrest, with his Dada watching over him and he could only express his unwillingness prior to the wedding ceremony, which required his consent. "*Yeh nikah maine kubool nahi kiya*" [55] (Mushthaq: 42). He consoles her saying that he had decided to break away from his ruthless family and promises Jabeen that they can set up their home in a distant town.

> Where is my baby? Hope you haven't hidden it in anger? We can't return to that house. Neither can we fall into Dada's hands. Let us go off somewhere far. I only need you and

[55] Meaning, I do not consent to this marriage.

> you alone to be with me. With you as my support I don't mind working hard to bring up our baby. I hope that you don't mind even surviving on watery gruel to live happily? Don't you still trust what I am saying? (ibid: 43)

The story has a happy ending, which puts across in no uncertain terms that if men are courageous and empathetic enough, they can bring sunshine into the lives of their loved ones. The title is symbolic and speaks of the dark clouds which had hovered over Jabeen's life in the form of rigid rules and the insane punishment, which shifted and was cleared by her husband's steadfast love and timely action, filling her life with brightness and joy. One is left wondering that if all women were lucky enough to marry understanding and gentle partners then half the anguish that we see around us might be cleared up.

"Shahista Mahalna Kallu Chappadigalu" (The Stone Slabs of Shahista Mahal): This storyexplicitly portrays the falsehood of men, when they profess their undying love towards their wives. Zeenath and Mujaheed are newly-weds and are a modern couple respecting the space of each other in their marriage. Zeenath is a feminist and when they first go to visit Shahista and her husband Ifthikar, she finds it a happy place, though she does not like his ways of showing his love towards his wife. They have six children, three boys and three girls and Shahista is with child again. Zeenath finds this disturbing, when Shahista explains that her husband does not believe in family planning and would like to have children, as symbols of their mutual love. While they are there, he never for a moment leaves her side and professes to love her dearly saying that he is no less than Shah Jahan, who had constructed the Taj Mahal, in fond memory of his beloved Mumtaz Mahal. He says that he would construct Shahista Mahal. Zeenath finds this to be in bad taste and Mujaheed reminds him that more than a memento of love it was a mausoleum, a memento of dead love. He chides Ifthikar saying how could he think of Shahista Mahal, when his wife was alive and prays for her long life. But Ifthikar adamantly says:

> But...no one sees Taj Mahal as a tomb. It is viewed as '*Mohabbath ki nishani*'[56]and that is what I meant". Mujaheed doesn't agree with him "Oh yes, it is seen as a memento of dead love" "But love doesn't die Mujaheed" "Hmmm it doesn't die. This is a filmy dialogue brother. ..If your mother dies, it's as good as her love has died with her. You can neither expect mother's love, nor can you get it from anyone else...Hmm...But if your wife dies... That is altogether a different matter…you can get another wife (Mushthaq: 49).

[56]a memento of love

Though Shahista takes this in a sportive manner smiling her lovely smile, it creates uneasiness in Zeenath, who is shell shocked to hear this dialogue from Mujaheed.

> Smiling sweetly Shahista remembers "yes, I have heard my grandmother say that 'when a wife dies it is like hurting your elbow'. Zeenath do you know……if one hurts the elbow, for a second it hurts like hell….the pain is excruciating... But it will last only for a second….then one doesn't feel anything…. No cuts, no bruises, no bleeding, and no pain….Nothing" (ibid: 49).

But Ifthikar is disturbed and holding Shahista's hands he declares undying love saying that his heartbeat, and that his entire system is alive only because of her. Zeenath is amused to see this drama. Shahista delivers a healthy baby and is out and active within a fortnight, much to the concern of Zeenath. Shortly Zeenath gets a telegram stating that her mother is critically ill and had to return to her parents' house. Her husband too accompanies her and they return only after a month, after the funeral of her mother.

When they pay a visit to Ifthikar's house, Shahista is nowhere to be seen and the house is in shambles. Then Ifthikar comes out of his bedroom in a tousled manner and Zeenath who enters the room recoils in disgust because she finds a young girl of twenty instead of her dear friend Shahista. She is shaken to know that Shahista is no more, having passed away shortly after the delivery. When questioned Ifthikar replies he had married because he wanted someone to look after his children. Zeenath sarcastically comments

> Yes…one can see that she is looking after your children properly…Ifthikar Bhai, do whatever you want, behave as you please, but I request you not to repeat your dialogues of unending love before your second wife. Even if you don't erect Shahista Mahal it's alright; but make sure that her tomb is properly strengthened by stone slabs…if the urgency of your ardent love reaches her …she might come back from the dead…Making it problematic for you... (ibid: 58).

Unable to restrain herself, Zeenath rushes out of the house, lest she lose control over herself, only to confront the children grouped together in the garden, a disheveled lot, the two month old baby in the arms of the eldest daughter, Asifa, who by default had become the surrogate mother to all of her siblings. All group around Zeenath, with Asifa in tears, who was made to quit her studies, to care for the young ones, even when her mother was alive, because Shahista was finding it difficult to cope with the situation.

The title is symbolic, suggesting that the seemingly doting husband reiterates all his promises and does not hesitate even for a moment to bring in a new woman to take the place of the mother of his kids. It is more like Ifthikar was in an indecent hurry to get a new mate rather than provide his children with a mother. It is amazing to realize that all his sentiments were not profound enough, that his love for his lovely wife Shahista was more of a carnal nature than a passionate ardent kind.

"Parakeeya" (A Stranger): Revolves around Shafi, a young boy of ten, who is sent to live with his paternal uncle, where he is treated badly. He is assailed by nostalgia, and his mind is filled with the thoughts of his loving mother and the happy days he had spent in the company of his parents and siblings. The reason for this change is that his father, who worked as a lorry driver, had passed away leaving the family of three sons and a daughter destitute. The mother had somehow managed to fend her family but was finding it increasingly difficult to manage, as the days dragged by. So without having any other alternative she sends his two brothers aged eight and six to work as hotel boys, in far off places, and Shafi to his uncle's place, not knowing what else to do. Otherwise it was starvation and it had become very clear to her. Shafi does not know the real reasons for this separation. He is sick of all the ill treatment meted out to him by his aunt, to which his uncle is a mute spectator. To make matters worse his aunt used to abuse his mother, insinuating that she was no mother at all, and the one who could discard her children without a second thought. She even went to the extent of blaming his mother had poisoned his father, her husband, because she was having an affair with a much younger man, an acquaintance of his father, whom she had married after her husband's death. Shafi used to cry and feel bad when he had to listen to this entire tirade; but of course, he did not have an option. But he never fully believed his aunt when she had stated rudely that his mother had a new husband now.

The restlessness within him grew and on the day of Eid festival, it spilled out into the open. He grieved for his family, remembering his young sister and especially his mother. He wanted to just embrace her and take shelter in her arms, behind her pallu.[57] He somehow did not believe that his mother had remarried, without caring for

[57] The loose end of the sari.

them. And if what his aunt had said was true he knew where his mother lived, because he remembered that he had visited the place once along with his dad.

He begs with the people who had come to offer their prayers in the mosque, with the sole intention of visiting his mother and sister in the neighbouring town of Hassan, without bothering to think that he is looked upon as a beggar. He somehow manages to collect two rupees and boards a bus to Hassan. He reaches the town at midday, and though he is hungry he buys a red ribbon for his sister and when he reaches the house where he believes his mother lives, he is hesitant and furtively hides behind the wall trying to catch a glimpse of his loved ones. Somebody spies him and is suspicious about his intentions because he looks a ragamuffin, what with his shaved head and emaciated body, dressed in dirty clothes, which had seen better days. An alarm is raised and people rush out of their houses, when he sees his mother and sister. She too recognizes him and calls out to him. But he is shocked to see his mother who looks different. She has a protruding belly and her kohl lined eyes and her lips stained red, with betel juice, she no longer resembles his loving mother. But he is troubled more with her protruding belly and all his plans of nestling against her and drowning his recent sorrows of being mistreated by his aunt vanish into thin air and he freezes. Without uttering a single word he wheels around and runs away from the place as fast as his legs could take him. He reaches the cemetery and reaches the grave at the farthest end, the grave of his father and weeps inconsolably, for all the lost hopes and happiness, falling asleep, under the sky.

The title suggests that circumstances create cracks in relations, so that loved ones become strangers. The story is seen through the eyes of a boy of ten who is immature to grasp the significance of his mother's decision. As a poor, destitute woman, she hardly had any choice. Had she not decided to marry her husband's acquaintance, in all probability she would have ended on the streets with her children. Her condition would have been worse. Now at least she is somebody's wife and has a roof over her, a promise of a decent life. The reason she chose to have her daughter with her is obvious. The society is crueller to females than males. And a young girl, unprotected is like fodder to unscrupulous people. So though it might have cut her in half, the mother had decided to send off her three sons, retaining her daughter.

Mushthaq portrays the customs and the sociocultural practices of her region, Hassan district of Karnataka. Though the Muslims of that region speak Urdu mixed Kannada, the religious practices are the same, wherein a woman is treated with little or no respect, the patriarchal system responsible for the exploitation of women. Her protagonists are from all walks of life, ranging from rich to poor, educated and uneducated alike. But their problems are no different from the problems of other Muslim women elsewhere. All the stories reveal the unspoken oppression meted out to women, the age not being a constraint. At every stage of life the female has a different version of discrimination and treatment doled out.

To conclude this section, the comparison of Hyder, Chughtai and Mushthaq with Sarah lays bare some interesting facets of the lives of women, cutting barriers across the boundaries of class, caste and religion, both temporally and spatially. The similarity is of course in the courage of these women writers to speak unflinchingly about issues which were and still are considered taboo. Another surprise is that all the four renowned writers were from an educated, conservative backgrounds, and being Muslims added to the restrictions. Yet, it did not stop them from voicing their opinions.

Hyder portrays the exploitation that is meted out to women who belong to an elite class, women who are always rich, beautiful, educated, and with an income of their own. They are economically independent and are assertive. They do not hesitate to choose their male partners or about having a date or a divorce. It is surprising that Hyder explored the sexuality, about the inner most sexual feelings of women, at a time when women hardly wrote about such matters. Hyder's protagonists come as a surprise because they are preyed upon by men, who take advantage of their emancipated mentality, debunking the myth that educated and economically independent women are to be envied, and are never exploited.

Chughtai too dares to speak about the sexuality of women and forbidden subjects like lesbianism and gay relationships. On the other hand, she also explores the grim situation of women from the middle and poor class, in the matters of dowry, marriage, and the exploitation of girls of the working class.

Banu sensitively portrays the anguish of women and speaks vehemently against gender insensitivity. She too raises her voice against the evil practice of dowry, and the stigma an unmarried girl has to face in the society, forcing them into marriage with unsuitable partners, which most of the times can lead to a lot of mental torture.

Going back to Sarah, she too portrays the same issues but her protagonists are mostly from lower middle class, devoid of education, and mired in superstitions. But she differs from the other three writers by speaking for the first time against the Sharia, the personal law of the Muslims. She does not mince her words and straight away goes to the crux of the problem of exploitation of women. She states that though the abuse of women is commonplace enough, in case of Muslim community it is practiced in the name of religion. Sarah strongly opposes this, arguing that their Quran does not sanction such ill treatment of women. She says that there are not many people who have mastered their holy book properly enough, and there are many interpretations, which have caused havoc in the lives of Muslim women. She goes on record saying that the Prophet was a staunch feminist and Quran had vested women with many rights (II Interview data). But, in actual practice the lives of Muslim women is downright derogatory. According to Afkhami "the infringement of women's rights is usually exercised in the name of tradition, religion, social cohesion, morality or some complex of transcendent values. Always, it is justified in the name of culture. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in Muslim societies, where over half a billion women live in vastly different lands, climates, cultures, societies, economies, and polities. Few of these women live in purely traditional environment" (Afkhami 2001: 234). Sarah is the first Muslim woman, in the context of Kannada literary world, who ventured into the strictly forbidden area of religion and has commented on the shari'a, the Muslim personal law, religious injunctions and still continues to do so, which is one of the reasons, she is reckoned as one of the most powerful voices from the margins.

If Hyder's protagonists come from an elite background, Chughtai's protagonists come from a middle class background. Banu's protagonists are from all walks of life. Sarah's protagonists belong to the middle and lower middle class; women are seldom educated and are mostly devoid of any 'agency'. But the point which is strongly

driven home is that irrespective of their social class the women always are at the receiving end. They are the ones to suffer.

> Male violence against women in personal relationships is one of the most blatant expressions of the use of abusive force to maintain domination and control. It epitomizes the actualization of the concept of hierarchical rule and coercive authority. Society's acceptance and perpetuation of that violence helps maintain it and makes it difficult to control or eliminate. That acceptance can be explained only in part by patriarchal rule supporting male domination of women through the use of power (Hooks: 120-121).

In this comparative section, though the writers and themes of all the stories are different, one cannot help noticing the single most universal thread, comparison that is common to all, and that is the diverse shades of gender discriminations that the female characters in these stories have to put up with, and have faced. It is a known fact that women have been oppressed and victimised from time immemorial, the social structures being conducive to socializing women psychologically.

> Women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression. As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo (ibid:43).

All the select stories of this section, speak of the myriad indescribable horrors and the different shades and nuances of violence perpetrated on women, both physical and psychological and the arguments are grounded in this reality. Parmer echoing Lynne Segal's critique of psychoanalytic approaches to feminism, states that women are merely "subjects" and subjects are denied autonomy, as they are trapped within the operations of linguistic structures and laws (Parmer 1989: 10).

2.9: INTERPRETATION THROUGH FEMINIST STAND-POINT EPISTEMOLOGY

Abigail Brooks first coined the phrase Feminist Stand-point Epistemology, which is a unique philosophy of knowledge building, which challenges us to:

i) See and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and

ii) Apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy Patricia, in *Feminist Research Practice - A Primer* argue that feminist stand-point epistemology attempts to negotiate women's position in the society, who are seen as members of the oppressed groups. The intention is to uncover the hidden knowledge, which women have experienced living on the margins.

> Instead of talking about *the* experience of women or conflate all women into one oppressed group, it is recognized that women hail from a diverse range of class, cultural, and racial backgrounds, inhabit many different social realities and endure oppression and exploitation in many shapes and forms. While differences between and among women – different experiences of oppression and different standpoints, or perspectives, based on those experiences – is recognized and understood, it also continues to emphasize the importance of dialogue between and among women, the need for empathetic understanding, and the potential for achieving alliances. After all, alliances between and among women are possible – *without risking the repression of difference* – and *necessary* if we hope to fight for more just societies to improve women's condition within them (Hesse and Leavy 2007: 55-78).

Feminist stand-point Epistemology requires the fusion of knowledge and practice, which makes women's concrete experiences the 'point of entry' for research and scholarship, thereby divulging an unknown terrain of women's experiences. With this new knowledge revealed within women's experiences, one can put together the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle on the subject of women that was hitherto shadowed, in many disciplines. Feminist stand-point epistemology also challenges us to critically examine society through woman's eyes. It requires us to ask ground-breaking questions as to what the experiences of women tell us about the society and its functioning style. It also compels us to ask whether the new knowledge thus gleaned from the experiences of women, offer any unique perspectives and insights into the world that we inhabit. It forces us, in no uncertain terms, to ponder deeply on the why and how of these issues (ibid). With the help of feminist stand-point epistemology, new knowledge can be expected to emerge, which in no uncertain terms, will give first-hand information about the lived-in realities of women's experiences, garnered by living on the periphery.

2.10: CONCLUSION

Interpreting the fictional works of women writers one can come up with the hidden knowledge that is the lived in experience of the oppressed groups. The voices which were hitherto stilled or smothered are now insisting to be heard. It is also understood that such experiences cannot be conflated into one monolithic mould and is

recognised independently, given such dissimilar array of class, race and cultural backgrounds. Women were denied agency in most of the cases. In some cases the agency was prescribed and in some cases it was inscribed. It is very true that the position of women in any society reflects the socio-economic configuration of that society. To quote Nayak "The role and status of women form an integral part of the prevailing socio-economic structure of any community, and the cultural norms and traditions and value system determine the woman's status in the society" (Nayak 2005: 163). A rigorous approach is needed to uplift women from such degradation, because a woman's position in a society reflects the degree of emancipation it has attained and the fact cannot be denied that women's potentials have to be realised for the growth of a social order.

Sarah herself has acknowledged that she has been influenced by women writers of the Kannada literary world – writers like Akka Mahadevi of the twelfth century, to Triveni of the twentieth century – saying that their thoughts have impregnated her mind making her want to write, to put down her thoughts sincerely. And she says that she realised her first allegiance should be towards the sisters of her community, mute as they were, having no one to speak for them, who were but pawns in the hands of the patriarchal system, which was and still is, blindfolded by religion. To quote Sarah "some Muslim writers have accused me of distancing myself from the community. I don't really understand this charge. Getting close or growing distant has no meaning until we address the issues of human indignity confronting us" (Srinivasraju: 101). Sarah is the product of a strong tradition of women writers and she has carved a niche for herself by being the first Muslim woman to voice the susceptibilities of her community, which was behind the purdah. She comes from the progressive school and belongs to the Bandaya movement, progressive in its outlook and rebelling against the old order. She is located in a tradition of profound women writers, humanists and feminists, who were spirited enough to lend voice to the sorority towards alleviating their misery and ushering in a new order. However, she is also the first Muslim writer in the whole Kannada literary tradition, which had its own implications on her literature, which we shall see in the later chapter. Thus, in this chapter an attempt is made to trace the tradition of women's writing in the Kannada

literary domain and to contextualise Sarah. The chapter also compares her with select post-colonial women writers of the twentieth century. In the next chapter we shall analyse her autobiographical writings, in an endeavour to understand the how and the why of her arrival as a writer, in the Kannada Domain. It makes an effort to understand the finer aspects of her disposition, and the circumstances which contributed to her personality, a woman in her different impressions. It also attempts to understand Sarah intimately in her journey of life, and the various factors that were influential in her emergence as a writer.

*"Now, on the threshold of seventy, if I took a trip down the memory lane, when I gaze back and glimpse the road that I have taken, although in a way I am satisfied with my choice, I still am nagged by the sentiment that most probably I wasn't successful enough, and indeed have failed in stopping the society going back in the reverse gear"...*Sarah Aboobackar

3.1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In the second chapter we have tried to locate Sarah in a tradition of Kannada women writers. We also juxtaposed some Muslim women writers with her. This chapter tries to analyse Sarah's autobiographical writings, with the intention of understanding her and thereby her creative writings better. In this chapter, apart from her autobiography *Hottu Kantuva Munna*, a novel *Tala Odeda Doniyalli*, two of her short stories "Muslim Hudugi Shale Kalitaddu" and "Bennattuva Boothagalu"; "Hejje Hadi", which is the first chapter of her felicitation volume *Chandragiri*, and some autobiographical essays are analysed. This chapter substantially deals with her autobiography, though a passing reference is made to other autobiographical writings.

Autobiography, as a research tool is made use of to understand the writer intimately which translates into understanding their writing better. The significance of autobiographies outside the construction of identity, mainly lies in the qualities of introspection, recall, reconstruction of the past, along with the confessional approaches, developed at a literary level, contributing to the fictional form (Jain 1997: 24). This is due to the reason that the researcher in this culture of revelation, has to make an attempt to establish a way of reading the lives of others, which does not simply become a collection of information. Jain quotes Chandra Talpade Mohanty from her essay "Anthropology and the Third World Woman as "Native"", wherein writing is seen as an activity which does not happen in a vacuum, with a lot of factors contributing to it (Jain 2005: 287).

Mary Evans, in her essay "Auto/ biography as a Research Method" opines that it is indeed the paradox about contemporary autobiography, and research about it, that, instead of studying the individual characteristics of a person, the important question becomes one that is outside the person. The researcher in autobiography encounters an individual who is now visualized as a puzzle, and he is now studied in terms of his

emergence in a particular time, in terms of his own dialogue and circumstances (Evans 2007: 32-37). Autobiographies reveal how the self is constructed, and the different levels from which the self is visualised. "Autobiographies also reveal constructions of the self which work at different levels – the writer who is very often hesitant and holds the self in low esteem, the society which is hostile and perceives the writer's 'self' as a threat, and the reader 'present' in the text who views the 'self' very often as strong, unusual and often subversive" (Jain 1997: 124). Evans believes that autobiography serves as an important reminder of the subterranean fault lines rife in social life, limiting subjects, and the assumed inevitability of the links between gender or race and social exclusion. She argues that one can see human intervention at work, in the way in which autobiography documents the individual's progress through the social world (Evans 2007: 34). Endorsing Evans, Jain cites Shashi Deshpande saying that the self is a construct of multiple forces. The first of which is the family, which may or may not be conducive to the growth of the individual, especially if it is a girl child. She says that "the family, contrary to popular belief is a place of relationships, hostilities, estrangements, refuge and rejection. It is, in itself, a puzzle, its pieces fall apart before our very eyes" (Jain 2003: 33). Autobiography offers insight into the extent to which a particular individual can be understood, and evaluated, in terms of achievement, apart from providing evidence of the worlds we, as individuals, know.

> Women's autobiographies have been used by social and cultural historians for documenting both the processes of socialization and internalization of this socialization, as also the oppositional questioning which was going on. But this kind of exploration has two strong limitations: it focuses excessively on gender discourse, and is often placed within the western framework (ibid: 123).

The basic difference between western women and the eastern counterpart is that of diversity in their socio-economic and cultural set up. Generally, autobiography is a literary genre which unravels the innermost feelings of a writer. It provides self-exploration. But, can a woman, who is taught to be submissive and docile, achieve such a goal? Susan Stanford Friedman has very remarkably put forth this problem of gender-discrimination even in creative writing. She argues that a man can afford to forget his biological sex; has the freedom to choose his identity as an individual, which is denied to women. To quote her "Women…Reminded at every turn in the

great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex… have no such luxuries". The autobiography depicts the 'hidden form of inwardness' and the writer has to establish the portrait of the self in the public eye. One has to consider whether a woman reveals her unique self and indulges in self-exploration (*Shodhganga*: 41-44).

Bell and Yalom in the introduction to *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and Gender,* consider autobiography to be frequently grounded in various post-structuralist theories that deconstruct texts and decentre subjects. This, they argue, apart from denying, also questions the mimetic relationship between literature and life. They state that on the contrary, they reclaim that relationship. They believe in the autobiographical "I", which can offer a significant form of individualism, in a noteworthy manner. Continuing, they state that however fugitive, partial, and unreliable this "I" appears to be, it still is "the privileged textual double of a real person, as well as a self-evident textual construct. And because that real person has selected from his or her past those kernels of experience which appear, in retrospect, to be the most formative and the most enduring, autobiography can offer a significantly "historical" form of self-expression" (1990: 2).

Friedman states that "women's autobiography comes alive as a literary tradition of self-creation when we approach its text from a psycho-political perspective based on lives of women". She says that historically women have never been the "gatherer of men, of land, of power, makers of kingdoms or empires", instead, they have been the gathered, colonized, the ruled. That they rarely were the "inventor of laws, and of wisdom" and that they have been born into those inventions – all the more so if their race, religion, class, or sexual preferences also marginalised them", and despite this historical oppression, women have managed to retain their consciousness of self (1998: 79).

Autobiography is about change, and it narrates a series of transformations. This is what we expect of any autobiographical text, and autobiography can be seen as essentially a text of life, presenting the "before" and "after" of individuals who have undergone transformations of some kind. Barros states that the change or transformation that we speak of is not necessarily the product of nature or time, but is more in the form of mutation. Wherein the principal persona undergoes a

"transformative" change in his characteristic qualities and societal relationships. Therefore according to Barros "[a]utobiography offers these various metamorphoses emplotted, bounded, and framed by its language and inscribed in its configurations of words and images. Change is then the operative *metaphor* in autobiographical discourse" (Barros 1998: 1-2).

Smith and Watson claim that women's autobiography has become a privileged site for thinking about issues of writing at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories. They believe that if feminism has revolutionized literary and social theory, texts and theory of women's autobiography have been pivotal for revising our concepts about women's life issues – growing up female, coming to voice, affiliation, sexuality and textuality, the life cycle (1998: 5).

Nayan Tara Sahgal considers writing as an invaluable aid which has great therapeutic value. She remarks that writing of any sort helps one to put the incomprehensible fragments of his or her world in order, apart from helping them understand what is happening in and around them. She states that these things never become comprehensible unless they are put down on paper, and sometimes not even then. But she does believe that writing definitely helps the process of making sense of one's life (*Shodhganga*: 50-51). Yet another notable point about women's autobiography is the age at which these autobiographies are written. Virginia Wolf had documented in her diary that she was forty years old when she found that she could talk freely about herself and her life. It is remarkable that women generally like to indulge in the act of self-creation when they reach their middle ages. To confront the society, one needs either the energetic youthful attitude or the shrewd, calm and calculating mind of the middle age. Erik Eriksson has observed that autobiographies: "…are written at certain late stages of life for the purpose of recreating oneself in the image of one's own method and they are written to make that image convincing". The reason is that a woman in her early life is involved in her responsibilities, duties and preoccupation, which makes her forget her 'self'. When they are past their prime they ruminate on their past and reflexively craft a different account of their experiences in life. "She forgets her individual existence and becomes one with the surroundings. But once, when she is comfortable with her circumstances, she may well for the first time be

woman herself. Women are well beyond youth when they begin often unconsciously to create another story" (ibid: 71).

Sarah Aboobackar is no exception to this rule and she started writing in her early forties. Her autobiography emerged three decades later, when she was in her seventies. She agrees to the fact that writing is cathartic, having great therapeutic value, that in actuality she does feel relieved after successfully completing a piece of writing; free from the ideas which might have stewed in her for a long time. Sarah is in compliance to the fact that writing helps one to see things in a bigger frame, and autobiographical writing is making sense of one's life; it is exactly like joining the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle – the puzzle of one's life – to get a coherent bigger picture of the situations of life, which has created the self, helping in self-exploration.

3.2: SARAH'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY: *HOTTU KANTUVA MUNNA* (Before the Day Light Wanes - Aboobackar 2010)

The one main feature that comes across and which is quite a distinct feature of the narrative technique of Sarah is where she takes a trip down the memory lane and the life narrative unfolds more or less in a chronological order. Sarah, as a narrator employs the intimate first person voice while talking about her life and personal history, all the while trying to understand how those very same instances have helped shape her. One of the major contributions of feminist literary criticism is its assertion that writing matters tremendously for women; that how we plot ourselves into our fiction has everything to do with how we plot ourselves into our lives.

Smith and Watson claim that to theorise the autobiographical, one needs an adequate critical vocabulary for describing how the components of subjectivity are implicated in self-presentational acts. They speak about five constitutive processes of autobiographical subjectivity: memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency. These foundational terms[58], they argue, are essential for the engagement of women's act of self-representation, in twentieth century narratives (2002: 9).

[58] Memory: In the act of remembering the autobiographical subject actively creates the past; Experience: "Experience" is a process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject with certain kind of identities in the social realm, identities constituted through material, cultural, economic,

Sarah's autobiography starts with reminiscences of her childhood, where, in her mind's eye she sees a young girl playing with kids, the young ones of goats. It is the twilight hour, which is very suggestive. Because Sarah herself is well past seventy. She can almost see the sunset, the sun slowly inching towards the west, the yellow clouds, tinged with vermillion hovering around as if in anticipation of sundown. Though she speaks about sundown she is recollecting the days of carefree childhood. It looks like she has come to terms with her life, and is in anticipation of the dusk, which sets in after the sunset. The dusk that she refers to, is metaphorical in nature, obliquely mentioning her life at present, that her sunny days of youth has winged past and now is in her mid-seventies, it is just right that the waning day light signifies dusk in her life.

> Though the sunset is not close at hand it isn't very distant either. Nevertheless doesn't every sunrise end in sunset? Dusk after dawn? Though my gaze is turned westwards, towards the sunset, the image that is gradually forming on the canvas of reminiscences, is of a courtyard haloed with the first golden rays of the rising sun; and the picture of a little girl playing with kids [young goats]**.** The days that were spent playing, and gamboling around, which at times would end in disagreements, erupting in quarrels with the three elder and two younger brothers. Likewise, moist eyes glistening with unshed tears, redolent with fond memories of long lost parents and siblings (Aboobackar 2009: 3).

Sarah goes down the memory lane and she is reminded of the celebrated writer Maxim Gorky's quote that 'with each passing day, man is nearing his death', to which she fervently agrees saying that though the bygone days will never come back, there is no dearth to the memories – bitter-sweet, painful, happy, sad, elated – memories which come crashing, when one ruminates about one's past, jostling each other on the canvas of the mind, to gain prominence over others.

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and interpsychic relations; Identity: Identities materialize within collectivities and out of culturally marked differences that constitute symbolic interactions within and between collectivities; Embodiment: As a textual surface on which a person's life is inscribed, the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embodied; Agency: If selves and self-knowledge is constituted through discursive practices, then the process through which autobiographical subjects assume agency – that is, control over the self-representations they produce about themselves – becomes particularly complex (Smith and Watson 2002: 9-10).

3.2.1. Snapshots of the Lives of Muslim Women in the Early Twentieth Century.

Sarah's first thought is of her birth on mother earth, which makes her wonder whether it would have been a mighty loss to the world in general or for her family, if she was not born at all. To which her truthful answer is a definite 'no', that none would have been any poorer if she was not born. The reason she gives is that those were the days when families had not less than eight to ten children. That too losing two to three children in their infancy was a common occurrence. But the parents still prayed for their remaining brood, and it was considered a miracle if the children grew to adulthood. Sarah was a blessed child, in many ways; she was born in an affluent and famous family, the 'Mayinga Tarawad' (Mayinga family). Her father was an educated person, a gold medalist in Mohammadan law from Madras University and a practicing lawyer. Her family had only sons and their prayer was to have a girl child in the family. Sarah says that her birth was celebrated because her parents, especially her grandmother's staunch belief was that Sarah's birth was an answer to her prayers. Stating this in a matter-of-fact manner, Sarah's next comment is vitriolic, when she forlornly remarks that today we live in a society, where the moment it is known that the fetus is female, it is thrown out and evicted from the mother's womb. She says she remembers having seen families which were blessed with not less than seven to eight daughters, who consoled themselves that none should contravene when the Lord showered them with children. Sarah is of the opinion that the women of those days never in their wildest dreams thought of aborting the fetus because of its sex, nor did they ever think of strangling a girl child (Aboobackar 2010: 1-2). This grisly thought mirrors the downward slide humans have managed to achieve in this so called "modern, enlightened" twenty-first century, making one wonder afresh about the psyche of the present generation. Ironically, in those days women seldom had the luxury of education, nor were they economically independent. Irrespective of these so called 'shortcomings' they were happy to have children, which nature chose to bestow on them. They were happy in whatever situations they were placed. Sarah continues saying that her grandmother had three sisters, with one of those sisters having four daughters. But that did not stop her from hankering for girl children, always being partial towards them, be it from the family or otherwise. Sarah remembers her granny

as a large hearted, kind and gentle lady, a true matriarch, who used to feed all of them, especially the girls in the family, with special tit-bits saying that boys would eat whenever they have an occasion, and which they had in plenty, since they often went out. But since girls were not allowed to go out, her granny's reasoning was that they need to be fed more and treated well. She would even treat the daughters of her maids well; to get a special treatment the only qualification one needed was to be a female! It does seem that we have come far from this seemingly idyllic scene. Today females are seen as a curse, if not as commodities, or else as slaves, to be bought and sold, as one wishes, leading to all the exploitation we witness. Bhatnagar et al (2005) states that the selective killing of female fetus in post-colonial India has received serious commitment from activists in the Indian women movement(s) but scant rhetorical and theoretical analysis. She says that this omission in post-colonial feminist theory is curious given the fact that the Indian women's movements were the first organized groups in the 1970s and 1980s to call attention to the use of new reproductive technologies for feticide and selective breeding and nurturing of male fetuses in modern India. Bhatnagar et al argue that the discourses of modernity, development, population control, and new reproductive technologies work together to claim the Indian woman's body as object and to name femicide (selective killing of female fetus) as informed choice and family planning.

> We understand femicide as a specifically postcolonial violence, which is facilitated by the patriarchal family, reproductive technologies, the nation-state, and the discourses of global agencies and international organization…The victims of female infanticide are not only the aborted female fetus, the girl child, the birthing mother, and the infanticide survivors who grow up with the knowledge that they and their female siblings survived attempts to murder them. The list of casualties include the large population of women who are disciplined by the violence visited on other women…Contrary to the economist reasoning, the serial killing of female fetuses and infants is not a function of the class and wealth status of the family but rather an index of the totality of women's condition, status, and value in family and society (Bhatnagar et al: 2-5).

Sarah ruminates about the way the females are treated and fears the consequences when looking at the dwindling female ratio. She does not see this encouraging. Her worst fear is that this skewed ratio will lead to more exploitation of women and has vociferously declared that this will lead to more rapes and victimization of women. As to the future of females globally, her prediction is dismal, which is proved by her statement that the 'contribution' of mankind to the twenty first century is 'gang rape'

and ‘honour killing’ (II interview data). The recent controversy on the documentary ‘India’s Daughter’ [59] is an eye opener, where two of the lawyers have given statements, which are downright derogatory and insulting. It also authenticates what Sarah so vehemently puts across. This is not an exception. Statistical data shows that rape cases are on the rise globally, making the public spaces unsafe for women. But unfortunately this is just the tip of the iceberg. The deep rooted biases against women have to be cured to bring about some positive change.

Sarah is justifiably proud of her ancestry of Mayinga family, who were very dynamic. She says that the family had recorded many of its noteworthy members as influential politicians, businessmen, landed gentry and educated people. Even in the days around the sixteenth and seventeenth century, many members of this illustrious family had gone on the ‘hajj’ pilgrimage to Mecca. They were also altruistic in nature and Sarah records that they had built mosques, schools and madrasas in the region; they were the first and foremost Muslim family in the entire region who gave prominence to modern education, and especially to the education of girls, which was nothing less than a sensation (Aboobackar 2010: 5). So, it is no wonder that since Sarah was born in this family she was lucky enough to get a proper school education, which was denied to her peers, especially Muslim girls who were not even allowed to go out of their houses. Sarah goes on record saying that during her time, she was the first Muslim girl to go to a proper school, and the first ever to complete her matriculation, to the surprise and in many instances the anger of many, in her community and region. But she says she is thankful to her father, who dared to go against the rigid socio-cultural practices and dictates of his community, and made sure that his daughter had a proper education, which he believed was necessary for girls. According to Ichlangod, modern education is still not popular among the Bearys, in spite of measures and efforts taken by the leaders. He states that more than ninety five percent (95%) of women among the Bearys still remain uneducated, and the misconception and the outlook against modern education has not yet disappeared (Ichlangod 2011: 201). When the situation

[59]The documentary ‘India’s Daughter’ is about the ‘Nirbhaya case’, the gang rape of a paramedical student and her ultimate death due to severe injury, in Delhi, which had caused such uproar globally. The documentary was directed by Leslee Udwin and aired on BBC. The documentary shows the rapist and two of the lawyers making extremely callous statements about women, bordering on misogyny.

is so very dismal even after more than half a century, it indeed was a very daring step taken by Sarah's father, when he was adamant on the score of his daughter's education. He even was against an early marriage and Sarah was married only after she finished her matriculation, at an advanced age of 18 years, because in those days the regular age of marriage for any girl was 8-10 years. Ichlangod states that normally Islam prescribes to take the consent of the girl prior to marriage. But generally, the girl being a minor, the consent of the parent was taken into consideration (ibid: 150-151). Sarah realizes the rare opportunity she was given, and declares that if it was not for her father, today she would have been in some remote corner of Kasaragod, illiterate and unheard of, instead of the well-known literary figure that she is.

She recollects that a celebrated member of the family, Kombantanji Kuinmudka, was Tippu Sultan's commander, and the word commander, which the villagers could not pronounce properly had been changed to Kombantanji, hence his name. Sarah says that now, the families are spread all over northern Malabar, in different names; and thanks to the job opportunities of the Middle-East, the entire region has become very prosperous. And in many cases, with the new found prosperity, the culture of fundamentalism too, was imported from the Middle East and ushered in (Aboobackar 2010: 5). Those who had not even heard of burkha in the 1950s, now never go out without wearing one. Today the situation is such that even a ten year old girl cannot venture out of the house without wearing a burkha. This is also seen as a label of affluence, apart from its religious significance. Engineer (2008) remarks that the main reason for the restrictions to be imposed upon women was to protect their chastity. And slowly *purdah* (veil system) represented by burkha became synonymous with chastity itself. And it came to be interpreted that the women who observed purdah very strictly were thought to be very chaste and those who violated even slightly were seen as 'immoral' (Engineer: 5-6). Ichlangod agrees that Islam in Coastal Karnataka had kept women under strict seclusion. The veil or burkha, which was also known locally as *volli* or double *volli* was strictly followed and it was compulsory for women to cover themselves fully (2011: 184).

Sarah, speaking on the observation of strict *purdah*, says that her society which had never given much thought to the burkha in the sixties started giving importance to it

in the seventies. She sarcastically remarks that the very same ladies who had made fun of her and had pulled her legs while helping her with her burkha, during her wedding, now all of a sudden started wearing not only burkha but also took to wearing gloves and socks, in an attempt to show off their religious fervor and piousness. She candidly declares that earlier though the men folk who had gone to Mumbai in search of jobs, returning home after a year or two, had brought burkha to their wives, they had seldom worn it. But with the onset of smuggling in Kasaragod, which resulted in a heavy surge of hard cash, things started changing. The people who could hardly afford two square meals a day, all of a sudden became fabulously rich. The unheard of luxury went to their heads like wine, and if that was not enough they became drugged with a kind of religious fanaticism.

> Burkha became a symbol of richness and affluence. Concurrently the advent of job opportunities in the Gulf countries considerably improved their economic conditions and living standards. But unfortunately their advanced status also blinded and immersed them in a kind of religious fanaticism. From time immemorial it was customary for Muslim women to suffer unquestioningly, the exploitation and injustice that was perpetrated on them in the name of religion, in silence and with bowed heads. To make matters worse, the illiterate and the poor, thanks to smuggling, unexpectedly finding the tide turn in their favor, became the leaders of the society. According to an Indian proverb "there is no knowing what an ill-bred person might do who is suddenly favored by riches". Similar state of affairs became rampant throughout Kerala. Zeal without knowledge is a runaway horse. Adding fuel to fire, organizations like Jamaate Islam and Tablig Jamaat, which had solid backup in the followers of Moudoodi, started further spoiling our society. Whenever I visited Kasaragod, though rarely, the stifling atmosphere would leave me gasping for breath (Aboobackar 2009: 6).

Sarah scathingly remarks that more than religious fervor it was to showcase their affluence that people started wearing Burkha. She also skeptically states that their ignorance doubled the problem and they were easy prey to unscrupulous clerics who wanted to hold the public in sway. Afkhami argues that the religious sanction is repeatedly established simultaneously in the form of discursive text and naked violence. And to legitimize the tradition which it believes is essential for the social structures to come up with an ethic of womanhood appropriate to Islam, which is historically symbolized by the institutions of *andarun* and *purdah* (1995: 1). When Sara says that 'the stifling atmosphere at Kasaragod, leaves her gasping for breath', it is not an exaggeration. She is only voicing the sentiments of women of her community, who have neither the luxury of education nor defiance.

Sarah records an interesting practice here. In the days when she was a child (1940s), women of backward classes, and tribes did not wear blouses. They never covered themselves waist upwards[60]. According to history the royalty banned the lower caste women from covering their breasts. With the coming of the Christian missionaries, these women started revolting against these discriminatory practices, which led to the 'Channar revolt'.

> In 1819, the Rani of Travancore announced that the lower castes including the Nadar climber women have no right to wear upper clothes like lower non-Brahmin castes of Kerala. Violence against Nadar climber women who revolted against this continued and reached its peak in 1858 across the kingdom, notably in southern taluks of Neyyattinkara and Neyyur. On 26 July 1859, under pressure from the Madras Governor, the king of Travancore issued a proclamation announcing the right of Nadar climber women to wear upper clothes but on condition that they should not imitate the style of clothing worn by upper class women (Ponnumuthan 1996: 109-110).

Sarah says that according to history, it is said that Tippu Sultan (the ruler of Mysore) forcibly converted Hindus of this region. When his soldiers came to these regions, they were shocked to see half naked women, especially fisherwomen, and it is said that they bought cloth from the shops of Kasaragod and distributed them free of cost to these women and forcibly made them cover themselves (Aboobackar 2010: 4-5). She says that she remembers seeing such women in the 1960s in many parts of Kerala, including her native Kasaragod.[61] Cohn (1996) speaking about the custom of the Nadar women says that they embraced Christianity to escape from the oppressive social practices.

> 19th century Travancore had a rigid caste hierarchy. There also existed a strict code of respect and mannerisms enforced by the state. The women were not allowed to carry pots on their hips or wear clothes that covered their breasts. Baring of chest to higher status was considered a sign of respect, by both males and females. The Nadar climbers of Travancore fared a little better than their Tirunelveli counterparts, but, however, suffered severe social disabilities, unlike their Tirunelveli counterparts, under the rigid caste hierarchy of Travancore. The Nadar climber women were not allowed to cover their bosoms, as most of the non- Brahmin women, to punctuate their low status. Uneasy with their social status, a large number of Nadar climbers embraced Christianity. The missionary agenda, in addition to conversion of Nadars was to free them from what they saw as the thraldom of the "heathen caste system"…Although the wives of the missionaries had designed and were producing a loose jacket that met their criteria of modest clothing befitting Christian women, the Nadar women, continued with or without the jacket, to prefer to wear the Nair-style breast cloth. In the 1820s there was an increasing number of incidents in markets and

[60]In one of her interviews Sarah humorously remarked that till recently she had, in the company of her children, seen women who were bare waist upwards, and she had told her shocked children, that 'topless women' were a common sight during her childhood days (III interview data).
[61] III interview data.

> other public places, when Nadar women wearing the Nair-breast cloth were attacked, stripped and beaten (Cohn: 140-141).

It is interesting to note that the folklore handed down is different, in that Sarah recalls it was the soldiers of Tippu and not the missionaries, as is popularly believed, who made it possible for the women to cover their breasts, conferring dignity on the women, who were unaware that it was humiliating, because they had seen nothing else since the day they were born, nor had any access to knowledge. Most probably, once converted, the soldiers made sure that the new converts followed the dictates of Islam. But one thing is certain, the low-caste women were not given a chance to cover their bosoms freely. It always came with a price - of conversion, accepting a new faith - whether it was Christianity or Islam, whether the oppressed people opted for conversion, or were forced to convert. The most important enquiry that arises is that the new faith was embraced to escape the oppression, to escape from a stifling atmosphere of a severe caste ridden society, than any real sense of piousness[62].

Sarah's next link in her memory is that of her grandparents. Mummunhi, her grandpa, and Beefhatumma, her grandma were not very rich though she belonged to a renowned family. She recalls how her uncles could not continue their education, due to lack of schools in the region. She says that to the people of her region, it was not short of a miracle, when her father, Ahamad, completed his intermediate staying in Mangaluru; but higher studies was out of his reach, because it meant going to Madras, which was unheard of in those days. But Ahamad was hell-bent on procuring a degree, which was his dream. But since there was none to guide this boy, apart from the fact that his parents could not afford an engineering education, he opted for arts. But now his father was in a fix, not knowing how to fulfill his son's dreams. Sarah says this is when the proposal from Talangara family, from her mother's side, came along as a blessing to her father, which is a different story altogether.

Sarah's mother, Jainabi, belonged to the exalted and very affluent Talangara family but was a divorcee! Sarah states that with the advent of British rule in India, in 1872,

[62] Sarah has taken up this theme and crafted a short story titled "One Who Has Worn a Blouse" (Aboobackar 2007). She says that the phrase "One Who Has Worn a Blouse", was an idiomatic expression, and meant that the woman in question was a convert. This is discussed in the next chapter.

the very first Muslim personal law was established. Sarah is of the opinion that there probably existed not even a single learned person, who was well versed with Quran, having profound knowledge. She says that she is sure that to this day there could not be any such erudite person, but she adds as a second thought, that today, if such a person exists, the fundamentalists would not hesitate to eliminate him! Because these fundamentalists would want the entire Muslim society to follow their interpretation of Islam, than the real, women friendly, original Islam, which was given by their prophet Mohammed. So, this Muslim personal law came into existence, in which there was no provision for a Muslim woman to divorce her husband. Sarah reasons that most probably the women must have suffered horribly, in case they were unfortunate enough to have married cruel, sadistic men, having no other choice but to live with their husbands. And in some instances, such women started converting to a different religion, to get a divorce. Sarah states that for such instances Quran has provided relief for women, which is a lesser known fact. Common knowledge is that Quran is partial towards men. According to the dictates of the holy Quran, a girls' permission is required for the marriage to be considered legal, if not, it can be annulled. In her mother's case, the young Jainabi was married at the age of 8, to Hassankutti, and most probably her consent was given by her elder brother, Talangara Mummuyi. Sarah says that this was more in the nature of a betrothal, than a proper marriage, which would be conducted at a later date, when the girl reached puberty. Unfortunately due to some difference the two parties fell apart, causing a rift. Sarah suspects that the rift could very well might have been in the matter of dowry. Jainabi's elder brother was furious and asked that his sister be given her *talaq* (divorce), to which the groom's party adamantly refused to comply with. But Talangara Mummuyi was not about to let go of the issue. He filed a case in the court requesting divorce, citing the stipulations from the holy Quran. The case was dragged for five years and he was successful in obtaining his sister's divorce, through the Supreme Court of Madras, which was sensational news, in those days, when divorce was virtually unheard of.

> This case – Jainabi Vs Hassankutti – is included in the law books and has become a compulsory case study for law students today, in Kerala; and when the law was amended in 1939, the verdict of this case has been included, which is akin to a miracle, and is like a beam of light in the lives of Muslim women. According to this new law, though women cannot divorce their husbands, they can ask for a divorce, which wasn't there earlier. When

> the Muslim women had no rights whatsoever, even this seemingly small amendment was like the adage "something is better than nothing". This divorce had happened without the knowledge of a little girl Jainabi, and all she would have done is probably signed the divorce papers with a thumb impression! (Aboobackar 2010: 10).

By then, the girl in question, Jainabi had aged fifteen, and her remarriage seemed almost impossible, which was terribly traumatic to her parents, and her father expired after her divorce. When such were the state of affairs, they came to know about Ahamad (Sarah's father) and accordingly a proposal was sent to Ahmad's father. Jainabi's brother said that if Ahmad marries his sister Jainabi, he would fund his higher studies. When a proposal of such stature – from the aristocratic Talangara family – had arrived they were in no position to decline. Though the girl was a divorcee, the marriage was more like an engagement and not marriage proper. Her earlier marriage was not consummated as well, which made them accept the offer. But the snag was that the girl was aged, which was all of fifteen, and past her prime for remarriage; hence though there was not any custom in those days of having a look at the bride, Ahmad's mother went to see the bride and immediately *nikah* was performed and Ahmad left for his higher studies, and returned four years later, as a gold medalist in Mohammadan Law from Madras University, after which the marriage proper was performed (Aboobackar 2010: 7-11).

Sarah sadly states that though her mother's parents were fabulously rich, her mother was cheated out of most of her property by her brother, who had maintained an account of every single paisa[63] that was sent to her father to facilitate his studies, as promised. Sarah remembers that sometimes her mother would unhappily speak about this to her children. The main reason for this cheating was that Sarah's father was anything but a mercenary person to hanker after property or riches and he never asked for his wife's rightful share. Sarah says that he was more concerned about his children's education, and believed that education was very important for all and that each of his children should be well educated, contrary to his wife's dream of amassing fortune or property and to have a house of one's own. Sarah sadly says that her maternal grandmother was such a snob that she never visited her daughter Jainabi, because she lived in a rented house, which was looked down upon and considered as

[63] The least denominator of Indian currency.

an insult. Sarah says that her mother's confinement during her several pregnancies and her post-natal care was taken up by her paternal grandmother, her mother's mother-in-law. There is no doubt that Sarah's paternal grandmother was a gentle and great lady, probably one can safely label her as an example of *modern, liberal and open-minded* woman. *Modern* because she valued girl children and never thought it beneath her to nurse and look after her daughter-in-law Jainabi, who was more like a daughter to her, her daughter whom she had lost in her infancy. *Liberal and open-minded* because she was given a free hand to run the house the way she wanted it. Ego problems were seldom heard of, mostly because women never voiced their opinions. Rather, they never had the freedom or luxury of being listened to. This is a very rare occurrence indeed, because in India, usually the post- natal care is the duty of one's own mother, and is eagerly looked forward to, even in this present day. One wonders that a mother could be so callous as not to visit her own daughter, during these delicate as well as dangerous, and much awaited moments of her life! All because the daughter was not affluent as they were and was living in a rented house. It can be interpreted that the fault of the daughter, never measuring up to the standards of her natal home could be laid at the door of her brother, who had cheated his sister out of her rightful inheritance. Sarah's grandmother should have seen the fault of her sons, instead of looking down on her daughter. The patriarchal discourse makes sure that women are oppressed by women, like in this instance. It could also be the dictates of the patriarch (in this case it was the eldest son, because Jainabi's father had passed away, worried to death, as to the fate of his daughter, when her divorce had come through) of the family, that the mother should not visit her daughter, because if she did, then naturally she needed to gift the new born child, which meant expenditure. Though this may sound mean, truth is always stranger than fiction, and not being economically independent, in all probability the mother must have had no other option than not to visit her daughter, thereby being labelled as an unkind and harsh mother. One cannot negate the fact that probably she herself might have been going through a personal hell of her own, as is the case of most women, even to this day. This is generally how women are exploited in the private spaces of home, in a myriad forms - 'domestic violence' - the veiled oppression of the females by the males in a family, which goes unnoticed in most cases.

From a feminist perspective, the most important point to be noticed here could very well be that Sarah's mother Jainabi, was exploited by her own brothers. The reason for her divorce could have very well been an issue of money, and one cannot negate the possibility that her brother initiated this divorce with an evil design to confiscate his sister's share of the property, which would have been handed down to her husband during her marriage proper. But by initiating divorce, that too in a very conservative Muslim society, he might have acquired quite a bad reputation. It makes one wonder afresh thinking that this happened in the early twentieth century, in a Muslim family. In all probability after acquiring such a questionable reputation, not to forget the number of years which had dragged by, had rendered the girl in question past her marriageable age. This was something unheard of, in those days and the brother might have assumed that her marriage was nigh impossible, making him profit his sister's share. This seems a strong possibility, looking at his behavior at a later stage – keeping an account of every penny spent for his sister Jainabi's marriage, and for Ahmad's education – wherein he did manage to dupe his sister out of a major chunk of her rightful assets. Sarah says that according to Quran, though a daughter is entitled to one third of the father's property, in most cases it is never given and the daughters are always cheated out of their rightful share, which is a common enough occurrence. The patriarchal society sees to it that the males retain the major share of the ancestral property.

Sarah has also described two instances wherein her aunts (her mother's elder sisters) too were not given their rightful share, and because of this, one of her aunts never visited her natal home ever, and remained a virtual prisoner in her home. Her brother cheated her, and her husband saw to it that she never set foot in her natal home again, never visited her parents. The paradox was that a man cheats and another man takes revenge on him; but the irony is, the victim, the woman in question, is always the one sandwiched in between, voiceless. In another instance, her cousin, her second aunt's daughter was married to a good for nothing man, a fact which came to light much later, leaving no other option for the lady in question, but to live with that person. Quoting this as a reason, her brothers did not give her share of the property which was promised during her marriage, which naturally led to a rift between the two families.

After having two children, she gave birth to a still born, and on that flimsy pretext her husband did not visit her again. In India a woman usually goes to her mother's place for her confinement. Naturally this lady was in her natal home. Her brothers saw to it that she did not meet her husband again. When he came to his senses and wanted his wife and children back, she was not allowed to go to her husband, and they obtained her *talaq*, and Sarah says that she will never forget to her dying day, the inhuman way her cousin lived, leading a very wretched existence, being insulted by her brothers and their wives and died an early death. In bargain they got all her property, plus a free maid and charwoman, for obviously that was what she was in her own natal home; a hand, who was exploited very badly, making it hard to believe. Patriarchal discourses devalue women's roles in family, society and the nation at large, and view them as insignificant or even as unnecessary burden. A particular line in Quran says that 'women have to be tolerated, a man cannot do away with her, and because only through women can he beget sons to propagate his lineage. So, a woman is just that, a womb and nothing more, which reminds one of Simone de Beauvoir's famous quote, in *The Second Sex*, "Woman? She is a womb, an ovary; she is a female – this word is sufficient to define her" (de Beauvoir 1989: 3).

Sarah recalls that in her mother's natal family daughters were considered a burden, and the moment they were born, the parents started worrying about their marriage and dowry, and it seemed that they viewed daughters as belonging to some other families, and never saw them as their own flesh and blood. Girls were never seen outside their homes and never attended school. Hence Sarah's mother Jainabi, never had any proper education. But since it was obligatory that, to get married, a girl should know to read Quran, she was taught Arabic. Sarah says that in those days many religious texts, folk songs of *Mapilla pattu*[64] and folk-lore were available in Malayalam language, using Arabic script. Sarah recollects her mother reading these books as well as singing these *Mapilla pattu* songs, which were her favorite. Sarah remembers that in her father's family this was not the case, they never saw daughters as encumbrance. Before Sarah's birth, they had even promised to name the child after the prophet Ibrahim's wife Sarah, and was ultimately given the promised name. She was an

[64]Mapilla pattu literally means folk tales of Mapilla, sung orally.

answer to their prayers, and her birth coincided with the same day – the twelfth day of the Rabiyal Avval, of the Muslim Calendar – was interestingly, the birthday of the prophet Mohammed. She says that she was the apple of every one's eyes in the family, from her grandparents, her parents, to her uncles, not to mention her overjoyed grandmother. When she was four years old her mother gave birth to her younger brother, which made none happy, because what everyone wanted was a baby girl. Sarah recalls that she had led a kind of lonely life, without the closeness that only a sister could give, though she was close enough with all her brothers (Aboobackar 2010: 15-17).

At this juncture, Sarah recounts about two to three more incidents which are etched permanently in her memory. The first instance is that of Nafisa, her playmate. Nafisa was the daughter of their charwoman, who along with her entire family lived in a small house in their backyard, depending on Sarah's family for their sustenance. Sarah recalls that her grandmother treated Nafisa at par with herself, never ill-treating the maid's daughter. At the age four, when Sarah's ears were pierced, called as *Sunnath*, a sacred function, which in Muslim families has a religious significance, even Nafisa had the good fortune to have her ears pierced, ending with both wearing gold earrings. Ichlangod states that in the Beary community a small ceremony known as 'Kadukuthu Mangila' is arranged for baby girls, which is the occasion of piercing the earlobes. Usually it is celebrated at the age of 3 or 5 years (2011:156). The women of Beary community can be seen adorned with earrings[65]. Sarah states a story for this religious belief, which runs as follows:

> Prophet Ibrahim's wife Sarah didn't have children. So an unhappy Sarah, in a fit of depression, forced her husband to marry one of her slave girls-Hajira. But when Hajira conceived, Sarah became jealous of her and pierced her ears out of jealousy. Later she repented her meanness and made Hajira wear gold and diamond jewelry in her earlobes. As luck would have it, this only helped increase Hajira's beauty, which again fanned the ire of Sarah, resulting in her asking her husband to abandon Hajira, to which he agreed saying that as soon as she delivers he would abandon her. Four months after the baby was born Sarah

[65]Ichlangod (2011) says that usually the each lobe (cartilages of the upper ear) is pierced in five to seven places, in which jewelry, in the form of gold rings is worn, which is a very distinct practice among the Bearys. These gold rings are known as 'alikath' or 'alikattu' (156).The upper ear usually curves inward, what with the weight of filigreed gold earrings. Since the women cover their head with a scarf, the ears are thrown into prominence, and they can be recognized as Bearys from a distance. One usually gets to see the old ladies in their courtyards. This tradition is slowly waning off in the educated classes.

> forced Ibrahim to leave Hajira and baby Ismail, which he obeyed, abandoning Hajira and her son Ismail, out in the desert. The story goes that Hajira wasn't aware that she was to be castoff, she waited for her husband Ibrahim to return, then slowly realized what had transpired. She was parched with thirst and prayed to the almighty going down on her knees, to save her and her baby. That is when her young son hit the ground of the arid desert with his palms and water sprung up. This is the famous Zam-Zam, the holy spring which all Muslims today, must visit during their Hajj pilgrimage. History has it that this is where Hajira and her son Ismail lived, which many years later came to be known as the holy Mecca, and the holy Kaba was constructed by Ibrahim. In remembrance of the piercing of Hajira's ears, all the girls in Muslim community have to undergo this *Sunnath*, and adorning the bride's ears with jewelry is a very important aspect of any Muslim marriage (Aboobackar 2010: 19).

It again comes to the fore that it was a woman against another woman. Millet has forcefully argued that one of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another. If in the past it was about creating a lively hatred between whore and matron, in the present it is between career woman and housewife.

> One envies the other, her "security" and prestige, while the envied yearns beyond the confines of respectability for what she takes to be the other's freedom, adventure, and contact with the great world. Through the multiple advantages of the double standard, the male participates in both worlds empowered by his superior social and economic resources to play the estranged women against each other as rivals. One might also recognise subsidiary status. Categories among women not only is virtue class, but beauty and age as well (Millet 2000: 38).

When one goes through the politics of patriarchy wherein women are set up against each other, Sarah's grandmother, comes across as unprejudiced and compassionate. Her thoughtfulness in allowing the ritual to be performed on a servant girl, adorning her ears with gold earrings, signals a change, a change, one would like to come across more often. Sarah frequently quotes from Quran to make people understand that what the clerics teach them in the mosques is not the real Islam, but 'their' interpretation of Quran. Speaking about the Muslim personal law, the shari'a, Sarah says that it is discriminatory in nature and does not do justice to Islam. Sarah wishes to create awareness in the people of her community and Muslims at large, that no religion has ever preached anything that is derogatory, or oppressive.

Sarah narrates the next incident which mirrors the cruelty meted out to wives. This one scarred young Sarah, who was probably about ten years old when it occurred. She distinctly remembers the day. It is about Nafisa's mother. In those days Muslim weddings were performed at night and women folk from distinguished families who attended weddings, permanently had female relatives or friends with them, as

travelling companions and chaperons, always returning the next day. Nafisa's mother had accompanied Sarah's Grandmother to attend a wedding. As was the custom when the former returned home the next day, her husband caned her severely until she bled, all in front of these children, which she bore unflinchingly without so much as whimpering. Adding insult to injury he even badmouthed her, insinuating that she was a whore, all the while knowing the custom and that she had no say while accompanying her mistress. He victimized his hapless wife, because he was in no position to show his anger towards his master or mistress (Aboobackar 2010: 20). And the result was that it was vented on his wife, women always bearing the brunt of every small upheavals of life. Sarah vividly recalls this shocking incident, which later found its way into one of her novels *Chandragiri Teeradalli*. She says this was a common enough occurrence in poor families, who have neither education nor money. What is more, women believed that men had a right to manhandle them, and in this instance, Nafisa's mother actually, happily tolerated his beatings and abuse, being thankful in the fact that her husband had not resorted to polygamy. One can visualize the situation of women whose husbands marry many women. Sarah says this was just an instance, which she narrates and makes it very clear that these kinds of situations were very common and the women of her community bore it in a matter-of-fact manner, in the course of their lives. She says that her main aim of crafting stories was to portray these kind of violent behavior of men, which was sanctioned by the unwritten rules of patriarchy, not to mention the antiquated rules of Sharia, which meted out insult over injury. When one reads Sarah's fiction, very often it makes one wonder about the atrocities performed on females, who form half the humanity, in the name of religion and under the guise of protection, all in the private spaces of home and family. One is reminded of Spivak's arguments, that what we have as feminist vocabulary is hardly able to explain these shades of oppression, and the need to have a vocabulary of one's own to explain the oppressive status of women in the third world countries, becomes essential (Spivak 1988).

Yet another incident was that of a young woman, who was living with her aged parents, after being divorced at a very young age. These women toiled day and night

and managed to adorn her ears[66] with gold rings. By now her parents had passed away and her neighbours forced her to marry a man who was interested in her. She duly married him and conceived. Slowly her husband began to empty her gold rings on one pretext or the other. By the time her daughter was born, her ears were devoid of their gold and had become bare. Her husband promptly disappeared from the scene, when saddled with responsibility, sans gold earrings.

> If anyone questioned her "why did you have to get married? Your ears have become bare, you were cheated out of your gold earrings, plus you have an extra burden of a child too", she would readily answer "let the gold go, I don't care, instead I have my dear daughter, who is more precious to me than all the gold in this world put together. Don't I have an asset which none can swindle? Now my life has a meaning, I too can dream of tomorrows. That in itself is sufficient for me". I hadn't understood it then, but now I do realize that in a woman's life, if she is supposed to have tomorrows, she needs to have someone whom she can call her own, whom she can trust, with whom she can share her happiness and sorrows (Aboobackar 2010: 20-21).

These words from an uneducated, poor woman of the working class, comes as a revelation. Sarah too agrees on this score, truthfully admitting that she realises now what the woman meant. Patriarchal discourses have reasoned that for a woman, her family and life is everything, but for a man it is just part of his life. That makes avenues for women to be exploited, their tender emotions to be taken advantage of, and then be labelled as the weaker sex. And we do have a *venomous phrase* on this which says "the female species is more deadly than the male". If a female is capable, she is *deadly*. Instead of appreciating her capacity and courage she is personified as death. Incapable ones could be equated with *beauty*. We have heard enough of 'dumb beauties'. It comes across as dumbness being appreciated. What is desired of women is physical attraction rather than the mental faculties. Because that way it is much safer and if women give in to their emotions then they are *foolish*. Only in the artificial human society, due to various discourses, the female sex is looked down upon, voiceless. When we look around us we witness many incidents wherein the mothers have taken care of their children, even when the husband is not around, foregoing herself, sacrificing her life and interests for the sake of her offspring. But what she gets in return is filthy names and abuses. One has to just glance through any language, which is replete with abuses, each one referring to women directly or

[66]Ears always seem to have a special significance. No matter how poor one is, ears should be adorned with jewelry.

indirectly. The above instance is but an example of the way the females are treated in the current world. The nuances are different, but at the end of the day, it is exploitation, which cuts across race, class, caste and age barriers. Gosh, in an article "unequal Burden" speaking about the uneven affliction the Indian female population faces, says that they lead a life which is in every possible manner inferior to that of their male counterparts.

> Indian women and girls get a much worse deal than their male counter parts. India ranks much worse than most developing countries – including those in Asia; and is close to sub Saharan Africa in terms of most important gender indicators: the sheer survival of women – the sex ratios at birth and missing women; education – literacy, school retention and higher education enrollment; nutrition and health – malnutrition, life expectancy and risks of maternal mortality; employment – work participation, wage gaps; security and voice – violence against women, political participation" (Gosh 2010: 15).

What we witness today is a skewed relationship which poses a threat to the formation of a healthy society. Warhol et al, opine that it has generally been agreed byfeminist critics that the oppression of women is a fact of life that gender leaves its trace in literary texts and on literary history, and that feminist literary criticism plays a worthwhile part in the struggle to end the oppression in the world outside of texts (1997: x). But in spite of all the struggle, one cannot help but realise that the end to oppression is anything but near. That the feminists have not been successful in eradicating exploitation, makes one realise the deep rootedness of biases that women's movement has to grapple with.

3.2.2. Sarah's Early Life: The impact of her Father and Mother's persona.

Going forward, we have a glimpse of Sarah's early childhood. Sarah spent her early days in Chamanad, with her paternal grandparents, where she went to a Malayalam school and started learning Quran. She remembers that her early schooling was in Chamanad, where she stayed at her grandmother's house and went to a nearby Malayalam school, and had Quran classes from eight to ten in the morning. A Muslim maulvi would come to teach Quran, after which they had Malayalam lessons. She recalls that it became quite easy for her to adjust since most of the students as well as the teacher who attended the school were Muslims. Sarah recollects that the problem started when she was in second standard, when she had really never progressed much in her Quran lessons, making her granny worried on this account.

Because, for her granny, her learning Quran was more important than learning Malayalam.

> …if a girl doesn't learn Malayalam, it was okay. But if she doesn't learn how to read Quran, then there would be a serious problem in getting her married! So I was admitted to a girl's school which was close by, where a Muslim lady taught Quran. The reason for this change was that someone had told my grandmother that the lady taught Quran excellently. I attended this school in the morning and my regular school in the afternoon. It gave me the distinction of attending two schools simultaneously! This continued for some time after which I became a pupil of the girl's school. No sooner had I passed from my second to the third, than my father who was on the alert, became ready to act. His one and only ambition in life was to make sure that his daughter completed her matriculation! He was very much concerned about the education of girls of our community and probably he had decided that his daughter should be the one to set an example. With this in mind he admitted me to a girl's school in Kasaragod (Aboobackar 2010: 21).

Ichlangod states that almost all Muslims were able to read the Quran and were able to recite some chapters from it by-heart (2011: 201). It becomes quite evident that her father, apart from being a highly qualified person, was strongly supportive of his daughter, because of which she was able to get a good education. Her father, apart from supporting his daughter, had also given a free hand to his wife in managing their domestic affairs. He was sensitive to the issues of women and supported his daughter in all legal matters to his dying day. We shall see more of this in the course of this chapter. In the current scenario, this might not sound great, because now many Muslims have realized the importance of education and send their daughters for higher education; but in the early twentieth century this was nothing short of a miracle. Ichlangod says that the nineteenth century was a time of social deterioration, when the modern developments demanded reforms and the Bearys stuck to their conventions. The modern education propagated by the British, was not welcomed by Beary community, which was the last to respond. The ulemas found this as dangerous to the religion and faith. He states that Muslim boys and girls were prevented from going to schools, mixing with the Christians, or even hearing about them. It was believed that learning anything other than Arabic was *haram* (forbidden), along with numerous other superstitions, crippling their society (2011: 71). It indeed was a major decision on the part of Sarah's father to let his daughter go to school, and was the first move of its kind in the whole of Beary community.

Sarah laughs when she recalls her abhorrence for school and how she pined for her friends back in Chamanad, feeling like 'a fish out of water'. In her autobiographical

short story “Muslim Hudugi Shale Kalitaddu”, she speaks of her abhorrence towards school and how once she started her third standard, she began liking school as she learned Kannada, Mathematics, etc. She realises that adjusting to the new environment of an alien language and students from diverse communities was a punishment for her, which made her bunk classes very often. She says she would not feel like returning home after the weekend visits to her grandmother, and it was not made easier, with her friends imploring her to stay back, hoping to persuade her, which was also what her granny wanted. But Sarah confesses that since her grandparents knew about her father’s attitude and way of thinking, they would never let her stay. Early on Monday morning her grandfather would set out towards their home, with young Sarah in tow. The ill-feeling about school lasted only till her second standard. She is immensely thankful for the firm steps her father had taken in the matter of her schooling, the benefit of which she was too immature to see at that point of time. She proudly asserts that her father was a lawyer and in those days the verandah-like front room of their house served as his office. If they wanted to go out, they had to pass through a door next to this room, which had a view that ranged almost to their compound gate and she playfully recalls that it was not an easy task to dodge her father’s ever watchful eyes.

> If I delayed going to school he would get up from his chair and walk in, looking for me. In spite of his busy schedule he was on the lookout and observed me, which made my escape quite impossible. Once it so happened that since I was late, he took me along with him to drop me to school, on his way to the court. On the way, around a bend in the road, when he had gone forward, I managed to get away and had run back home. In this fashion, I never let go of a single opportunity to miss my school. This abhorrence I had for school must have been an issue of great anxiety to my father who had fond hopes of educating me. But all this hatred was reserved only for my second standard. If my father had not taken such keen interest regarding my schooling, most probably today I would have been like all those Muslim women of our hometown, completed fifth standard in Chamanad; married at the age of ten and lived in some remote corner of Kasaragod (Aboobackar 2010 : 21-23).

Though Sarah loved and respected her father, she says she was never friendly with him in her younger days, misunderstanding his firmness towards her as his lack of love for her. According to her a much strong bonding only came at a later phase of her life. Her father never allowed her to go to picnics, to represent her school in sports, nor was she allowed to accompany him to Mangaluru, or to wear silks. This was never a problem where her brothers were considered. Sarah recalls herself as an excellent throw-ball player; she remembers her feeling of helplessness and a sense of

anger, when her friends used to discuss their train journey, or the school picnic they had enjoyed. All these made her decide that her father was partial towards his sons. Only later did she realize his true feelings for his firmness. She candidly admits that she now knows that her father had done all he could for his daughter, possibly stretching the limits of their rigid society to its maximum capacity; and going further in relaxing the rules only meant danger to his dear daughter. He in all probability did not want to jeopardize his daughter's future by crossing the 'line of control'. One needs to realise the social pressure that worked on her father and he was very practical in executing his commitment. Sarah candidly admits that her mother always sided with her father when he put down his foot on certain issues, which Sarah resented at that point. Yet, she remembers her mother to be a very efficient lady. Though uneducated in the formal sense, she was given a free hand and she always managed their household affairs with much efficiency. Sarah says that it is because her mother was such a good businesswoman that she managed to build themselves a big house in Kasaragod. When her father was busy enveloped in his work, it was her mother who took care of the home and hearth. If her father spent money in buying books, her mother could do savings. The family could buy some property with the money saved. And thanks to her saving habit, Sarah was given enough jewelry and property during her wedding (Aboobackar 2010: 36-37). Her mother even managed to have a dig at her father during her wedding, saying if it was not for her, Sarah would not have had anything to show off! Sarah remembers her mother to be an able lady who had a free hand to do as she chose and was a very generous and courageous woman. Sarah enumerates certain incidents for our benefit which without doubt, places her mother far above many women of today.

Sarah narrates many incidents to support this. The first incident is that of the compulsory donation (*zakat*) her mother used give to the poor women who used to visit during the holy month of Ramzan. The women would pour out their woes to her mother. Sara's mother would console them and would donate in cash and or kind, in the form of rice, coconut, old and new clothes, etc. On certain occasions it would even extend to asylum in their house.

The second instance was that her mother had given shelter to a poor woman, who had come to their house with three of her children, seeking work. She was given shelter and work in their house. She had specialized in post-natal nursing – which is observed for forty days – and whenever she was away her children stayed back. They were even admitted to a Malayalam school by her mother. They went to school with Sarah's brothers. The girl was of Sarah's age and became more like a sister to her. When Sarah was in high school, this girl was married. She was divorced within a year, who went on to become the protagonist, Nadira, of Sarah's debut novel, *Chandragiri Teeradalli* (1984) which is her life story, crafted by Sarah as a poignant, touching tale (ibid: 34-35).

The third instance was about a woman who was rumored to have led a 'life of sin' and had delivered a baby. They were ousted from their village. When the woman in question, along with her elder sister and brother came to Sarah's house, her mother gave them a roof over their heads. When they wanted to leave after a few days and called the younger sister to accompany them, Sarah's mother scolded them properly, and denied to send away the woman and her baby. She even told the brother that it was enough of them living off their sister's earnings of sin, and it was high time he worked and took responsibility of the elder sister. Sarah proudly acknowledges that her mother was a large hearted lady, a queen of her house, welcome to do what she pleased. She wonders that her mother neither was bothered about the woman's past sinful life, nor did she treat the child like a pariah.

> She had consoled the woman thus: "Hunger is the biggest evil which robs one of every vestige of human dignity. Poverty is the main culprit, and it misleads anyone. So don't blame yourself, try to lead a better and spotless life from now on. If you look after your child well, and see to it that she is properly settled, Allah will forgive you and absolve your sins" (ibid: 35).

Sarah remembers that her mother never used to detest these women nor talk ill of them. There were many more incidents wherein her mother had helped the victimized women to the best of her ability. These facts make us realize that contrary to popular belief women – some at least, if not all – did exercise their freedom to do as they pleased in many facets of their life. One cannot generalize, but it could very well have been because of the reason that they belonged to a renowned, educated family. These rare snapshots – of Sarah's grandmothers, both paternal and maternal, her mother and

aunts, not to forget the glimpse of the women of the working class – give us a valuable insight into the life of Muslim women of yesteryears. Patriarchy in some cases was ascribed and in some cases, prescribed. But we do find avenues when women supported women and that made their lives tolerable. For those who extended a helping hand, it gave a sense of happiness and usefulness, whereas those who were at the receiving end felt buoyed by the support, which instilled them with a moral courage to march ahead. Invoking Hooks (2000), what the Western feminists hoped for and talked in favor of, if we are to defeat patriarchy – sisterhood – was already very much practiced in India, in the early twentieth century - at least in some cases. By unknowingly practicing sisterhood, these women, to some extent were successful in subverting patriarchy. Hooks argues that male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe that they are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. Women are taught that their relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich their experience. They are taught that women are "natural" enemies, that solidarity will never exist between them because they cannot, should not and do not bond with each other. She opines that women have learnt those lessons very well and unless and until they unlearn these lessons they cannot aspire to build a sustained feminist movement. They need to learn to live and work in solidarity, which is the true meaning of "sisterhood" and learn to value it. She says that women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege and a host of other prejudices. According to Hooks, a sustained woman bonding can occur only when these divisions are confronted and necessary steps are taken to eliminate them. She believes that solidarity strengthens resistance struggle; hence women must put up a united front and take up the initiative towards demonstrating the power of solidarity (43-44). Thus Sarah's autobiography helps us to come across some rare incidents in the lives of Muslim women of yesteryears, making us realise that when women practiced solidarity, they could subvert the power of patriarchy.

3.2.3: Adolescence and Matrimony: Sarah in Her Various Roles

Next link of Sarah's memory takes us to her marriage episode. Once she completed her matriculation, getting a proper husband for her became a matter of prime importance to her parents. She reminisces about a proposal where the boy in question

was very rich, but was uneducated, which of course was rejected, both by Sarah as well as her father, who was more interested in an educated person. Laughingly Sarah recalls how this news, travelling over the grapevine had caused a furore in the region. Some even commented in a surprise "a girl rejecting such a proposal, only because the boy does not have a proper education! What else can you expect from an educated girl? This is what happens if girls are sent to school!" She was married to Aboobackar from Mangaluru, who was an engineer. He was from a family that met the parameters set by her parents. But Sarah says that though rich, the first question was about the amount of jewelry and dowry that would be given in marriage. Sarah remembers that the custom in Mangaluru was that immediately after *Nikah,* when the groom sought the blessings of his father-in-law, he was to be presented with a wrist-watch. Obviously her father was not aware of this, since they were from the Kasaragod region, and nothing was given on the said occasion. Sarah sadly recalls that her husband carried this grouse with him till his last day, and at times used to remind her of this scathingly, because it seems that he saw it as an insult, which had bruised his ego badly! This incident just goes to show how deeply these sociocultural practices are entrenched, taking root in a vicious manner. He could have bought a watch easily, he might have at a later date, but he neither forgot nor forgave this little error on the part of his father-in-law (Aboobackar 2010: 50).

Sarah states her husband's was a very conservative family, a joint family in fact, and wearing burkha was mandatory. Sarah sarcastically remarks that her mother was overjoyed at this prospect and was happy that at last her daughter will be observing the rules and regulations of their religion, which was not forced upon her while at home. She was asked to stop wearing her blouses and made to wear a loose shirt with her sari, a head scarf even when at home and was not allowed to go out, nor watch movies, which in today's world, does come as a surprise. Women folk were not supposed to be seen in the outer rooms of the house and were always confined to the inner rooms, mostly the kitchen. She says that her husband just obeyed whatever his mother and family members said, which doubled the difficulties of her life. She lacked nothing as far as material comforts were considered, but mentally she felt starved. She started wondering how could her father, who was quite progressive in his

thinking, dump his daughter in that house because her husband was an educated person for namesake, his attitude was very much old fashioned, which she had difficulty in stomaching for quite some time. When perceived from Sarah's point of view, one realizes the difficulty that women had to face, the amount of adjustments one needed to make, not to forget the oppressive sociocultural practices one needed to observe, all to placate the society and the patriarchs.

She remembers an incident while travelling from Mangaluru to Kasaragod. They were waiting at the railway station for the train to arrive. She was wearing a burkha, which in those days had a lacey flap over the face, covering the face fully. She used to gaze at the books in the stall and she humorously says that most probably the shop keeper must have wondered what a Muslim woman in burkha is up to, staring at the books, through her lace mask, which was certainly not a common occurrence in those days. Though she would have dearly loved to buy some, she could not because she did not have any cash with her, which was the regular norm. Asking her husband for money was abhorrent to her, and he never offered to buy any, not having any liking for literature. He was quite a different personality from her brothers, who loved books. Thankfully, since he was a government officer, her life improved considerably when he was transferred to a distant town, where Sarah was the mistress of the house and could do as she pleased. One can only visualise the yearnings of a young girl, longing for books, but at the same time maintaining a stiff upper lip, her dignity not allowing her to ask her husband, while he is blissfully unaware of his wife's mental state. This just showcases the need for compatibility in partners. But in those days these thoughts were unheard of, and the best a wife could hope for, was a stomach full of food and nice clothing to wear. Actually all things considered, not to forget her rigid Muslim society, Sarah was lucky to have all that, and the luxury of travelling alone with her educated husband, which must have caused a lot of eye brows to go up. All said and done, many must have seen Sarah as a very fortunate girl to have everything. The question of understanding one's wife did not even appear on the distant horizon. Sarah places on record that her love of books and her habit of reading Kannada novels from a young age, which was encouraged by her father, was what put her on the trajectory of literature, and if today she is a known literary figure in the

Kannada world, all the credit should go to her father. Though she admits that at that point in time, she did not visualise herself as a writer. Only in her later years when she witnessed the oppressive sociocultural practices of which she too was a victim, did the thought of expressing her feelings surface. And it does not come as a surprise that she chose Kannada as her medium of expression, because she has time and again reiterated that though she was a Muslim, studying in a Kannada medium school, reading Kannada magazines and books had nourished her love for the language, which she saw as her own. Sarah acknowledges that writing in Kannada was not a choice, but was natural, as natural as for someone to write in their mother tongue (III interview data). And thanks to her upbringing the Kannada world is richer by Sarah's writings, which were the first of its kind, portraying the Muslim sensibilities, the world they inhabited, though so different, still identifiable, because the sentiments and the repressions faced by women were but the same. Sarah, through her writings, for the first time in the history of Kannada literature, opened a door showcasing the lives of a minority people, which was unlike anything the society had perceived.[67]

Sarah recalls a very painful incident, just four months after her wedding, of her eldest brother's death due to tetanus, on the eve of his returning home after successfully completing his law degree. Other two brothers of hers too were studying in Madras. She explains the funeral, where the people of the entire region had come to bid her brother good bye, except for her husband, the only son-in-law of the family, who was hardly ten kilometers away at a construction site, giving the reason that his higher officers had come making it impossible for him to leave. This shocked everyone, not to mention her parents, who had to bear an additional blow. Sarah sadly remembers the day when her father who was looking forward to his eldest son joining him as a lawyer, had to go to Madras to bring back his mortal remains and bury it in the cemetery. She says that her grandfather just could not handle the grief and passed away within a few months (Aboobackar 2010: 54-55). Though Sarah's husband was a well-educated person, Sarah herself has mentioned that he had never forgotten, nor was allowed to forget, the insult of not being conferred with the gift after the nikah.

[67] After Sarah, however, several other writers from Beary community have emerged in the Kannada scene. Prominent ones are Bolwar Mohammad Kunhi and Fakir Mohammad Katpadi.

The prized gift which had become the subject of a debate many a time between the couple, Sarah thankfully acknowledges, had never soured their relationship, which speaks for the refinement of her husband. And any bickering they had, was but a human tendency and should be seen as such. The silences in any autobiographical writings are more provocative than the voluble expressions and poses a serious threat to any investigator.

Sarah has four sons and she explains her longing for a daughter, each time she was expecting. But she was disappointed. She says a daughter is more likely to be more loving than sons and could have been her confidant, since she never had sisters with whom she could confide her deepest aspirations and disappointments. She remembers that her husband never took active interest either in the affairs of the home or regarding their children, and their education. It was she, most probably unconsciously emulating her mother, who had to take the responsibility of all these issues. We may recall that she was living in a joint family with all of her in-laws. Naturally, there used to be a lot of politics, and she says though she tried hard, she could never be one among them, always remaining an outsider. Whenever she expressed a desire to build a house of their own, or while discussing the higher education of their sons, her husband would always chastise her on the issue of not having received a proper dowry. In these instances Sarah remarks that she felt she was hounded by the specter of dowry, which was never far behind, casting gloomy shadows in her otherwise happy life. Thankfully, Sarah says that these disagreements were few and far in between, and since they loved each other dearly, and had a strong bond, it did not affect their life much. She appreciates her husband Aboobackar in more ways than one. Though he was not one much for literature, he never stopped her from persuading her interests and gave her a free reign in everything. He was not a domineering person, but was a loving spouse and father, in fact. His biggest asset was his integrity and honesty. He was an honest government officer, till the day he retired, and was a pain in the neck, for many corrupt officials. Sarah honestly admits that at times she did think her husband did not know the ‘ways of the world’! Especially at those trying times when they were short of cash, when they were transferred to remote areas – because he refused to give or take bribes – and when they were discriminated and treated shabbily for their race and religion, they who belonged to the minority.

She has portrayed her anguish of these times in one of her novels *Tala Odeda Doniyalli*, which is autobiographical in nature[68]. It is a brilliant novel, portraying the rot and corruption in the government circles, and the helplessness of the people who are crushed by the red tape and government machinery, all because they dared to be honest and refused to plunder their motherland.

Sarah's quest towards gender equality, her earnest wish that women should be treated well, and given a chance for a decent living, like human beings, had her chafing, and in her own words, 'she didn't know how to put a full stop to this'. Her only hope was to create awareness, through which she fervently hoped to change the situation for the better. Sarah fiercely argues that unless people are aware of the discrimination, nothing much can be achieved. From a very young age she was fond of listening to stories and at a later stage, reading, a habit which was favored and encouraged by her father, which she acknowledges, had stood her in good faith, broadening her horizons, all the while adding to her knowledge base. She says that to this day, though T.V and media have become very popular, nothing has diminished her love for books and reading. She is emphatic that because of her reading habit, she is what she is today. She says she came to discern a lot of psychological maladies by reading Triveni's novels, which centered on psychology and mental health[69]. Explaining further, Sarah recalls that right from the days when she was quite young, listening to stories was her favorite pastime, and her mother would tell stories, besides the elderly maids, who lent a helping hand to her mother in the household chores. She says that she distinctly remembers Mariyamma, a maid who would sometimes behave rather strangely, laughing and singing loudly, and used to mutter things to herself. This Mariyamma had neither husband nor children, nobody to call her own, and Sarah's mother had told them that a *jinn* (evil spirit) has possessed her. Sarah vividly remembers how Mariyamma would recount very famous Mapilla *pattu*, folk tales of 'Badarul Muneer, Husanul Jamaal', during bedtime. But her mother was scared to retain her because of her jinn problem, the belief that she was possessed by an evil spirit, terrified that the jinn might trouble the children. Sarah wistfully remembers Mariyamma, saying that

[68]This is discussed in the next chapter.

[69]In the second chapter we have touched upon this briefly.

without her tales she had to spend some sleepless nights mooning around, long after she had left their service. Sarah states that when she started reading Triveni's novels, it made her realise that Mariyamma's *jinn* was none other than her psychological imbalance, and was a mental disease (Aboobackar 2009: 3-4).

Sarah recounts that even after reading Triveni, she did not sense that she too ought to write something. The urge to write had not yet descended on her. She distinctly remembers that only at a later phase, with a continued reading of renowned books written by well-known authors must have awakened the novelist within her. That is when Mariyamma, Umali, Nafisa, all began to crystallize as distinct images, in the cast of her protagonists. Sarah gives yet another reason for her protagonists to linger in the nook and corner of her mind, which were the recurring episodes, occurring during the holy month of Ramzan, when a horde of poor women from her mother's native would come over for *zakat*[70] (compulsory donation). Sarah recalls that these women, in their younger days were either maids or had been companions to her mother, apart from being in charge of postnatal care in her mother's family. Despite the fact that her father was not a businessman, and there would not be much to donate, these women would make use of this yearly opportunity to visit her mother. She remembers how much they respected her mother for the reason that she would have small talk with them enquiring about their lives. She also helped by giving off coconuts, rice, and old garments never sending anyone empty handed. She would be all ears and compassionately listened to their problems, which was more than their expectations. Having the rare luxury of someone listening to and sympathizing with them, they would pour out all their woes, and be lighter by the exercise.

> Their woes ranged across a wide spectrum. From *talaq*, their poverty, the problem of dowry, the sickness of their children, to their husbands' polygamy: there were hundred and one issues to be told. My brothers used to nick name this as either 'Annual report' or 'Deepavali special issue'! Rarely, when some request would come, in the form of an enquiry for a suitable alliance for their children, my Umma helped them out by acting as a mediator trying to settle the matrimony. All the protagonists of my novels like Khadija, Julekha, Fatimah, are created from the painful expressions and epithets of these poor women (Aboobackar 2009: 3-4).

[70] As per this practice, a person who has hundred rupees in his possession should compulsorily donate two and a half rupees. If he has jewelry worth hundred sovereigns he has to part with jewelry worth two and a half sovereigns. Likewise from his harvest gains, an agriculturist he has to donate two and a half percent of his yields Businessmen, depending on their turnover, have to donate the calculated amount.

Sarah proudly asserts that though her mother lacked the so called 'formal' education, she was a woman to be reckoned with, a woman who knew the ways of the world. Sarah does not forget to credit her father for giving a free hand to her mother in managing the family affairs. She sincerely agrees that her mother was one of her role models, when the question of managing the household affairs comes into the picture. Unmistakably in Sarah's life, the mother-daughter relationship, played a pivotal role in the development of young Sarah's sensibilities.

3.2.4: Sarah's Emergence as a Writer: A Quest Against Fundamentalism

Sarah tried her hand at writing, but she says was unsuccessful in getting anything published. She lightheartedly recounts her acid comments, while discussing with her husband any unsavory incidents of exploitation, but is thankful that those ranting and ravings stopped, once she started publishing her writings, which ranged from articles to short stories and novels. She confirms that her fiction is based on true incidents – the ones she had witnessed while growing up – tales of exploitation and oppression meted out to women, all in the name of religion! That, she never had to go in search of a theme, and all the misery she had witnessed had crystallized in her mind in the shape of myriads of her protagonists. This could very well be the reason that her protagonists always come across as three dimensional, full figures and never caricatures. She declares her writings provided her with an opportunity to vent out her cooped up emotions at the way women were and are being treated. Specifically, it was the women of her community, who were doubly handicapped by superstition and the dictates of the shari'a, not to forget the patriarchal system, of which Shari'a was a part. She candidly admits that despite the fact that she liked reading books, she never had dreamt of becoming a writer, and the writing bug had bit her after marriage, as she was bored with her life within the burkha.

> After marriage when I had to live a life within the burkha, cut off from the world, so to say, my mind started inclining towards writing. There was absolutely no need for me to go in search of themes for a story because I had grown up watching and listening to hundreds of tales filled with woes and sufferings that the women folk of our community had to endure. All I wanted was someone to publish what I had written. There was a need for

> encouragement in the literary field. When that deficiency was fulfilled by Lankesh[71], all I can say is that I went ahead without any obstacle to stop me (Aboobackar 2009: 5-6).

Sarah wanted to create awareness about the various issues in society, and when she started writing novels, short stories and articles, three of her main themes were: the education of Muslim girls, the exploitation that is perpetrated on Muslim women in the name of religion and communal harmony. She was unhappy that just when her community was coming out of the gloomy woods of superstition and fanaticism, the fundamentalist organizations were succeeding in terrorizing and brainwashing these people in the name of religion, which she wanted to pause, if not put a full stop to. Writing was her tool, her way of subversion, retaliating against the unjust rules and sociocultural practices of her community.

> As I see it, in a way, through my writings, I believe I have taken up arms against the Muslim fundamentalists. At the time that I started writing or in all probability a decade earlier, when our people had just learnt to raise their heads, and were inching towards progress and advancement, the Muslim fundamentalists had silently begun to propel and push our community backwards, to the seventh century…I became fidgety and restive not knowing how to reign in this blind, religious obsession of our women folk. I thought that I could try to bring about a change in their ways of thinking through my writings or through literature. But it wasn't to be for the simple reason that none of the magazines encouraged me, and I had to put a stop to my activities in that direction. In 1980's, the commencement of Lankesh's magazine cleared my path and opened a doorway to express my feelings which had been stewing in me for a long time. The flow that emerged from my pen had a force that was nothing less than the turbulent waters freed from the confines of a dam, the mad rush of eddying, swirling waters that sweeps away everything in its course (ibid: 6).

Sarah comments on how she was never encouraged by any of the magazines or publishers and she really had thought of giving up writing. But when Lankesh published her writing, there was no stopping her. This calls for some discussion about her mentor, Lankesh himself. Lankesh, through his weekly tabloid *Lankesh Patrike*, encouraged several young budding writers who were groping for avenues of publication. He published works which in most cases were full of the Bandaya spirit. It can be said that Lankesh created a fire brand with his tabloid. The articles in the tabloid were controversial in most instances, openly criticising the shortcomings of religion, society and the state. Kannada literary world should be thankful to him, for many of the established writers of today remember Lankesh with gratitude. Sarah has openly written about this. Even in her interview she has stated that if she is a writer

[71] Palyada Lankeshappa, better known as P. Lankesh (8 March 1935 – 25 January 2000), was a Kannada writer, teacher and journalist. He founded the tabloid *Lankesh Patrike* in 1980. More about him, below.

today, it is mainly because of Lankesh. Sarah reminisces how her short stories and articles, which she had sent to famous Kannada weeklies like *Taranga* and *Sudha*, to name only two, were not even acknowledged. She says that after she gained recognition, she had sent the very same stories, to these weeklies and that they were published. In the earlier chapter we have seen how Banu Mushthaq too, thankfully recalls Lankesh for publishing her work. Today both Sarah and Banu are considered prominent voices from the margins. And it is an undeniable fact that they were protégés of Lankesh (II interview data) apart from many others writers.

Unquestionably, the two strong women in Sarah's life – her paternal grandmother and mother – must have influenced her thoughts and the importance of being assertive in one's life. We can see that Sarah had internalized the concept of 'sisterhood' – women supporting women – which can be seen in her way of identifying herself in the woes of exploited women and in treating her daughters-in-law and other female members of her family well. As for being assertive, and speaking daringly, her writings are a proof of that. Being from a conservative Muslim background did not stop her from speaking her mind. She has portrayed the unsavory social customs of her religion unflinchingly, without as much giving a thought to the fundamentalists of her religion. It is a fact the most of the communities are a closed one, no matter what their particular religious sect is. Beary community is no exception and what she wrote made many squirm, and was put down as her flights of fancy, and negated. Speaking about Islam, John L. Esposito states that from the very beginning, Islam existed and spread as a community-state, that it was both a faith as well as a political order. He says

> Within the diversity of states and cultures, Islamic faith and civilization provided an underlying unity, epitomized by a common profession of faith and acceptance of the Sharia, Islamic law. Islam provided the basic ideological framework for political and social life, a source of identity, legitimacy, and guidance. A sense of continuity with past history and institutions was maintained. The world was divided into Islamic (dar al-Islam, the land of Islam) and non-Islamic (dar al-harb, the land of warfare). All Muslims were to strive to extend Islam wherever possible…The ulama in particular successfully asserted their role as protectors and interpreters of the tradition…For the majority of believers, there was a continuum of guidance, power, and success that transcended the contradictions and vicissitudes of Muslim life, and validated and reinforced the sense of a divinely mandated and guided community with a purpose and mission (Esposito 1988: 37-67).

This probably explains the reason for Islam to maintain a certain distance and remain a closed community. It also explains to some extent the staunch belief Muslims have with respect to shari'a. Sarah, by speaking the actuality as she saw it, was going against the fundamental tenet of the Muslims, which was why her actions have been viewed as sacrilegious. For Sarah, it was a misuse of religion, and for the devout Muslims it was a breach of trust from an insider. She even was manhandled, demonstrations happened when she first went on stage, but she was adamant in her decision to portray the negative aspects of her community, the deplorable way women were treated, come what may. She strongly believes that the inhuman sociocultural practices prescribed by the Shari'a are like the rot or mildew, and unless cut out and thrown, will worsen with time. She believes that to cleanse the society someone has to do the job, and she is contributing to such an endeavour. Sarah candidly remarks that though socially she could do nothing against these fundamentalists, personally she felt that she had to wage a war. The opportunity presented itself in January 1985, when the Bandaya Sahitya movement organized a seminar in Putter on "Study of Communities". By then, besides some of her articles, her novel *Sahana* was also published. The organizers had invited her to present a paper on *'Chandragiri Teeradalli'*. Sarah says that in her schooldays she had seen a debate being conducted in school; but apart from that, had no idea and was very ignorant about a seminar procedures; and her initial thought was that it would have been better if she could participate as a delegate instead of a presenter in the seminar. She was in a dilemma not knowing whether it was feasible to request to be an audience before taking the dais. But then, she knew that it was not possible for her to say that she "knew nothing" about the lives of Muslim women. Moreover, Sarah recalls that she did not want to let go of this opportunity of participating in a seminar and addressing a gathering; so she agreed. But what she was not aware and had no idea was that a plan was being hatched there to attack and manhandle her. She distinctly remembers the red lettered day, when she was accompanied by her husband and Dr. Vivek Rai presided over the day's function. After Dr. Amrutha Someshwar presented his paper on the Koraga community, it was her turn. She vividly recalls that as she had stood up to present her paper, a person from the audience remarked "Since you are not wearing burkha, you are not a Muslim lady, therefore you have no right and should not talk

about Muslim women". The next moment all hell had broken loose, with riots breaking out amongst the audience. She thankfully remembers that it was writer Fakir Mohammed Katpadi, who had shielded and prevented her from coming to any harm and with the arrival of the police on the scene, the situation was brought under control. She humorously recalls that Dr. Vivek Rai to this day remembers it, as the one and only occasion wherein he had come away without delivering his presidential address after having presided over the function. The next day, all the newspapers carried this sensational news and throughout the state it had received extensive exposure. In some places it led to protest rallies. Sarah says that it did come to her notice that one Sharifa in Gulbarga and Banu Musthaq in Hassan had headed the rallies there and the incident was publicized widely. On an ironical note Sarah comments that if those fundamentalists had not attacked her in this manner, most probably she would not have received either such wide publicity or recognition and these many awards. So, she questions ironically if she shouldn't be grateful to these people, who had created such a scene. She is sarcastic about the ways of the people who hold power. Her firm conviction is that if the elected representatives, who wield power, decide to help, certainly they can bring in some relief; but she is sad that in reality they never do anything, especially in conflicting situations. She says

> The police force of Putter never took any legal measures on these people after this unpleasant incident. "When Muslims assault Muslim women, we need not interfere and do anything!" might be the reasoning behind their inaction. I had also written and appealed to Ramakrishna Hegde, the then Chief Minister of Karnataka. His hesitation to get in the way might have been on the account of losing the Muslim vote bank! What if Muslims choose not to vote for their party?! The very next day my younger brother arrived posthaste from Kerala. "In Kerala some writers do this for publicity. So you needn't worry unduly on this score. Good that this happened. Now without worrying, write daringly, we are all with you" was his counsel and encouragement to me. But, though most of my husband's relations reside in Mangaluru, none called, not even a single person had the civility to call and ask what had happened! Am I not the dark sheep of the family? The one separated from the flock...? (Aboobackar 2009: 8-9).

Though Sarah was taken aback when the above mentioned episode happened, instead of cowering with fear, it only succeeded in strengthening her resolve to write what she thought was right. Sarah is saddened that though whatever she does is for the welfare of the women of her community and women at large, her efforts do not merit recognition from her husband's family. For they see her work as an insult to their family, and blasphemous because she disagrees with the fundamentalists, in matters

of the sociocultural practices, quoting from Quran if need be. She says that their Prophet Mohammed was a feminist and he had always valued women and had given them due respect and freedom. Her grouse is that these fundamentalists, in the form of various organizations take undue advantage of women folk, brainwashing them with some rubbish, which has no place in the holy Quran. But the women are not aware of it and are exploited in the name of religion. She was shaken to realise the hold of the Jamaate Islami organization, which slowly but surely, was gaining control over women, and by way of influence was having a powerful sway on them. The process of brainwashing Muslim women by filling their heads with fundamentalist, 'pious' and 'dutiful' thoughts had begun in real earnest. The people from these organizations would go to the houses of affluent people in Kasaragod, invite the poor, underprivileged women from the vicinity and would give them religious discourses.

> "Don't desire anything from this earth. God will grant you everything in the next world. You should never step out of your houses. Your sole responsibility is to remain inside the four walls of your homes and to take care and nurture your children….." this is a sample of how the discourses would run. In 1983 one of my friends had once taken me to listen to a discourse. After that first instance I have never ever set my foot there again (ibid: 7).

When one reads the above paragraph, the realization begins to dawn. It answers a lot of questions as to how people are swayed by the religious discourses, all for a hidden agenda of exercising power, for and through religion.

Sarah gives an example of an incident of a young Muslim lady, a certain Nazima Bhangi. Some religious fanatics had attacked Ms. Bhangi, for the simple reason that she had gone to a theatre to watch a movie. This had caused a huge uproar, with intellectuals protesting this uncalled for act, staging protests throughout the state, but to no avail. With the sample of religious discourses that people are made to attend, it hardly comes as a surprise that the lady in question was attacked. Sarah goes back in time remembering the period when her first article was published, when the above mentioned incident had taken place in the distant Bijapur. The fundamentalists had started prohibiting Muslim women from going to theaters and had curtailed their freedom even in entertaining themselves by watching movies. Nazima Bhangi was an unmarried, college lecturer. Her sisters too were unmarried. Sarah states that Nazima Bhangi was suspended from college after this incident, and later when Sarah had visited her in Bijapur, she seemed depressed. It looked like she had been ostracized

from the community and society. Not surprisingly, Muslim women were shying to visit theatres due to this one stray incident and the publicity that it had gained. It was in this manner these organizations were slowly but surely gaining ground in controlling their society. Opposing this inhuman act of injustice and ban on Muslim women by an organization, Banu Musthaq and Sarah had sent articles to Lankesh's magazine. Sarah reminisces

> One can safely declare that this article put me on the pathway of warfare against the system. The rules of Islamic Shari'a are impartial for both the sexes and the Holy Quran virtually sees no difference between a man and woman. Both men and women have to observe Namaz five times a day, fast during Ramzan and if possible go on a pilgrimage to Hajj. Similarly if watching movies is erroneous, then it is applicable to men as well and I wanted to bring this to the notice of our society, and had written that article (Aboobackar 2009: 7).

Sarah considers this incident was the turning point in her career as a writer. She is certain that by writing an article critiquing this injustice, she took up arms against fundamentalists and their abhorrent train of thoughts. Sarah, time and again vehemently declares that contrary to popular belief, this kind of behavior is against their Holy Quran, which virtually does not differentiate between the sexes, and she wanted to drive home this point.

Once in the fray, logically the next step of Sarah was to write a novel. She made her debut with *Chandragiri Teeradalli* questioning the relevance of one day's marriage in the life of a Muslim woman, who is divorced through *talaq*. Her second novel *Sahana* was an attempt in unveiling the mental agony a woman endures as a reason of polygamy. In the Shah Bano's case when the Supreme Court had given the judgment that a divorced Muslim woman (one who is given *talaq*), should be given alimony, the Muslim men throughout the length and breadth of our country had argued that divorced Muslim women lead quite a happy life with their parents and there was absolutely neither reason nor need to offer alimony. Sarah says that she wrote the novel *Vajragalu* to bring to light the insincerity and hollowness of this argument. This was her way of showcasing the exploitation and injustice that was perpetrated on women in the name of religion.

Two sets of rule in place, one for a man and the other for a woman – this was Sarah's way of showcasing the patriarchal power structures and gender politics. Summoning Bell and Yalom (1990), these instances can be safely labeled as examples of reality,

select kernels of experience garnered from life, of historic self-expression, that an autobiography can reveal. And there is no necessity to harness a feminist perspective to realize that women are treated in downright derogatory manner in this twenty first century. Especially so in the Muslim community, where the situation of women is much worse, handicapped as they are with the shari'a, which gives men undue advantage over women.

Sarah narrates how men in her community started taking notice of her writing and did not like what they read and saw, and tried very hard to put a full stop to her writing. She critically says that all men came together, sensing an inherent danger which would in all probability curtail their freedom of divorcing and marrying at will. Sarah cynically exclaims that the men were not about to let go their freedom of exploiting women in the name of religion. Opposing the Shah Bano verdict by the Supreme Court, the various religious organizations, which otherwise had rivalry between them, came together and spearheaded a nationwide agitation by Muslim men, with an intention to further exploit Muslim women to suit their whims, and managed to pass a bill by coercing the government 'to safeguard the rights of divorced Muslim women' in the Loka Sabha (The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986). Sarah states that it had made her wonder, time and again, at the power the Muslim men wielded in the concerned circles. She reminisces that what depressed her the most was the knowledge that Muslim women too, had supported and seconded this campaign and she was left utterly clueless not knowing how to put up a fight against this. But true to her sentiments, assertive as she was, she knew that it was against her conscience to keep quiet. Though, in hindsight, she was aware that she did not have the necessary means and power to unite the Muslim women to take up arms for their cause or to create awareness in them. Sarah saw that the one and the only path that was open to her to create awareness and to put up a fight was through her writings. She claims

> The holy Quran clearly states that the divorced woman is to be given "mataah" (compensation given in a single installment to safe-guard her future), which had been concealed in this bill of The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, and my intention was to throw light on this serious breach of code of ethics, as to not give any alimony to the divorced woman. The chief Justice of the Supreme Court had given the verdict based on this statement from Quran. Arif Mohammed Khan; a Loka Sabha member had also seconded this judgment. But when the government was about to take steps to

> improve the lives of women, Muslim men were capable of altering the law to suit them! At that point of time they were not stalled by either the law of the nation or the dictates of the Holy Quran (ibid: 7-8).

One is certainly shocked to read the above paragraph, because being a non-Muslim, what one would know is only selective interpretation of Quran, a skewed interpretation, given by the people, having a vested interest in permanently maintaining the patriarchal and male supremacist discourses alive. Sarah vouches that there are not many Muslim erudite people who can interpret the Holy Quran. The reason she knows more about the holy book than what most women and men of her community do, is all thanks to her father, who was a gold medalist in the Mohammadan law. Her grandfather too, who knew his Quran so well that people of the village used to flock his home, instead of going to a Maulvi, in case they had doubts about anything.

> It was compulsory that one learnt to read all the chapters of Quran…For that reason every year, the one and a half months of summer vacation I would spend at Chamanad. There, apart from learning everything about our faith from my grandfather and the maulvi, I also used to read many sacred books my grandfather had in Malayalam and he would explain to me the things that were beyond my comprehension. Interestingly, though the town had no dearth of either mosques or maulvis, people would flock to my grandfather seeking his advice, if they had problems related to *nikah* and *talaq* (ibid: 5).

Sarah is justifiably proud of her erudite ancestry, but is doubtless sad at the turn of events taking place in the Muslim community in the country, not to forget her own native. Sarah explaining this blind fanaticism, which most of the Muslim leaders and heads various Muslim religious organizations are handicapped with, says that if any learned person arrives on the scene with an intention of making people understand the real Islam and Quran, it would not be taken lightly, and that these fanatics would not even hesitate to murder him, because they have tasted power, supreme power, of having people under the sway of religious dictates and they dare not let the people slip through their fingers. In relation to this, she narrates an incident regarding a person called as Chekannur Maulavi.

Chekannur Maulavi's name was Abul Hasan, but he was famous and known throughout Kerala as Chekannur Maulavi. With a quest to really understand the essence of Islam, he had migrated and lived in Saudi Arabia for many years. He first mastered the Arabic language there and then started studying the Holy Quran. His

profound study and research made him realise that the Muslims have lost their way, have misinterpreted their religion, and most of whatever they were practicing in the name of religion was wrong. He started writing books with the intention of showing them the right path. He started giving discourses and speeches, having discussions throughout Kerala, arguing that most of what they were practicing was un-Islamic and never was in the Holy Quran, even going to the extent that none of their religious leaders or heads have scholarly knowledge on Islam and Quran. He used to invite religious leaders to discuss these issues in an open forum, on a dais, which would be promptly evaded by them. He claimed that the *namaz* was to be performed only thrice a day, and that there was a lot of inconsistency regarding the law of inheritance. Sensing a danger to their positions, the fundamentalists hatched a plan, invited him to a distant town on the pretext of a speech in 1991, and promptly murdered him. In this manner a real religious leader, who was an excellent and progressive orator, debater, writer, and philosopher, mysteriously vanished from the scene[72] (Aboobackar 2010: 178-179).

Sarah candidly admits that there is nothing new in the fact that violence is perpetrated on those who raise their voice against injustice, and they are usually brutally murdered. She once again supplies us with an ancient incident, that after the death of the prophet, three main disciples of his – Omer, Usman and his son-in-law Ali, were all assassinated along with his sons Hassan and Hussain. She goes on record saying that the books that Chekannur had written are still sold and bought by many to this day, and his followers are multiplying in number. A certain Prof. Karassheri is not only in the forefront of this, but every year, on the death anniversary of Chekannur, he organizes a program to commemorate the life and death of Chekannur.

[72] Chekannur P. K. Mohammed Abul Hassan Maulvi, popularly known as Chekannur Moulavi, was a traditionalist historian and was considered a radical because he was against several current Islamic customs and practices. He had done extensive research on Quran and tried his best to educate people regarding what were the teachings of Quran. He published 17 books, Journal Al Buhran and even translated the Quran into Malay. The last book he published was Communal Harmony. His steadfast belief was that The Quran, preached universal brotherhood and did not divide communities, but subsequent texts, also deemed sacred, brought in a divisive element. He argued that only the teachings of Quran should be followed. This automatically led to the devaluation of the second religious text, the Hadith or Hadis, which was known as the "Canon or Traditions of the Prophet". The Hadith is widely followed and claims to be a collection of sayings of the Prophet (members.tripod.com/Signs_Magazines/.../profile_chekannur_moulavi.htm, retrieved on May 26, 2015).

> The murderers had immediately fled to Dubai, Lakshadweep and Malay islands. Neither the Congress Government which was in power in Kerala when this incident occurred, nor the Communist Government, which came to power later were bothered and did nothing to trace the killers of Chekannur. A turn for the better happened when Vajpayee Government came to power in Delhi. This central government, with the help of C.B.I, managed to catch hold of the culprits, who were pinned down and brought home to Kerala. By then 12 years had elapsed and though the murderers identified and showed the spot where the body of Chekannur was buried, the mortal remains could not be found and the murder was not proved. But the followers of Chekannur, try to see that the public does not forget this incident, by organizing talks and programs. The organization which was founded by Chekannur, the 'Quran Sunnath Society' is growing steadily (Aboobackar 2010: 178-179).

Sarah gratefully acknowledges the steps taken by the then BJP Government, headed by Vajpayee, to bring the culprits to book. This is but an instance which proves that governments too shirk their responsibilities, when the question is about fighting against fundamentalism, which already is deep-rooted, and needs a sincere effort to uproot.

Sarah, speaking about the misinterpretation of the Holy Quran, says, that there are empathetic men too, in the Muslim community, who try their level best to fight against an easy divorce in the form of *talaq* and polygamy and many such discriminating practices, which she finds hopeful to bring about a positive change in the situation of Muslim women. She is all praises for Syed Bhai, who was on the forefront of an agitation, which was fighting against the numerous archaic practices rife in the Muslim community, irrespective of their different sects.

She remarkably remembers that she was intrigued by a news item which had caught her attention. Syed Bhai of Poona was fighting against the easy divorce, the *talaq* system and polygamy which was weighing down Muslim women, as well as advocating the need of educating girls. She identified with his sentiments which mirrored her concerns and sensed that both of them were like minded. Moreover, he also supported the verdict of the Supreme Court and was a champion for equal civil rights of women. Without much waste of time Sarah contacted him and he quite happily, straight away visited her. Then the two of them along with one Rahamat Khan from Bangalore, called a press meet in Bangalore, saying that they were in favor of equal civil rights and founded an organization called 'Muslim Pragati Parishattu'. Apart from that, they had also received some letters from Muslims supporting their

cause. But it came to nothing as the fundamentalist organizations saw red and effectively accomplished to put a full stop to their advancement.

> But the fundamentalist organizations were successful in stopping us from making any progress in this matter. The organization that we had founded by the name of "Muslim Pragati Parishattu" was short lived. Since Syed Bhai had organized some meetings in Madurai and Poona, I came into contact with a number of women who approved my view points and agreed to fight for it, which did give me some measure of fulfillment. Hafeesa, a lawyer in Madurai, had given a call to the government that this law, The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, was damaging to women, a flawed one and had to be revoked. But the law to this day remains the same. In addition, these fundamentalist organizations see to it that no woman, divorced through *talaq*, ever ventures near the court to file a case, and in case the petition is filed, it pressurizes them into withdrawing the case and is successful in systematically keeping the women in total darkness (Aboobackar 2009: 8).

These real life incidents, which no person, man or woman, dared to put forth, was publicized by Sarah, and hence her community, does not acknowledge her presence even to this day. She does not care and repeats that as a writer her duty is to put forth the issues she witnesses, through her writings. This portrayal of the corruption that takes place behind the scenes, is revolting and callous, to say the least. It seems upsetting, that women who are the pillars and an integral part of any family – the basic unit of society – are treated in such an abominable manner. The question of who is to be blamed, looms large. We end up asking numerous questions which have no satisfactory answers. The jigsaw puzzle is never completed, what with some missing bits and pieces. It is Sarah's perception that religion has turned to be the parable of the 'blind men's elephant' - to each his own interpretation. They can never see the entire elephant, nor are they willing to believe people's description of an elephant, who can see and are not blind, as had happened in Chekannur's case.

3.2.5: Sarah's Censorious Recollections

Sarah recounts her various unsavory experiences, about the different ways she was swindled and ill-treated by people of repute, both men and women. But, she says what they did not know was that she was made of sterner stuff, thanks to her upbringing. She argues that silence encourages the perpetrators of crime, resulting in an increase of criminal mentality. Unless we stand up and face the guilty squarely, we cannot hope to usher in a just society. She bitterly states, as a matter of fact that she had to suffer a lot. To quote Sarah: "I have suffered in many ways for being a woman, and

that too for being a Muslim woman". One is strongly reminded of Spivak's seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, and her theoretical assumptions of a subaltern having no voice. Sarah, is doubly subordinated. Sarah offers many instances when she senses she was cheated, because she was a woman, and that too a Muslim woman. She sees it as pure injustice.

The first instance that Sarah recalls is of Sadashivam, who was felicitated with the Sahitya Academi Award for his translated Tamil version of her novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli,* and is unhappy to note that no recognition came her way although the original novel is hers. She asks if it signified that the original story was no good and only the translated version was deemed fit to receive the award. Or if it is that the translation was better than the original? The second instance was when Macmillan Publishers gave the copyright of the English translation of *Chandragiri Teeradalli*, to Vanamala Vishwanath, who had translated the novel into English. She remembers that she had to take them to task by sending a legal notice (Aboobackar 2010: 153-154).

C. Raghavan when translating the same novel to Malayalam, had taken liberty with the novel by changing the end. So, she had requested K.K.Nayar to translate the novel again into Malayalam which she had later published through Prabhatam Book House.

Sarah scornfully recounts about a man from their community, who had produced the movie *Byari*. The movie 'Byari' which has shared the 'Swarna Kamal' award in 2012, is based on her award-winning Kannada novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli*, which is a lesser known fact. Sarah has alleged that the producer, T.H. Altaf Hussein, has stolen the story from the novel published in 1984. She says

> It has come to my notice that very recently, a young man, a quite inexperienced lad from Mangaluru, had produced a movie titled *Byari*, in Beary language based on my debut novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli*. The people who used to say, 'there are no such rules in our society' and [blame me] 'I have written this novel for the sake of money, name and fame' have now stooped so low as to steal my novel to produce a film! Based on this novel Ponnvannan had produced a film in Tamil, titled *'Nadira'*. But without resorting to shortcuts and unethical behavior he had invited me to Chennai, paid me appropriate honorarium, then with my consent had made the movie, which has admirably showcased and reflected the problems of women and had the distinction of bagging the best movie award in 2001, conferred by the Tamil Nadu Government (Aboobackar 2009: 11-12).

Both Sarah and Altaf hail from Beary community. Sarah is fighting a legal battle against the producer and is saddened by the turn of events. She is shocked at the irony that the very same men who criticise her for the issues her writing raises, celebrate the award for the movie dealing with the very same issues. To quote her from an interview in the magazine *Outlook*:

> Muslim women can't do anything fearlessly and on their own volition. When such is the oppressive condition within the community, isn't it an irony that Byari men are issuing statements extolling Altaf's achievements. For these men, my novel makes a sensational movie subject. It stops there. It doesn't stir their conscience. It doesn't drive them to reform the community. They often wear masks of moderates and progressives, but in reality they are conservative. The men who ecstacise over 'Byari' won't change themselves **(Srinivasraju: 101).**

In the earlier section of this chapter we had fleetingly discussed her attempts to publish her writings. To stop people from swindling her she came up with her own publishing house, and she publishes all her writings under the banner 'Chandragiri Prakashana'. Sarah recalled an elating experience when she had visited her son in USA. She had visited a library there, and it had all her books, fiction and non-fiction. Sarah says that it took her by surprise, and she says that it is not the case in Indian universities or libraries. Though a lot of felicitations have come her way, she says there are many cases where college libraries do not have her books. She views this as unfortunate (II interview data).

Sarah next explains how she decided to strike back on the fundamentalists who, in more ways than one, have tried their level best to slacken her pace in writing by slandering her with all sorts of names, apart from trying to harm her. Her firm belief is that women should dare to question anyone who exploits them in any form, without which they are not going to acquire personal freedom. Sarah goes down the memory lane, refreshing her memory about the seminar riot that had happened in Puttur, and believes that that was when the tide had turned and she had personally taken up arms against the fundamentalist organizations. She says that this

> ...happened after the unpleasant incident and riots in Puttur. The focal voice of Jamaate Islamic organization, a magazine named *Sanmarga* had in fact, tried hard to put a full stop to my writing. The magazine had slandered me as a Namadhari Muslim and a movie star. A few writers who used to author articles for this magazine came together and founded an organization called "Muslim Lekakhara Sangha" (Muslim Writers' Association). When I was in mourning, observing 'Hidda', on account of my husband's demise, this organization distributed circulars in town, giving a call to our society to excommunicate me from our caste and community. My younger brother-in- law had sent me a copy of the circular. I

> hadn't lost my patience till then. But this being the limit, I felt my endurance shatter (Aboobackar 2009: 10).

Vehemently commenting on the above issue Sarah says that she had lost control, the limits of her patience stretched. She decided to retaliate against the approach of these fundamentalists and showed the articles printed in the magazine as well as the copy of the circular to her father, who was then living with her. She asked his counsel regarding the matter of approaching the court, whether she had the right to question this and file a defamation case, if what these people were doing was against the Indian penal code. Her sole question was who had given these people, who were civilians like her, the permission to take the law into their hands, meting out punishment against fellow civilians in the name of religion. She asks

> Is our religion Islam captive, exclusively belonging to a select few? The prophet, in his discourses, had given some guidelines to people with the intention that they should walk the path of virtue, and live accordingly. Nowhere is it made known that those who don't follow these rules should be excommunicated and ostracized. When this is the case how can some oppress others in the name of religion, as if they were heirs to the religion and it solely belonged to them? In actual fact, with the exception of our sacred duties, Quran advises us to follow the social laws of the nation (like marriage, divorce, etc.) to which we belong, as the citizens of that country. If we can abide by the criminal laws of this nation why can't we follow its social laws too? If we follow the criminal rules laid down by Shari'a, then a thief's hand should be cut. The punishment for adultery is being whipped publicly. Definitely men would be the ones to be hot and bothered by this. That's why this patriarchal, male dominated society decided to have the social rules according to the shari'a and the criminal rules according to the penal codes of that nation! (ibid: 11).

Sarah, says she was incensed beyond measure, by the underhand dealings of the fundamentalists of her community. She visualises herself first as a citizen of the country and believes that she is entirely eligible to all the rights the constitution of this country gives to its citizens. It is her staunch belief that if today she failed to question this ostracizing and the defamation articles, almost certainly in future no Muslim woman will dare to open up or will take hold of a pen. Even if she dares to grasp a pen, one need not be surprised, if the grip on the pen is in the hands of men. Hence, she decides

> ...that once and for all I had to teach these fundamentalists a lesson, so as they don't intimidate and oppress anybody in the future, and acted upon it. I filed a defamation case on this magazine as well as on the Muslim Writer's Association... The moment these people received the lawyer notice they sent their mediators to me requesting to withdraw the case and compromise. I replied, "[a]lright, I will withdraw the case, but they have to publish a single statement in their magazine, "[w]e regret and repent for publishing those articles. They need not apologize". But with a lady, they were not even prepared to say that much!

> With the commencement of the case the writings against me stopped (ibid: 11-12, Aboobackar 2010:132).

Even though Sarah was systematically tried to be pulled back, she fought for what was and is her right, not fearing the consequences, which should be emulated by the women of today, if they wish to see a better future for women. If Sarah has won many issues, half of the credit should go to the male members of her family. Be it her father, grandfather, brothers, husband, and sons, who supported her and her decision, in times of need, and were pillars of reinforcement. Otherwise it would have been still more difficult. One should realize that it is not a question of man *versus* woman, but man *and* woman. Sarah, elaborating on this issue of patriarchal discourse which always throws the weight of the tradition on women, recalls many incidents in this connection, especially when people always questioned her on her not wearing burkha, which she explains bluntly.

> I still remember some of the questions their lawyer had asked me in the court during the hearing of the case. "What is your opinion about Salman Rushdie? Why aren't you wearing burkha? Why haven't you gone on a Hajj pilgrimage?" were his questions. It is noteworthy that the lawyer who had asked me these questions was a Hindu. To this day I have absolutely no idea what connection Salman Rushdie has with my case (ibid: 11, Aboobackar 2010: 133).

Reading between the lines, one realises that the effort of the advocate of the respondent in this case was to establish her identity as a 'progressive one' as though it was opposed to Islam in itself. This, he tried by cleverly eliciting her responses to these questions and thereby pit her against Islam. Sarah does not hesitate to admit that she never understood the relative reason for the questions she was asked and therefore refused to answer that question. She then informed him that she did not have the necessary funds to go on a Hajj pilgrimage and wearing burkha is not compulsory. Sarah happily notes that at the end of the trial, the magistrate's verdict was in her favor. It is hard to believe the extent to which the fundamentalists have gone to tarnish her reputation, and sounds far-fetched. Slandering remarks that she was not a Muslim and was a convert, were frequently used to defame her.

Sarah remembers yet another incident when on an occasion she was invited to visit a Muslim Women's Association in Bengare[73] by one Rita Noronha. The Muslim ladies

[73] A place in coastal Karnataka.

there were quite friendly and they did have a very interesting conversation with Sarah. Sarah even presented them with some of her books and parted happily. They had requested her to come over again. Sometime later when Rita Noronha chanced to meet Sarah, she told her that the people who had taken Sarah to the Women's Association were thrown out of the Association. Sarah critically comments that "these people can't and won't tolerate Muslim women getting to see even a glimmer or ray of light. They are so very scared that these women might break free from their clutches!" (Aboobackar 2009:11).

Subsequently when a lecturer from Badria College, Mangaluru, came to invite her for a programme, she became alert, because she did not want other people to suffer and be in a quandary on her account. Her wish was that none should get into trouble because of her. So with this admirable intention of not wanting to hurt anybody she asked him to confirm with the management whether he could invite her so that later on he should not be in trouble because of the invitation going without notice to the management. Sarah sadly recalls that some members of the management had not even been inside a school in their entire lives and were illiterates and she confesses that she does not know what transpired later; but the lecturer never came back. She states that her uncle Haji M. Moideenabba was one of the founders of Badria School and had donated a lot to this school and the mosque that was attached to it. "In tribute, his tomb is inside the mosque next to that of a saint. By that I don't mean to say that I am entitled and have a right to visit Badria College and give a talk there. It's just that I am saddened to witness the meanness of these people" (ibid: 11). In all probability, the college Management did not want a radical (that is how she is considered by her community) to talk to their students. They were afraid that she might give them a line of progressive thought.

Sarah was not happy when she was asked about the Beary Sahitya Academy. Karnataka Beary Sahitya Academy is a state-sponsored Academy to promote Beary literature and culture in Karnataka. Its functions are similar to that of Karnataka Tulu Sahitya Academy or Karnataka Konkani Sahitya Academy, etc. The Beary Academy had started functioning even before it got the full grant from the state. Sarah, being a Beary, one would naturally expect the Academy to benefit from the services or the

expertise of Sarah. However, speaking about the Academy she says she is unhappy about the way they have treated her (Aboobackar 2012 a: 159). Since she does not mince words, and speaks her mind, her community does not look on her favourably. Sarah states that the Academy even had a lady who was incited to write against her, slandering her, which she found quite distasteful. And in many such instances, as stated earlier, she had filed a case of defamation. Sarah goes on record saying that these same people, who had defamed her, had sent some intermediary to her asking her pardon. In response, she had asked for a public apology, which they of course would not agree to. In one of her interviews, she even went to the point of saying that she would rather be known as a 'Mapilla' than a Beary[74] (III interview data). Though Sarah is the voice of the women of her community, she has never been recognized for what she is. She is not given her proper due, which she deserves. Sarah states that most of the issues, which she has portrayed in her fiction and essays, concern more, the lower middle class and the poorer sections of her society. The problem is not extensive in the upper middle and the upper classes. Though from an affluent family, she took up the gauntlet, and worked for the cause of the voiceless, oppressed women of her community. This is a paradox of life, which at least some in her community honorably acknowledge (Respondent's interview data).[75]

3.2.6: Sarah's Experiences within the Literary Circle

Sarah's experience in the exalted literary circles is no better either. She is saddened with the way things have taken a turn, and she is pained with the rude behavior of people. She sees religion, caste and race also as reasons for discrimination apart from gender, and narrates some instances, wherein she speaks about professional jealousy too. She recounts some instances where renowned women writers have refused to

[74] The difference between the two is referred to in the second chapter.

[75] Sometimes, the anger against Sarah was also oriented towards her family members. Sarah said that earlier, before the Beary Academy got the full grant, she knew how her own son painstakingly used to do all the typesetting for articles which were published in Kannada and Beary language, without an honorarium. But the moment the Academy got the recognition and grants to the tune of several lakhs from the state government, he was discarded. Sarah had acidly remarked that, when money started pouring in, many people came forward to do the work and get paid, and this work was given to a non-Beary person. The Academy neither had the decency to acknowledge the free labour of the person, nor found it reasonable to give him work nor pay for it. She says that the money received from grants goes to line the pockets of the favoured few (Aboobackar 2012 a: 159, 164).

acknowledge her as a writer; have given her a cold shoulder; and spoken in an intolerant manner. This shameful occurrence happened in 1990, during a programme organized by 'Karnataka Lekhakiyara Sangha' [Karnataka Women Writers' Association] in Bangalore, and almost all women writers from across Karnataka had participated in this program. Sarah wonders why some agonizing incidents which have given us a lot of pain, never disappear from our memory. During the proceedings of the function Dr. Vijaya, in the course of her speech had said "I will never consider Sarah Aboobackar as a writer". Sarah says she was not sure whether Dr. Vijaya knew of her presence in the audience. Sarah was naturally stunned to witness that none of the other writers who were a part of the audience raised their voices to oppose this statement (Aboobackar 2010: 148). Sarah bitterly exclaims this was not a solitary incident. In some other programmes too she had heard people raise question like "why is it that only Sarah Aboobackar gets so much of publicity? Aren't there other women writers who write like her?" It is Sarah's passionate belief that there was absolutely no cause for these women writers to be ill-tempered and prickly. Because according to Sarah, from 1910 onwards a lot of progress is happening in the situation of women of the Hindu society. Raja Ram Mohan Roy had started his fight against 'sati'. Ongoing we have stalwarts like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhay, Sharat Chandra Chatterjee, and Rabindranath Tagore, who have fought against the derogatory sociocultural practices, portraying the issues women face, through literature. In Karnataka, beginning from Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba, Saraswathi Bai Rajawade, Raj Lakshmi, Kodagina Gouramma, Triveni, and M.K.Indira, to the emerging writers, almost all have put up a fight and their writings mainly focused on women issues. Sarah argues that if one but glances towards the Muslim community, what is it that meets our eye? A scenario of exalting the religion, and exploiting the women in the name of religion, excluding them from education, brainwashing them to such an extent that they comply with everything meekly, so that they never speak openly about the atrocities, which to date was successfully hidden from the society at large. She says

> ...when I wrote about these unknown oppressive practices of the Muslim society, it might have seen like a miracle to the non-Muslim world. They might have got a different glimpse of a society, of which they knew nothing, apart from the fact that they were Muslims. The people who had read nothing other than the sambar, huliyanna [sambar rice] and mosaranna

> [curd rice] of the Brahmin community, might have read for the first time about fried fish, chicken curry and Biryani, and the exploitation of women, opening doors to hitherto unheard of life, which they must have valued. Hence the publicity! I smiled to myself and never reacted to their snide remarks. The reason was that the Kannada literary world, to this day, has never ignored me! (Aboobackar 2010: 149).

Sarah accepts as true, that these women were jealous of her success partly because she was from a different community, and the same reason why other women never spoke in her defense. She was necessarily the 'other', an alien, given her religion and identity; gender never was a cause in these instances because this was a women writers' space! Sarah regales us with yet another incident, which also she says, is hard to forget.

> I had visited Kalasa for a literary programme. The speeches were not up to the mark and I realized that I need not have attended the program. Since it was not possible to return the same day I was put up in one of the rooms of my host. After dinner I was given a room in the outer verandah. I could not sleep the entire night because I was tormented by mosquitoes and could smell cow dung strongly. Also the fear of being alone in an unknown place troubled me. I had to sleep on a makeshift bed, on the floor, without a proper bed or fan. In the morning, I saw that the cowshed was adjacent to my room. There were better furnished rooms inside the house; but I was given the outer room! I was considered an 'outsider' there! (Aboobackar 2010: 182).

One is profoundly distressed when one reads this excerpt from her autobiography. One of the prominent literary figures was treated in such poor fashion, needs a close reading. Sarah is an economically independent woman, an educated person, a writer of repute, a recipient of many literary awards. But she was treated shabbily as is narrated in the above incident. It is shocking to see that discrimination can happen in such an environment. These acid comments, and behavior she takes in a matter-of-fact manner, consoling herself philosophically; but she is happy that by and large the people of Karnataka have showered her with lots of love and admiration, and have applauded her writings, conferring her with numerous prestigious awards. The above narrated incidents from her autobiography, enable a glimpse into the hidden recesses of a renowned writer. The subterranean fault lines – of religion, gender and sect – leaps to the eye. But as Sarah remarks, she is accepted by the general public, for which she is content.

3.2.7: Sarah's Tryst against Communalism.

Yet another aspect of Sarah's writings center on communalism. She argues that we need to learn to live like Indians first and communalism should be weeded out for the

growth of a healthy social order. She distinctly remembers her childhood days when the people of different communities lived in peace and harmony. During her childhood and school days, they never had any of these communal thoughts. Though theirs was a single Muslim house plumb in the center of the Hindu houses they were never an island nor marooned. Sarah realises that they need to be grateful to their parents regarding this issue. All the neighboring children were friends. Sarah distinctly remembers a house opposite to theirs, which belonged to a certain Dr. Raghavendra Rao, who was a friend of her father. He had expired at an early age and his only son used to go to school in the company of Sarah's elder brothers. When Sarah's brothers went to Madras to pursue their higher studies it was decided that he should accompany them to and fro, and his mother was the one who had enforced this. Sarah remarks that though this might come as a surprise today, during her childhood days, this was a common enough occurrence wherein neighbours helped each other, the religion never coming into the picture. Sarah happily reminisces that her elder brother was virtually a big brother, a hero to many young boys; that being an excellent athlete and an outstanding swimmer, he could swim nonstop fourteen laps across the river Chandragiri. He was also a swimming coach to these lads from different communities – Brahmins, Billavas, Mogaveeras, Dalits, etc.[76] – all with an easy camaraderie amongst them which was devoid of prejudice and superiority complex. She says that there was never any mention of the word Hindu or Muslim of which she is aware of and she had never heard anything to the contrary. Many a time when they were exhausted after a game of cricket in their backyard, her brother would climb the coconut tree; he would fetch down some tender coconuts which all would relish. Similarly when she could not go home for lunch after they had changed their house which was at quite a distance to school, one of her Hindu friends had taken Sarah to her home and served food, all the while forcing for a second helping, in case she hesitated to have her fill, which Sarah says is hard to forget. At a later stage, once in a blue moon when she used to visit this friend's house with her kids, her friend's mother would shower the same love on all, to which she was accustomed during her

[76] If Brahmins are upper castes, Billavas are toddy tappers traditionally and belong to backward castes. Mogaveeras are the fisher folk, again from the backward caste. The latter two caste names are specifically from south coastal Karnataka and the Kasaragod district of Kerala. Dalits are the former untouchables.

school days. It was like time had stood still, with nothing changing in the interim. Sarah argues it is the politicians who are busy erecting walls between neighbors and people and we should be wise enough to read in between the lines and not fall prey to their strategy of 'divide and rule'. She asks

> When we were living in harmony like this, who has raised the walls now in our midst? Why? To this day no such walls exist in Kerala. But Karnataka? Through my writings I have tried to bring down these walls, to crumble them. Forget the doing away; instead of disintegrating, day by day the walls are growing higher, with us watching helplessly. In our childhood days we had never heard words like Bhajarangadala, Sri Rama Sene, B.J.P, Jamaate Islami, Tablig Jamaat, SIMI[77], terrorism, and Taliban; except R.S.S.[78] which was in existence and active. Nowadays the moment you open a newspaper, aren't these the words that grab your attention at first sight? Today our prime responsibility is to spew out the poison that people like Govalkar, Savarkar and Moudoodi have injected into the psychological space of the populace and cleanse the system (Aboobackar 2009: 12-13).

Sarah cautions us that it is high time people realised the true reasons for these communal agitations and jealousy, which is mostly the handiwork of the politicians, serving their political gimmicks. Her reminder and advice is apt and one has but to agree with her sentiments that the political parties and their organisations are responsible for half of the communal unrest we observe as bystanders today, irrespective of their religion. That what we need is an awareness to understand the veiled communalism, barely held in check and a serious responsibility to cleanse the system of the poison circulated by the nefarious discourses. In one of her short stories "Bennattuva Bhootagalu", which is an autobiographical account, Sarah portrays the uneasiness Sarah had to face with her husband as a couple because of communalism, which she recalls as unfortunate[79].

At this juncture, it is pertinent that we look into the scenario of coastal Karnataka, when Sarah started writing. As we have seen earlier, it was in the 1980's that she started writing. We should also note that religious communalism started in coastal Karnataka around the same time, which also meant that the Hindu fundamentalism became more conspicuous during this time. It was no co-incidence that writing from coastal Karnataka, Sarah started writing at the same time as communalism started

[77] Student Islamic Movement of India, identified as having involved in some anti-national activities
[78] Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu outfit that argues for a monolithic Hindu nation.
[79]Discussed in the next chapter.

showing up.[80] She has written stories on the subject, depicting the suffering people undergo, especially women, during communal riots. She is a regular speaker at the conventions of Karnataka Komu Souharda Vedike (Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum), which makes an attempt to bring about harmony between the communities by hosting various programmes. The Forum has been quite vigilant during the riots and has helped the justice redress system by taking up independent fact-finding missions.

In the wake of aggressive fundamentalism and communalism, the question of who critiques whom takes pre-eminence. Members of the communities always blame and criticise each other and more militant and aggressive members of the community embark on physical attack on the others. In such a context, more progressive individuals belonging to both the communities would be self-reflexive and be self-critical rather than blame the other. Any critiquing of the other would feed into the larger communal feeling, which might translate into violence. Therefore, we could see that many progressives belonging to the Hindu community did not directly critique the Muslim community for their internal oppression. Instead, they encouraged self-critical views to emerge from within the community. This was the time when we see progressives like P. Lankesh encouraging writers like Sarah Aboobackar and Banu Mushthaq, who had the capability to engage in self-criticism. Lankesh made a fervent effort to unite people of backward caste, minority and Dalits against communalism. He gave such calls through his tabloid *Lankesh Patrike*. Sarah wrote several articles in the tabloid on the issue of fundamentalism and communalism (III interview data). As stated elsewhere in this thesis, it was upon Lankesh's insistence that Sarah wrote her first novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli*.

Sarah is aware that her writing against her own community has elated the Hindu fundamentalists. She narrates an interesting incident when a woman came to her showing interest to write her biography. When she started interviewing her, she asked Sarah how she got interested in Hinduism. This makes Sarah wonder and she says that

[80] Sarah herself says that it *is* a co-incidence, in the sense that Sarah did not consciously start writing provoked by the rise in fundamentalism. However, as it turned out to be, her mentor was P. Lankesh, who was very consciously working against the rise of communalism and fundamentalism in Karnataka. She also says that she would like to see herself [fighting Muslim fundamentalists] with those who fight Hindu fundamentalists.

it was clear that she has been commissioned by someone to do this task (Aboobackar 2001). The question would mean that her critiquing her own community was perceived as her liking the Hindu religion, which was an utter stupidity. Yet, she would like to continue writing about the problems of her community since other communities should be aware that there are problems in her community too. Therefore, when she is blamed that she writes since she wants to court controversies, it should be understood that such criticism usually comes from the ones who are critiqued. In fact it is also true that she was quite afraid when she started writing, convincing herself that at the most, they might write against her or black list her (III interview data).

Sarah next recounts incidents when she was asked personal questions regarding her writing and whether her family was okay with it, to which she had retorted that it was not possible to reach the heights she has attained without the support of her family members. She acknowledges that if her husband and her father's support was not there, it was not only impossible, but she does not think she would have been able to even write in the first place. She recounts an instance when once a Mangalorean had come to her father saying, "Your daughter writes against the religion and is blaspheming the religious conviction. Advise her not to write like that". In reply, her father had answered in rather a philosophical tone, "Who is to tell what one says is right or wrong? I have read all that she has written, and I haven't found anything in opposition to our religion, in whatever that she has written so far". Since Sarah's father had immense knowledge in matters related to religion and was also a gold medalist in Mohammadan Law from Madras University, the person who had come to complain against her had left, knowing well that he was not capable enough to argue on the matter, and was no match to her father. Likewise, in another instance some people had asked her, "What do your children say about your writing?" In reply to that query she had told them "I don't think I need my children's permission to write what I feel like writing. They are my children, whom I have borne, given birth to and nurtured from infancy. They know me and what I stand for, pretty well. I too never meddle in their lives. They are free to live their lives the way they want to". Sarah frankly expresses her astonishment to the very question of her children's opinion

regarding her writing. She does agree that one might require one's children's love and care in old age. But she does not consent to their being in charge of, and controlling their parents' lives. Subsequently during a programme, in the course of a discussion someone had asked, "Doesn't everybody in your community wear burkha? Wont people say anything if you don't wear one?" To which Sarah recalls that she had replied, "The way I dress is my concern and not that of my religion" (ibid: 9-10).

Sarah is dumbfounded by the kind of questions people ask her, which she is sure will never be asked to any other writer from a different community. She wonders why is it that people worry about whether she has consent from her family members. She says she does not understand the logic behind such questions. She believes writing is a creative art, and the writer, like any other artist has an urge to produce something worthwhile which he feels brewing inside him, and does not require anybody's approval. Looking back at the road travelled, Sarah feels, that to some extent she has been successful. To quote her "Now, on the threshold of seventy, when I gaze back and glimpse the road that I have taken, although in a way I am satisfied with my choice, I still am nagged by the sentiment that most probably I was not successful enough, and indeed have failed in stopping the society going back in the reverse gear" (ibid: 6). She honestly agrees that consciously she can by no means say that socially she has never received recognition and success after the publication of *Chandragiri Teeradalli.* She jogs our memory regarding the very first time, when she had written this novel, how people had denied the existence of such social evils – *talaq*, polygamy, one day's marriage, etc. – portrayed in the novel. But she is content that as a matter of fact, now almost a decade later, newspapers have started carrying news items on these kinds of incidents which are being reported from Uttar Pradesh to Tamil Nadu, from the north to the south of our country. Sarah feels she is justified, vindicated and to some degree is elated that people have started noticing such incidents, and she emphatically believes that creating awareness towards such issues, is the first step towards eradicating them. She says

> If people overhear a husband, in a drunken stupor, telling his wife, 'I have uttered your three talaqs', then from the very next day they will not allow the couple to live like man and wife. In case they live together, the society will not only say that they are living in sin and start hounding them, but will also excommunicate them. After this issue was illuminated, at least some intellectuals have woken up from their nonchalant attitude. The reckoning that

> 'this law should be amended and even if the three talaqs are spoken at the same time, it should be considered as one and permission be given to the couple for reconciliation to lead a normal life' is gaining currency. What is more, an organization of Uttar Pradesh has already circulated a Fatwa to that effect. In Kerala a powerful movement has been initiated opposing this 'marriage for a day' (one day marriage). A professor from Kerala is heading one such movement. He has authored a book called *An Application of Anguish for Mothers* which speaks about the heartrending suffering women face due to social evils like polygamy, purdah and the easy procedure of *talaq*. I believe that I too have a share in his outlook. My personal victory in court and these budding new thoughts, which seem like an omen, add to my belief that socially I have managed to achieve a modicum of success (Aboobackar 2009: 11).

Sarah is happy to note that some revolutionary actions are being taken and jubilantly foresees it as a good omen, an omen indicating the inauguration of a crusade to put an end to ignoble customs.

3.2.8. Towards Reconciliation: Through the Looking Glass

Sarah ends her autobiography on a wistful note. She says that though she has participated and voiced her opinions in various programs hosted by prestigious organizations like Sahitya Academy, etc. She still is hesitant to speak impromptu, and prefers reading out the prepared speech. She humorously recalls that since some of her writings are prescribed as texts in schools and colleges, teachers send their students to interview her, but in most of the instances when Sarah questions them, it appears that these students have not read any of her other books, except for the prescribed text. She is sorry at such state of affairs, which is drawing away the younger generation from the golden habit of reading books. She feels that unless students read, they can never develop the all-pervasive insight of questioning. She recounts an interesting incident in this connection. Once when her mother had complained about Sarah, Sarah's father had remarked "she reads a lot. So it doesn't seem like she would be as bad as you make her out to be"! Sarah vouches that it is none other than her reading habit which has brought her to where she is now. She states that the Karnataka Government has not given her any sites in Bangalore, nor the membership to Vidhana Parishat (legislative council), which are usually given to renowned literary figures, musing that probably even if the Government wants to do so, the vote bank politics is preventing it.

Sarah frankly remarks that though she feels sad sometimes while recollecting these happenings, other occasions buoy her up. For instance when Dr. Sabiha Bhoomi

Gowda, had brought out a felicitation volume *Chandragiri* in her honor, Sarah duly places her gratitude on record, proudly noting the fact that it is indeed a rare honor for a Muslim woman writer to receive such felicitation, which she happily sees as a symbol of acceptance. She says that all are not steeped in communalism, the proof of her acceptance by the general public, who have vested her with lots of love and respect. To quote Sarah "The people of this country live adhering to the adage of "live and let live" and all are not steeped in communalism and racial hostility". Sarah is optimistic in her outlook when she remarks thus:

> Doesn't each cloud come with a silver lining? It is my emphatic belief that this silver lining is none other than the reality of Non-Muslims appreciating and honoring me, a Muslim lady, which I see as a definite silver lining in the dark cloud, hovering over us. If people across communities realise this, then I will consider myself fulfilled, with what I have written not going waste and content in the knowledge that my efforts are justified. I am thankful to the Kannadigas for accepting and showering me with their love, respect and encouragement from the last twenty five years which amounts to almost a quarter century. I appreciate the honour accorded to me in the form of numerous awards, titles and felicitations, which I acknowledge with gratitude (ibid: 13).

Sarah has no doubt, when she invokes the adage of "live and let live", which according to her is the essence of Indian heritage, a heritage of tolerance, of a country which has been a haven to many a religions. She is not amiss when she advises that we need to see ourselves as Indians first and develop patriotism. Sarah unhesitatingly places herself as an Indian first, above everything else, stating that she is proud of her identity. She also thanks all people for accepting with open arms, a Muslim lady, which see considers as a positive sign.

3.3: CONCLUSION

Being a Muslim female writer in a patriarchal society, the marginalised voice of Sarah raises issues on gender and gender roles, patriarchy, violence and exploitation of women in the name of religion, daring and challenging women to change their images. Through her writings, in particular her autobiographical writings, Sarah questions the relevance of the shari'a and its role in perpetrating exploitation of women, in the name of religion. She provides many instances: from her family, Nazma Bhangi, the women of the working classes, Shah Bano, Chekannur Maulavi, to mention a few, and the most common thread in all these instances is that of misusing the shari'a. She urges common people to understand the exploitation that

they are subjected to, in the name of religion. Sarah does not agree to follow the outdated sociocultural practices like wearing burkha, or differentiating between the sexes which are intrinsic to the shari'a. She says there is a need to create awareness in the lay men and women, that shari'a is being used as a ploy. This is clear when we see that in the struggle over the rights of women, the shari'a remains the point of reference. That each society in the Muslim world has evolved its own set of laws and references to the shari'a suggests the juridical differences in Islam and its inherent flexibility. Yet, conservative groups seeking political and economic power have used violence and intimidation to oust governments and threaten women into complying with rituals they deem fit, keeping with Muslim tradition (Lateef 1998: 269). Sarah's own perspective about Quran is that it treats men and women impartially. Sarah is vehement when she portrays the evils of the power patriarchy wields and argues that all that is due to misinterpretations of the religious texts, that their Prophet, himself was a staunch feminist[81] and always spoke in favour of women (III interview data). Sarah herself is a devout Muslim with faith in the Holy Quran. If Quran is the word of God, the shari'a is the contemporary interpretation of that. The scenario has become more complex because of the paucity of good number of Islamic scholars to interpret the Holy Quran in the contemporary era. Therefore, a significant import of her writing is a subtle distinction between the Quran and the shari'a as it is in practice. Since Quran is always interpreted by powerful men, Shari'a would serve their convenience and purpose and challenging this is a mammoth as well as a risky task. Hajjar opines that the relationship between the shari'a and domestic violence is of critical importance because the shari'a provides both the legal framework for administering family relations and a religio-cultural framework for social norms and values in Muslim societies (Hajjar: 234). Narain too endorses this view and opines that in reality Muslim women are oppressed by the shari'a.

> Despite the recognition of formal constitutional rights, the actual experience of Muslim women, as determined by personal law, is one of inequality and subordination. This separation of 'public' and 'private' spheres is maintained by the state and supported by religious leaders; personal law is preserved as a measure of group autonomy and serves to deny equality to Muslim women. The convergence of personal law and religious identity and the conceptualization of women as markers of the cultural community have profound implications for the position of Muslim women (Narain 2001: 3).

[81] The word she uses in Kannada is *'Streewadi'*, literally meaning one who argues for women.

In fact, by examining the cases above, one could conclude that Sarah is depicting the shari'a rather *as* a form of patriarchy, than anything that is to do with religion. As a writer, that was what she has done and is doing.

Evoking Todd, at any given historical moment, 'new womanhood' refers to a complex focus, comprising of conflicting discourses on gender difference related to sexuality, motherhood, work, family, feminism, femininity and masculinity, to name a few which are the most recognisable. Todd believes that the term 'new womanhood' is thus one site of the continuous production, definition, and redefinition of women's roles and behavior, and is a place of intersection of various political and power-related interests. According to him, the ideas of women, their role and identity become especially obvious in their works – be it a short story or novel. "The phrase 'New Womanhood' can be shown to reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies, depending on when, how, by whom, and in whose interests the term is used and to what ends. Neither the 'New' nor the 'Woman' of this construct is a fixed term. Analysing new womanhood involves determining whether the new woman is continuous with earlier and more traditional conceptions of woman, or how the notion of "woman" at a given moment is understood in relation to the notion "man" (Todd 1993: xxviii).

Sarah is very optimistic. With the impact of this optimism, there seems to be a marked change in her strategy of writing fiction. If many of her earlier collections were representations of situations and characters 'as they were', in the collection *Gagana Sakhi* (2007), and thenceforth, she changes the tragic stories that she has witnessed around, into stories with a happy ending – contributing in shaping the new woman's identity – thus creating counter images, as she sets out to obliterate the stereotypes that we are familiar with.[82] Sarah states that a woman should have a positive outlook in life, believe in herself and know when to say 'no' and put a full stop to the oppression in her life. This is because it is never is easy to get into the new image, for patriarchal system never lets its hold loosen. Cui points out that it is never easy to get into the image of a 'modern woman', because the question of her identity remains unanswered, in spite of her embracing modernity.

[82] More on this change in strategy of writing, in the next chapter.

> The image of "modern woman" as an embodiment of national enlightenment implies rejection of sociocultural tradition and acceptance of the advent of modernity. The modern woman as a self, however, is torn between the given identity and a problematic reality. The question of what a woman can become after she flees the patriarchal household and signals the call for a modern nation remains unanswered (Cui 2003: xiii).

Sarah advocates that women should stop seeing themselves as victims and should be assertive enough to fight for their rights. "Women who live in communities with practices and traditions that are discriminatory and prejudicial to them and who condone such practices and traditions are often regarded in the feminist literature as victims, influenced, unable to decide, oppressed and in need of guidance and help from the outside" (Krivenko 2009: 10-11). She is optimistic in her outlook, hoping for a better tomorrow for her sorority. She cautions them not to lose their identity, encouraging them to carve a niche for themselves, to gain a foothold in the crevices of life, to recognise and retrieve their voices, which is lost in the maze of patriarchal discourse. The retrieval is necessary in projecting a new image and goes a long way in securing them a life of dignity.

This chapter after attempting to understand Sarah through her autobiographical writings, identifies that as author, a major thrust of hers was a clear distinction between Quran and the shari'a. The next chapter discusses her fictional representations and discusses several illustrations of this point.

"When I started writing novels, short stories and articles, three of my main themes were: the education of Muslim girls, the exploitation that is perpetrated on Muslim women in the name of religion and communal harmony" …Sarah Aboobackar

4.1: CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The previous chapter attempted to analyse Sarah from her autobiographical writings. We observed that the main thrust of her writing is on a subtle distinction between 'pure' religion and 'manmade' religion: in other words, between the Quran and the shari'a. Her fiction is an illustration of this. In this chapter, we shall discuss her fictional representations. In doing so, we shall try to identify patterns in the depiction of her protagonists, primarily women. This is done by borrowing insights from feminist criticism. Firstly, we shall look into how patriarchy unfurls in her fiction. We shall see that patriarchy works through an array of strategies − sometimes through coercion and some other times, through subtler ways. Even as we do this, we shall also make a scrutiny of female protagonists as to how they respond to patriarchy. We can see that primarily there are three responses, which have been categorized using the metaphor of flight − the flightless, the fledglings and the ones who soar high. The scenario is of course more complex with the liberal patriarchs also figuring in some of her fiction, who could be the source of hope in bringing about gender equality in the long run. We shall see these characters too, in the course of this chapter. The chapter also makes an attempt to assess Sarah as a writer, comparing her with some of the earlier Kannada women writers, with a view towards finding affinities and linkages.

Feminist analysis has always recognised the centrality of rewriting and remembering history. This process has considerable significance as a corrective measure in eliminating the lacunae and misunderstandings of the hegemonic masculinist history. Moreover, it also recognises the centrality of remembering and writing with the identification of the self, developed due to the formation of political consciousness. Thus writing opens up opportunities towards the formation of new political identities. It becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself (Mohanty et al, 1991: 34).Writing is seen as a form of resistance, providing women with a voice to

contest the forces of coercion within gender relations. Mohanty et al claim that questions of race, class, sexuality, colonialism, and imperialism are (and always have been) the ground for political struggles around the world, just as they are now constitutive of knowledge production in a number of disciplines (ibid: x).

Many contemporary women writers challenge the dominant ideology of patriarchy by raising the issues of negative social practices, which are deeply entrenched in the system, colouring one's perception of gender, race, class, color and sexuality. When discussing representation, gender invariably comes across as a very vital facet, and hence, when human beings are catalogued, one cannot do away with the reference of the all important aspect of gender. Though it is a known fact that gender is a social concept, one cannot overlook the fact that gender relations are conceptualised by linguistic and symbolic representations. And it is through this primary site that power politics is articulated. Though the basic understanding of representation is all about depicting a 'natural' image, involving in the construction of 'reality', these two terms are highly problematic. What we experience as 'natural' is coded. This naturally leads to the foregrounding of semiotics for comprehending the complexity of the representations. Belsey in her essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Method" speaking about the complexity of representations argues that however 'realistic' a text might seem to appear, it still is a reality which is constructed. Thus it is selective, notwithstanding its impression of being natural. Therefore Belsey states that a textual analysis requires interpretive strategies which exist prior to the act of reading, determining the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. Thus concerns of ideologies are framed which 'position' their subjects (Belsey 2007: 169). Media shapes our conceptions about gender, which is a key issue when discussing essential elements of our own identity, and the identities, we assume other people to have. Women's representation in the media focus on the physical attributes to the near exclusion of other values. The stereotyped depiction is a far cry from what women experience in real life bearing little resemblance to reality. Gender stereotypes subtly condition most young boys and girls, not to speak of teenagers and adults, to conform to the social norms, without providing them with alternative role models, depriving the freedom of expression curtailing their individuality, trapping

them in the ‘cage’ of identity, pressurising them to conform to rigid gender roles, into the ‘cage’ of false identities, stunting their individual growth. Pearson (1981) states that the cage and the mirrors are the symbols commonly used to express the limiting and oppressive effects of the traditional female role (22). Foucault’s metaphor for this new sort of social regulation is that of the ‘Panoptican’, a type of prison designed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century. This ideal prison consisted of a ring of cells that was built around a central point of observation from which one single guardian could survey all the cells – which were open to inspection – on a given floor. However, the prisoner cannot see the supervision. He never knows if he is being watched. This is for Foucault the ‘major effect’ of the Panoptican: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assure the automatic functioning of power. In short, that, inmates are regulated by themselves, which Foucault sees as a state of perpetual mental imprisonment (Bertens 2001:150-51). Portrayal of women reflects that their status has not changed much in the male-dominated media. Most of our perceptions of gender roles are shaped by the different role models that the media projects. Hence it becomes all the more important that alertness ought to be created as to the achievability, which should be grounded in reality. The most significant question that has to be addressed is are we given stereotypes which are distanced from reality? The role models that we encounter in the media, do they bear any semblance to real people? If not, are they not projecting a false image of what should 'be' instead of what 'is'? And in this manner is it not stunting individual growth? Simone de Beauvoir (1989) boldly declares in *The Second Sex* that “One Is Not Born, but rather becomes a woman”. It is also a known fact that women are always expected to carry the cultural norms and are pressurised and expected to behave in a befitting manner, endorsing the dominant cultural codes of the society they live in.

> Women are always under pressure to conform to family, society and community expectations. The family becomes the site where the material body is disciplined. Cultural assumptions of womanhood are reproduced through stipulations and the female body becomes a site of social control (Sabala et al: 45).

If feminism’s expedition for gender equality is to be realised, the need to reinterpret ‘the gaze’, of how men and women analyse the images of each other, becomes indispensable. Grieshaber (2006) states that culture is conceptualised as “diverse and

dynamic, formed by internal and external influences, and structured by representation and power". Critically analysing these representations helps us to come up with different readings, interpreting knowledge in their myriad forms, since knowledge is not monolithic. It adds to our existing perception of the rich diversity of social interactions, enlarging the boundaries of knowledge.

Women writers – the marginalised voices – question the gender politics of stereotyping women in images, offering new, identifiable, counter images of womanhood. An attempt is made in this chapter to study Sarah's fictional writings – ranging from short stories (35), novels (9), and novellas (2) – to analyse her women protagonists. Some are fatalistic and bow down before the forces of patriarchy. Some valiantly try to fight and try to break out of the traditional mould, while only a few are successful in attaining what they sought to achieve. It has been proved time and again that with a positive attitude, one can break down the shackles, which holds one down. Singh et al observe that women in the Indian social set up can be described as the victims of their own 'diseased psyches' in which they perceive themselves as, incompetent and helpless creatures, looked down upon by significant others in their lives. A great effort is required to provide womenfolk with necessary psychological security, nurturing, support, guidance and counseling to enable them to understand themselves in more realistic and progressive terms (Singh et al 1999: 23). Sarah is in complete agreement with this idea and believes that through her fiction she has managed to create a modicum of awareness among women of her society. She insightfully portrays multiple versions of inequity faced by women and echoes Wood when she says identifying such inequities through research is the first step in bringing about social change (III interview data, Wood 2012: 15). Catherine Belsey opines that cultural criticism seeks to understand texts. In other words, it tries to read the culture in the texts because texts themselves constitute the inscription of culture. Belsey states that in principle, the text has priority and sets the agenda. But she agrees that once an idea is lodged in the mind of the researcher, it becomes part of what one brings to the text (Belsey 2007: 167). Reminiscing Belsey, since any textual analysis is made at a particular historical moment and from within a specific culture, the analysis is not

exhaustive. Nevertheless the project of this chapter is to read the culture which is inscribed in Sarah's texts, and come up with new meanings and readings.

Sarah candidly admits that her protagonists are drawn from real life and she never ceases to wonder that she is a successful writer. She has carved for herself a new image and she is a symbol of 'new womanhood' for her society. We have seen in the third chapter, how Sarah had sincerely admitted that she had never thought that she would emerge as a writer, and her abortive attempts to become one. If we remember, she also acknowledges that if she is any writer today, it is only because Lankesh had given her a chance, which the others had denied her. That there was absolutely no need for her to go in search of themes for a story, because she had literally grown up listening to and seeing hundreds of tales, filled with woes and sufferings that the women folk of her community had to endure (Aboobackar 2010).

Sarah advocates that education in itself empowers, emancipates and liberates women from invisible bondage of power relations. The patriarchal system, through sexual dominion, has institutionalised women. Millet argues that though invisible on the surface, this sexual politics is perhaps the most prevalent ideology of our culture, providing its most fundamental concept of power.

> What goes largely unexamined, often even unacknowledged (yet is institutionalized nonetheless) in our social order, is the birthright priority whereby males rule females. Through this system a most ingenious form of "interior colonization" has been achieved. It is one which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance might be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power. This is so because our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance –in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive power of police, is entirely in male hands. As the essence of politics is power, such realization cannot fail to carry impact (Millet 2000: 25).

Sarah echoing Millet's views, says that since we live in a patriarchal culture, males view it as their birth right to rule females, which is the main reasons for the subordination of women. She states that in the Muslim community, this power-play extends a little further by men making use of the religious dictates, as we have discussed in the previous chapter.

From Sarah's fiction her novels, novellas and short stories (collections) are selected for analysis. Her novels are:

1. *Chandragiri Teeradalli* (On the Banks of Chandragiri, Aboobackarv1984)
2. *Sahana* (Patience, Aboobackarv1985)
3. *Vajragalu* (Diamonds,Aboobackar 1988)
4. *Kadana Virama* (Ceasefire,Aboobackar 1991)
5. *Suliyalli Sikkavaru* (Trapped in a whirlpool,Aboobackar 1994)
6. *Pravaha-Suli* (Floods-Whirlpool, Aboobackar 1996)
7. *Tala Odeda Doniyalli* (In a Wrecked Boat, Aboobackar 1997)
8. *Panjara* (Cage, Aboobackar 2004)
9. *Ilijaru* (The Slope, Aboobackar 2011)

Her novellas & collection of short stories:

1. *Chappaligau* (Slippers, Aboobackar 1989): a collection of 10 short stories.
2. *Payana Mattu Ethara Kategalu* (Journey, Aboobackar 1992): a collection of 9 short stories.
3. *Ardha Ratriyalli Huttida Koosu* (Mid-Night's Child, Aboobackar 1996): a collection of 11 short stories.
4. *Khedda* (A Trap, Aboobackar 1999): a collection of a novella and 7 short stories.
5. *Gagana Sakhi* (Air Hostess, Aboobackar 2007): a collection of a novella and 8 short stories.

4.2. SARAH'S PROTAGONISTS, BROADLY CLASSIFIED

After reading the above works we could classify Sarah's women characters as below:

1. The Flightless − those who can never fly

2. Fledglings − those who try to fly but fail

3. Flying high − those who successfully take off, soaring to great heights.

With the use of these categories it is also possible to see a certain change or modification in the stance of the author Sarah, in relation to the level of optimism exuded in her works. This is also corroborated by her own self (Aboobackar 2010).

Lynn Welchman feels that two aspects of the position of women merit particular attention to provide adequate context for a study of the impact of personal status law: women's de facto status in society, which renders them the vulnerable party in society and social encounters; and women's social image, which promotes the idea of a weaker and second-grade sex. According to her, many women have themselves accepted and promoted this suppressed set of values. She argues that the social role of women has been defined by the economic, social and cultural values of this society. "Of the many social and economic factors that interact in this complicated picture underlying the drafting and implementation of the law, economic factors and the issue of illiteracy are arguably the most critical. In the context of family structure, women tend to suffer a double social and political suppression" (Welchman 2004: 22). Sarah is of the opinion that if women are treated with respect and love, and if they are supported in times of distress, we might be able to mitigate a lot of exploitation that women are subjected to and suffer from. It is her staunch belief that women should be educated and from education springs financial freedom, which in itself is the spring-board of self-respect, assertiveness and a healthy psychological attitude. She links women's exploitation to lack of education, which in turn, leads to financial dependence and patriarchy, making one vulnerable and become an easy prey of the system.

4.2.1: The Flightless

These are the ones who can never fly and become easy targets and fall prey to the hunters, who are the unscrupulous people supporting the members of the rigid patriarchal system irrespective of their sexes. These women are hunted and taken advantage of throughout their lives and live in the shadows of their tormentors. They have a poor image of themselves and believe that they are inferior to men in all

respects, obediently allowing the abuses to be heaped on them. They are the eternal victims, who are blind, deaf and mute to the world around them. Their 'diseased psyche' is the main reason for this apathy. Probably because they have no models to emulate and come from a background where the female members of their family had imprinted upon their mind that it is a losing battle to even think, let alone enact on a new idea. Their subconscious is dead and arid like a desert which is one of the harshest places of survival, without water –the water of human kindness and amity – things unheard of by these unfortunate womenfolk. In this category we have Nirmala, the protagonist of *Kadana Virama*; Samira of "Chappaligalu", Mariyamma and Julekha of "Mariyammana Aliya"; Fatima of "Birugali"; mother and daughter in"Visha Unisuvavaru"; Kajjamma and Nebisa of "Bisilgudureya Bennu Hatti"; Kajjamma of "Arakshitha"; Jamila of "Gode"; mother and aunt of Rafina in"Neeli Chitrada Kempu Banna"; Shabana of "Oh Raama", Saudabi and her daughters of "Oh… Gande ..!". Let us now briefly go through these tales, discussing the protagonists who are 'flightless'.

4. 2.1.1 *Kadana Virama* (Ceasefire, Aboobackar 1991)

Sarah says that this novel is based on a real life narrative. The theme of this novel is about the result of being headstrong and the lack of higher education. She clearly remembers the day when a person called her saying that he wanted to meet her, with the intention that he wanted her to write a novel based on his daughter's life. In the course of their meeting, Sarah says that she was apprehensive about conceding to his wish, because he was from a different community. But he was adamant, giving the reason that her novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli* had profound impact on him and that his firm belief was that if anyone could write this novel it was Sarah, turning down her suggestion of approaching another famous author. This touched Sarah to such an extent that she had taken it up as a challenge, though she candidly admits that creating a world of which she was not an insider was a little difficult. This also nullifies the myth that she writes only about the problems of the Muslim community (Aboobackar 1991).

Nirmala is the daughter of a well-to-do family. Her parents have spoiled her because she was their prayers answered after thirteen years of having no offspring. Even her smallest whims are catered to by her doting father, who is a high ranking bank official. Her mother is illiterate who never bothers with any of her children. The result is a headstrong daughter, with a massive superiority complex. Though intelligent, she does not pursue higher education on the flimsy reasons that she cannot travel by public conveyance and staying in hostel is ruled out by her father. But unfortunately finding her a suitable groom is proving to be difficult, with her father rejecting one proposal for a simple reason of family ties. The second proposal goes out of the window for a valid reason of dowry. Nirmala's ego is hurt the first time but she refuses to go with her father's decision the second time and without heeding the consequences, rushes into a hasty marriage with Sanjay. But what she does not know is that he is not a straightforward man who stands by his promises. To cut a long story short, she is rejected by her in-laws, finds it hard to make ends meet on the paltry salary of her husband and slowly starts repenting her hasty decision.

> She realises that because of her ego she had missed on formal higher education and things would have been much better if only she had had a job, which is unthinkable now. "Why didn't I continue my education in spite of having all the facilities? I wasn't willing to travel in trains and busses; papa too never forced me. Why wasn't I warned and made to realise that the future might be uncertain? Nobody told me that tomorrow the road that I might travel might be rock-strewn, and filled with brambles. If only I was a graduate, probably I could have got a job and earned my own living which probably would have saved my life from being disastrous. This was the bitter truth which made her suffering more acute. She agonised over the waste of talents she was endowed with, over the lost opportunities. Am I the symbol of failure in all its totality? This was the question which tormented her in its enormity" (148).

This novel upholds the importance of a formal college education as well as the significance of financial emancipation. By now her parents know that she is not happy in life, as they can see through their daughter's façade. When she comes to know that she is carrying, it is like the proverbial last straw on the back of the camel. She decides against bringing a child into such an atmosphere of poverty and ends her life. Instead of living in hell, dying a daily death, she decides that dying once and for all is a far better option. Though inconsolable, her father is honest enough to acknowledge that he is also a party to his daughter's failure in life. If only he had been a little strict with her, if only his wife was a little more gifted to understand their daughter, if only he had not sheltered her so much, if only he had given her a college education; so

many of those ifs! Nirmala who till that moment had tried hard to make a success of her doomed life, stops fighting− a promising life cut short. Nirmala comes across a failed heroine; a traditional role, one who puts her ego in front of everything else, the budding life in her notwithstanding her harsh decision of 'ceasefire'. Her husband was not man enough to stand by her, as he was a dutiful son first, not caring two hoots for his wife. He saw her as an ATM, seeing nothing wrong in her begging her father's monetary assistance, which battered her ego and that was one of the main flaws in her life, which compounded her unhappiness.

But one thing which Nirmala's father did do was requesting Sarah to write a novel about his daughter's life with the intention of serving it as a gesture of warning to parents like them, not to forget the willful generation of today, who without so much as a whit of common sense bring about misfortune and lingering misery to themselves and their families.

4.2.1.2. "Chappaligalu" (Slippers, Aboobackar 1989)

The story revolves around a young girl Samira, whose schooling is cut short at the tender age of eleven, when her father sees her in the company of her friends, walking home, and his acquaintance remarks on her not wearing a burkha. This is unmistakably the patriarch speaking, in the hold of religious observations, wherein the sociocultural practices play a very important role of demarcating spaces very rigidly, the burkha being one of those. The veil was associated with seclusion. Bodman and Tohidi invoking Mernissi state that sexual segregation divides all social space into male and female spaces, the women's space being private, and the men's public, the latter entered by elite women only on limited occasions. "The veil", is an expression of the invisibility of women on the street, the male space *par excellence*"[83]……those veiled in public reinforced the basic concept of seclusion, that women's lives and activities were a private sphere to be closely guarded in defense of male "honor" (Bodman and Tohidi 1998: 10).

Samira is married at sixteen to Shabir, who is working in the gulf region and hence comes home once in two years. Girl child treated like a burden, to be palmed off, as

[83]Original emphasis

early as possible; and an unmarried girl is seen as a threat to the social fabric. Mridula Garg writes about the hope for a post-patriarchy era with which a search for new metaphors began:

> New metaphors were not born in vacuum, but out of old metaphors that people reject. The reason the women writers share the new metaphors, is because they share a common history of constraints. Whatever the religion in practice, whether Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, or Christian, the onus of the constraints was always borne by the women. They were named the keepers of tradition, rituals, family and morality. Women's freedom, their right to dream, questioning of norms or any 'manifestation of cerebral questioning' was looked upon as a threat to the social fabric (as quoted in Jain 2003: 251-52).

Shabir's father-in-law takes Shabir aside and tries to instill some 'common sense' into his head saying that women should not know the pleasures of a city, like hotel food and cinema, saying that it is all right for Shabir to enjoy, but where was the need to take Samira? He candidly remarks that if women sample the delights, it becomes difficult to control them. In addition, he adds insult to injury when he says in good faith that women should be treated like slippers! They should be kept in the place meant for them, to be used, discarded and forgotten! The attitude and the language of the father-in-law screams of discrimination. Shabir is shocked, but decency and that his mother would not expect such a behavior from her son, stalls him from retorting, "I wasn't born to slippers; a woman gave birth to me". Shabir flies back and Samira's life becomes lackluster and dull. An impossible case of a young girl, who should have been school going and carefree at the age of sixteen, yearning for a life with her husband.

When Shabir returns next time, he is in for a rude shock, for the bubbly, pretty Samira had vanished and in her place, he finds a girl who has lost interest in life. His dream of spending precious time with his wife is dashed to the ground when he learns that his mother-in-law has delivered and Samira is expected to take post-natal care of her mother. Over and above that, she is also supposed to manage the household chores, since it is culturally an unwritten rule that it is a daughter, who should take care of her mother.

Shabir sarcastically he remarks that Samira's father is treating his own wife like slippers and probably he would buy a new one if the one he has goes beyond repair. The couple hardly spend time together when Shabir has to return. Samira pleads with

her husband to take her with him, which is of course impossible. The darker side of the life of those who work in Gulf countries is depicted most poignantly, for they hardly get enough time to spend with their families, busy as they are with earning the much needed money which enables them to lead a decent life, jeopardising their personal one.

Young Samira is disillusioned; her father's attitude has sapped her buoyancy leaving her an empty shell. She starts pining for a happy life and turns melancholic, a puzzle to her parents. Shabir is summoned posthaste; her malady is more of a mental nature. The shock of listening to her father when he calls women as slippers, to be treated as such; her father calling her a shameless hussy for wanting to accompany them to the airport; scolding for having gone to a cinema, all these coupled with having absolutely no entertainment, overwhelm Samira, plummeting her into depression. The story ends with a counseling session and a promise of a better tomorrow. The theme speaks of the power relations in patriarchy. Women are being treated like slippers in this instance, rather than human beings.

There is a highly skewed gender bias, with two different laws in place, one for men and the other for women. A very powerful evidence for gender discrimination in a given society, comes from the language of that society. Each language abounds in expressions, which are indicative of society's differential treatment of women. Linguistically, gender discrimination finds expressions in two forms namely, in the language restricted in use to women, and language descriptive of women alone. In her book, *Language and Women's place* Robin Lakoff argues that this kind of disparity in use of parallel words can be explained by women's position in society, that women are given their identities in society by virtue of their relationship with men, not vice versa. As Lakoff (1975) has put it, "if it is indeed true that our feelings about the world color our expression of our thoughts, then we can use our linguistic behavior as a diagnostic of our hidden feelings about thoughts". Singh and Arora say, perhaps, an analogy can be drawn with psychoanalysis where one can interpret our overt actions and perceptions in accordance with our covert desires. In the same way, linguistic data can be interpreted as manifestations of hidden attitudes towards women. "Feminist scholars have also argued the fact that women's low achievement success is not due to

any inherent personality trait. Rather, it is the material resultant of prevailing social structure" (Singh and Arora 1999: 19).

4.2.1.3. "Mariyammana Aliya" (Mariyamma's Son-in-law, Aboobackar 1989)

The story deals with the age old Indian theme of getting one's daughter married, no matter who the groom is. The girl has to have a husband no matter what. This creates a vicious circle, in which the women suffer later. This is an apt story running on the lines of the adage, 'marry in haste, repent in leisure'.

As the title suggests Mariyamma, a poor widow, has a grown up daughter, Julekha. She is married to Moidu, who does not have a proper job and is a flotsam. He is treated royally by Mariyamma. Moidu, after living off the poor mother and daughter, one fine morning leaves them and goes away after stealing what little they have. His wife being with child, does not stop his flight. The plight of the mother and daughter is not enviable and their sorrow is any body's guess. The pitiable happiness of Mariyamma at finding a husband for her daughter, the inhuman practice that marriage is a must, makes people go to any lengths, as pictured in this story. This is true only among the humans, where as in nature, the female is the much sought after species. Gilman argues that we are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation. The economic status of the human female is relative to the sex-relation. The condition is permanent and general, though there are exceptions, and though the present century is witnessing the beginnings of a great change in this respect (Gilman 2006: 3-4).

Unless women gain economic independence these practices cannot be stopped. Education and awareness is a way out of this grim situation. One cannot but feel sorry for the mother and daughter duo.

4.2.1.4. "Birugali" (Tempest, Aboobackar 1989)

The story speaks about the difficult situation of Fatima, whose husband had given her *talaq*, when her two sons were very young. The reason for the divorce was unknown to her. She had returned to her mother's place, and at times, had to fast because of the

poverty. Now her elder son had grown up and was working in a ship as a coolie, under daily wages, which in itself was a fortune to the poor lady. One fine day her uncle, who had supported her during her bad days, requests her to send Monu, her younger son too, as a crew member, to work in the ship, because the hand he had promised had absconded and he had to fill in the void. Fatima, in no position to oppose, sends Monu. Fate deals her a cruel, fatal blow and she loses both her sons at sea. She is distressed as expected and traumatised brutally. She is at her wits end, which is but natural under the circumstances.

The title is suggestive of the tempest in her life. First in the form of *talaq*, which was nothing but a betrayal of trust. Secondly the poverty and hardships she had to face to bring up her sons. When everything seemed to be fine, her sons were plucked from her, never to be returned. She received no compensation either, from the owner of the ship. Her life becomes a symbol of eternal sorrow, a leaky, unmanned boat, weathering the gales and tempests of life. Fatima faces a series of traumas. Herman speaks about the psychological trauma and claims that it is an affliction of the powerless:

> At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning…Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe (Herman 1997: 33).

Sarah with a deft hand paints a vivid picture of the distress, trauma and the inhuman ways the poor, illiterate people are taken advantage of.

4.2.1.5. "Visha Unisuvavaru" (Those Who Poison, Aboobackar 1989)

This story has a theme of communal suspicion cast the platonic friendship of two young people who belong to different communities, which leads to communal tension and violence. The crooked minds and narrow mentality of people bring about uncalled for hostility leading to bloodshed. The fragile friendship is shattered; the families who lived in harmony are torn apart. Her mother is all tears, because when Jafar helps them, even that is viewed with suspicion, labeling their relationship as shady. And in

the end, Jafar Ali, the protagonist decides to marry the girl in question because he has lost his mother in the riots and the girl in question has lost her brother, the sole breadwinner of the family. But she says that she cannot even think about it because she had always seen him as her brother. And she does not care two hoots of what people think about her because she knows she has not done anything immoral. The story beseeches everyone to look at the world at large with a broad outlook and gives a call to all that we need to develop a healthy mindset to progress in life or else we tend to lose everything we hold dear in this world for some petty reasons. In most cases, gossip is the culprit in spreading malice and slandering people, and spreads like slow poison, bringing havoc in its wake.

> Listening to gossip can be likened to receiving stolen goods; it puts you in immediate collusion with the person conveying the gossip to you…Not all gossip need be malicious, mean-spirited, vengeance seeking, status-enhancing, though much of it is. All gossip start out as people talking about other people…Most gossip, or most of the best gossip, is about dubious if not downright reprehensible behavior (Epstein:3-5).

The title is evocative and makes us realize that it is these people, who poison the system; make it dangerous to all. Izuogu rightly labels gossip as the 'mind poison' and cautions that it acts on the psyche just like consumed poison would on the physiology of man, and is more subtle, crippling the person mentally.

> If gossip is regarded as a form of indirect aggression, then of course, it should be almost always derogatory, because one can only harm the target by presenting him or her in a bad light. Gossip can be effective regardless of whether it presents the target in a positive or negative light (Izuogu: 25-26).

Sarah places her finger exactly on the pulse of the society and believes that religion should be practiced for harmonious living and should not be used as a tool of mutiny, leading to sedition and untold horrors which it brings in its wake. She argues that the gossip mongers, both the spreaders as well as the listeners, are at fault. And the woman in question is always besmirched. Especially, in the wake of communal tension, gossips and rumours can play havoc in bringing in a sense of vengeance in the communities in question. They separate, because theirs was a companionable relationship. Jafar Ali offers to marry the girl because he does not her name spoiled. But she refuses because she decides that since she had seen Ali as a brother figure, a brother he was going to remain. She does not want to marry for fear of her name be

sullied. The poison fed into the system is the ill-natured gossip, which all of us are too familiar with.

4.2.1.6. "Bisilgudureya Bennu Hatti" (In Pursuit of a Mirage, Aboobackar 1999)

The story is about how a poor mother, though saddled with a good for nothing husband, tries very hard to educate her only son, who is favoured over his two sisters, who is seen as their saviour, one who ends their troubles, and lifts them up from their poverty.

Kajjamma has high hopes for her only son Hamid, which is supported by his two sisters, Nebisa and Suhara. Since they cannot afford to send all the three to school, Hamid is chosen as the one to be educated, since he is the one who is going to look after them. Hamid is not a very intelligent boy and somehow, with great difficulty manages to acquire a degree, blaming others for his failures lying very convincingly to his mother. Neither does he get a proper job nor is he willing to work for daily wages. When at last his mother tells him point blank that he has to bring in some income, he joins a local merchant to work as an accountant for a paltry sum. But within a month or two he loses his job. Now there is no other option for him but to go to the Middle East for work, which is a costly decision. Since they are very poor, the question of even thinking about twenty five thousand, the sum for an air ticket and the agent's fee, seems exorbitant and out of their reach.

Fortunately when the family had all but given up hopes, a proposal comes for Nebisa from a rich person, who is ready to support their family in every means possible. But the fly in the ointment is that the proposed groom is her father's age and is recently widowed, with grown up children of Nebisa's age. Hamid, to his credit, opposes this and says he is unwilling to build his future on his sister's grave.

> Hamid was shaken. His facial expressions underwent a drastic change. "Umma… marrying akka[84] to an old man…? No Umma, no, I will not slaughter akka and go to Dubai" (61).

But his resistance is watered down; Nebisa is counseled by her mother that she is better off with a rich husband than a poor one, and she fills in Hamid with hopes of earning a handsome salary in the 'country of gold', providing for his family, so that

[84] Elder sister

his younger sister Suhara can have a better proposal and marry a suitable boy. Against his better judgment he leaves. As he is about to leave, the agent who had managed his affairs from passport to visa, approaches him with a slip of paper. He is told to meet the person who would be of help to him in the strange land. Hamid is happy and does not notice that a packet has been slipped into his bag.

As his plane lands in Jeddah, during the routine checkup at the immigration counter, the police seize the packet from his bag, and he is handed over to the police and is thrown in jail. He is handicapped by not knowing the language and is ignorant as to what has gone wrong. There is no one to listen to him. One Friday an Indian is publicly beheaded. He was charged with drug smuggling, for which the penalty is death. Hamid's mother is awaiting her son's return eagerly and sometimes weeps inconsolably for she has not heard from him since the day of his departure. Sarah in this short story has given an account of how the travel agents to the Middle East dupe young innocent boys and use them for smuggling. Speaking about smuggling Bhagwati says that in some underdeveloped countries smuggling takes on large proportions and is a major economic problem. Therefore it becomes vital to look at smuggling not only as a moral and legal problem but also as a purely economic problem (Bhagwati 1971: 8-9).

Poor people chase the mirage, thinking it to be an oasis. The title is symbolic and makes one ruminate upon the gullibility of people and the terrible way in which they are taken advantage of by middle-men without any morals. One begins to wonder where the trouble lay. Was it wrong of a poor mother to dream big for her son, sending him abroad? Or are the poor denied right even to dream? Was it Nebisa's mistake of marrying a man old enough to be her father, to help her brother? Was it because they lacked education? Was it because they trusted their fellow men? One is awfully reminded of the appalling ways the humans trick the credulous, uncaring what sorrow befalls their victims. Sarah gives us a rare insight as to what is happening around us, a depiction which most of us are seldom aware of.

4.2.1.7. "Arakshitha" (Defenseless, Aboobackar 1996)

The tale revolves around Kaijamma and the sufferings of her family. It has an eternal theme of an irresponsible husband, Usman, who has a business of some sort in a distant town; visits his family twice a year. Though he does not think twice about having a big family, he never worries much about their maintenance. His wife Kaijamma is the one who looks after the upkeep of their family amidst a lot of trials and tribulations. They are poor, living in a single roomed hovel called house, and to make matters worse, she has seven daughters and a son. The eldest daughter is married and she is trying her level best to get her second daughter Julekha married. Her trouble begins when they leave their old house for a better one, because Kaijamma wonders how could one marry their children in such a pathetic condition, living in a hovel as they do. They move to a slightly better, rented house, on the condition that they vacate the house within six months. Julekha gets married and in the happiness of the moment, Kaijamma forgets about the rent and the conditions of six months. Naturally in due course they default the rent and the owner orders them to leave the house. But where on earth can a woman go, saddled as she is with seven children and the husband not in sight? Neither is she financially independent. To cut a long story short the owner moves in with his wife and sons and these poor devils are imprisoned in the kitchen, for the grown up girls cannot come out into the open when young lads are moving about. Kaijamma is desperate and she sends her only son, an eleven year old boy, Hamid, to the town where his father is, to fetch him. The very night Usman returns home in a sorry state, for there has broken a communal riot in the town where he had his business. He is shocked to learn that Hamid has gone in search of him and curses his wife asking her as to what kind of a mother she is. Kaijamma is enraged and she derides her husband questioning him as to what rights has he to question her so. What had he done as a father and how was she supposed to counter-act in such a disastrous situation, an illiterate woman, with no financial security? Here we find the patriarchy speaking. The onus is always on the woman, no matter what happens, accusing fingers always point towards her and she, only she, is answerable. The violence which is faced by women come in different shades and they are abused in subtle ways, coerced into behaving the way the patriarchal system wants them to,

denying them agency. Stark defines coercive control as a strategic course of self-interested behavior designed to secure and expand gender-based privilege by establishing a regime of domination in personal life. He goes on to state that this definition incorporates three facets of women's experience that are obscured by the violence model:

> …the oppression is "ongoing" rather than episodic (a "course of conduct") and resulting harms cumulative, that it is multi-faceted and that it involves rational, instrumental behavior. Since "domination" is a political relationship, the definition points us towards the means used to establish and maintain "power" over a partner (such as isolation or control) and their consequence, an objective condition of subordination / subjugation that is termed *entrapment* in the coercive model. Entrapment has more in common with the predicament faced by hostages than a psychological state of *dependence*, for instance. The four major tactics that comprise coercive control are violence, intimidation, isolation and control (Stark 2013: 21-22).

The title is apt − the defenseless party of eight people, existing on a meager income, with no one to back them up. And to make matters worse, the owner too takes advantage of their pitiable condition and moves in with his wife and sons. Another aspect of this tale is culturally rooted. It is considered a dishonor for young girls to appear in front of any men, other than their family members, and it is considered an insult to decent god fearing people. Because living in such a situation has all the dangers of society labeling them as whores. Is it a surprise then that Kaijamma sends her immature boy to an unknown town to fetch her husband? These situations still exist even today, and it is deplorable that men get away unscathed, while the women have to bear the brunt of the situation. It is also true that the society expects the women to keep the culture alive.

4.2.1.8. "Gode" (Wall, Aboobackar 1996)

The title "Wall" is a barrier redolent with innuendos, suggestive of the kind of relation between the husband Shafi and his wife Farida. For some petty reason Shafi had divorced his wife through *talaq*. She was living with her mother. During the time of her daughter Jamila's marriage, she was not even invited because according to shari'a only the father has the rights of his children and never the mother. But now that Jamila was expecting a baby, Shafi had called for Farida, to their daughter's delivery and post-natal care that too after Jamila had gone down on her knees and begged her father to call for her mother. The plea had made a chink in the wall and Farida had the

good fortune to stay with her daughter for a few months. All these months Farida was ecstatic and she was optimistic that the wall between them might disintegrate and even their son-in-law had tried his best to break down the barriers between them, but to no avail. It is then that Farida realises that the wall was built on the foundation laid down by her mother-in-law, a spiteful woman who, just because Farida had disobeyed her, had made her son Shafi divorce his wife. After five years of getting *talaq*, Farida comes to know the reason for which she was divorced! This is but an instance of the unjust ways women are being treated, all in the name of religion and the laws of Shari'a. She is not even told of her offence, the reason for which she is divorced.

Rahman in his article "Triple *Talaq*: Bad in Law and Theology", explains that When the executive committee of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board met in Kanpur on July 4, it was widely expected that triple *talaq* would be proclaimed un-Islamic and its abolition recommended. It was not to be. In a classic exhibition of equivocation it was declared after the meeting that "law alone cannot ensure reforms" and that the board would try to create awareness in the community on the issue of divorce and persuade the Muslims to abide by the shari'a. It is surprising that the board could issue such an evasive statement when it was clear that what was being debated was not the religious education of Muslims but a matter of law. The question before it was whether triple *talaq* as practiced in India today was in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and the authentic traditions of the Prophet. The truth is that triple t*alaq* in its present form is totally antithetical to the spirit of the Quran... Even the Prophet when he was informed about a man who gave three divorces at a time was so enraged that he said, "Are you playing with the Book of Allah who is Great and Glorious while I am still amongst you?" Therefore, it becomes all the more expedient for the Muslim Personal Law Board to call for the enactment of a law invalidating the practice of triple t*alaq*, lest it be felt that the board's inaction and silence on the issue tantamount to supporting the perpetuation of an un-Islamic practice which has ruined the life and career of many a Muslim woman (Rahman 2004).

Sarah commenting on this practice, agrees with Rahman and states that the blind following of shari'a is the reason for half of the trouble women have to endure. Getting back to the story in concern, the time for Jamila to depart had come and there

never is a sign of any chinks appearing in the facade of the wall, let alone it disintegrating. Farida realises her folly of being optimistic, when Shafi rejects any reconciliation and turns abusive, mouthing cheap epithets. Farida leaves with a heavy heart, wishing she was deaf, wherein her deafness might have spared her the humiliation of having listening to Shafi's abuse.

Speaking about domestic violence, which is rampant and is considered a curse, Welchman argues that the problem of violence in marital relationship is found in all social classes, but is more widespread among the poor and the uneducated classes.

> In these classes, manifold economic and social problems may lead to violent behavior. Violence against women and children is a phenomenon with social, economic and psychological implications that substantively affect the coming generations, their social relationships and productive capacities. The degree of a man's violence is heavily dependent on his inability or reluctance to settle disputes or problems through discussion. Many men seek to justify their resort to violence on such baseless pretexts as disciplining the wife, correcting her conduct and deterring her from wrongdoing; sometimes they also feel that this is a right protected legally and supported religiously. Statistics …reveal that the breakdown of family life and destruction of family is usually caused by the man; that domestic violence is usually carried out by the man; and that desertion, abandonment and divorce usually occur at the will of the man. Across all social classes it is common for women to put up with a lot from their husbands in order to preserve the family and keep it stable; moreover, the woman cannot resolve the problem of marital violence as she has nowhere to seek refuge. Thus many women put up with humiliation in their marriage for fear otherwise of having to leave their homes (Welchman 2004: 29).

The story depicts the plight of women who for no fault of theirs are divorced and have to lead a life, without the love and comfort of their children. A life devoid of all happiness, because one cannot overlook the fact that for most women their home and hearth means a lot. And no matter what one's achievements in life, family life is important, which provides a kind of psychological balance.

4.2.1.9. "Neeli Chitrada Kempu Banna" (Crimson Tint of the Blue Film, Aboobackar 1999)

This short story has an unusual theme of the impact of blue films on an immature girl who becomes ill, the reason being psychological. Sarah has broached a very important issue, which is a cause of concern mostly among parents today. With the rise in the use of internet, it is important that children are monitored, though in this story, it is the mischief caused by a relative. Though unintentionally done, the mischief was

caused by a woman, and when the tragedy strikes, the grown up women, who are steeped in superstitions, act in a foolish manner.

Rafina, a girl of sixteen is an innocent child who is about to be married in the near future. She is a bubbly teenager, of whom her mother is justifiably proud. Her father works in the Gulf country and visits them once in two years and theirs is a well to do family. Her paternal uncle too works in the gulf country and his house is next to Rafina's. She visits her aunt Jubaida regularly, who is a little older than her, and they are friends.

Once while Rafina is chatting with her aunt, the latter jokingly asks Rafina, now that she is to be married shortly, does she know how children are born. Rafina, young girl that she is, innocently replies that children are born in the stomach of women. When further questioned she replies that god creates children. Jubaida teases Rafina calling her an imbecile. She promises to show Rafina something different, a 'surprise' the next day. Rafina returns home, and the whole day is preoccupied about the 'surprise' her aunt Jubaida is about to reveal the next day. She is in for a rude shock when she is made to watch an explicit blue film. The young mind which had no inkling as to the facts of life, goes into a tailspin. She is rudely awakened to the realities of life and her mind is unable to process the information overload and goes blank. She returns home a changed girl while Jubaida is blissfully unaware of what she had done. The impact on the young mind is tremendous; the psychological trauma is so acute, the damage is to such an extent that Rafina becomes mute.

Rafina takes to bed and is disinterested with the worldly affairs. Her mother, Fatima, is worried. But when Rafina refuses to get up the next day, she is alarmed, but puts it down to the haunting of a jinni, which she thinks must have entered her daughter's body, while she was returning the previous evening at dusk. She is taken to faith healers, who cane Rafina on the pretext of exorcising the evil spirit. She faints and is brought home. She becomes delirious with fever and a doctor is called in, who chides Rafina's mother on her ignorance and tells her that Rafina had endured a massive shock, due to which her mind had given way, making her mute.

> "How could you tolerate such actions? Standing there watching your daughter being caned and brutally beaten? You people are evil spirits and real Jinns! If anything happens to her

> this becomes murder and a medico-legal case…I shall try my best but I think this case has gone beyond my limits". So saying when the doctor was about leave, Rafina's heart stopped beating. Fatima's wailing rose in a crescendo. "Oh! Why did this blood thirsty, evil spirit choose my daughter, of all people?" (90).

The story is redolent with implicit inferences. The colours play important roles and are suggestive of the trauma to which the girl is subjected. Red, though a warm colour, in this instance, is garish and reminds one of the colour of spilt blood −life sustenance gone waste. The blue colour suggests brazenness and lack of remorse on part of Jubaida, her careless act of making Rafina view the blue film with her, knowing full well that the girl was innocent about the ways of life. The trauma becomes too much for the young girl, who goes into a severe shock, never recovering from the ordeal of witnessing an explicit adult movie. Over and above that, she had to suffer the superstitious and inhuman ways of treatment she was subjected to.

The story cautions one of springing tasteless surprises on unwary people that could lead to grave and disastrous results. In this instance, the unhinging of a young mind, leading to untimely death. Rafina's mother and aunt are depicted as careless women. The mother is bogged down by superstitions and loses her daughter because of her ignorance. Whereas Rafina's aunt was such a stupid woman, who could not foresee what her actions might bring in. Metaphorically speaking, the blue colour denotes intelligence, which is clouded by ignorance, the red tint. The title crimson tint of the blue film is macabre in its aptness.

4.2.1.10 "Oh Raama…" (Oh My God…, Aboobackar 2007)

The theme of this story is about the aftermath of communal riots. How people behave in a malicious manner and many unscrupulous people take advantage of the situation to loot shops, houses. But the worst hit are women and children, being defenseless in the face of such calamity and are taken undue advantage of, the atrocious acts ranging from gang rape to murder. Brass opines that

> ...in riots "mob action" may take the form of confrontations between gangs or crowds from different communities or segments of them, armed with sticks, knives, swords, occasionally bombs and small weapons and kerosene. It also often involves armed gangs from one community seeking out defenseless persons, or whole families in their homes, slashing and cutting up the male members and sometimes the female members, raping the latter, and burning all alive (Brass 2005: 65).

Shabana is a pretty and vivacious girl, the only daughter of the affluent Khan Saab, who has dreams of becoming a doctor. She has many friends belonging to different communities and religion or belief had not come in between their friendship. On the fateful day Shabana was getting ready to go to college, when they hear some commotions at a distance. They never give it a serious thought. But suddenly an angry mob, dressed in orange garments engulfs their bungalow, and dousing their house in kerosene, they set fire, all the while shouting slogans. In the melee Shabana is caught hold of by some hooligans from the mob and she is carried by them to the rear of the bungalow, where she is gang raped and left in an unconscious state, not caring to see whether she is alive or dead. Shabana's mother shouts herself hoarse, pleading with people to save her daughter, while Khan Saab is calling the police to come to their rescue. But it seemed like the police too were not interested to help and Khan Saab's bungalow, along with his family go up in flames, except their unfortunate daughter Shabana.

The scene shifts to a refugee colony, where the refugees, people who have lost their all in the communal riots, take shelter. Shabana too is there; but sadly she has lost her mental faculty and is not aware of anything that is happening around her. She wanders aimlessly around the camp. She eats if somebody gives her a morsel to eat, and if she feels like eating or, throws it away. She stands around young children playing with dolls and at times cries, and butts in the game, sweeping everything aside, weeping bitterly. People sympathise with her, but nobody knows, where she is from. Recently she had started vomiting. The brutal, sexual assault on her has left its mark on her young body, of which she is unaware.

When a social worker Kumuda Tayi visits the refugee camp, the government officials tell her that there is no need to maintain the camp further because all are returning to their homes. An incensed Kumuda tayi questions them as to which home are these people returning to. Acidly she remarks as to whether one can call the houses razed to the ground, which are nothing but a heap of ashes, as home. She spots this girl, vomiting, and asks who she is. In reply they tell her that she is a way side prostitute. Kumuda Tayi stares at the police officer, who had replied to her query, and he hesitates to meet her glance. She goes to Shabana, helps to wash her face and tells her

that she will be taken to a doctor. When she was about to lead Shabana away, one of the refugees, a woman exclaims loudly, "Oh...Raama…isn't she Khan Saab's daughter?"(79). The young girl is victimised for no fault of hers. Women like Kumuda Tayi come across as strong and compassionate, women of mettle, supportive of the less fortunate, reminding one of sisterhood.

Though the story is hardly about three pages, it makes one ashamed of the atrocities that are perpetrated during communal riots. It touches one deeply, raising hitherto unknown feelings in one's psyche. The cruel way in which a tender, innocent and promising life is cut short, is highly disgraceful and shocking to say the least. It leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

Sarah says that when people first read this story, they were indignant and many had called her expressing their displeasure. She sarcastically argues that those who had enjoyed reading her tales, and had appreciated her efforts, when she had written about the rampant rot in their community, the same people had not liked it when the tables were turned and she had portrayed the heinous outcome of the riots. She philosophically admits that this is the way of life. But the sad part is the exploitation of females, which is searing in its intensity. The irony is that these acts are viewed as commonplace incidents and as unavoidable byproducts of civil riots, which is disquieting in the way it is neglected, and not addressed. In these cases it is strong willed women like Kumuda Tayi that raise one's hopes for a tolerable tomorrow.

4.2.1.11. "Oh… Gande ..!" (You…Males…!, Aboobackar 2007)

This story informs us about an Islamic law, according to which if a man dies without sons, then one third of his property passes on to his brothers and his widow and children have to make do with whatever is remaining. It is solely because they are males and it is the prerogative of the males to inherit. This seems to be a very callous law, wherein even very wealthy relatives instead of denying their share, come and get what belongs to them as per Islamic law, though the widow and her children need the money more than they might. Instead of helping the bereaved, they openly grog on their share, which is highly inhuman.

The story is about two brothers and their families who are living in all comforts, a peaceful life. Though theirs is a joint family, there is unity and love in abundance. The elder brother has only three daughters and no sons. He is fatherly in his love to his younger brother, who has two sons and a daughter. To cut a long story short the elder brother even divides the property and gives his brother his rightful share, apart from supporting his brother's sons in their business venture.

Now the picture has changed to that of a dismal scene. The elder brother has passed away, believing that his family will be taken care by his brother and his sons, the majority of his wealth having spent to marry off his daughters. To make matters worse, his eldest daughter has returned to the roost, a widow, with four children in tow. Saudabi, the widow of the eldest brother is finding it difficult to make ends meet. Their demands for extra groceries and cash is being denied by her brother-in-law on one excuse or the other. The next brutal turn in their life is at hand when the only piece of land, with a coconut grove on it, the sole sustenance of Saudabi, is about to leave her hand. She is about to lose half of her plantation for the construction of railway track by the government, for which the land is being acquired. She would be paid for this. But her concern was about her income from the coconut trees on the site. Upon knowing this, her remaining daughters too ask for their share in the property. She is shocked because they are all well placed. It is her eldest daughter and her children who are in dire need of protection. In spite of lending a helping hand, her daughters and brother-in-law, are swooping down to get their share of the kill. None is bothered about the poor, old mother or the eldest daughter and her kids who now rely on the old lady to keep body and soul together. Saudabi is disillusioned and wonders aloud of their plight and of the paltry sum that will remain once everyone’s share is distributed. She feels that blood has lost its thickness and is no longer thicker than water; that money has gained the upper hand, while love and family filiations are thrown out. She remembers what Vasanti, her friend had told her long ago −that Hindus always long for a son, because the sons are their passport to heaven. Saudabi now feels that it is indeed true in her case too. Though for the women of her community, it is more of providing for their life on earth. If she had a son, she need not have had to break her property into bits and pieces, leaving a pittance for her. Yes,

she felt that whichever the religion, males were superior to females and she realises the supreme power of males and exclaims "Oh … Males, How powerful are you!"(105). Islam grants equality to men and women alike, but in reality the stipulations of Quran are not followed. According to the Holy Quran, the verse of inheritance which fixes various shares in the property of a deceased person, says thus:

> "Allah enjoins concerning your children for the male is the equal of the portion of two females; but if there be more than two females, two-thirds of what the deceased leaves is theirs; and if there be one, for her is the half. And as for his parents, for each of them is the sixth of what he leaves, if he has a child; but if he has no child and (only) his two parents inherit him, for his mother is the third, but if he has brothers, for his mother is the sixth, after (payment of) a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt. Your parents and your children, you know not which of them is the nearer to you in benefit. This is an ordinance from Allah." A careful reading of this verse shows that Qur'an has taken care to give women a share in the property of the deceased not only as daughters but also as mothers. Similarly they also inherit as wives according to the Qur'an. ("…and theirs, i.e. the wives' is the fourth of what you leave if you have no child, but if you have a child, their share is the eighth of what you leave"). Al-Razi, a great commentator, also tells us about the context of the revelation of this verse, i.e., verse 4:11. According to him, when S'ad bin Rabi' was martyred he left behind his wife, two daughters and a brother. The brother took away the entire wealth of his deceased brother, leaving the wife and daughters high and dry. The wife went to the Prophet and complained about her husband's brother appropriating all his wealth. The Prophet sent her away saying Allah would decide the matter. After some time she again went to complain about it. It was then that this verse (4:11) was revealed. The Prophet ordered S'ad's brother to pay two-thirds of the property to the daughters and one-eighth to the mother. He could keep the rest (Engineer 2008: 83-84).

Sarah powerfully portrays the helplessness of women in a patriarchal society and the devious ways patriarchy cheats women out of their inheritance in the name of sociocultural practices, relationships notwithstanding. We can witness the same even today all around us, which is accepted as the truth of life. Of course there are bound to be exceptions, but they are few and far outweigh the common instances whish reflect the insatiability of man.

When the behavior of the protagonists of the stories discussed above is analysed, it makes one realise that not many of these women have the mettle to face the forces of an unjust patriarchy and that they bow down sooner or later. Though Nirmala, the protagonist of *Kadana Virama* is from an affluent family, blessed with caring parents, chooses escapism, and commits suicide to escape the ugliness of life, which is the direct result of her being headstrong and foolish enough to be gullible and marry a man who is not trustworthy. She prefers cease fire to daily warfare. Adding insult to injury, her husband, is not even a caring person. He has his sights not for her but the

wealth she brings from her parents. Many a time he makes her ask her parents for help, which she perceived as begging, and which was not to her liking. The substandard life, the uncaring attitude, and the agony of her husband's greed made her opt for the easy way out. Hence, she is seen as flightless, falling a victim to the system and situations, a woman with no strength to stand up and face life squarely.

Samira of "Chappaligalu", is also weak. She has no education, neither her parents have, nor are they affluent. She becomes a mental wreck, just because she could not live with her husband who was working in the Middle East, a very flimsy reason for anyone to go to pieces, lacking the mental stamina, flightless in mind and body, like a pair of slippers, to be worn and discarded. But she is saved, for she was lucky enough to have a liberal man in her husband.

Mariyamma and Julekha of "Mariyammana Aliya" are poor, sans education and it is a wonder that Mariyamma had her daughter married at all. She, in some respects is a strong woman, much better than her daughter Julekha, who is a nerveless creature, a parasite. They are the standard examples of the patriarchal system, wherein they view themselves as inadequate, and think on the lines that marriage is of the utmost importance, fully abiding by the societal rules and following it blindly. Hence, they fall prey to the designing person, their son-in-law. When he absconds, cheating them heavily they simply crack, without any support.

Fatima of "Birugali", is a spirited old woman, but fate deals her cruel blows, and she simply cannot take it any longer and buckles down under the trauma, the tempest, which wrecks her life literally.

Kajjamma and Nebisa of "Bisilgudureya Bennu Hatti", are cruelly duped by the ones they trusted. Being very poor and uneducated, when a marriage offer comes for Nebisa, from a man old enough to be her father, her mother Kajjamma convinces her to marry the man, so that she could help her brother go abroad, and for the sake of three square meals a day. Her brother is against this. He does not want to build his life on his sister's tomb, because he views this proposal and marriage, only as her funeral and interment. He does not want his pretty sister, hardly out of her teens, to marry an old man. But he is over ruled and Nebisa sacrifices herself willingly for the sake of

her family. Her brother flies abroad, for the promised job, but he is imprisoned on charges of drug smuggling, taken for a ride, because of his credulousness.Very aptly titled, all they were chasing were mirages without their knowledge. The cruelty of taking advantage of poor people, their poverty, the horrible situations into which they enter unknowingly, makes one sick, leaving one wondering whether the hapless women had any choice at all, other than bowing down to the unjust laws and the system, where women are seen as sacrificial beasts and are preyed upon accordingly.

Kajjamma of "Arakshitha", is again taken advantage in the absence of her husband, who is not concerned enough about his family. In such circumstances what can a woman, saddled with many children, with neither money nor education do? She is defenseless, like the title aptly suggests. It is no wonder she falls prey.

Jamila of "Gode" is a victim of the underhand dealings of her mother-in-law, coupled with the system, which gives so much power to men, who can discard their wives without a second thought. There is no hint of any humanitarian concern. A woman, with no positive thoughts in her mental makeup is but a natural loser. She is denied her right and autonomy. She does not even know that women too are entitled to an honorable life and have certain rights. The title 'Gode' is suggestive. It is like a wall which cuts her off from her husband. Not just a wall but a veritable fort, is what Shafi, her husband erects between them, all in the name of religion and its rules − the shari'a.

In "Neeli Chitrada Kempu Banna" Rafina falls victim for ignorance and superstitions. Sarah has depicted women characters who could be identified with someone we know. Even their actions are predictable, leading to misery. Sarah, in this story, has powerfully portrayed the pitfalls of being too secretive in life.

Saudabi of "Oh… Gande ..!" knows what is happening to her. But she is unable to do anything about it. Instead of acting, she laments her situation. Since what we lack today is empathy, she is bound to get no help. All she is left is exclaim and curse the wrong doers, who are ironically her own family. Through this tale, Sarah has successfully laid bare the laws of the shari'a which favour the males.

Hence these women can be seen as flightless, because they never show any will power nor try to change the situation in their favour. They do not have the fighting instinct which is very crucial for the survival, and hence, are easy prey. They have neither the willingness nor the awareness to fight too. We can observe that in none of the above stories or novel, women are the educated lots. It is also true that they are economically dependent on males of their family. The resistance against discrimination might germinate only when both or either of these two assist women in this modern age as a necessary tool − a tool that would assist the 'flight', which could also be the fight against oppressing patriarchy.

4.2.2: Fledglings

Fledglings, the metaphor for the next set of characters, refers to the ones who are aware that they have wings and who know that if tried, they can fly, but fail due to their 'fragile wings'. Even if they try to fly they plummet down; get hurt and in worse cases die. This would mean that they make an effort to fight the system; yet, they fail. This could be due to lack of education, or the mental attitude of these very women or most importantly, the lack of support from their immediate family members. They have not been taught the importance of being assertive. They can neither see themselves independent, nor fathom themselves being so. In spite of their inability to succeed, these women lay a foundation for their daughters, giving them hope to think positively, being a model, the defects on which they could work out, so that at least the next generation mutates, sprouting strong wings, and flies. In this category we have Nadira of *Chandragiri Teeradalli*, Malini of "Vijnana Bhavishya Nudidaga", Zareena of "Dwaniyillada Novugalu", Girijamma and her daughter Latha, of "Doni Sagali", Shabana and Yamuna of "Saramsha", Khadija who later becomes Celina of "Ondu Badukina Kelavu Putagalu", Shakila of "Ankura", Johara of "Niyama Niyamagala Naduve", Amina of "Uri Bisilu", Khadija of "Huttu", and protagonists of "Neeru". Now let us briefly go through the summary of these representations.

4.2.2.1. ***Chandragiri Teeradalli*** (On the Banks of Chandragiri, Aboobackar 1984)

This is the debut novel of Sarah, and a first of its kind which portrays a different world, the internal lives of the women of Beary community. This novel caused a huge

uproar with description of burning issues in the community and people were stunned to know such practices still exist. The theme of the novel is about a much debated custom, the triple *talaq*s and 'one day's marriage' (marriage for a day) of the community. Sarah deftly paints a vivid picture of Nadira and her sufferings in a poignant manner.

Nadira is married at the tender age of fourteen to Rashid. They were leading a happy life and Nadira even becomes a young mother, giving birth to a son. Their life is happy, wanting for nothing. Nadira has a younger sister Jamila and her father Mohammed Khan, was seeking an alliance for Jamila. The wedding is arranged and he falls short of a few thousand rupees. He decides to go to his son-in-law, Rashid for help, thinking that it is his duty to help. But unfortunately Rashid is unable to help his father-in-law, which leads to a heated quarrel. Mohammed Khan, well known to be obstinate and pig headed, sees this as an insult, becomes furious and brings Nadira and her child home with him, on the pretext of visiting. He does not have any intention of sending her back to Rashid; neither does he invite them to Jamila's wedding. Lately does Rashid realise the true reason for his father-in-law's determination of compelling Nadira to accompany him back home, giving the reason of Jamila's wedding. He curses himself, but alas, it is too late for him to do anything. Nadira is miserable but it does not affect her father, who is foolish enough to believe that he can do what he pleases because she is his daughter. In the meantime, one fine day Rashid's mother Amina comes to visit them and leaves with her grandson, without informing them, which would have amounted to kidnapping the child, if it was not for the support from religion. Because, according to the Islamic law, only the father has total rights over his offspring. Nadira is shell shocked and Mohammed Khan utilises the incident to separate them forever. He forces Rashid to divorce Nadira through *talaq* and lies that she had asked for it, not wanting to live with him anymore, definitely not after stealing her son from her. To cut a long story short Nadira is given her *talaq*. She is then forced to marry a man who is already married with wife and children, old enough to be her father. His only qualification is that he is very rich. She rejects this proposal and for the first time in her life, which is all of

seventeen years, she retaliates, shouting at her father that if they force her she will commit suicide.

> Abba! Never forget that I was very happy with Rashid. It's enough that you have had me married for once. If at all you think of marrying me off again, I will definitely end my life in the waters of Chandragiri (55-56).

Mohammed Khan, her stupid father, tastes defeat for the first time in his life, and he starts repenting, thinking that probably it is because of him that his daughter Nadira is in living hell. His health starts deteriorating and he sends word to Rashid, who all this while neither had forgotten Nadira nor remarried. He readily agrees to remarry Nadira, because after the *talaq*, she is *haram*[85] to him and not his legal wife anymore. But their happiness is short-lived when they realise that according to the rules of the shari'a, she has to undergo what is known as 'one day's marriage'. She has to marry someone for a day, be his wife for a day, the next day being divorced (*talaq*) by him, has to wait for a period of three months, just to be sure that she has not conceived in the one day's marriage. Then, and only then, is she eligible to remarry her first husband! Sarah brings to the fore the humiliation that women have to endure for no fault of theirs, save that of being born a female! Nadira does not agree to this, worrying what if she conceives. There is no proper answer to this, other than the fact that she has to hand over the child to its father. Just the thought of being somebody's wife for a day is appalling to her. She is counseled by everyone to agree to go through this barbarous custom of a day's marriage and at last she capitulates, for the sole reason of being united with her loved ones − Rashid and her son.

Sheikali, who is no better than a servant, is chosen as her second husband for this marriage of convenience. Marriage is duly performed and though Nadira can hardly bear the situation she convinces herself that she is ready for this supreme sacrifice for her child and her beloved, Rashid. She wants to have a look at her so called 'husband'. She peeps and is stunned and horrified when she sees an uncouth, potbellied old man, gobbling up food as if he has been starved for ages, the light shining on his bald pate. Nadira cannot help but compare her gentleman of a first husband Rashid with this brute of a man, her second husband. She feels like throwing

[85]Prohibited.

up and cannot picture herself as his wife even for a second, let alone spending the night with him. It powerfully evokes indignant responses in the reader, as to the fate of Nadira as his wife. His haste over his food conjures up horrible images and is suggestive of the ravenous hunger of a different kind. Her mother prepares her for the night, draping her in a new sari. Nadira tells her mother that she will go for a quick stroll to calm herself. Promising to return within a few minutes she escapes out of the stifling atmosphere and goes straight towards the banks of Chandragiri. Standing there, she stares at the opposite bank, where the love of her life, her child and Rashid live. Her face is set and resolute, indicating that she has come to a decision. A new, carefree, happy world is beckoning her. Walking along the banks, lamenting about her wretched state of affairs, Nadira ignores the river and continues in the direction of the mosque. In her younger days she would not even have thought of such a stroll, at that time of night, because she used to be terror stricken of the tombs in the cemetery adjoining the mosque. But not on this day! Nothing in the world had any power to move her, or frighten her. She had seen so much of the horrors of life, that nothing scared her any more. She enters the precincts of the mosque and stares at the water in the pool. The image of her son and Rashid appears to be floating on the surface of the still waters. "God willing, let us meet on the day of the final judgment" (88), so saying she jumps into the pool. The calm waters is agitated, but for a few seconds, and then becomes still and placid once again.

Nadira chooses death, dignified death, to the humiliation that was in store for her, with the river Chandragiri in the background as a mute witness. A young life is lost, a mother is lost to her child, and a daughter is lost to her mother, not to mention a wife lost to her husband. While trying to negotiate the principles of religion, one is not blind to the gory details of the gut wrenching grief this story doles out− exploitation in the name of religion. One is disturbed deeply after reading this tale, which begs some serious answers. Haddad et al, citing Fouad Zakaria, note a contradiction in the Islamic perspective when he says that:

> The view of women among contemporary Muslim fundamentalists suggests a duality of overt praise and flattery on the one hand and covert humiliation and degradation on the other. This duality occurs in order to perpetuate the "degraded and marginalized state of women" and at the same time that they are made to look free and honorable (Haddad: 10).

Nadira by committing suicide in the pool of the mosque raises a Hornet's nest. It seems like she is questioning the relevance of redundant cultural practices. She dares to make a point, questioning the written dictates of the religion. Sarah, when questioned about this, says that it was probably Nadira's application in the court of the supreme power, her quest for justice, which she was denied here. It was her way of asking for justice from the all-powerful, Allah. Nadira refused to throw herself into the waters of Chandragiri, because there was no guarantee that her body would be recovered. Then in all probability, her name would be besmirched with the insinuation that she has eloped with someone, something which she could not risk and did not want to happen. The powerful narration, though very insightful, instead of causing ripples, gives rise to huge waves of indignation in a responsive reader who is sensitive to injustice. No society can aspire to attain great heights, peace and happiness when one half of its population − the mothers, sisters, wives and daughters − are treated callously. It makes one wonder that despite the advent of feminism, in reality things have not changed much for most women. "[E]ven today, after feminist awakenings, we struggle to make our voices heard and to convince ourselves that our writing, in a time of increasing poverty, racism, inequality, xenophobia, and warfare, still somehow matters" (Behar: 16). The novel makes one want to do away with redundant sociocultural practices, which are degrading to say the least. Only when a society has healthy practices and promises better future and freedom to its inhabitants can positive change occur.

The entire novel revolves around the plight of a young girl, whose life becomes a virtual hell for no fault of hers, save that of being born a female. A promising young life becomes devoid of all hope. Sarah comments on this evil practice of *talaq*, saying that it robs one of human dignity and women are but pawns in the hands of men and divorced women without any financial backup live lives not worth living. Sarah states that such destitute women resort to prostitution in most of the instances because they are neither educated nor have their natal family to fall back on. Sarah's fervent wish is that innocent people must become conscious of the fact that fanaticism and political interests of some individuals lie at the roots of such unhealthy practices, misleading society, and unless awareness is generated there could be no help. Sarah portrays

intensely how people take advantage of others in the name of personal law, which she says is a common occurrence. And what is more, the society condones this kind of a behavior, which in itself a shame for any civilised society. The story depicts all the cantankerous growth, hampering the progress of society. Sarah states that according to a study, the inmates of the infamous red light areas in big Indian cities are divorced Muslim women.

Sarah says that people have accused her of writing against her own community, but she refuses to agree to the accusation and says that literature mirrors the ugly truth of life, and people, instead of realising that the ugliness is their own reflection, try to blame the person who has held the mirror (Aboobackar 2010). In fact, she first become known as a writer thanks to her rebellion against gender inequality and religious fundamentalism, an attitude that she retains even today despite sustained attempts by fundamentalist groups to silence her. She believes that one needs to cut away the rot to keep it from spreading and try saving what one could, and she is doing just that, of shedding light on the rot that is rampant in her society, so that it could be erased to create a healthy society. The entire novel is a portrayal of stifled voices.

The first voice that is cut off permanently is that of Nadira's mother, Fatima. She literally is terror stricken of her husband, who on many instances have even manhandled her. An instance in the novel gives us an inkling about his brutality. Once Fatima had gone to attend a marriage in the family with his permission. The family members request her to stay back and spend the night, because it was already too late for her to return, to which she agrees. When she returns the next morning escorted by her nephew, her husband Mohammad Khan, who was in a towering rage because she had failed to return the previous day, slaps and thrashes her, calling her filthy names, all in front of her nephew, who immediately leaves. She is not even given a chance to speak, neither does he ask the reason. But in spite of this, she still loved him and felt indebted to him because she sensed that he did have his good points. Her reasoning was that all said and done, he was not a polygamous person − had never married a second time and she was thankful for that! Speak of small mercies in life! Fatima always used to tell her daughters that she was lucky not to have another woman with

whom she had to share her husband. So, she stifles all her misgivings and at the bottom of her heart acquiesces this silencing.

Nadira's is the second voice that is suppressed because she has no say, either in selecting or discarding a husband. Though she was quite happy with Rashid, none seem to think that her approval too is necessary for the *talaq*. She and her emotions are negligible, since patriarchy denies women any agency and gives men the right to decide the fate of women.

The third hushed voice is that of Jamila, because in the Indian settings, it is mostly arranged marriages and the daughters have no say.[86] They meekly marry the man their family chooses. The women are not thought to have a voice and ideally they should be seen and not be heard! Jamila is just a shadow in the course of the narration, but still we realise that hers is one more voice that is stilled; first as a bride, then in the course of time will be choked as a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother, which is a common enough occurrence.

The fourth voice which is inaudible is that of Rashid's mother, Amina. Though she loved her daughter-in-law Nadira, she has no say when it comes to the matter of *talaq* and remarriage. Traditionally, women and their opinions are not considered in any matter. She just becomes a go between, a messenger, who means well, wants to see her son Rashid and Nadira together again, but is helpless as much as they are, when it comes to the rules and regulations of the shari'a. Her voice is muffled and goes unheard.

Nadira regains her voice in her death. What she could not achieve in life she manages to, in her death. Her stifled voice gives rise to a piercing scream. She becomes a question mark, a whistle blower in her death, questioning the relevance of archaic customs which have religious sanction. She makes sure her lone voice is strong enough to be heard by committing her body in the pool of the mosque, a place where the omnipotent Allah is worshipped. And her suicide becomes not just another attempt at ending a life but becomes a sacrifice at the altar of justice. She becomes a

[86] This is mostly true about lower-middle class and lower class. In upper class, and upper-middle class families, this is not the case. In middle class families, of course, the scenario is fast changing. The realities might also differ as per the community too.

martyr in her death, opening up avenues for other women, instilling courage in women. One wishes that she had shown this daring while alive, but it is easier said than done. Going against the rules laid down by religion is not an easy affair. And it requires nerves of iron if one is to swim against the tides. Nadira, is but an example of what thousands of young women undergo in all walks of life. We have multiple examples of even educated women from affluent backgrounds being crushed in life, burdened with unsurmountable, unrealistic expectations, their voices hushed and muffled in life, stilled in death.

Sarah herself becomes the voice that dares to question the oppression women face, by portraying the stifled voices in her debut novel. She believes that writing indeed is her way, the only space that was open to her to voice her opinions. She locates herself as a humanist first and then a feminist, because her steadfast belief is that one needs to become a human first. Narain (2001) is of the opinion that fundamentalist discourse, predicated on the notion of an essential Islamic identity, views any challenge to personal law as a betrayal of the community. In seeking to homogenise the group and in rejecting difference within the group, fundamentalist leaders have refused to acknowledge or address the systematic disadvantage of Muslim women. Thus fundamentalism has marginalised Muslim women's interests, by failing to address the reality of their social and economic vulnerability (5).

Sarah argues that literature should not be tainted with religion, be it any. She endorses her work saying that they are not fiction but based on reality, real life instances that she has witnessed around her and her objective is to portray the lives of women as she has seen it. The novel makes a fervent plea for liberating women from a custom that has more to do with the perpetuation of the oppressive structure of patriarchy and power equations, than any religious consciousness. The title *Chandragiri Teeradalli* is metaphoric in its relevance. The Chandragiri River cannot be crossed without a boat, without the help of a boatman, who ferries one across; and that too a woman had to be escorted by male members of her family, is similar to the religious stipulations women are made to observe. The real barrier river is equated with the virtual barrier of cultural stipulations, wherein women are denied autonomy to think, decide and act for themselves. Sarah strongly advocates that women's empowerment is to give

women the power to act, participate, make decisions, raise voice against social evils, and fight against injustice, to become aware of their rights and privileges, and education is the only way towards emancipation.

4.2.2.2. "Niyama Niyamagala Naduve" (In Between Principles, Aboobackar 1996)

The theme of this story is about the 'one day's marriage', as we have seen it in the case of the novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli*. Johara, the protagonist of this story, has two children and is with child, when her husband Khader divorces her for a silly reason. She had refused to part with her earrings when asked. And his mother fuels his anger. Khader takes Johara to her mother's house and never returns. After a week she receives her *talaq*, through the mukri of the mosque, as is the custom. She is shattered. Though not rich, she had till then had a life which wanted nothing. Now, she, along with her children becomes a burden – a dead albatross – to her mother and brother. To make matters worse, they start ill-treating her. They too are not to be blamed, because they themselves are poor folks.

Now Johara became the reason for anything that went wrong in the house. For any misfortune she was blamed. If there was no sugar or coffee powder in the house, both the son and mother behaved as if it was all Johara's fault. The children who were habituated with having biscuits and plantains, often used to cry for these things. Johara who knew no work whatsoever, and had never earned anything in her life, would weep along with her children. The mental agony which was perpetrated by the harsh words and behaviour of her mother and brother would find an outlet in her, through scolding and beating her children. At times, lying down in her bed, Johara would ruminate deeply about what was meant by 'husband'. Was it so great an error not to comply with his wishes, of not giving her hard earned jewels to him? For such a silly reason did he have to abandon her and his own offspring? Was the relationship of husband and wife so very fragile, that it would sever with the utterance of three *talaq*s? "Are those three words so very powerful so as to separate both of us forever, in spite of his child growing in my womb, his blood flowing in my body? Is it possible that I too could utter three words and free him?" Questions which had no answers would worry her mind (86).

Johara delivers a son, but due to malnutrition she is not lactating properly. Somehow days are dragging by. Suddenly one day her husband sends word that he is repenting his hasty decision and wants his wife and children back. Both mother and daughter are flabbergasted. But is it easy? Of course 'One Day's Marriage' has to be performed. Johara rejects this offer, but is made to see reason and at last she capitulates. Once again, it is not as easy as it was supposed to be. She cannot undergo one day's marriage because she has to start menstruating after her delivery. But in some instances, women do not menstruate for many months. But time is running short. What guarantee is there for a fickle mind? What if Khader changes his mind? How can one let go of this god sent opportunity?

Amina, the mother, sat thinking. Menstruation, conception, are all work of nature and should happen naturally. How can one change these rules of nature to suit one's convenience? They decide to administer Johara with herbal concoctions. But she develops fever and stomach aches and is in pain. She is once again given potions and medicated. At last when she starts bleeding, both mother and daughter heave a sigh of relief. The jubilation was all too soon, because the bleeding turns to heavy hemorrhage, deteriorating the already weak Johara. Her condition worsens and she breaths her last. While breathing her last, in her death throes she questions her mother to the whereabouts of her husband.

> Umma...where is your son-in-law? Who made me go through so much misery... your son-in-law who had divorced me, given my *talaq*…and once again wanted to marry me?...where is he? (89).

Her question stands out in red letters in the course of the story, because it is more of an accusation, pointing a finger to the wrong done to her.

This is a poignant story which openly states the injustice perpetrated on women in the name of religion. The title illustrates how much people suffer trying to adhere to principles and how there are a lot of loopholes which are ill used by unscrupulous people. A young life is lost, a mother is lost to her children, a daughter is lost to her mother, a sister lost to a brother and not to mention a wife lost to her husband. While trying to negotiate between the principles of nature and religion, one is not blind to the gory details of the gut wrenching grief this story doles out.

4.2.2.3. "Vijnana Bhavishya Nudidaga" (The Scientific Oracle, Aboobackar 1989).

This story has the theme of female feticide, when science plays the part of an oracle and foretells future – i.e. sex determination tests − very common occurrence wherein the sex of the fetus is detected through scientific method of amniocentesis, and then conveniently the female fetus is aborted, all for the sake of a male offspring. Sarah portrays the feelings of Malini, the mother to be, who does not want to abort her child but is in no position to oppose her husband and in laws. Malini remembers an Arab custom she had read − a new born baby girl being buried alive the minute it is born − the barbaric custom as it was then known to be. She wonders where the difference is then and now, because ultimately a girl child is destroyed, what if the system is a little more sophisticated. The deed is the same, based on sex selection, killing one's own progeny. The poignancy of the tale makes one want to do something, anything, in one's powers to stop such blood-spattered customs.Bhatnagar et al claim that femicide (the selective killing of female foetus) in post-colonial India has received serious commitment from activists in the Indian women movement(s) but scant rhetorical and theoretical analysis. They say that this omission in post-colonial feminist theory is curious given the fact that the Indian women's movements were the first organised groups in the 1970s and 1980s to call attention to the use of new reproductive technologies for feticide and selective breeding and nurturing of male foetuses in modern India. Bhatnagar et al maintain that the discourses of modernity, development, population control, and new reproductive technologies work together to claim the Indian woman's body as object and to name femicide as informed choice and family planning (2005: 1).

The root cause for this, is the belief that lies in the Sanskritic tradition which says 'Aputrasyo *gatir nasti*' – meaning 'no son, no salvation' –sanctions that only through a male offspring can salvation be attained. This further boosts the orthodox thinking that a girl child is a burden and one has to spend a lot in dowry, during the time of marriage. Agarwal argues that gender bias is deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. The popular perception draws the girl child as a losing proposition − only to be married into another family. This leads to a natural dislike for girls. The society looks down upon the female child as a liability and male child as an asset. The fear of dowry on

the one hand and losing property in inheritance on the other major irritants in acceptance of a girl child. Discrimination against female children starts early, and is maintained as the female child grows (Agarwal 2003: 3).

This story makes one think about the fate of a girl child in India, which is denied the right to be born, in this twenty first century. We, who seem to be proud of our ancient heritage and culture, in a land where goddesses are worshipped, a female embryo is doomed to be terminated, indeed comes as a surprise. The statistics already speaks of highly skewed gender ratios in India[87].The irony of the situation, when we are busy talking about gender equality and the arrival of twenty first century, makes one wonder afresh about the horrifying images of a future, stripped naked, without the very important factor of gender balance, which might worsen the situation for women.

4.2.2.4. "Dwaniyillada Novugalu" (Voiceless Pains, Aboobackar 1992)

The story has a theme of instant divorce − *talaq*. Zareena, sister of a maulvi, is married after much trouble to Mustapha, who does not have a steady income. "When the son himself was a burden, by bringing in a daughter-in-law the load had increased and Mustapha's father started worrying and became distressed thinking of the folly he had perpetrated by marrying his good for nothing son. He tried to instill some sense by advising his son now and then" (18).

He denies and the incensed father throw him along with his wife out of the house. They come to live in Zareena's house. For her family, it is an extra burden and maulvi tries to solve the problem by sending him off to a Gulf country to earn his living, with others' help. The picture appears to be rosy and Zareena is happy in the thought that very soon she will be the mistress of her own house, bought with the money her husband now earns.

> Lately, yet another intense desire was burgeoning forth from the innermost recesses of her heart. It was four years since they were married. True, from the past one and a half years he was abroad, but before that they were together, say for almost two and a half years. But still she had not conceived and had remained barren! None seemed to have been concerned about it at that moment. Probably for the reason her husband wasn't earning then. Even her mother never gave it a thought, as to why she was childless. Now that he has started working in the Gulf her mother occasionally used to say, "Next time when Zareena's

[87]Currently the female to male ratio is 933 females per 1,000 males. While the world over women outnumber men, India is unique in that here men outnumber women (Bhatnagar et al 2005: 2-5).

> husband comes we need to take her to the "doctor" in Mangalore for a checkup". Her mother's words had taken hold of her and germinated in the form of a new longing. How marvelous it would be if I too had a baby like that of my brother! Since my husband is working abroad, it shouldn't be difficult to purchase a small house of our own, within a couple of years. A modest house of my own, a little one, a caring and loving spouse... her future unfurled in her vision, surfacing from the bottom of her heart, like a beautiful, flowering garden (23-24).

It is the holy month of Ramzan and Mustapha is scheduled to visit them. When the Maulvi came home after concluding the noon's prayer Zareena came running to meet her brother.

> "Anna, the letter has come", she was unable to hide her happiness and failing to curb her impatience, she, with twinkling eyes appeared before him. "Four or five more days to go for the festival", so saying she placed the letter in his outstretched palm. When opened, the envelope seemed to contain two letters. Maulvi first read the small sheet of paper that his hand closed on. "I have sent Abdul Kadar's daughter Zareena's three *talaq*s" signed, "Mustafa" the names of other four witnesses were also written in the letter (26).

Thus, instead of Mustapha, *talaq* sent by him arrives, and the entire family is engulfed in sorrow.

> "Hmmm…" Maulvi uttered stridently. "Rascal, he says he is going to send a thousand rupees to get her married to someone else. Wretch that he is, who couldn't even treat a woman with proper decency, the dog… anyhow hasn't he crossed the waterway safely? So where is the necessity for a boatman? He doesn't need me anymore. Nor does he need my sister. Why should he want her now? People of this sort should be publicly beaten with slippers and skinned alive!" The words exploded from him, his anguish, and the misery that he couldn't hold back, found an outlet and flowed forth in the form of frenzied expressions. "Anna, he was abroad, away from me from the past one and half years and hadn't even seen me during these eighteen months, let alone live with me as man and wife. Does our holy book agree to his divorcing me like this, without any of my mistakes, without a thought to justice, without even giving me an opportunity to speak in my defense? Does it give autonomy to a man to divorce his lawful wife, ruthlessly, in one single instance, to give her the three *talaq*s and release her from holy wedding vows? Does our holy scripture preach that one can behave callously, in this insensitive, brutal manner?" When Zareena pathetically voiced these words, a direct result of her unbearable pain, it sounded as a wail of distress to Maulvi and fell on his ears like the crash of thundering sea waves. Devoid of an answer, he was speechless (27-28).

Zareena is thunderstruck and her brother is shocked at the insensitivity of Mustapha, and one can but understand the situation of the stranded ones too well, not to speak of the brutality of it all. Sarah portrays vividly how people take advantage of others in the name of personal law, wherein the women are cheated out of their rights, which she says is a common occurrence. Afkhami argues that the infringement of women's rights is usually exercised in the name of tradition, religion, social cohesion, morality or some complex of transcendent values. Always, it is justified in the name of culture. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in Muslim societies, where over half a

billion women live in vastly different lands, climates, cultures, societies, economies, and polities. Few of these women live in purely traditional environment (Afkhami 1995: 234).

Mustapha, who was not getting any proposal earlier because he had no job, now suddenly becomes an eligible groom, who would not think twice of discarding his wife to get on with life. He had used them like stepping stones for a better future. And what is more, this kind of a behavior is condoned and in some instances even upheld by the patriarchal discourse.

4.2.2.5. "Doni Sagali" (Let the Boat Sail, Aboobackar 1996)

This story portrays the degradation that is rife in urban societies and exposes the dark underbelly of the swank cities, which look nothing less than heaven on earth. Girijamma has come to visit her daughter Latha, who is expecting. While staying in the city, she comes across many untoward incidents in the vicinity of her daughter's house. She is shocked; but Latha assures her mother, that whatever she had witnessed were common enough occurrences in the city. Girijamma witnesses an incident, wherein the man in question, her daughter's neighbor, throws out a prostitute from his house, all the while abusing her in filthy language, that too without paying, after using her, along with his friends in the absence of his wife. Girijamma is shocked to the core, at the callousness of the brutes, who do not hesitate to cheat an unfortunate woman. The exploitation of a prostitute − who herself is bought and sold as a commodity − is the lowest, any civil person can stoop to. Flowers opines that throughout history the victimisation and exploitation of women have perhaps been most tragic in prostitution.

> Few other crimes reflect such a wide gender double standard as prostitution where women are far more likely than men to be recruited, abused, raped, killed, arrested, incarcerated, poor, and vulnerable to such diseases as AIDS. Many see prostitution as largely a victimless crime while others favor legalization of prostitution, which further foster the victimization of women. Modern sociological theories of prostitution examine it in terms of social structure, social pathology, and culture. Theories of prostitution tend to remain gender-specific, thereby creating a built-in bias towards women as prostitutes and disregarding the male prostitute and predominantly male customer. Many social scientists believe that economic deprivation is the primary factor in female prostitution (Flowers 1994: 171-176).

Girijamma is apprehensive, and her mind now conjures up unwanted ideas of her husband. She cannot sleep peacefully and she decides that it is better to return home.

The title speaks of the life as a boat, that one should set sail against all odds and it is one's duty to see it is not capsized in the face of gales and turbulent waters of the sea of life. In this instance it could very well mean infidelity, betrayal and all sorts of vices and evils, in the midst of which one needs to continue one's journey.

4.2.2.6. "Saramsha" (Summary, Aboobackar 1992)

The theme of this story is about how the men in this patriarchal society take advantage of women in the name of marriage. The protagonist of the story is Shabana who is faced by a dilemma of protecting a woman, Yamuna, who is in dire straits and needs asylum. When prodded, Yamuna breaks down and regales the sorry story of her life. She was an old maid when a man of her acquaintance offered her marriage. Though it was his second marriage, she did not object because her condition at home was worse, notwithstanding having a mother. He had given the lame excuse of his first wife being an invalid and hence the need for second marriage. Yamuna was like a wilting plant, sagging, dying for water. Her family agrees and she marries him. If her family really cared for her wellbeing they would have counseled her out of this, which they did not. They just wanted her out of their house and lives. He visits her regularly and later takes her home after she pesters him. She is shocked when a young lady with a child answers the door. She very lately realises that he had lied and cheated her. His wife was in good health. What's more, she had gone for her confinement when he had married Yamuna. But she could not retrace her steps. She was nothing more than a servant working for free, who served the mistress in the day time and the master at night. When she becomes pregnant, he convinces her for an abortion saying that he can ill afford the child. He sells her gold jewelry − what little was given by her mother − to pay the doctor's fee. When Yamuna realises this, she is drained of all her feelings and becomes like dead wood. No words are needed to understand her sad state! But very soon Yamuna realises that he had duped her once again, when his wife conceives. Sarah has very powerfully summarized Yamuna's trauma:

> "My mind was already blank, devoid of any feelings. Now my womb too is emptied of what little happiness I was left with…." Shabana is shocked when she hears the callousness of the man and her question is laced with all her loathing. "So... a land to sow and reap and the other one to be used as a playground... Is this the arrangement?" (35-36).

The story takes an unexpected turn when he then sends her to one of his friend's house, saying that she cannot live with him anymore, and that is how she realises that she was on the verge of being changed hands and had come to Shabana seeking help. Though Shabana's husband agrees first, later tells Shabana that Yamuna must leave. The reason was that two days earlier, two parties − one belonging to each religion that of Shabana and Yamuna – had visited them saying that their helping her could lead to a communal riot! Shabana is justifiably livid with the system which only exploits women, and hates herself for not being able to support a woman, though she had understood the horrible plight of Yamuna, being a woman herself. She furiously tosses the paper which carried the headlines "[t]he different programs for the welfare and progress of women which the government plans to bring into motion". The story depicts all the cantankerous growth, hampering the progress of society. In addition, women are treated like commodity, like an article to be used and then disposed of, when not wanted. Yamuna was clearly exploited sexually and was about to be trafficked, which would most probably have made a prostitute out of her. She is almost one, because her relationship lacks security and is one of sexual exploitation. Hughes (2000) elaborates on sexual exploitation which is a global problem.

> Global sexual exploitation is a human rights crisis for women and girls. It is also a crisis for democracy and the security of nations. The harm of sexual exploitation extends from the individual to the state. When a state permits prostitution or trafficking to flourish a certain portion of each generation of young women will be lost. Some might argue that prostitution is the work of women, a way of making a living unique to their gender, but in fact, prostitution is the position the dominant class puts the subordinate class into, in order to use them as they desire. Prostitution creates an underclass of women whose purpose is to sexually serve men. It is a degraded status, everywhere. No form of sexual exploitation leads to the liberation or empowerment of women, or enhances the rights or status of women. Prostitution and trafficking are extreme forms of gender discrimination and exist as a result of the powerlessness of women as a class. Sexual exploitation is more than an act; it is a systematic way to abuse and control women that socializes and coerces women and girls until they comply, take ownership of their own subordinate status, and say, "I choose this." Prostitution and trafficking restrict women's freedom and citizenship rights. If women are treated as commodities, they are consigned to second-class citizenship. No state can be a true democracy, if half of its citizens can potentially be treated as commodities. If women and girls are to live in this world with dignity and equality, their bodies and emotions must belong to them alone. They cannot be commodities to be bought and sold. The sexual exploitation of women is justified or condemned by so many different perspectives and ideologies. It is difficult to get people to see and understand the harm to women, individually and as a class (Hughes 2000).

It is no wonder that such women have recourse only to two things: either to commit suicide or to resort to prostitution. This is one of the greatest problems that are troubling the South Asian countries.

4.2.2.7. "Ondu Badukina Kelavu Putagalu" (Some Pages from a Life, Aboobackar 1996)

The protagonist Khadija is a girl from a poor family, who works as a charwoman. She has lofty dreams and marrying 'a young man, one who wears goggles and rides a bike' is her favorite dream. She justifies it by saying that dreaming is what makes their dreary lives tolerable. One fine day her dream turns to ashes when she is forced to marry an old man, whom she flatly refuses and with her friend's help goes to live with a family as their maid. These are the first three pages of her life's book.

The remaining pages are not any better. Khadija is ill-treated and later converts her faith, becoming Celina. She now marries a soldier and begets a daughter, Philomena. Her husband already has a son by his first marriage. But our protagonist has become wise enough to realise that she is not in a position to choose. Eventually she is not to lead a happy life. He passes away leaving her to the mercy of his son, Joseph, who duly starts taking advantage of his step-sister. He systematically exploits and rapes her and one fine day the young girl commits suicide. Rape is committed by a close relative, step-brother, who lives together with her. As Flowers states, in most of the cases it is a known person who is known to the victim, who rapes. This is called acquaintance rape. More than 50 types of rapists have been identified by criminologists and sex researchers. And in almost all the typologies, the act of rape is seen not as an "aggressive expression of sexuality but rather as a sexual expression of aggression" (Flowers 1994: 144-152).

Suffering the impact of aggression by Joseph, Celina, now reverts to being Khadija, severs all ties with Joseph. But for her bad luck she is duped out of a piece of land, which her husband had bequeathed her. When Khadija realises this, all is lost. Sarah has portrayed the myriad ways in which women are exploited, taken advantage of. She believes that women have to be very cautious before they trust anyone, and

cautions against infatuation, which is one of the prime causes leading to sexual exploitation of young girls and women.

4.2.2.8. "Ankura" (Germination, Aboobackar 1992)

This story portrays the brutality of the marriage laws and how women are traumatised due to various socio-cultural practices in the name of religion. Shakila, a young lass of sixteen, marries Salim, who works in the Middle East. A week later leaving his new bride, he returns to his job. Shakila is with child, a sign to show that the marriage is consummated. The moment he leaves the saga of ill-treating the daughter-in-law starts, the stock practice of Indian societies, be it any religion, all due to not having given the promised things in cash or kind during marriage, in this instance, jewelry. Her father is also insulted when he visits his daughter and Shakila is sent home in an advanced state of pregnancy. She returns after three months and when her husband comes, he has plans to buy a property. Her father is requested to pay a part of it, which he promptly refuses, owing to his not being able to repay the loans he had incurred during the marriage of Shakila. An ugly scene ensues and he leaves in a huff with his wife and child. The scene is touching and emotions run high. The mother consoles her daughter saying thus:

> Go with your husband dear! We, your parents love you no matter what. Ours is the ties of blood, the bond is not severed easily and is indestructible. But the bond and relationship of husband and wife is that of three *talaq*, fragile and is easily broken (63).

The silences of insecurity in a relationship shows up in this piece of advice. Though she follows the advice of her mother, she is treated badly. Over and above that, she conceives for the second time. Now her in-laws have other plans for her. Because she dared to request her husband to send some money in her name –which of course was not complied with, − they label her as a woman of loose morals and she is sent home before her husband returns. The brutal way she was sent home without her children, is chilling in its intensity. Shakila is unceremoniously dumped with a thud, in front of her parent's home, the force of which had bruised her to such an extent she is hospitalised for weeks, and her *Talaqnama* (divorce paper) is thrown on her face. Shakila, a pretty girl hardly out of her teens has become a bag of bones. Her husband and his family had sucked out her beautiful youth and what little jewelry her parents

had given her and discarded her like an empty shell, without even her children, all thanks to marriage. The story ends with Shakila wondering as to what is religion; what exactly does it signify, etc. As we have seen earlier, while divorce is a permissible and established option in Islam, in many Muslim societies it tends to be treated as a male prerogative; women can easily *be* divorced, but not *seek* divorce (Hajjar 2004: 233).

One but wonders why is it that these systems are not banished or why is it that there is no punishment for these atrocities, perpetrated in the name of religion. Shakila's life is over where as her husband gets married for a second time. A lush, new bride, in place of Shakila, who has become a hag much too prematurely. Salim's cruelty to Shakila, the mother of his kids, does not surprise one because he is granted immunity by these socio-cultural practices under the auspice of religion. Afkhami argues that 'rights of women' in Muslim community is a shadowy area, ambiguous, without any definite meaning.

> Statements by Muslim religious leaders about women's rights, are however, rarely clear because of the ambiguity of meaning when words are used in different contexts. Terms such as *freedom, equality, equity, justice, authenticity, humanity, legitimacy, law, law-abiding* and the like are complex, changing meaning depending on who utters them and where and why (Afkhami 1995: 237).

The meanings of the words such as 'freedom', 'equality', etc. being dynamic, it is very convenient to arrive at the interpretation that the more powerful wants to infuse into them.

4.2.2.9. "Uri Bisilu" (Sweltering Heat, Aboobackar 1992)

The story captures the disillusion of its protagonist Patu (Fatima) and her friend Amina. Patu is not happy to visit her hometown but when her mother-in-law invites them over during vacations, it is nothing short of an order. She does not relish visiting for several reasons, one of which is that she dislikes seeing her friends leading very suffocating lives. Amina is one such friend and Patu recalls how she used to be a very bright student and her fiery debates in school and most of all, her wish to become a writer, her spirit which had craved freedom. Patu's mother reminds her to visit Amina, informing that she had built a new house, but that had led to a row with her husband who had divorced her and to top it all Amina was labeled as the shrew of the

place. Patu is shocked and she decides to visit Amina. She is not prepared to digest the shockwaves when she fails to recognise Amina, who has aged beyond her years. Jokingly she asks Amina as to the whereabouts of her writing skill and her dream house. Amina fills her in with her sad story, which scorches Fatima and she feels uneasiness as if she is standing in the hot sun at noon. The title "Uri Bisilu" literally means the 'Sweltering Heat' and is suggestive of the heat waves of the noon, which if suffered for long, blisters one's skin. In addition, it might also bring about sun stroke leading to giddiness. The title is indicative of Amina's life. Amina says:

> Patu, do you remember how we had decided that we should fight against the wrongs and revolt against injustice? How we thought that we would fight the inequalities? Forget about the fight; see the state I am reduced to, even before I had collected arms. I am disgusted to even think that those who throw stones at me are women, who themselves are in no good position either. No Patu, there isn't even a trace of water in this wasteland of ours. I cannot see an oasis in this desert (80).

Patu is sickened to the core and is assailed by questions which have no sane answers. To control a woman another woman is used, and Patu feels a searing hatred towards the second wife, than Amina's husband. Patu is shocked that what security she has, is denied to Amina though both of them belong to the same country and are Indian citizens. If her husband marries for a second time, it is a punishable offence. But Amina's husband can have four wives, irrespective of whether he can look after them or not. The story ends with an ironical, ambiguous question, "[i]s law an ass?" Afkhami points out that it is neither an error on the part of Islam nor the culture of Muslims, which prevent women from leading an oppression free life; but the mischief lies in the patriarchal structures, justified in the name of religion(Afkhami 2001: 236).

The story delicately unveils the rigid rules before which women have to bow down and what happens if a woman so much as aspires to have a voice and wishes to be heard. Of course, though Amina got the house that she wanted, it was not the one which she had wished. She did get it, but at what cost? Her family life in shambles; labeled as a shrew; and her dream dissolved to nothing. All for the reason that she dared to have an independent outlook; dared to have an opinion and was unwise enough to dream.

4.2.2.10. "Huttu" (Birth, Aboobackar 1992)

The theme of this story is polygamy, and the discrimination that ensues between the wives. This short story revolves around the protagonist, Khadija, and the story unfolds as a flashback starting from the day she was made to quit school, to the present when she is in labor, trying unsuccessfully to deliver, associating each pain with that of the different painful incidences of her short, unfortunate life.

Khadija is in labor and her mind is relentlessly going through the mental and physical torture she has gone through, in the course of her life, hardly exceeding twenty five years. Her mind conjures up the taste of her very first pain when she was ten, the day her education had come to an end. Her mother's reply to her teacher's request to send her to school, because she was an intelligent girl and had a promising future was:

> Ayyo teacher! what is this that you are saying? Next year she has to get married. And when will she learn the household chores? Why do our girls need to study more? Are we going to send them out to work? (82)

From then on, the increasing pains had not subsided even for a moment. Each succeeding pain was worse than the previous one. Her husband's demand for an offspring, laced with unspoken threats! The day he had brought home his second wife: "Hey you! Why do you look at me like that? With what hopes was I waiting for a child? I have finished with my patience. So I have brought Ayesha home after undergoing *nikah* with her" (ibid: 84). Khadija's world had toppled that day and now with the increasing pains she recollects her mixed feelings of helplessness and addresses her ten year old daughter Summaiyya, with words that speak volumes − of the way women are treated; the language replete and heavy with urges of seeking economic independence and self-respect when she grows:

> Baby, never ever will I be able to give birth to a child; I can give birth to nothing. I don't have it in me. I lack the vigor to give birth. My misfortune was that I had to bear never ending pain and anguish… Tomorrow, for my funeral, I am sure my mother, I mean, your granny and uncle will be here beyond doubt. Blood is always thicker than water and none can sever these ties. You go with them… No power on earth can stop you. No one has the right to stop you. Study to your heart's content and become smart and highly educated. Earn your living, be your own master. What I couldn't conceive and give birth to, let it germinate in you. Where I failed, I want you to succeed (88-89).

The title 'Huttu' is symbolic in that it signifies the birth of ineffective attempts of Khadija's flight to succeed in life, valiantly fighting as she was, against all odds.

Metaphorically it also signifies a rare hope to realise her dreams of a decent life, in her daughter, a life of self-respect. She wants her daughter to succeed where she failed, which is a positive sign, auguring better expectations, the *birth* of a better tomorrow.

Though the story ends tragically for Khadija, it symbolises the darkness before dawn. It is full of promises for Summaiyya, and one can be optimistic in that she might realise her full potential and that education is her salvation towards leading a life of dignity. One cannot help thinking that if only Khadija had education or a job, with an access to a respectable life, the story would have ended differently. Men rarely realise the trauma women undergo, due to their thoughtless actions, and one cannot help but wish that if only the husband was little more human, not resorting to polygamy, things would have been so much better for the woman in question.

4.2.2.11. "Neeru" (Water, Aboobackar 1996)

The title is symbolic. The protagonist of the tale can be any woman, who craves to bathe in a luxurious bathroom. Her only wish is to have a warm shower, with all the toiletries and bathe to her heart's content. She once goes to a marriage hall, which has rows of luxurious bathrooms. Standing outside one such bathroom she can hear water gushing and cannot wait to take her turn. When another bathroom is empty, though the woman who is leaving calls her she refuses to go in. She has fixed her mind on one particular, big, luxurious bathroom, despite it getting late in the day. Only when she enters and starts bathing does she realise that it is not up to the mark. The water stops gushing from the shower and is now running in thin streams, and she spots a snake in one of the crannies. She is thankful to come out alive, though her dream is unfulfilled. She blames her ill luck for all the mishaps and is distressed. She leaves consoling herself that her own bathroom was a much better place.

Metaphorically this story portrays the pitfalls associated with everything that seems luxurious and modern − the myth that rich people live happier than the less fortunate ones. The myth that educated people are well, better behaved than the uneducated ones; the myth that beautiful people have beautiful lives; the myth that money can buy one anything on earth; the list is endless. Abele et al speaking about emotional

distress say that it is as vague a term and like the experience of pain, emotional distress is personal and felt internally. Doubtless modern life is stressful, and there is no way to avoid many of the daily inconveniences and petty aggravations that afflict us all. The well-adjusted individual shrugs off the minor incivilities and maintains a healthy mental outlook on life, pursuing his or her interests and developing personal relationships with family and friends (Abele et al 2003: vii).

Nadira of *Chandragiri Teeradalli*, Malini of "Vijnana Bhavishya Nudidaga", Zareena of "Dwaniyillada Novugalu" , Girijamma and her daughter Latha, of "Doni Sagali", Shabana and Yamuna of "Saramsha", Khadija who later becomes Celina of "Ondu Badukina Kelavu Putagalu", Shakila of "Ankura", Johara of "Niyama Niyamagala Naduve", Amina of "Uri Bisilu", Khadija of "Huttu", protagonists of "Neeru" – could be considered fledglings. They are fledglings because they might have ultimately bowed down before the iron fisted rule of the patriarchal system, but not before putting up a fight! They are winners even in their defeat, for, they tried with all their might to resist the power the patriarchal system wielded over them. If they have succumbed, it is only with a vision of a better tomorrow for the others who come after them, which is an admirable quality and their loss becomes others' profit. They have the guts to swim against the tide, to question the system, which in itself is laudable, and they form the base on which the future generations of women can build the edifice of a decent life. If they have lost the battle it is because they had none to support them in the quagmire of power politics. One always needs someone to fall back on, while in distress, that is how human psychology works. If they have lost the battle, they have won the war. Hence they are like the fledglings, weak, but ambitious, their weakness notwithstanding, they tried to take off desperately, when faced with mortal dangers, but crashed for lack of wind and the strength of their wings to soar. Their awareness of the injustice and their courage not to give in, come what may, makes them winners, winners in their own right, the forerunners of a feminist vein, in their quest towards gender equality. Except for Girijamma and her daughter Latha, all the other characters have neither education nor economical backup. They come from lower middle class background, hence lack the mental frame of positive attitude.

4.2.3: Flying High

In this section, we shall see the strongest women characters portrayed by Sarah. Using the metaphor of the flight, they are the ones who are strong enough, take off and soar to great heights. The strength of these women is definitely their confidence, a confidence which is the result of having education and being aware of the reality around them along with the invaluable support from their family members, which to a great extent strengthens their decisions and boosts their morale, to emerge winners. This could also mean that their family members are equally aware as the protagonist is and extend cooperation. Hence, these protagonists can be deemed to possess a certain amount of social capital,[88] that facilitates their 'flight'. It enables them to soar to greater heights towards a radical possibility. In this category, we have Nasima of *Sahana*, Nafisa of *Vajragalu*, Ayesha of *Tala Odeda Doniyalli*, Khadijabi of "Dharma Bale Beesidaga", the daughter of "Sunna", Sarasamma of "MooleMuttida Hulu", the daughter-in-law of "Bale", Nirmala of "Khedda",Ayesha of "Bennattuva Boothagalu", The old lady of "Yuddha", Hasina of "Nirdhara", Rachana of "Gagana Sakhi", Rafina of "Bete", Mubeena of "Tangiya Patragalu", Maadevi of "Kuppasa Tottavalu", Jamila and Shaheen of "Hosa Dikku". Let us have a brief look at these tales now.

4.2.3.1. ***Sahana*** (Patience, Aboobackar 1985)

This is the second novel written by Sarah and has a theme of polygamy. Sarah opines that polygamy was practiced since time immemorial and says that men having second wives were not a rare occurrence, though the practice was not sanctioned in many religions. She urges us to spare a thought to the disastrous situation of women in her religion where it is lawfully sanctioned by the laws of Islamic Shari'a. She says that the custom is not extensive in the upper classes but is rampant and a curse among the lower middle and poor classes, where it has become a hobby of men to marry twice or thrice, even though they are hardly in a position to look after the wives and children born to them, creating misery for themselves and their family.

[88] Though the concept of social capital has a history of more than a century and could be developed as a complex one, here it is intended to refer to the immediate network group/s that share certain values and understandings and extend cooperation among themselves.

The title is suggestive of the patience levels of women in such cases −the forbearance they have to exercise to make ends meet, as well as to lead an honest life. Sarah goes on record when she says *Sahana* was written to put across the inhuman, cruel ways men behave in such situations. According to Sarah, the story is based on a true incident to which she was a witness. The young girl in question was ruthlessly discarded by her husband. Sarah says that in her novel the protagonist is made to survive but in real life the girl who was a healthy lass before her marriage, had succumbed to death, suffering from tuberculosis because of neglect and lack of proper food, breathing her last when the new bride, her husband's second wife, had come home. Though this incident took place 25 years ago, Sarah questions whether the situation has changed now, to which the answer is 'not much' (Aboobackar 1985).If one but looks into the reasons for the second marriage, it is not surprisingly, 'an ailing wife'. The reason for her deteriorated health is too many pregnancies, too little health care and virtually unceasing toil day and night, all in the absence of nutritious food. The irony of the situation is that the husband is responsible for many pregnancies; he does not take proper care of the woman; the result of this is the ill-health of the wife and giving the pretext of ill-health, marrying the second time − that too, middle aged men, having fathered 8-10 children marrying a girl of seventeen.

Sakina is a poor woman who works as a maid, specializing in post-natal care to make ends meet. Her husband had deserted her when their daughter, Nasima was of two years. Sakina is always worried about her daughter's welfare, since the child had to be alone when the mother was busy elsewhere, taking postnatal care of women in distant places. Sakina had started worrying about Nasima's marriage the day she was born and the worries were slowly increasing. Poor though she was, she wanted to marry off her daughter at the right age of thirteen or fourteen, as was the custom. Sakina had a good for nothing brother, Abdul Khader, apart from whom she had no other family. He finds a groom Pasha, who works as a lorry driver, for his niece, Nasima.

The marriage is solemnised and the young girl who hardly knows the meaning of marriage and all that it entails is sent to her in-law's place. Nasima always had three desires in her life, which amounted to a silk sari with a glossy border, to own a goat and to visit the Darga at Ullal, which is a place of pilgrimage. Whenever she

expressed these wishes her mother used to tell her that all her wishes would be fulfilled by her husband. So, naturally Nasima was happy she had married and, the child that she was, looked forward to this. But her first wish was dashed to ground when Pasha, her husband presented her with a plain sari on their wedding. But she was optimistic about her remaining wishes. It did not take her long to realise the futility of her wishes. Nasima had to slog incessantly with neither proper rest nor good food, because theirs was a poor family. Pasha had the additional responsibility of his sister and her children too. This did not stop him from having a family of his own. Nasima, apart from the household chores rolled beedies to make ends meet.

To cut a long story short, within a time span of three years Nasima has three children, two daughters and a son and her health which was precarious in her first two pregnancies now goes into a rapid decline. Her first born, due to lack of proper medication dies in infancy, the only reason for the neglect was that it was a girl child. When she delivers her second daughter, Nasima has mixed feelings of joy and sorrow.

> Looking at her new born baby, who was sleeping without a care in the world, not knowing what was in store for her, Nasima woefully speaks to the day-old infant "baby why did you come as a daughter? Why were you born a female? If you had entered this world as a male, you would have got proper treatment with good food and medicine and you would have survived. But because you are a female, you might not even get a drop of milk (129).

Her second daughter Roshanara, called Rosy, too is not looked after well and her mother-in-law is partial towards her grandson, Iqbal, neglecting Rosy. Nasima had seen many a time the two year old Rosy, crying for a banana or a candy which her brother was enjoying and could not understand why was she not given one. In the Indian context, the cultural codes which view girl children as burden is the main reason for this debilitating gender disparity. Mohanty and Biswal argue that the socio-economic, health and educational discrimination against women in Indian societies has been an integral part of the Indian mind-set, and of course, the traditional socialisation process of male children as against the female ones garners the feeling of dominance of the former sex over the latter one. That is why a girl child suffers from her birth (2007: 2).

By now Nasima had stopped rolling beedies because she had not any strength left in her. To make matters worse, she held no attraction for her husband and he, upon his

mother's advice, promptly marries again, on the pretext of needing someone to take care of his home and children. Nasima, who is suffering with fever and severe cough does not even know that her husband is getting ready for his second marriage. When she learns of this, she is shattered but still she pleads with him not to marry till she dies.

> "Have you forgotten me so soon? What mistake have I done? Please wait till I die. Allow me to die peacefully. I can't let go of you and handover you to another woman. I can't bear to see you with another woman when I am still alive. I would have lived if you had given me proper treatment from a good doctor. Now there is no need for that anymore. I have nothing left in this life to interest me any longer. But please wait till I am gone." Nasima had wept, falling at his feet in abject distress. Probably if stones could melt, her grief had the power to melt stones that day. But not her husband and mother-in-law, who were inflexible in their decision, to bring in another woman (167).

The mother-son duo is no better than devils and turning deaf ears, Pasha goes ahead and comes home with his second wife. Nasima is devastated that Pasha, her husband, and father of her children, could be so callous and she goes to pieces when she hears the hushed whispers of the newlyweds in the adjoining room.

Sakina, when she comes to visit her daughter is shocked to see that Nasima is in this advanced state of illness, without any medical help. She immediately rushes Nasima, who by now has become delirious, to the hospital. The doctors are shocked after inspecting the patient's condition and say they can give no assurances, as to whether they can save the patient, but will do their best. Nasima is diagnosed with advanced tuberculosis. The doctors scold Sakina harshly blaming her for her daughter's condition. But miraculously Nasima responds to the treatment and returns to her mother's home. She slowly recuperates and Rosy is with her. Iqbal lives with his dad. Three years have passed in this fashion. Nasima is now a healthy, young lady of twenty, has a small business of her own, and rolls beedies in addition. Her long lost dream of visiting the Ullal Darga and having a milch goat has also come true. Though sometimes at night, she remembers Pasha fleetingly. But her distaste for the way he had treated her and her daughters is something which she cannot let pass, so very easily. Five year old Rosy is going to school and they are leading a contented life. Sakina is once again worried about Nasima's future, which appears bleak to her. But Nasima is happy and has decided that she will never return to her husband. Suddenly one day, out of the blue, Pasha visits them. Rosy refuses to go to him because she

does not remember her father, who had not come to meet them even once in the long interval of three years. Sakina is ecstatic visualizing Nasima complete life, with her husband once again. Nasima is furious and she does not even invite him in. she ruthlessly asks him to leave. When she realises that he has divorced his second wife and that his mother is ill she becomes livid, understanding the reason for his visit. When he tries to caress and cajole her she cautions him not to touch her and rejects his offer to return with him. She speaks brutally saying that all Pasha wants is a woman in his bed and an unpaid maid to cook for him and his family. She tells her mother that she does not need her husband for any purpose. She admonishes Sakina, her mother, saying that she had buried her husband long ago, on his second wedding night, to be precise. She asks if she doesn't mind losing her daughter for a second time. She reminds her mother about the pathetic condition she was in and if it weren't for her, she would have been dead and buried long ago. Where was her husband, this Pasha, then? Enjoying with his new wife? Why has he come now? She is sarcastic about the ways of men.

Pasha becomes furious on being rejected. He had not foreseen this and Nasima's beauty and healthy body is igniting his desires. Her rejection bruises his ego and he takes his daughter Rosy with him saying that she is his by right and Nasima has no rights whatsoever. If she wanted her daughter she had to go live with him as his wife. Enraged, she decides to fight back like a cornered animal. But her decision of not going back to him is final. She spends a sleepless night and goes to a lawyer the next day. But the lawyer truthfully advises her that her case will not stand in the court of law for lack of evidence and he further adds that according to the Islamic Shari'a, a father has all the rights and never the mother. Dejected, she returns home and is overjoyed to find Rosy playing on the doorstep with the kid (young goat). Pasha accepts defeat saying that she had not eaten anything since the previous day and had created a ruckus at home and hence he had brought her back. But being the rogue that he is, he threatens her that no matter what he will never release her, and she remains his wife forever, thus stopping her marriage with somebody else. He gloats over his ultimate triumph warning her that if she fails to return to him within a month, he will

marry for the third time, giving her an ultimatum. But Nasima's decision never wavers and disgust wells in her at his behavior.

> Nasima came to a decision. Not only a month, even if Pasha gives me an entire life time, I will not return to him. The custom of marrying another when the first wife is alive should change in our society. Either he has to release her through *talaq*, i.e. divorce her or he has to wait patiently till she dies. But none should be made to go through what I had. Those women, who have suffered like me, who are suffering in this hellfire, all, should give this a second thought. The society should put a full stop to this system of treating women like animals. All men should realise that females too are humans; that they too have a beating heart in place and not a stone in their ribcages. A new light should emerge in our society. A renaissance should happen to our society, creating a new social order. All the women who have gone through this agony should stand up against this revolting custom of our society. Rebelling together, this custom should be eradicated (234).

Nasima chooses to live with her daughter, Rosy and her mother and resolves never to return to her husband Pasha, not worrying about him not giving her *talaq*, because she has no intentions of marrying again. She decides that Rosy should study well and vouches that she will not marry Rosy at a young age, definitely not until her daughter is educated and financially independent. Nasima starts dreaming again, but now the dreams are not for her but for her daughter Rosy, coloring her otherwise bleak life which is devoid of colors.

Sarah, in her foreword mentions the fact that in reality the protagonist had died, but since she wanted a different ending, which had to be positive, she decides that at least in the story, Nasima should fight back and live. Sarah argues that through literature one creates awareness, which is crucial to bring about a positive change, and has created a new model of womanhood in Nasima. She says it is her way of showing the downtrodden women that. She believes that it is very important that we need to provide our daughters with good education, which automatically empowers them to lead dignified lives (Aboobackar 1985: 3).

4.2.3.2. *Vajragalu* (Diamonds, Aboobackar 1988).

Sarah, speaking about this novel, says that the title of the novel crystallised in her mind during one of the seminars she had attended, when in the course of his speech, one of the eminent speakers, commenting on *Talaq* says that whatever Sarah had written in her novels is not found in his Muslim community, saying that probably this is specific to Sarah's region. He continues saying that they look after their women

folk as if they are precious *Vajragalu* (Diamonds), which needless to say, was far from reality. Hence this novel. Richard Burton, the nineteenth century explorer and linguist quotes a Muslim contemporary of his, stating that the Arabs think that when a man has a precious jewel "it's wiser to lock it up in a box than to leave it about for anyone to take". Bullough states that this in essence reflects the Islamic view. Women are looked upon as jewels, admired and sought after, but should be protected and guarded lest they be stolen. They are viewed as valuable property, and not like an individual, because the prerogative of being an individual is exclusively that of a male (Bullough 2004: 125).In the previous chapter, we have also seen that the novel was written to refute the unison statement of the Muslim patriarchs throughout India that divorced women lived happily with their parents and that they did not need any alimony to support themselves.

The novel starts with the marriage of Nafisa, a young girl of fifteen, belonging to a well to do family. Unfortunately for Nafisa, her husband rejects her, the reason being she is a dark skinned village girl, with no refinement, unfit to be his wife. But this does not stop him from consummating the wedding. He works in Mumbai and leaves after a month, without even a tender word for his young wife. She is with child, and this puts everyone at ease thinking that all is well between the couple. She returns home to her parents, gives birth to a son, but though her in-laws are kind to her, her husband, who returns after two years, wants to remarry and discards her with *talaq*, thrice uttered, destroying her life, saddling her with a child. Her parents decide to remarry her, since she is hardly eighteen. But now that she is labeled as a divorced woman with a child, the only option she has is of men thrice her age, fit enough to be her father. A proposal is at hand of a young educated guy, Shafiulla, her childhood friend, albeit a class lower than hers. Naturally, his mother is put off. She berates her son's foolishness asking why is he interested in a divorced woman with a child when he can have a pick among a good number of eligible girls.

> He closes the argument saying "do you mean to say that Nafisa is not eligible just because she is divorced and a mother? Have you forgotten that Mohammed Paigambar's first wife Khateeja Bibi was a woman twice divorced and a mother too? Why is it that we, his followers, hesitate to follow his footsteps in the issue of marriage?"(Aboobackar 1988: 84).

His sister, Fatima, is Nafisa's bosom friend, but Nafisa does not agree to marry him because she does not want to part with her son, though there is no such condition. She tells Fatima that she is afraid that if she remarries, her former husband's family might come and take away her son, their heir. Fatima tries hard to make her see sense, saying that that could very well happen even if she does not marry again, but to no avail. Her prophecy comes true and Nafisa's son Munna is taken to his father's home, on the pretext of higher education. Nafisa is devastated, her entire life which was revolving around Munna, comes to a standstill. To make matters worse, her brother's wife starts ill-treating her. Against her better judgment, she decides to remarry for the sake of security, and the groom is old enough to be her father. She is all at once a mother to his two young daughters of 13 and 8, and married children, as well as mother in law to her step sons' wives. The condition of the two young children is pathetic and she eases herself into the role of a caring mom and wife. To cut a long story short, though one of her stepsons, Hussein, who is staying with them despises her, her husband fully supports her and she reigns supreme. Hussein also has a family of his own, but he is such a fanatic that his wife, Hameeda is not allowed to come downstairs, for fear of other men seeing her. She is constantly made to live in purdah, monitored by her husband, who does not care two hoots for her. She literally lives like his kept woman, delivering children and dies in childbirth, because he refuses to call a doctor during her confinement. The disgust in Nafisa wells up when she sees his callousness and she furiously tells him:

> If anything happens to her, you are not going to lose anything. You will acquire someone tomorrow. But the children will never have a mother again. I wonder that there are still such people in our society who give their daughters to the likes of you. They should be thrown into the deep (142).

He does not worry what happens to his wife because he can very well get a new wife, which he promptly does. Even before a decent interval of forty days has elapsed after Hameeda's death, he marries a young girl of seventeen. Nafisa's husband once speaks out his mind laying bare his apprehension about her safety once he is gone, but she silences him. He even speaks of registering a piece of land in her name, but before that could happen he is struck down with paralysis, falls sick losing his speech as well. Nafisa takes care of him without any hesitation, lovingly. One day she receives a summons from her parents saying that her mother has sustained a fracture and though

she does not want to leave her husband in his precarious condition, her stepson Hussein, persuades her to leave and she rushes home with the consent of her ailing husband. She is hardly there for two days, wanting to return, waiting for the conveyance Hussein had promised he would send, when out of the blue arrives her *'talaq'*, duly signed with witnesses and thumb imprint of her husband. She collapses, but refuses to believe this of her gentleman husband. Later they realise it was a plot hatched by her stepson to cheat her out of her legacy, her share of her husband's property after his death. Her condition is pathetic beyond words. Once again she is at the mercy of her brother's wife, her parents being old. She feels that it would not have been so bad had she returned a widow, with her share of property, a little something to call her own. Her biological son Munna, does not care for his mom, who had sacrificed her life for his sake. She is not even eligible to attend his wedding, because his father had severed his ties with her through *talaq*. Nafisa a woman who is not yet in her forties looks like an old lady. She goes to pieces, a mental wreck, but pulls herself up again, and decides to adopt a new born baby girl, discarded by the mother, since it is a bastard child. She pleads with her brother.

> Anna my very own son, whom I had borne, I couldn't retain. The children whom I had cared for as my own, I couldn't hold on to, were they mine? If it wasn't for that *talaq*, today I would have lived a decent life with my Selma[89].But didn't those three letters[90] on that piece of paper wash away all my relationships and security? Now this child doesn't have any body to call its own. Let me see whether this can be mine. Please don't stop me. Permit this be the one and only oasis in the desert of my life. Please at least you, try to understand me anna (172).

Her plea with her brother to let her keep the baby and care for it, as an oasis in the desert of her life, is heart wrenching. Her brother for once understands her, and she starts a new life, tending a few cattle and making a living out of it.

The entire novel revolves around the plight of a young girl, whose life becomes a virtual hell for no fault of hers, save that of being born a female. A promising young life becomes devoid of all hope. The inhuman practices of divorcing one's wife by uttering the three lettered word '*talaq*' thrice and washing one's hands off all responsibilities, the insecurity, the mental trauma, the helplessness and the feeling of remorse that young girls go through is unspeakable in its brutality. Though women are

[89] Step daughter from her second marriage.
[90] The word *Talaq* has three letters in Kannada.

vested with rights in Islam, the sociocultural practices defeats the purpose of making it available to women. Haddad and Esposito state that among the rights guaranteed for women by Islam are the rights to life, to education, to conduct business, to inherit, to maintain property and to keep their names. While such rights for Muslim women have been affirmed, however, social customs continue to dominate still making them unavailable. Such customs include the lack of equal treatment of wives in polygamous marriages: and the abuse of the privilege of divorce (especially in the gulf region) in which the husband simply states "you are divorced" three times, without recourse to arbitration or attempt at reconciliation (Haddad and Esposito 1998: 7). At one point in the novel Nafisa says to her son "if you were a girl you would have lived with me. but because you are a boy my life is disfigured"(Aboobackar 1988: 103), meaning that it is unfortunate that she gave birth to a son because if it was a daughter they would not have snatched her away, no one would have wanted her. That is exactly why at a later phase she decides to adopt the bastard child, because it is a girl, so that she need not be separated from her. She comes to a stage where she completely turns a misandrist and she blurts out "[t]he moment a male child is born it should be strangled. All men should be immersed in the river and killed…" (ibid: 167).

Sarah's fervent wish is that innocent people must become conscious of the fact that fanaticism and political interests of some individuals lie at the roots of such unhealthy practices, misleading society, and unless awareness is generated, there could be no help. In *Vajragalu*, Nafisa emerges victorious to some extent. Though uneducated, she shows the guts to adopt a girl child, notwithstanding bitter experiences of her past, which is a credit to motherhood and the maternal instinct of women. Though she is dealt blow after blow, she rises time and again and faces life squarely, showing a streak of survival instinct. A woman of lesser determination might just have given up, but not Nafisa, who though swimming against all odds, is still optimistic about life! Sarah has created an incomparable representation of women in Nafisa, who can be seen 'flying high', soaring off to greater heights.

4.2.3.3. *Tala Odeda Doniyalli* (In A Wrecked Boat, Aboobackar 1997)

The novel is symbolic and is autobiographical. It narrates Sarah's life with her husband, with all its ups and downs. Sarah has attempted a depiction of all the trials and tribulations her husband had to undergo, because he dared to be an honest government officer. A rare illustration of the red tape and corruption that is rife in the administration.

Saifuddin is an honest person and serving the government in the capacity of an executive engineer. He and Ayesha are happy along with their four sons, when for the reason that he has crossed swords with his higher official, he is transferred from the capital to a region filled with problems. His transfer is sudden and is on the verge of his retirement, due in two years. But Saifuddin refuses to bribe the bigwigs and instead, accepts to go where he is transferred. He fights an uphill battle, paying a heavy price, as his health has already started deteriorating. The novel unfolds his predicament in the corrupt working atmosphere and portrays his mental agony sensitively.

> Saifuddin remembered what one of his colleagues had said, when he had come to know about Saifuddin's transfer orders and that he was about to leave, "sir, there are a lot of problems in the canal department. If anyone is transferred there they somehow try to cancel the order, but never think of going there. That transfer is considered as "punishment transfer" and he had added for good measure that there was no justice in that department (142).

Ayesha counsels her husband many times, telling him to be a 'Roman while in Rome', all to no avail. The couple does their best to help the poor people, who are illiterate souls, being robbed of their rights. When it is time for them to return, they are dumbfounded by the love shown by the people, who by now have come to realise that Saifuddin is different from all the government officials they had known. The couple return home after their stint but are not happy knowing it was a half-finished affair with nothing to lift their spirits, thinking about the sad state of affairs of the peasants, who had nobody to turn to.

> Thinking about their partially empty bellies throughout the year, Ayesha's heart was filled with agony. She pitied those poor people who had neither education, nor money, or influence. When would their battle for life cease? She could picture the frail farmers with naked bodies, bare feet, protruding ribcages, blackening already sun burnt black bodies, and aging already aged bodies, tilling the arid fields with the emaciated cattle that looked like skeletons of famine! And those who fix a price slab for the crop that was harvested in this

> harsh manner, by the sweat and blood of the toiling farmers, were the anglicised officers sitting in the ivory towers of the capital, sipping tea and coffee at intervals in the coziness of their A.C cabins. Those officials must be made to work in the fields for some days − to weed, till and sow! (161-162).

The novel ends on a pessimistic note. 'Desires were putting forth buds. But there were no signs of those buds blossoming and filling the air with their fragrance! They had already started wilting!'(162). The title of the novel is apt and echoes the disillusionment of common man regarding their corrupt leaders and the ruling government. Sampford et al (2006) discussing about corruption, says that corruption undermines the fairness, stability and efficiency of a society, especially, a developing society like that of India.

> Levels of individual bribes and the incidence of corruption are merely symptoms of the deeper distortions introduced by corruption. Bribery that moves public resources into private pockets is serious enough. However, even more importantly, corrupt payments influence policy choices made by public officials. The unscrupulous are rewarded and the honest become demoralized. As a consequence, the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of ordinary people is compromised. Corruption should be pursued, not merely because it is a moral issue (which it is), and not just because it is bad for business (which again, it is), but because people everywhere pay the price of corruption one way or another, and none more so than the people of the developing world and countries in transition (Samford et al: 1).

Sarah intensely portrays their life in Raichur, in north Karnataka, in the 1980's at the site of Tungabhadra Dam. The decay and rot that is rife in the government circles is astonishing to say the least. But thankfully all is not as bad as it seems because Sarah has mentioned a few honest souls in the course of the novel, a ray of light in darkness. The novel is situated in real time and speaks of the situation in the area of Tungabhadra dam, its canals which supply water to the surrounding villages. Sarah, in the course of the novel narrates the pathetic plight of the poor farmers, especially those farmers whose villages were situated on the left bank of Tungabhadra dam, who had to fight literally, for water to use for their daily purposes as well as to irrigate their farms − how they had to bribe some officials; how they used to come in hordes to the engineer's house pleading for water and squabble if they were not heard. Their voices and lament would go unheard in the brutal world, where power and money reigns supreme. Sarah has painted a picture of reality in all its gory details on the canvas of her novel. In this tale Ayesha is the fortunate one who has everything one can wish for. But she, to some extent goes out of her way to help the poor. She is empathetic. She also has a mind of her own and independent thought processes. She

even advises her husband to be a Roman while in Rome. Indian women usually are not asked for advice or suggestions by their husbands. Yet, though being a Muslim woman, she has a voice, which she puts to use in no uncertain terms. So, in her own way, given her limitations one can label her as flying high.

4.2.3.4. "Dharma Bale Beesidaga" (Ensnared by Religion, Aboobackar 1989)

The theme underlines the social power relations, gender discrimination and how a courageous woman managed not to fall in the cesspool of religion. The protagonist of this short story is Karimsab's wife Khadijabi, who is a gutsy woman, sticks to her guns and is ready to face the threat of excommunication with all its trials and difficulties rather than agree to something that she is not guilty of and bow before those overbearing men –the religious leaders. We see a rare nature of confrontation, of daring, of a courage seldom seen in women, irrespective of caste and creed. Equally astonishing is her husband's behavior. Contrary to expected norms, he backs his wife, bringing in a fresh of hope, renewing belief in humanity and marital relationships. The redundant religious laws, corrupt leaders, priests and *imam*s – keepers of religion – all lose face before a woman of exceptional mettle. Khadijabi proves beyond doubt that she has a rational thought process, kind and loving heart towards her young daughter, whom she refuses to give in marriage to a lecherous man point blank, old enough to be her father. The man threatens to excommunicate them, being an influential person in the town − a most common incidence of female exploitation by the wealthy. A tale is concocted, a plot hatched against Khadijabi for spurning the wealthy, influential man. She is painted as a drunkard and an adulteress, in the absence of her husband who works in a neighboring town, visiting occasionally. A meeting is called in the mosque and Khadijabi is found guilty. A punishment is to be meted out to the woman who has committed adultery and taken to drinking. Khadijabi prefers excommunication to the obeying of the ru les laid down by the *Jamaat*[91] and the religious leaders. She sends for her husband, urges him to file a case against harassment by the *Jamaat*, asking how can a woman commit adultery alone. If she has committed a crime what about her partner? Since it is against the Indian penal code to punish anyone in the name of religion, which is a criminal offense, the Jamaat

[91]A body formed by religious leaders, who dictate the stipulations of the Islamic law, the up-keepers of Shari'a

committee drops the charges against Khadijabi, like hot coals. Though Karimsab was reluctant to go ahead, now he changes his mind, ashamed of himself, when his wife taunts him saying that she doubts whether he is a 'man' at all! He ralises his mistake and reacts. Stung, he decides to fight for justice. The question, which Karimsab makes a point to the Maulvi, "anyone can believe that Khadijabi could have drunk alcohol alone, but that she alone is an adulteress is something which I cannot comprehend! Or probably in today's modern world could there be a…?" (40). A question to which Karimsab gets no answer but only a grim, cold stare from the Maulvi. This is an example of corruption of religion. The net it had drawn on, the iron grip of black terror it might have had if it was not for the courage of the woman in question. John Dewy, the great educationist of the twentieth century had claimed that religion, coagulates the free flowing human consciousness, so very vital for existence. He was for a different kind of religion, one that came naturally to humans, the inner conscience of one's self.

> Dewy was a supporter of the "religious" quality of human experience, but he did not like religions. Trust the religiousness that is fundamental to your human nature, said Dewy, but do not permit that religiousness to be imprisoned in the cells of religion. Religion is like hardening of the arteries, according to Dewy. It represents the coagulation of what is otherwise free flowing and necessary to existence. In religion ideas and behavior are confined and repressed to a point where they control us. They no longer serve us; we begin to serve them. We become the servants of doctrine and a certain rigid morality. At that point we are ready to do harm to those who do not agree with our ideas or do not behave morally as we do (Wentz 1987: 14)

When the plight of Khadijabi is viewed from understanding Dewey's argument, one indeed agrees that a certain kind of moral rigidity had occurred, which was essentially harmful. Most of the unwanted horror which is the byproduct of any war – civil war, cold war, war, and terrorism –has always happened mostly because of religion. As Dewy rightly said, one becomes encased within religion and loses touch with their religiousness or consciousness. When that happens, in all probability he becomes less of a human being, more of a zombie who, having lost his power of thought, is more like a machine created to destroy and harm humanity. Indeed, Sarah has created a rare representation of a spirited woman in Khadijabi, something that all would welcome with open arms, if the social injustice were to be addressed and eradicated.

4.2.3.5. "Sunna"[92] (Chunam/ Burnt Lime, Aboobackar 1996)

The theme is about the partiality that parents show to their daughters, preferring sons over daughters. The story opens with an old man who is impatiently waiting for his morning cup of tea and breakfast. But he has to shout himself hoarse to get through his morning ablutions and tea. His daughter-in-law is sick of him and his tantrums and there is no love lost between them. Neither does his son care for him. All this makes the old man want to go to his daughter's house. But the son is very crafty and convinces his father to make a will before going over to his daughter's, bequeathing everything to his sons, leaving his daughter out in the cold. The father readily agrees and things are settled to their mutual satisfaction. When the daughter comes she is shocked to realise that her father has not even considered her as his offspring, his behavior openly making things very plain. She accuses him and refuses to take his responsibility. She returns home without her father. The son is incensed at his sister's behavior and tells his father that daughters always eye their father's property and never care for them otherwise. The old man is bewildered and does not know what to say. Though his son is well off, in a better position than his daughter, he does not want to take his responsibility and was about to palm it off to his sister.

One of the most efficient branches of patriarchal government lies in the agency of its economic hold over its female subjects. In traditional patriarchy, women as non-persons without legal standing, were permitted no actual economic existence as they could neither own nor earn in their right. In modern, reformed patriarchal societies, women have certain economic rights, yet the "woman's work" in which some two thirds of the female population in most developed counties are engaged, is work that is not paid for. In a money economy where autonomy and prestige depend upon currency, this is a fact of great importance. In general, the position of women in patriarchy is a continuous function of their economic dependence. Just as their social position is vicarious and achieved (often on a temporary or marginal basis) through

[92]*Sunna* is popularly known as chunam or chuna in the wider Indian context. It is a compound of calcium, which is used to smear betel leaves with, while making it ready for consumption in the form of *paan* or *beeda*. *Paan* is then prepared by adding shredded betel nuts and spices. If sunna is applied to eyes it causes burning sensation and is dangerous. The Kannada proverb 'Ondu kannige Benne, Ondu Kannige Sunna' means 'butter for an eye, and chuna for the other eye' meaning partiality and bias.

males, their relation to the economy is also typically vicarious or tangential (Millet 2000: 39-40).

But for once Sarah has given a twist to the tale showing that daughters too are hurt and they too have the rights to turn down the offer of looking after their aged parents − in this instance, father. The son treats him very badly but despite the bad treatment, the old man wants his son to inherit all that he has and does not offer even a farthing to his daughter. The title evocatively lets us know the meaning of the tale in a single word in the daughter's words.

> Appa, I really am feeling sorry that even in this condition of yours you are not letting go of the tradition of never considering your own daughter when dividing your property. When one applies butter to an eye and s*unna* to the other eye, the eye that has been applied s*unna* burns, appa, it burns. Why this partiality? Let your son shoulder the burden of your so called tradition. I am leaving now (80).

The patriarchal culture always favors the male offspring, and they are seen as the legal heirs. Especially in the Indian culture the daughters are never considered as the lawful heirs. Girl children are seen as unnecessary burden. This unhealthy mental attitude has led to female feticide and the abortion of female fetuses in India, which has given way to a skewed gender ratio, signaling the awful days that are yet to dawn. This has given rise to serious debates and it is seen as a grim social issue.

4.2.3.6. "Moole Muttida Hulu" (Worm that Reaches the Dead End, Aboobackar 1992)

The story is about Sarasamma, a poor lady, with a son, whose husband has discarded her, without even paying any allowance. She works hard to make ends meet and brings up her only son. On the way, she was once offered shelter but she refuses for the sake of her son, whom she wants to bring up with all her morals intact. But he turns out to be a rotten scoundrel. When Sarasamma realises this, she decides that she too has a life and right to live, when she sees all her efforts to make her son work has gone down the drain. He has stooped to such a level that he has started selling things from the house. She eyes a worm, worming its way through the room and after reaching a dead end, turning round towards another direction.

The title is symbolic in that she too feels that she is like the worm, which crawls without any direction or purpose. But the worm too has to change direction when it reaches a dead end in the room. That makes her decisive and she takes up the offer which was given to her long ago by Appanna, who had lost his wife, to be his home maker. The story jolts one sharply and undermines the fact that none should take any relationship for granted. One understands that none should take a jolly ride, taking things for granted, not even one's children have the right to take advantage of their parents' good will. And one has the right to make one's own bed.

4.2.3.7. "Bale" (Net, Aboobackar 1996)

Inter-caste marriage is the theme of this story. Indian custom demands that children marry the partners chosen by their parents, an arranged match. God help any who trespasses this code of conduct. This story speaks of one such incident wherein the son marries against his parents' wish. They think their son is a babe in the woods and the girl is to be blamed for casting a net and ensnaring him, by her viles. The title 'Bale' drives home this point. The girl is thought to be a witch! But later, the story has it that the daughter-in-law stands by them and looks after them, after the unfortunate and untimely death of her father-in-law.

The story brings to the fore the prejudices that are rife in the society and the jaundiced look that the girl in question has to put up with. Attitudes need to be changed, to bring about a change in the society. Parents need to give their children a free hand when it comes to choosing their life partners. They should be treated with love and dignity. This awareness can really put a stop to all unwanted miseries and heart break, both on the part of the parents and children.

4.2.3.8. "Khedda"[93] (A Trap, Aboobackar 1999)

The title of the novella is allegorical in nature and intensely captures the gory details and the way in which a young girl is exploited. Shailini wants to pursue her higher studies, i.e. a course in bachelor of education, which is of a year's duration. Since her

[93] In India, wild elephants are caught by using Khedda, which is a technique, a trap. It is a deep pit dug in the forest and covered with foliage. The unsuspecting herd of elephants are made to walk over and fall into the *Khedda*, which are later tamed and used in timber industry, not to forget their use in temple festivities.

parents are conservative, they arrange for her to stay in her father's friend's house as a paying guest. Shailini is upset when she is introduced to the only son of the house, Suhas, who is a cripple, yet has a business and runs an auto rickshaw. His parents drop hints that they are on the lookout for an eligible girl for their son. Shailini is shocked to hear this and their optimism in thinking that their son, though crippled is a handsome catch, that none would turn down. This does imply the inferior status of women and the exalted status of men in a traditionally patriarchal society.

She starts her college, but is asked to help in the household chores, which she obliges. But slowly Suhas's mother asks Shailini to help Suhas in one thing or the other, taking advantage of her position in their house. He too starts taking liberty with her: entering her room uninvited, boasting about himself, dropping her to college in his rickshaw, etc., all of which she tolerates only because she wants to finish her studies and did not want to hurt them unnecessarily. But matters come to a stage when one day when she returns from college, seizing the opportunity in the absence of his parents Suhas proposes, insinuating that she would be a fool to reject him. Shailini is shocked to say the least. She marvels at his audacity in proposing. When his parents return home, he gaily informs them that she has agreed to marry him. His mother immediately starts making plans for the wedding saying that Shailini will lack nothing being her son's wife. Shailini is dazed and wants to run home from the suffocating environment, wherein she feels she is being stalked and threatened by Suhas and his parents. She immediately returns home; puts her parents wise about the situation. Her fear complex is such that she does not think twice about quitting her studies.

According to Flowers years in the near past have seen highly publicised cases of women and children who have been victimised by violence and exploitation, whose voices are often never heard nor their faces seen by the public, and he states that escaping violent homes, environments, or circumstances is hard for some and nearly impossible for others. He says that stalking is a form of sexual harassment more ominous to women, which is gaining more attention these days. He opines that defining sexual harassment is not easy. For many, it may be the slightest intrusion into their lives or livelihood with respect to sexual innuendos. Others may not consider an incident or situation to be sexual harassment unless it becomes physical aggression

(Flowers 1994: 186-187). Thus, there could be very subtle ways to blatant ones when some women might feel harassed.

Shailini's parents are shocked and she refuses point blank to return. She stays with one of the teachers of her college and continues her education. But Suhas hounds her there too, following her in his rickshaw, and telling all her friends that she is his betrothed. Shailini's refusal falls on deaf ears. None is ready to believe her. Suhas threatens her that it is vain to think of escaping from his clutches and she better acquiesce. Traumatised, she quits her education and returns home. Too late, they realise that they had fallen into the trap – a *Khedda* – which was laid by Suhas's parents. Her parents are incensed at the way things have panned out. They try for her marriage elsewhere. When an alliance is about to transpire, they are summoned to the police station, in front of all the guests. They come to know that Suhas has lodged a complaint against them of kidnapping his wife, Shailini. They lose face and honor, when they are falsely accused of separating their daughter from her husband Suhas. Needless to say, her life ends on rocks, with the news spreading like wild fire that she is a divorcee. The court case drags on for years and by the time it is over she is well advanced in years. That is exactly what Suhas and his parents wanted. They knew for sure that she could not marry anyone else, for the stigma she was attached with. At one point of time her father advices her to marry Suhas, since there is no other way out of the mess. She rejects this saying that she would have thought of it if the fellow was good enough, but she tells her father that Suhas in not only handicapped physically but he is a mental cripple too; that he does not even have any humanity in him.

> "Appa, probably I might have thought of marrying and would have tolerated him if he was a good person, decent and had come the right way. But not only is the person's body, his mind, heart, his entire system is crippled. Forget about spending my entire life with him, I can't even visualise myself half an hour with him…" she sobbed (28).

The way Sahilini's life is wrecked is a proof of this. Later on, she marries a friend of her brother, who is also his brother-in-law, but from a different caste. That is all she can aspire for, in the given situation. One can even say that she is lucky to marry at all, not only because the Indian society is made up of rigid caste systems, and it is considered a dishonor to marry outside one's caste, but also because marriage is considered the be-all and end-all of life.

Sarah in this novella has given a forceful portrayal of how women are taken advantage of, in a patriarchal society, since marriage is a must for girls, no matter whatever the condition of the man is. There is undue pressure on parents having daughters of marriageable age and this thinking has led to all sorts of exhortation, sometimes even leading to criminal offense. That is exactly why, though a cripple, his parents have a very high opinion of their son and believe that since he is a man, a moderately well off person, an only son who inherits all they have, he can marry any one he pleases. The society too, joins hands with him. Fingers are pointed at Shailini who is blamed. The stigma she has to live with does not bother Suhas, nor does it trouble him. Shailini is the one who suffers for no fault of hers, save that of being a female. Sarah has given a rare twist in the tale. Shailini, her protagonist prefers a man outside their caste, rather than marry the cad, who belongs to their caste. This in itself is a very bold step, which needs to be applauded. The title *Khedda* is very apt, literally as well as symbolically too. The cleverly laid *Khedda*, all but trapped her, if it was not for her parents' support and her own presence of mind. Nonetheless it left her scarred for life and almost succeeded in ruining her life, without allowing her to complete her higher education. The viciousness of Suhas and his parents almost amounted to a criminal offense. Their attitude that if she rejects their son, she should not marry at all, is a mirror held to the warped thinking of the society.

4.2.3.9. "BennattuvaBoothagalu" (Pursued by Ghosts, Aboobackar 1999)

This short story is autobiographical and in this Sarah narrates the way in which the minority people are treated, their high position notwithstanding. She caustically remarks that her husband is to be equally blamed for not being assertive enough and for being too liberal with his subordinates, allowing them to take a joy ride. She says that when you are amongst callous people you too should be hard enough to tackle them. Her advice is 'be a Roman while in Rome', which of course, her husband disregards, being a soft person and one of integrity. She speaks about the intolerance levels of corrupt people regarding religion and honesty.

Ayesha is Sarafuddin's wife. He is an executive engineer and they lead a happy life. Sarafuddin is an honest person and though he had to go on long trips on his duty, he

never enjoyed his beautiful surroundings. Ayesha would always plead with him to take her along so that at least she might enjoy the picaresque nature, while he worked on site. But he was deaf to her pleas. His honesty was a little too much for his family's liking. Now at last, things seemed better. He was promoted and had a jeep now to go about, and Ayesha too was comparatively free with children away, studying. Once it so transpired that Sarafuddin had some official work in an area, which was of particular interest to Ayesha, which she was longing to visit from a long time. Since she was at a loose end, she stubbornly accompanies her husband, leaving him no other option. She happily packs for them and when the jeep arrives is shocked to find some subordinates of Sarafuddin. He offers them tea, but they decline, souring her mood. Ayesha knew beforehand they would not drink anything in their house because of their religion. She empties the tea into the sink and they embark on their tour. Though the subordinates knew about her wish to visit the famous waterfalls of the area they take them to visit the heritage sites of the area, explaining in detail the ruins that was once a famous temple, mentioning that Ghajni Mohammad had looted the treasure and demolished the temple, implying that all Muslims are thieves and not to be trusted. When she makes eye contact with the one who is explaining, she encounters a brutal gaze, which implies hostility and is incensed. Ayesha recalls her husband's warning that though they live in a secular country, still they have to be careful about their behavior, lest they end up in the deep.

> We belong to the minority community. We are being trampled upon. If we are not careful we might fall in the ditch. Even in a secular country, we have to be on fire at the stake of religion! (113).

They purposely way lay them on the pretext of explaining the beauty and bounty of the bygone era, and by the time it is over, darkness has fallen. Ayesha chokes back her tears and is furious with her husband and his not being assertive. While they are driving back she casually remarks about the Taj Mahal, saying that was it not the British who had looted the precious gems which had adorned its walls and arethey not still looting India? She successfully makes her point and silence reigns. They return home with her wish unfulfilled. Ayesha comes across as a defiant woman, who does not hesitate to speak her mind. She is neither cowed by being the only lady of the party nor by the hostile vibes of the people travelling with them.

Sarah feels that majority people are prejudiced; having rigid notions, making it difficult for the minorities to lead a contented life. She is of the opinion that one is pursued by ghosts, in this instance the ghosts of yesteryears, and the ghosts are the jaundiced attitude of people, who are too full of biases, and who fail to see beyond trifles. The ghosts could also be one's feeble nature and lack of confidence, as one encounters in Sarafuddin.

The story truly upholds the feeling of the minority community especially in the context of India. The media, the state, through its apparatus such as police, picturise the minority community, especially Muslims as culprits, criminals and terrorists. Ultra-nationalists instill in them a guilty feeling that they are responsible for what happened during the Middle Ages in India − the Islamic invasions. A Muslim is required to vouch for his or her patriotism at every given juncture. Given this scenario, Ayesha stands out as a courageous woman to face the majoritarian males and make her point very firmly as a woman belonging to a minority community.

4.2.3.10. "Yuddha" (War, Aboobackar 1996)

As the title suggests, the theme is of war and the resulting mass destructions, sufferings, razing of families and towns, altogether gruesome details and the sufferings of common man. Sarah has beautifully crafted this tale, which has a surprising end.

It is war time. Dr. Rahil's plane is bombed and crashes over a river and he is in the enemy territory, wounded. He somehow manages to save himself and is given shelter by an old woman in her abode. Her daughter-in-law is in the throes of delivery and he as a doctor does all that he can because they cannot go to a hospital given the conditions of the war. The child is stillborn and both the women of the house wail over their loss. The soldiers come in search of the wounded foe but the old lady hides him in Fatima's, her daughter-in-law's room and the soldiers leave, certain that their foe has not come that way. Later when the old woman bemoans of her loss about both her husband and son, whom she had lost because of the war, Rahil too tells his sad story which is no different either. When the conditions deteriorate on the war front, truce is declared. They together watch news on the T.V and the old lady is dazed to

see ceasefire being announced, while the leaders of both the countries smile and hug each other. The old woman sadly wonders as to why wars are waged and what is gained apart from bloodshed and uncalled for sorrow and despondency?

The old lady tells Rahil that though governments change, for the common people the life is the same. They pay taxes through their noses, and the situation is not any different, to which he agrees. A sensible enough logic, which is never understood by the rulers, is indeed a surprising thought. The most obvious and easily perceived consequences of a war are in fact the *political* ones: plunder, raids, territorial annexations, reparation payments and damages, the taking of hostages, etc. The most difficult to determine are the *sociocultural* ones, i.e., those that affect the social structures and mores of the warring groups, both winners and losers, during and after the war. So far, with few exceptions, little attention has been paid by thinkers in all disciplines to the widespread consequences and effects of war on society at large (Ausenda 1992: 23-24).

The story ends dramatically when Rahil is about to leave and the old lady asks him to stay with them being their lost son, since he too does not have anyone to call his own. Rahil is stunned, to say the least. But he is defeated in front of the old lady's reasoning and he agrees happily, telling her that how could she be called unfortunate and destitute when she has such a large heart. The story ends on this heart rending note:

> For the first time a guileless smile appeared on the old woman's face. Then she said "these leaders shook hands and declared peace. But have they given a thought to the bleeding hearts and the blood that is oozing from many mothers' and wives' hearts? Which experts and technicians are being called in to bring to an end to this massive hemorrhage? The only recourse open to us now is subversion against these fools" (17).

The story superbly crafts the trauma of the war and the ensuing tragedy and has the potency to set into motions one's thought processes and awaken the dormant consciousness and inner voice. The old lady in this story is independent, large-hearted and highly humane. She exists as part of the larger humanity and not as a citizen of any country, recognising in Rahil, a fellow human being and not an enemy.

4.2.3.11. "Nirdhara" (Decision, Aboobackar 1999)

This story has a unique theme which claims that we can make this earth a better place to live, if only men are more sympathetic and empathetic and care for the women folk of their family.

It is midnight and the clock has struck twelve. Hasina is trying in vain to sleep, which is eluding her. She is deep in thought, mentally going over what Khateejamma, a lady who had come to meet her that day. She goes back in memory and remembers the day she had lost her mother, when she was hardly ten. Her two elder brothers were twenty five and eighteen. And her step mother, Jamila, had walked in. Her elder brother had stopped coming home from then but she was happy. Her step mother had a teenaged son, Hamid. Her father had treated his stepson like his own son and he lacked for nothing, though he was not treated cordially by the sons of the house. But Hasina had taken to her step mom easily and loved her like her own mother. Five years had flown and Hamid had graduated and was in business. Hasina's father wanted to marry her to Hamid, which was opposed by her brothers. But the nikah is performed and Hamid leaves, because they decide to send her after a year. In the interim, her father passes away and her brothers ask Hamid to take his mother away from their house. He leaves with his mother but Hasina cannot go with them because one more ritual of the nuptials is not over and Hasina and Hamid are not man and wife in the proper sense. But by now she has developed tender feelings towards Hamid, her husband, who is a well behaved, gentleman.

Her brothers now look towards separating them, because they wish their sister marry someone suitable to their status. They are furious because Hamid had declined to dissolve the marriage, saying that if he had not liked her he would not have married her in the first place. They force Hasina to annul the *nikah* and she obediently signs the divorce papers. But after pondering over Khateejamma's advice, her decision is made. The next day her brothers find her bed empty and read the note she had left them, which says she is sorry.

> "Anna, our Abba had given me in marriage. I was in a dilemma not knowing whether he wanted me or not. Now that I know that he loves me and has not agreed to dissolve the marriage. I am at peace and I have decided to go to him, my lawful husband. I too don't

want to divorce my husband. I do believe that I have taken the right *decision*. Please bless me.

Your loving sister,

Acchi" (140)

In this story Sarah has given a different view of the family life. Hasina's father and her husband are liberal patriarchs, men who are empathetic in their views. Schacht and Ewing (2004) argue that challenging the assumptions of patriarchy is much more than women's liberation; it is the freeing of all people everywhere –and ultimately, the healing of the earth. For them there are few men today who self-identify as feminists. Some state that they are supportive of the women's movement and they believe that women have marginalised sympathetic men for too long and have ignored or devalued their contributions. According to them, women simply cannot change the world alone and the initial step for men is to come to truly respect women, to seek non-oppressive ways of being in the world, and to actively advocate for the fair and equal treatment of all. They are emphatic in their views that there are many decent men with liberal attitudes who are already doing these things (48-55). As in the above story, we do find many a liberal man in the stories of Sarah, who are ready to make a change. A woman's life can be heaven or hell and it is an undeniable fact that since we live in a patriarchal society we need to have liberal men, if not feminist, and pro-feminist men, to support and elevate the status of women.

4.2.3.12. "GaganaSakhi" (Air Hostess, Aboobackar 2007)

The story has a theme of young girls being taken advantage of by their near and dear ones and how if a girl starts earning, she is seen as a goose laying golden eggs, destroying her life for the purpose of retaining her income. Sarah illustrates the dissipated way in which a young girl is betrayed and treated callously by her own family members, ruining her life.

Rachana had lost her mother when she was still in her teens and except for an elder brother, Rajeev, she has no one to call her own. He maintains a small business which he had inherited from his father and his mother had bright plans for her daughter's future since Rachana was a promising student. But when her mother passes away, the siblings feel as if a dark cloud has descended on them. Rachana could not manage

studies and house hold chores and she forces her brother to marry. Though he was not keen, he later agrees and Mangala comes home as his bride. Rachana continues her studies and trains to become an air hostess and becomes one, much to the displeasure of her brother, who wants his sister to marry and settle. But the minute they taste the luxury of a handsome pay packet, they forget their intentions of getting Rachana married, because Rachana is an unassuming girl who never for a moment doubts her brother and his wife. Rachana even renovates their house and incurs a loan in the process. But as years roll by without a hint of any proposal she feels unhappy, but at one point, though she wants to marry Hashim, a pilot friend of hers, who had proposed, she declines the offer on the pretext of his religion, not wanting to hurt her brother.

By now Mangala does not want to lose Rachana with her income, and she devises a devious plan of getting her married to her own unemployed brother, Sadanand, who is a high school dropout. Rachana's brother Rajeev is now a puppet in Mangala's hands and does not object to this. Though Rachana is furious, she does not know what to do and tries to evade the unscrupulous people at home, but to no avail. She feels suffocated in her own home, because emboldened by his sister's support, Sadanand starts to woo Rachana. Thankfully Rachana, on one of her flights meets an eligible bachelor, Aravind, who is an engineer working in America. After knowing each other for some time, they marry through a registered ceremony, because both of them knew, that there would be opposition from their families. He flies back, without consummating the wedding, promising that he would return for her in six months, with a visa. Rachana is happy she has found a husband to her liking, but she keeps this a secret.

Next when they force her to marry Sadanand, she spills the beans and the relation at home along with the atmosphere becomes stifled. Mangala is now openly showing her anger and displeasure, and Rachana is ill-treated in her own home. Her friend Marina gets married and leaves with her husband on a long leave, Rachana too wants to follow suit and Marina informs her that if she has a certificate confirming her pregnancy she will get a long leave, and tells her how to obtain a fake one. Rachana does so when Aravind is due to come home, so that she could accompany him. She is

unaware that Mangala had seen the certificate. When Aravind arrives they spend three blissful days together, but his behavior towards Rachana changes after his visit to her home. She never suspects anything amiss and they leave together to States. But after some time she is shocked to know that Aravind suspects her morality. When she conceives, he questions the paternity of the child naming her a hussy, asking her about the certificate back home, which he tells Mangala had informed. She smiles and fills him up about the way she had managed to get a long leave, with the help of the fake pregnancy certificate. But he never believes her and his behavior towards her is callous, to say the least. It is then that Rachana realises that Mangala had betrayed her trust and had poisoned her life beyond repair for turning down Sadanand; by concocting unsavory tales about her, which unfortunately Aravind believes.

Rachana is disillusioned beyond measure and with the help of Marina she returns to India and after all that has happened does not want to live with her brother and his family. But she cannot bring herself to throw them out of her house. She first rents a small house and decides that she will have the child she is carrying, seeing no reason to abort it, for its father's behavior. She delivers a son, hires a middle aged lady to care for her son, Jeevan, and starts working again and is happy with her decision. When Jeevan is a boy of two, Marina feeling sorry for her friend informs Aravind about the truth of Rachana's fake certificate, which was the cause for the ruin of her life. He communicates to her, apologising for his callous behavior, but Rachana is unmoved. Her brother Rajeev too wants her to forget the past and unite with Aravind. But Rachana sees red. When Aravind comes to meet her and tries to persuade her, she turns down his request, seeing nothing in the relation anymore. Her belief is that the moment a husband doubts his wife's character, he forfeits the rights of a husband.

> Look here, I am not Sita. What I have told you is my final decision. When a husband, no matter how cruel is he to his wife, comes and apologises, the wife acquiesces and meekly drops at his feet or should drop at his feet. This is the lesson that you have learnt. Now those lessons have changed. You have exposed the extent of cruelty a man can show to his wife. And I don't think that I am ready to go through the same hell of brutality again (44).

Her dialogue is evocative and rings firm and true. Sarah's evoking the name of Sita, in this dialogue, speaks volumes, since feminist readings see Sita as a victim of the power relations of the patriarchal system. For Rachana, trust is the glue of life. Her mind now turns to Hashim, who had proposed to her earlier, who is still a very good

friend of hers. He too had married, lost his wife and has a daughter. She decides that he is a better man any day and broaches the subject with him. In answer he calls on her personally. She is elated and she rejects Aravind, neither caring for her brother Rajeev, nor the society. She had burnt her fingers once and she does not want to repeat the experience again. It is a blow to Aravind but she is past caring, having led an independent life, during the most grueling time of her life, carrying a child and with no one to call her own. She decides to file a divorce and is jubilant in her decision.

In this story Sarah has represented the new womanhood in Rachana, a woman of noteworthy character, one who stands up for her rights. Though she was once an obedient, dutiful daughter, retaliates when she is taken for granted, showing that women too can lead independent, dignified lives, if they are determined not to let people trample them. It is never easy to get into the new image, because patriarchal system hardly lets its hold loosen.

Sarah has said that in reality the woman in question has committed suicide, not knowing where to turn, being cheated and let down by all. But she did not want the women of today to follow in the footsteps of Sita of the yore. So, she purposely created Rachana, a woman who can withstand all the hardships of life with dignity, as well as one who can think differently. Sarah argues that writers need to create new models of womanhood and differ from the regular stereotypes, that only then our women can aspire to realize their potentials and blossom forth, changing the face of the country, for the better.

4.2.3.13. "Bete" (Prey, Aboobackar 2007)

The theme of this story looks to be far-fetched, but Sarah vouches for it saying that she had witnessed this incident, which had happened in one of the families she knew (Aboobackar 2007). A husband, who works in a gulf country, jails his wife for no reason, save that of spite. The story is around this incident and about the lukewarm response of the Indian consulate officials, who fail to fulfill the very reason of their existence there, of helping the Indians who are in need of them in times of distress.

Rafina's education is cut short and she is married when she was about to answer her final exams. Her mother consoles her saying that a girl's primary need is to find a good husband, which Rafina is fortunate enough to accomplish. Rafina flies to Saudi Arabia with her husband, Anwar. He never becomes a soul-mate to Rafina. All he wanted was a cook and a woman to warm his bed. He is a man of suspicion, added to the strict rules of the country where women are not allowed to go out without being accompanied by a male member of the house. Rafina becomes virtually a prisoner in the house, which ironically lacks nothing in comforts, save mental peace. Anwar is not happy with his wife, since she knows nothing about household chores. She was a student till then; she was not a good cook, much to the chagrin of her husband. He starts humiliating her for not being a better wife to him. His most common jibe being:

> "Don't tell me, being a female you don't know cooking. What do you mean by saying you don't know how to cook? Then why did you come with me...oh … I do see it now. I think your family thrust you upon me because they couldn't resist the temptation, since they had got me for free" (63).

Once luckily she meets her neighbor, Suhara and her husband Hamid, who too are Indians and they befriend her. But her happiness is short lived. Anwar always used to watch his wife doubtfully, which was something she could never stomach. He does not change even after being a father, always doubting Rafina and humiliating her for anything and everything. By now Rafina had resigned herself to her fate and was trying to find happiness in her young son. Once Rafina loses her control when she encounters his stock jibe of 'getting him for free'. She retorts "probably my uncles didn't know that you were for sale, because had they known they would have bought you for a proper price" (65), which ends in her being slapped the next instant. This angers him to such an extent he falsely accuses Rafina and complains to the police against her behavior, saying that she was a woman of loose morals and has an extra marital liaison with his neighbor, Hamid. At an opportune moment, he invites Hamid to his house and then promptly goes out and returns with the police, who arrest both Rafina and Hamid, on charges of prostitution. They are thrown into prison, without being given a chance to prove their innocence because the laws in the Middle Eastern countries are very stringent in the matters of morality. To top it all the husband himself had lodged the complaint, which they could not doubt, because he is a *man*. The punishment in such cases is death by stoning the culprits publicly. Rafina does

not even know her crime, and has no one to help her. All that is left to her is to resort to tears. She weeps bitterly cursing her fate for saddling her with such a despotic husband and her grief knows no bounds when she remembers her suckling, young son.

But Suhara, who knows that her husband, Hamid and Rafina are not guilty, calls home and informs them about what has transpired. Anwar in one master stroke has wiped off her future too. The news spreads like wildfire and tongues start wagging. But Rafina's mother refuses to believe this of her daughter and urges her brother to visit Suhara, who has returned to India, because she was a poor lady who had sold her trinkets in order to send her husband Hamid abroad and it was beyond her to help either Hamid or Rafina. When Rafina's uncle visits Suhara, expecting insults, he is shocked to know that his niece is guiltless and Anwar is to blame. Suhara, in no uncertain terms berates him. Wiping her tears she takes him to task.

> How could you marry your niece to such a person? Wasn't it your duty to enquire about him, instead of marrying her off to a person working somewhere? If you are burdened with girls, throw them into the deep, with stones around their necks, so that they sink to the bottom, without a trace, but never give them in marriage to such vile persons. That wicked person has even wrecked my life... if you want your niece back alive, please do something. Salim Sahib, who is from your place, is a very influential person there. Do take his help, and please help my husband too (69).

Rafina's uncle is galvanised into action. He calls Salim Sahib, who manages to free both Rafina and Hamid, but even he, with all his influence had to face tough moments, both with the police and the Indian consulate. Rafina returns home, minus her son, as per the Islamic law. She has lost her beautiful tresses too, because in the Saudi prisons the women prisoners are shorn off, leaving a bald pate. She is a ghost of her previous self. When the flight takes off she fervently prays for the plane to crash, because the thought of facing people back home is distasteful to her. She toys with the idea of committing suicide, but decides against it thinking that she should not allow Anwar to defeat her in life.

> No I need to live! Like the watch which starts ticking the moment it is wound! I need to finish my graduation, and specialise in computer education. I should be financially independent and need to show the person who had trampled me, that he is unable to defeat me. In front of him I need to prove myself telling him 'You cannot do anything to me. You robbed my son from me. You stripped from me all that was mine. But you can never, ever, disable my mental faculties' and should rise before him. I should never accept defeat and live a happy life with a life partner of my choice. Yes, I need to survive. My mom…my

> mom, will she not believe me if I tell her that I am not a guilty party? When the plane lands, she falls into her mother's arms sobbing (71).

The title "Bête" is suggestive and tells us how women are victimised and preyed upon by men. This victimisation of women is echoed by Afkhami, who states that for Islamic fundamentalists every domestic issue is negotiable except women's rights and their position in society.

> …a significant number of Muslim women outgrow and transgress traditional boundaries. Islamist intransigence forces Muslim women to fight for their rights, openly when they can, and subtly when they must. The struggle is multifaceted, at once political, economic, ethical, psychological and intellectual. It resonates with the mix of values, mores, facts, ambitions, prejudices, ambivalences, uncertainties, and fear that are the stuff of human culture. Above all, it is a casting off of a tradition of subjection (Afkhami 1995: 1-2).

Sarah has once again portrayed a woman with remarkable characteristics. It is high time women thought about themselves for a change and fought for their lives, which is the birth right of all who are born free on this earth. But what one must not forget is that this could happen only if the family members support the female members of their families unquestioningly. Hajjar opines that when violence occurs within the context of the family, it raises questions about the laws and legal administration of family relations. Are violent practices among family members legally permitted or prohibited? In practice, is violence ignored, tolerated or penalised? Do perpetrators enjoy impunity or do they stand to be punished? Are civil rights available to victims, e.g. right to divorce, restraining orders (Hajjar 2004: 236).

4.2.3.14. "Tangiya Patragalu" (Letters from a Younger Sister, Aboobackar 2007)

This story is different in its narrative technique, because it is written in the form of a series of letters, written from a younger sister to her elder one and the entire story is unfolded in these letters. The issue is about Mubeena, the daughter of the younger sister.

This story has a shocking theme, which is that of sexual exploitation. Sarah places on record that this was a real instance which she had unfortunately witnessed (II Interview data) being close to the family in question, where it had happened. She feels sorry for the girl in question who for no fault of hers had to undergo profound misery and heartbreak by the callous behavior of her husband and his family, especially his father, who is the villain and with whom even the lawyers joined hands to cheat

happiness from a young girl's life. Sarah is unhappy about the irresponsible way the practitioners of legal profession behave in this instance, clearly exposing the filth of corruption some of them have descended to.

Since his son was working abroad, the father-in-law wanted to sexually use his daughter-in-law, and when she did not compromise on this revolting proposal, he, the villain that he was, managed to implant in his son's mind unsavory lies about her, and was successful in making his son divorce his wife, through *talaq* (Aboobackar 2007).

The theme is repulsive and makes one wonder about the degradation of the human spirit. Sarah believes that if the daughter-in-law in question, a highly qualified girl, was immoral as insinuated by her father-in-law, then probably she would be still wedded to her husband, because, then in all probability, the father-in-law, would not have asked his son to divorce her. After reading the story, one begins imagining masks, apprehensive to trust anyone. Another aspect of the story is the gullibility of youngsters today, believing everything their parents tell them without resorting to any critical thinking. Does it mean that marriage is performed to fulfill one's vested interests? If such incidents could happen in educated, affluent families, one shudders to think of the plight of women placed in economically dependent situations. French et al in *Violence Against Women: Philosophical Perspectives*, opine that the one reason sexual violence is taken for granted by many is because it is so very prevalent. "The everydayness of sexual violence… leads many to think that male violence against women is natural, a given, something not in need of explanation, and not amenable to change…" (French et al 1998: 13-14).

Coming back to the tale: the first letter written by the younger sister, broaches the difficulty of raising girls, about the complications that arise if a girl is highly educated in their community and the difficulty of finding them a suitable alliance, ending the letter on the note that Mubeena wishes to marry on the condition that the groom should be working abroad and requesting the elder sister to keep a look out for such a person in her city. Thankfully in the second letter she happily announces that Mubeena is lucky to find such a groom, who works abroad, the only son from an educated family, with a happily married sister and is ecstatic about the alliance. The

third letter informs us that Mubeena has left with her husband, Sharif, on a visiting visa of three months, not forgetting to express her displeasure for her elder sister's absence during Mubeena's marriage. A tiny whisper of all is not well, is what the fourth letter portends; that, a lady too stays in Mubeena's flat who accompanies Sharif to work, since she seems to be his colleague. Mubeena is told that the lady's husband is working elsewhere. But Mubeena, not liking to share the flat, plans to ask her husband to rent a separate apartment. The next letters speak about Mubeena's homecoming and how she tries to stay at her in-law's place making adjustments. But matters take a turn for the worse when her mother-in-law is hospitalised and she denies staying alone with her father-in-law at home not mentioning the reasons for her refusal. She returns to her mother's place, and though she tearfully pleads her husband to send her visa, he denies saying that she has displeased his father and until and unless she apologises and obeys him, she is not going to get her visa. Even her passport is confiscated, and she is subjected to a pregnancy test. This of course, in preparation for divorcing her. Her jewelry is returned after they fight for it. They are pressurised not to fight it out in the court of law. Mubeena's in-laws even go to the extent of terrorising them with dire consequences if they take legal actions. And to cut a long story short, the last letter arrives informing the elder sister about Mubeena's pitiable situation. They had sent her *talaq*, on the flimsy reason that she was a spendthrift, did not know how to cook, and spent a long time in the toilet, in addition to being disobedient. Mubeena had resigned from a cushy job for the sake of marrying a well-placed guy, and here she was ditched half way, for no fault of hers and left to rot away in a cold blooded manner. She could not face the prospect of going back to work in the same place, for fear of losing face and self-respect. Mubeena's mother is sad that the lawyers too had joined hands with Mubeena's unscrupulous father-in-law, and aided him in his effort to ruin his daughter-in-law's life. She wonders that his son, an educated boy could behave in this uncouth manner; that his father has a sway on him and in a position to influence his psyche about his wife, Mubeena. Her mother is anxious for her daughter and is worried about her future. She expresses her woes saying that in spite of going to such lengths of raising daughters, educating them, the difficulties of finding a suitable match, as well as incurring expenses of marriage, their lives have no guarantee and could be destroyed so easily. In addition, she is

afraid what if Mubeena attempts suicide in a moment of despair. She recalls a similar incident in her neighborhood, where the divorced woman who had received her *talaq*, had committed suicide, along with her two young children, to save herself from humiliation. She is pessimistic in her attitude towards the fate of girls in such an environment that prevails in the society. The last letter ends with her telling her elder sister that she now realises why people resort to female infanticide and sex selective abortions, which she feels is a far better and kinder way of saving daughters from humiliation, disgrace and exploitation in future (126).

In her concluding sentence, the younger sister means that righteous people like her, people who have neither the power of money nor that of influence, those who always adhere to morals, are unfit to live in this cruel world sans moral values and principles.

Thus the story ends, and Sarah has made a commendable attempt in portraying the rot that is rampant in the society, which is like the microscopic pores that grow in moist and humid areas, invisible to the normal eye, but if left untreated with carelessness, have the power to infect human health, in this instance, the health of the society. This is especially true in Indian societies, where daughters are seen as a burden.

4.2.3.15. "Kuppasa Tottavalu" (One Who Has Worn a Blouse, Aboobackar 2007)

Sarah while reminiscing about her childhood says she remembers seeing women without blouses and that these women were dalits[94].Occasionally these dalits and their women would change their religion, converting to Islam. Since in Islam there is a strict rule that women should cover their beauty from the eyes of men, wearing blouses was mandatory and these women would start wearing blouses, covering themselves. And the phrase 'kuppasa tottavalu' was an idiomatic expression with a pun which meant one who wore a blouse and (therefore) one who was converted from being a dalit to Islam. Sarah says that this story too is not fiction, but a real incident that had happened when she was young, out of which she thought of creating a story (III interview data).

[94] People who belonged the untouchable communities. In independent India, the ones whose caste and tribe are classified as scheduled caste and scheduled tribe.

Once when Ayesha had attended a wedding and was about to return, the lady of the house was reluctant to let go of Ayesha. She was adamant in her request that Ayesha had to accompany them in visiting the bride's place. Ayesha had no other go, but to accept. The rumor was that the bride's family was very rich, and Ayesha resigns herself to witness the affluence. When they arrive, they are escorted inside the house with due respect and were taken to the room, where the bride was seated, laden with loads of jewelry, a sure sign of wealth. An old lady, who is also wearing kilos of expensive jewelry walks in, seating herself next to the young bride, when whispers go around that she is the grandmother. When Ayesha looks at the old lady, she is pervaded with a sense of déjà vu and she tries to remember. By then the old lady recognises Ayesha, and reminds her of the fateful morning when she, as a burkha clad woman, leading a girl of three had entered their courtyard, and that how, it was never possible for her to forget Ayesha's parents, who had helped her. Suddenly Ayesha spies the faint blue tattoo on her forehead, which immediately helps to place her as Maadevi, the converted one.

Maadevi's was a pathetic story, which was a common occurrence in those days. She was the only daughter of a poor dalit widow, who worked hard for her living. Maadevi grew up to be lissome lass and one day, the innocent young girl was taken advantage of, by the son of the house, where her mother worked. The son spotted Maadevi and started visiting her in her hut when her mother was out working. He had promised marriage to the young gullible girl, and she had fallen a prey to his saccharine sweet words. He left to town after some days, but not before nature had worked its wonder. Her mother noticed the difference in her daughter's condition, beat her black and blue, but upon knowing the name of the culprit, she was mute. The poor women like her could do nothing, when the son of their landlord imposed himself on them? She cursed him and his family, the only outlet for her anger and misery. But she could not bring herself to terminate her daughter's pregnancy, because the memory was fresh in her mind when a young girl had died in one such attempt from the quacks. She did not want to lose her only offspring. In due course Maadevi had given birth to a daughter. Three years had passed and Maadevi never spoke to any men, having learnt her lesson well. It so happened that one day an

accident befalls her daughter, who was playing while she was busy working in the fields. Isubu, a young worker rescues her daughter and scolds a distraught Maadevi. Though, after that he started noticing her, he used to stop to talk to her occasionally but never attempted anything untoward. Gradually she became friendly with him. It was then that he sprung his proposal, inviting her to be his wife. Maadevi was shocked, but she pondered on this option. Since she had given birth out of wedlock, people of her community had excommunicated both the mother and daughter along with the young child. Maadevi thought that it was better to be somebody's wife than not being a wife at all. Having decided, she had accompanied Isubu the next day, to his house, where she was welcomed by his mother. It is then that his neighbors caution him about her religion and advise him to change her religion in a proper manner. And that is how she had landed in Ayesha's courtyard, that morning long ago, because Ayesha's father was a renowned lawyer of the region. She was converted and for the ceremony it was required that she wear a blouse, which Ayesha's mother had stitched for Maadevi, who was rechristened as Khadija and her daughter had become Fatima. This incident had created quite a ruckus and she was taken to the police station for questioning. When asked about this Maadevi had explained her experience:

> No it was nothing. The entire night they tried to convert my intention of becoming a Muslim and cajoled me not to think of conversion. They even told me that they would look for a suitable groom in our community and see to it that I was compensated properly by my daughter's father. But since I knew that all this didn't mean anything I didn't agree to what they were telling and held against their brain washing. They accepted their defeat in the end, but not before exclaiming that god knows how I was mesmerised and they implied that I was doctored to change my religion. But because they couldn't do anything else, they brought me back to your house safely (95-96).

Ayesha comes back to the present when the old lady, now Khadija, smiles at her saying that the bride is her daughter Fatima's girl. The story speaks about the exploitation of the dalits by upper caste people in all aspects. Though they are not given respect and treated worse than animals, the upper castes cannot see them converting to a different religion, which promises them at least a decent life, allowing them to live like humans. According to Viswanathan, if India's religious diversity is shown in the sheer proliferation of customary, personal, and statutory laws, then

English law provides the uniformity required for steering religious differences into enlightened nationhood.

> As a transgression of religious barriers, conversion participates in this transformative act…Conversion in an age of tolerance connotes he emergence of pluralistic possibilities- and more fluid movements in society- than evident in situation of religious absolutism. Conversion establishes the principle of the nation as egalitarian, just, open, protective, and constitutional, and at the same time committed to a leveling of religious differences…Conversion narratives liberally derive an ideology of individualism and free will that renders the religion to which one converts less important than the possibility of the change itself… Conversion is not limited to the function of either preserving or erasing identity but, in far more complex ways, is associated with a deconstructive activity central to modernity itself (Viswanathan 1998: 75-76).

Thus, Sarah documents the modern nation-state's oppressed making use of the constitution's provisions and reveling not only in the 'possibility of change', but also the changed status, *after* the change. Alongside, it is also a record of a long history of the upper caste resistance of the lower caste conversion to keep the caste hierarchy in its hold.

4.2.3.16. "HosaDikku" (A New Direction, Aboobackar 2007)

The theme is about the difficulties of finding a suitable match for an educated and working girl in the Muslim community, where as a rule, girls are married at a young age, before they are out of their teens, which automatically prevents them from finishing their schooling. Working women are an anomaly.

The story opens with Fatima worrying about her niece Shaheen's wedding. She ruminates about her yesteryears when, after her mother's death, her elder sister Jamila was the one who was very close to her. She remembers how, after Jamila's three new born babies had died, because her own milk was not agreeing with them. This was something unheard of, a very rare occurrence; however, she had breast fed Shaheen, from the day of her birth, being a young, lactating mother herself during the time. Fatima, for this reason had a very special attachment towards her niece, wishing her the very best in life. So, naturally she was worried to know that her well educated, economically independent niece could not get proper proposals. When Jamila wanted to curb her daughter's education, it was Fatima who had spoken in favor of Shaheen's education, which had ended successfully by her becoming an air hostess. Though Jamila was not happy on the account of her daughter working as an air hostess, she

was overruled by all, especially Shaheen herself who saw nothing wrong in her choice of career. But time had proved her mother, Jamila right, with years passing by, without Shaheen getting appropriate proposals from eligible grooms.

Now there was a proposal at hand, though the groom was a divorcee, the reason for his divorce was that it was a love match. The groom's family had met Shaheen, and the proposal was about to conclude successfully, and Fatima was on tenterhooks to know the result, the decision of the boy's family. The answer was in the affirmative. Shaheen had not rejected the offer, because she liked what she saw, after meeting Najeer, the person in question. Wisely they had decided not to broach the topic of her continuing her career after marriage, which they thought could be decided upon later. The wedding was fixed after a period of six months and the preparations were in full swing. There was hardly a month left, when Najeer called Shaheen to meet him. All were happy thinking she would come back with the date fixed. However, Shaheen returns home within an hour, in tears. On questioning, she reveals that he had rejected her on the pretext that she is an introvert, stating that he wanted an extrovert for his wife, which was of course a flimsy reason to reject her. The atmosphere becomes one of dejection and unhappiness and all are dumbfounded that Najeer had thought about this after six months. What none can understand is the reason he invited her to meet him. If he had intended to reject her could he not done it over the phone? Why call her and humiliate her?

> Akka, what kind of heartless people are these? I don't know how to name this behavior; whether to call this as a case of exploitation or cruelty. Probably he invited her to meet him at the hotel, wanting to see her facial expressions when he rejects her, and revel in her discomfit. I haven't seen anyone stooping to this level to cause pain and hurt a lady's mind. Thank goodness Shaheen is not marrying such a cad! (85).

This is when Jamila springs a surprise saying that she will give her daughter freedom of choice, saying that she was a fool all these days to not allow her daughter to take stock of the situation, pressurising her to consider proposals which she thought to be suitable. Determined, she tells Shaheen, that the day she finds an understanding, educated guy, who is to her liking, she will receive him with open arms, irrespective of his religion, which was never heard of in their family and community. Jamila drops her match making, realising the futility of her action, when people out there are narrow minded and unethical.

The title is apt, signaling a new direction in Jamila's behavior and her thoughts. The story also opens fresh avenues, heralding a new direction in Shaheen's life, wherein she is given a new lease of freedom to choose her life partner. The guts and the sadism of Najeer are astounding. Though he himself is a divorcee, he rejects a very eligible girl, that too going back on his promise and never thinks twice about the misery he is about to cause, which is not surprising. This is possible because patriarchal society provides men such leverage, even to the point of trampling on somebody's delicate feelings. And rest assured that always women are blamed for anything and everything.

If this story was a regular stereotype, it would have ended with all sorts of blames being heaped on Shaheen. Accusing fingers would have pointed to her career, her education, her age, etc. But Sarah has given a unique ending, wherein even all join hands to support the woman in question. The story thus opens up a *new direction* for Shaheen and with Shaheen, there are possibilities of change even for others in the community. This is because precedents are important. Once a particular case occurs, the following cases would not attract as much societal attention and evaluation as the first one. And therefore, Jamila's decision is invaluable in an orthodox society.

Looking at the overall corpus of Sarah, though it might appear that there are no radical protagonists in her fiction, going through her works, it is more than clear that there are characters (mostly female, but sometimes male) *bordering* on radicalism, deflecting the course of the community in the longer run. The protagonists discussed in this section stand out in their being different. They are the ones who, with their positive attitude and courageous behavior, manage to change the lie of the land, by soaring to greater heights, and can be perceived as role models for the women of younger generation to follow. Nasima of *Sahana*, Nafisa of *Vajragalu*, Ayesha of *Tala Odeda Doniyalli*, Khadijabi of "Dharma Bale Beesidaga", the daughter in "Sunna", Sarasamma of "Moole Muttida Hulu", the daughter-in-law of "Bale", Nirmala of "Khedda", The old lady of "Yuddha", Hasina of "Nirdhara", Rachana of "Gagana Sakhi", Rafina of "Bete", Mubeena of "Tangiya Patragalu",Maadevi of "Kuppasa Tottavalu", Jamila and Shaheen of "Hosa Dikku", are among the fortunate few, who could manage to take off and soar to greater heights. The reason is

unmistakably the support they had on the home front –father, mother, brothers, sisters, husband, and sons – apart from their own assertiveness, confidence and initiative, which were very strong. It was not that their lives were easy. They too had their share of the disparity, oppression, and heart break. But they chose to overcome them with the help − moral or otherwise − of some one very close. It also is to be noted that majority of them in the last section are educated protagonists. They were aware of their rights and tried to rise above the discourses of patriarchy. They are truly examples of new womanhood. As we saw in some of these stories, we do have male characters who are largely liberals, sometimes touching upon radicalism, with all their limitations. We shall discuss these characters in the following section.

4.3: COMPLICATING THE SYSTEM: LIBERAL PATRIARCHS

We have discussed in the earlier chapter that the patriarchal system exploits women systematically in the name of religion and in the name of familial relationships and in the earlier section, numerous illustration of that. Women cannot extricate themselves from the iron grip of religion, which takes undue advantage. In the case of Sarah's fiction, the Jamaat and the shari'a represent religion. Sarah vehemently speaks about the evils of the patriarchal powers and says that the misinterpretations of the religious texts are causing havoc in many lives. Nevertheless, Sarah talks about the invaluable support the male members of her family extended, both before and after marriage, which is a proof that in India, women's equality is practiced at least by some empathetic and liberal men. The undeniable fact is that education was the prime factor which helped the author to overcome a lot of obstacles, apart from giving her a positive, assertive attitude. Though the terrain looks arid, there are fertile spots –oases –in the desert of subordination and exploitation. Liberal patriarchs, in the form of fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, give one some measure of happiness and hope that all is not lost, wishing that more awareness needs to be created, to have more individuals on these lines. Sarah, giving her own example says that if she has attained success, it is primarily because of her father. This is explained in detail in the previous chapter while discussing the various episodes of her life. To quote Sarah "If my father had not taken such keen interest regarding my schooling, most probably today I would have been like all those Muslim women of our hometown, completed fifth standard in

Chamanad, married at the age of ten and living in some remote corner of Kasaragod!"(Aboobackar 2009: 2-3). Leaving apart the discussed works of Sarah, we shall now briefly look into the ones, which have liberal patriarchs with the help of whom the protagonists of the following stories manage to surface. We have the protagonist of *Panjara*, Sunayana, Rashida of *Ilijaru*, the protagonist of "Payana", Jalaluddin of "Salahe", Umar of "Kallu Bandeyallondu Vosaru"and Hanif of "Bikariya Malugalu".

4.3.1. *Panjara* (Cage, Aboobackar 2004)

We have seen a few characters with Hindu names above. Sarah has been accused sometimes, of representing only Muslim characters and voicing only the concerns of Muslim women. But, Sarah says this is not correct. She contends that her depiction of women's oppression is not merely specific to Muslims but applies across communities. "Panjara' is one such story which involves Hindu characters.

In this novel, Sarah has discussed the plight of an unwed mother and how due to the stringent laws of the society a child is snatched from its mother, much to the grievance of the young mother. And how, due to the secrecy attached with the birth, the young mother in question goes untreated during her delivery which in future leads to complications, making her incapable of conceiving.

Sunayana, who is from a decent family, is taken advantage of by her friend, Vasanth Kumar, who claims to love her and promises marriage. She finds herself with child but the man in question disappears and, Sunayana goes to pieces after realising that he has married leaving her in the lurch. By the time her parents are aware of the disaster, it is too late. Her parents resort to telling lies that their son-in-law is an engineer and working abroad. She carries the child to full term and delivers a daughter. She is named as Malavika and since they had spinned the story that she is a married lady, the child is with her for four months and after that they give it up for adoption, leaving the baby in an orphanage and return to their native village. Though Sunayana pleads with her parents to allow her to retain her daughter they refuse and there is nothing she could do but obey them. Though she hated the father of her child, could not bring herself to hate the baby, who was the innocent victim of the state of affairs. There is

nothing she could do to help her situation; she is as good as *caged* up, ensnared in the sociocultural mores, which never accepts an unwed mother.

She resigns herself to her fate, starts a new life and in due course marries an eligible man. But in a remote corner of her mind she always was worried about the fate of her first born. Unfortunately the child is adopted by her sister-in-law, Kumuda, and the past comes back to haunt her present. She conceives and during her delivery the doctor realises that this is her second delivery due to some complications and the cat is out of the bag. Unknowingly she questions Sunayana's husband Prakash, who does not know anything about it since he was not told about it. When he comes to know about the fact, he is incensed because he believes that he is duped. The child does not survive and the doctor declares that Sunayana can never become a mother again. Motherhood has been exalted as one of the sole aims of womanhood, which in reality encircles and ensnares a woman in an invisible boundary, a *cage*. To cut a long story short, Prakash pardons his wife after knowing that she is not at fault and they take care of Malavika, his sister's adopted daughter, after knowing that she is Sunayana's biological daughter, her first born. The man, who was the biological father of Malavika, comes back and claims her, filing a case of paternity. But Sunayana and Prakash put up a fight together and win the case in their favor. All ends well and Sunayana gets the custody of her daughter.

Sarah has sensitively portrayed this delicate issue from the point of the estranged mother. The dilemma a mother faces when she has to discard her baby, is heart wrenching. The norm of the society is always to find fault with the woman in question, holding her responsible for her condition, criticising her decisions, labelling her as amoral, all the while letting the man go, scot-free. Quoting Gilligan, Linn says that "whatever a woman wanted to do, she tended to be labelled '*selfish*' and wrong whether having the baby or having the abortion… because the very fact of her wanting it meant that it was *selfish*, bad and wrong, and what she did not want was *selfless* and good"(Linn 2002: 117).

Sarah argues that it is always women who have to pay the price and the innocent children who suffer all their lives carrying the stigma, for no fault of theirs, save that

of being born out of wedlock. She says that we have to treat unwed mothers favorably in this society so that a lot of heartbreak can be avoided.

4.3.2. *Ilijaru* (The Slope, Aboobackar 2011)

The theme of this story is one of debauchery and how it takes one downhill, *down the slope,* as the title suggests, towards one's own destruction. Rashida and Hanif belong to an affluent family, a happy couple, living a contented life. But due to bad friendship, Hanif takes a turn for the worse. He starts cheating his wife and recklessly spends money on wine and women, in the company of his friends. But things come to a point when his dishonesty comes to the fore. Rashida cannot take it any longer and she is on the verge of leaving her husband. Fortunately for her, father-in-law comes to her rescue and threatens to disown his son, Hanif. When his friends realise that he is not flush with cash any more they lose interest in him. He almost comes to lose his family but awakens at the right time from total destruction.

The novel has an unusual theme of a wife stalling the downhill fall of a loved one and how a father being level headed supports his daughter-in-law, and not his son, which was the reason for the tide to turn in her favor. How by her perseverance she stops her husband from going down *the slope.* It broaches about peer pressure, which could happen at any age in a person's lifetime and only by tackling it courageously can one overcome the problem, is portrayed very effectively by Sarah. Apart from that here we find something singular, which is the episode of a father-in-law, supporting and standing beside his daughter-in-law. This signals a new development in the equation of men and women, a corrective measure to ensure gender equality, through ethics.

4.3.3. "Payana" (Journey, Aboobackar 1992)

The title is metaphoric and speaks about a journey, a journey of life. The story starts with a train journey. A young woman is travelling. The day has dawned bright and fresh. With a lot of dreams she embarks on her journey. In the course of the journey she meets men of different types and the first time she is saddled with an unwanted child. She becomes wary later and congratulates herself that she has learnt the ways of life. She changes compartments twice. At last she meets a man, who is man enough to

take her responsibility and her child's as well. The story ends with her finding a station.

In the course of the narration we realise that the girl in question is an eternal symbol of a young and innocent girl, who does not know 'the ways of the world', with no protection in this wide and complex world, one who is in search of her destiny. Seen from a feminist perspective, it amounts to the exploitation of a young innocent maiden, who earlier or later gets discarded by men who had fancied her this far. She even begets a child and all lose interest in her. None are bothered to trouble themselves about this slip of a girl in the course of the journey. Her changing compartments allude to her having changed hands, from one man to another. By now the young lady had realised what had befallen her because of her foolishness –in idiotically believing the nectarine whisperings – and had lost her belief in her fellow travelers. It is then that a young man shows up and provides support to her and her child, when she had but given up hope. She reaches her destination, alighting down at the station meant for her, which is the safety and security that she had been seeking, all through the journey. The train in the tale, meeting new people, the anecdotes, the events that one witnesses in the course of the train journey, are but metaphors of the progress in the span of one's life, the metaphors which add depth to the narration.

Though the entire tale is metaphoric in nature, where the protagonists are portrayed in abstract, faceless shadows, Sarah nevertheless makes the reader sympathise with the girl in question and the reader is happy when at last she gets down at her destination. Sarah is optimistic in her depiction and believes that good people do still exist.

4.3.4. "Salahe" (Advice, Aboobackar 1999)

This story has an unusual theme of a man having an unbiased makeup in his character. Jaluluddin's only desire in life was to study well and secure a white collar job. He did not want to toil in the fields like his father. His mother Fathimabi's opinion was also the same. She used to advise her son to get a job and live comfortably in the city unlike his father. Her husband always chided her for filling Jalal's mind with 'unwanted' ideas. He was of the opinion that they live a happy and decent life in the village, which was a lot better compared to the city life. Imbibing his mother's advice,

Jalal tried his hand at college, but was a misfit. He blamed his teachers for his failure. At last somehow, after repeating many times, he managed to acquire a degree of sorts. He even tried his luck and went to a law college, but as always, quit in between. But by then the news had reached his village that he was a lawyer. Now that he had settled, his mother was in haste to get him married. There was no dearth of alliances, when the groom was supposed to be a lawyer. He duly married Ramlabi, the daughter of a rich person, who worked in one of the Gulf Countries.

He lived with his parents in the village and used to commute daily. He could not set up a house in the city, because in reality he was not a lawyer, and probably he could not manage the expenses on his own. Ramlabi was not happy with this since she had married him expecting to live in the city. Now she started complaining about the problems she faced and lack of amenities at their house in the village. And to make matters worse, she came to know that her husband was not a lawyer, and duly informed her mother, who was furious to know that they were duped. When Ramlabi goes to her mother's place for delivery, her mother makes sure that Jalal spends handsomely for all the rituals post and pre delivery. Ramlabi delivers a daughter and stays put in her mother's place. She refuses to return to the village and her parents start dropping hints that he should set up an independent house.

Though Jalal agreed to this, he was financially in no position to do so. His wife never returned. He went to visit them during the month of Ramzan, with lots of presents, since he had not seen them for two years. But his mother-in-law insulted him in no uncertain terms. Jalal was in a fix. He loved his wife and child but could not stomach the insult. His mother was livid with rage and she asked her son to divorce Ramlabi and marry another. Jalal refused to do so and thought of a plan. One day when there was a wedding in the family, he decided to kidnap his wife and child. Waiting outside Ramlabi's house in an auto rickshaw, he awaited for the moment when they would come out. Two burka clad women came out and boarded another auto and he started following. At an opportune moment his auto overtook the other one and he pulled one of them, whom he had thought to be his wife, by her wrist. All hell broke loose, because she was not his wife and though he mumbled feebly that he thought her to be his wife, he was thrashed soundly by people in the street and landed in a hospital. His

mother rushed to the hospital and was shocked to hear from her son about his escapades. She scolded him severely saying that Ramlabi is not the last woman on earth, complaining how dare her parents treat Jalal in this fashion, urging him to remarry. Jalal groaned in pain and anguish, having had to listen to this tirade from his mother. At this point, all of a sudden the door opened and in walked Ramlabi, with her daughter. She apologises to Jalal saying that she wanted to return to him but was not allowed by her mother to do so. She says that Jalal should have written a letter to his father-in-law, her dad, who would have definitely sorted things out. Jalal and his mother feel happy at the turn of events and all ends well. His mother exclaims that men never think straight, hinting at the auto rickshaw episode, and hugs her granddaughter.

The story is different in that the theme powerfully suggests that if only men are liberal, women can aspire for a positive change, to live a better life. Though Jalal lied before marriage and is very much part off the established patriarchy, there is an element in him that refuses to accept everything that patriarchy offers on a platter, which opens up a lot of new possibilities. Schacht and Ewing argue that change is difficult when it is widely believed that current structures are not only normal but inevitable.

> Five thousand years of patriarchy have left people convinced that it is the natural form of human organization. Yet alternatives to patriarchy and male domination do exist. What little is known about ancient societies strongly suggests that partnership models for living were once the norm instead of the exception…Real dialogue between feminist women and (pro) feminist men and cooperative efforts in our communities to bring about change are the only things that will promote greater understanding…Clearly, what is required is that men (and some women) give up oppressive forms of male privilege and ways of being in relation to others and instead learn to think and act in ways that are typically expected of and associated with women (Schacht and Ewing 2004: 9-17).

Jalal gives up the offer to marry another woman, though he is pressurised for the same by his mother. Thus, he shows that he is for a different model of family. The irony of the situation is that both the elder women in this story – the mother and the mother-in-law –are to be blamed. One would have thought that being women themselves they should have had better judgment. But no! In the first instance it is Ramlabi's mother who is pigheaded and almost succeeds in ruining her daughter's life, going after false prestige. Her husband advises her not to be so headstrong, proving he has principles in

life. In the second instance it is Jalal's mother who feeling insulted forces her son to remarry, not considering for a moment the plight of her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. If it was not for Jalal's staunch refusal she might have wrecked the life of a young girl. This story helps create awareness putting across the fact that having liberal men in our midst helps alleviate the misery of women to some extent.

4.3.5. Kallu Bandeyallondu Vosaru (A Boulder Oozing a Trickle of Water, Aboobackar 2007)

This is a story with a theme about how one fails to spot good in others and about finding a sympathetic mind in a person, who for all outward appearances was thought to be as hard as a boulder, unmoved by anything. Sarah has portrayed that often one mistakes the outer demeanor and fails to find the truth about human beings.

Khateejamma is incensed with her eldest son Umar, and her fury knows no bounds when she is told that he has already left to attend to his business. The reason for her anger is that he had fixed an alliance for his younger brother, Hussein. But the rumor had it that the girl in question was of loose morals, having had an affair, because of which they could not find a suitable match for her, in spite of their affluence. Umar was a millionaire, thanks to his inheritance, but he was also known to be a skinflint, and he had cheated his sister Nafisa, out of her inheritance during her marriage, not giving enough jewelry. Nafisa's in-laws had expected to receive a fat dowry during her wedding, because she was the only sister of a millionaire. Naturally they felt cheated when nothing measured up and an ugly scene had ensued, when Khateejamma had gone to visit her daughter. When she had questioned Umar about cheating his sister, he had replied that he had spent her entire inheritance during her wedding. The upshot of the incident was that they had ordered Nafisa to sever ties with her family. And they had seen nothing of her in the past five years. Umar's wife was a match for him in her stinginess. The duo never gave alms and shunned all. Khateejamma and Hussein had no say in any of the matters, Umar being the master of the house after his father's death.

Now he had transcended the limits of his miserliness by finding a rich girl for his brother Hussein, who would bring a huge dowry with her, not caring for the unsavory

rumor. Khateejamma was annoyed with her son for stooping to such levels for the sake of money, and she wanted to talk to him, urgently. Nafisa had sent word about the rumors to her mother, through one of their helping hands. After hearing the news from the maid, Khateejamma had spent a restless night and then decided to confront her eldest son, Umar. But she was shocked by his answer. He told her that it was already late in the day, and he had already given his word of honor to the bride's family, expressing his consent to the marriage. He advises his mother not to believe in nasty rumors, which could be a pack of lies and goes to the extent of reproaching his mother, saying that what if she too had such a daughter at home? How would she feel if the marriage was cancelled? When Khateejamma retorts that it could be their wealth that has blinded him, he smiles back, telling his mother that if the bride comes in with a huge dowry, how does he benefit? Isn't it true that Hussein would be the beneficiary? He questions his mother as to how Hussein would care for his wife, if not for her riches, because he is unemployed.

> And how do I benefit from this wedding? Isn't Hussein the beneficiary? Does he have any income? How will he take care of his wife and kids in future? The girl's family is in dire need of finding a suitable husband for their daughter. Never forget that in a way we are helping them out of their dilemma. I have given my word of honor. Let us be content in this proposal and take pleasure in the marriage (116).

Khateejamma is dumbfounded and has nothing to say. When Nafisa gets to know about this she is thunderstruck. Her astonishment is immense and she exclaims that none had thought that her eldest brother Umar had a heart of flesh and blood. Common opinion was that he was a boulder, a piece of stone, unmoving, uncaring, and devoid of human feelings. She realises that there flows a tiny stream of tenderness, a vein of moisture in the rocky surface of his demeanor. The main problem in this case was a lack of communication between the family members, which is often the case.

Sarah in this story cautions one, not to form opinions on outward appearances and that it is possible for dampness to be present in the face of rocks, like the proverbial oasis in the desert. That life springs surprises at the least expected moment, bringing in fresh hope about humanity. Umar comes out as a liberal with his deep seated concerns about the girl in question and his questioning his mother whether she too was not a woman, and how would she have felt if the same thing had happened to her own

daughter. The stance shown by Umar is quite important in the Indian context as a lot of assertive girls are branded and their morality, questioned. A small suspicion would take the shape of a gossip and spreads like grapevine, hampering the girl's future. In such a situation, Umar's stand is certainly commendable.

4.3.6. "BikariyaMalugalu" (For Sale, Aboobackar 2007)

The story is about the apprehensions fathers have about their sons, not wanting them to fall in love and marry, because as the title suggests their sons are *for sale*, to the highest bidder, which is a common aspect of matrimony in Indian settings, cutting across castes and status levels. For a change, the protagonists are all male in this story. In Indian societies, arranged marriages are still favored for love marriages, and parents usually arrange the match, taking into consideration the reputation, wealth, history of the family, in which they are interested, not to forget the very important aspect of the horoscopes of the bride and groom, which is given prime importance.

Abbas Haji, a rich and influential man always looks down upon his wife Julekamma, as a woman of no substance. He berates her for their son Salman's behavior, though she is innocent of his where about. The reason for Haji's disquiet is that Salman, who is studying medicine in a different city, is a frequent visitor to Ajeej's, place. Ajeej is the son of Haji's bosom friend, Hanif, who is a lawyer. The truth is that he is worried that Salman might fall for Ajeej's sister Suhara, a beautiful girl. Though Haji takes advantage of his friendship with Hanif, appointing him as his lawyer, for the sake of a discount in the fee, now that the children are coming of age, he does not want the friendship between the two families to deepen on a different aspect. Hanif too is well off, with two of his sons studying engineering in the city but his status is not to Haji's level. Haji has great plans for his son, and already proposals from rich families had started to come. But Haji wants his son to finish his studies, so that he can ask for a huge dowry, which is a regular custom, one which all is aware of, in the matrimonial market.

He calls his other friend Hyder, who is Suhara's maternal uncle on the pretext of business. When they meet he casually drops hints about Suhara, and implants ideas into Hyder, saying that she will make him a good daughter-in-law and a pretty wife to

his son Ashraf. But Hyder too is no different than Hajji. He too is not interested in his niece Suhara's proposal because he too is angling for a better catch, in terms of money of course. What if his son is a high school dropout? Isn't he a man? Isn't the factor that they are affluent sufficient to bring in a huge dowry? Because in the marriage market, money and only money is the deciding factor, with all the eligible bachelors being put up *for sale*, to the highest bidder, all other qualities taking a back seat.

But the oily Hyder turns the tables neatly on Haji, when he speaks to his sister Asma, Suhara's mother. He inquires about Suhara's marriage, and suggests Haji's son Salman's name, to which the guileless Asma is overjoyed, thinking that her brother is conscientious enough to think about his niece. But what she does not know is that it is her brother's apprehension, lest Suhara becomes his daughter-in-law, a prospect he does not relish.

But while this busy match making is going on, the one thing they never realise is that Hanif has decided that he will think of his daughter, Suhara's marriage only after she has finished her education and has no intention of buying himself a son-in-law, come what may. He knows well that in their community girls are married at a young age, not sent to colleges for higher studies, and should observe purdah. But he is raising Suhara to be a modern girl, one who is capable of being independent and one who takes pride in being a woman. He overhears the conversation between his wife and Hyder and bluntly tells Hyder that he knows their fears the reason being his daughter. He cautions them about making a football out of her, brusquely telling Hyder that he has no intention of giving his daughter to any of their sons. He does not forget to add that if and when Salman comes asking for his daughter's hand, then probably he might give it a thought but definitely not before, since he is not one amongst the bidders.

> Haven't all of you, fixed a price for your sons? Put them up *for sale*? I too could bargain and haggle if I so wish. But I don't think I will do that, because I don't believe that your product is of good quality. Hence you needn't worry about my daughter. Sell your products wherever you get a good price. But I would like to declare one thing; if Abbas Haji's son comes to me requesting, 'give me your daughter's hand', definitely I will agree and won't wait for his parents' approval. Inform Haji about this. Both of you have started this game, let me too add my hand to it (57).

Since we live in a patriarchal society the change that we need to see should be thought of and practiced by men. Sarah has admirably given a pretty picture of how things can change in favor of women, if the men in their families think about them positively, as worthwhile members and not as a burden. That when daughters are treated at par with sons, definitely the lives of women will change for the better, signaling a new genesis.

With the above mentioned stories, the portrayal of the male characters complicate patriarchy, which like feminism is not a monolith, but comes in different forms, varying across cultures. Even in the fiction that is discussed in the earlier section, we could find liberal patriarchs. For example, in *Chandragiri Teeradalli*, it is Nadira's husband, who is supportive of her. He hates the custom of a day's marriage and questions why is it that lawfully wedded couple should not get together if they wish it so. He feels that for the mistake that men commit women have to pay a heavy price. Because in his case it was Nadira's father, out of spite, who insists that his son-in-law divorce her lying that she had asked for it; and he the fool that he is without speaking to her directly believes all that he is told. And now that both of them have realized their folly, it is the guileless Nadira who has to undergo the sordid custom of a day's marriage!

In *Vajragalu* it is Shafiulla who wants to marry the mother of a child , Nafisa, and when he isn't allowed to do so, he quotes that the Prophet himself had married a divorced woman, Khateejabi, having three children, and why is it that they, who are his followers, have a different rule? Nafisa's second husband too is a kind hearted person, who treats her with respect.

In *Sahana*, Nasima's uncle, though is a good for nothing person, is kindhearted and feels sorry for his niece. He lends a helping hand to his sister, Sakina, when she is in dire need of moral help. He is the one who helps her find a suitable groom for his niece, and one cannot blame him if things went wrong on the marriage front.

Saifuddin of *Tala Odeda Doniyalli*, an educated man, supports his wife Ayesha in all aspects, treats her equal to him and respecting and heeding her advice. He is a man aware of the fact that love reigns where respect is a matter of give and take. Thanks to his attitude Ayesha is free to choose what she wants and pursue her interests.

Samira's husband Shabir, in "Chappaligalu", comes across as a committed person, who is modern in his outlooks. This is proved beyond doubt by his taking his wife and mother to an outing in the city, a movie, restaurant, etc. He does not like the way his father-in-law speaks about women, calling them slippers. But he manages to mask his anger and behaves civilly. He even takes his wife for a counselling session with a psychiatrist, despite stiff opposition from all the family members. He is enlightened enough to foresee the repercussions of a diseased psyche, if left untreated. He does not care for the society or its verdict, but is humane enough to think of curing his wife's mental illness, which portrays him in a favorable light.

In "Dharma Bale Beesidaga", Khadija's husband supports her to the extent of going against the rules of the Jamaat, not caring even when they are threatened to be excommunicated, all for the reason that Khadija had refused to marry her daughter to the aged influential Jamaat leader. The protagonist of "Khedda", Shailini, goes through a harrowing phase; but she is able to surface because she had the strong support of her father, brother and then a good person as her husband, who respects her.

Our social structures too aid this conditioning of both the sexes, and thus gender roles become deeply entrenched in culture and are culture specific. Millet opines that

> Because of our social structures, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different and this is crucial. Implicit in all the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression…What does seem decisive in assuring the maintenance of the temperamental differences between the sexes is the conditioning of early childhood. Conditioning runs in a circle of self-perpetuation and self-fulfilling prophecy (Millet 2000: 31).

Sarah has created men who are supportive and empathetic of their women folk. She is optimistic in her views and she believes that creating awareness helps society at large and it is her steadfast belief that the onus is much on writers to create awareness through their writings for a better future. It is the portrayal of all these male characters of Sarah, men who are pro-women that gives us a more complex picture of patriarchy, which is definitely different from what one understands of patriarchy from the discourses of western feminists. It also comes across clearly that the experiences of

third world women cannot be conflated as a single entity. What we need today, is a vocabulary which can be applied to explain the experiences of the third world women.

4.4. ARE SARAH'S PORTRAYAL STEREOTYPICAL?

The Oxford dictionary explains stereotypical as a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing. Sarah has portrayed the real issues, faced by real women of her community, which is corroborated in the empirical study by the respondents, who agreed that indeed they could identify with her representation in their neighbourhood (research data). Sarah herself has stated that prior to her portrayal of the Muslim community in her fiction, Muslims never appeared as protagonists in any Kannada novels or short stories, but only in such stereotypical roles as either the coach man or a prostitute, or a fisherwomen[95] (Aboobackar 2001). It is through her writings the veil was lifted off the community which till then was almost invisible in Kannada literary representation.

At first glance, though some of her fiction reminds one of melodrama, Sarah vouches for its authenticity, stating emphatically that 'truth is always stranger than fiction' and this is what she had seen in the course of her life. She is sincere when she admits that her community did not receive her writings gracefully. On the contrary they besmirched her name in more ways than one, which has been explained in the second and third chapters. But time and again, Sarah has emphasised that what she has portrayed in her story is 'real', to the extent of being suspicious of her intentions. However, at this point, it needs to be reminded that she is the first Muslim writer – that too a woman – in the whole Kannada literary tradition and that she carries the burden of establishing the new versions of reality on part of the whole community, at a stage when a good half size of that very same community – the patriarchy of the shari'a – disowned her literature as not 'real'.[96]It is true that the term 'real' itself is problematic, raising a series of questions in its wake, like whose reality, why consider it real, what is the authentication etc. However, it is certainly true that a reality, which

[95] Explained in chapter 2.

[96]In chapter 2, we have seen that Tirumalamba's characters were criticised by Masti. Though Masti was steeped in realism, the characters of Tirumalamba did not seem to be 'real' to him. However, for Tirumalamba, they were very much 'real'.

was outside the Kannadiga literary experience, became ‘real’ with the writing of Sarah. Tharu and Lalitha claim that today feminist critics choose to read women’s writing as a transparent expression of women’s authentic experience, to the stereotypes of mainstream, often spoken as “male” literature, which is regarded simply as distorting the reality of women (1991: 32).

Evoking Fish’s (2000) interpretative strategy, if one attempts to analyse any fiction, the readings are always open ended because, meaning is essentially plural, and according to the theory of textual analysis it is a well-known fact that there can be no single reading. No doubt Sarah has given the Kannada literary world a new dimension, portraying hitherto unexpressed sensibilities – call it Muslim sensibilities – which was virtually missing from its impressive archives.

4.5: CONCLUSION

Jain (2003) reasons that patriarchal values control not only the thoughts about women but also mold the thoughts of women, as in power relationships, values are defined on the basis of power. She states that women in patriarchy work in a shadow area (188). Sarah echoing these sentiments states that when women write, the upper part of the pen is in the hands of men, referring to the control patriarchy has over what women write (Aboobackar 2010).

A curious factor comes to the fore in the course of analyzing her fiction. During her early days of writing career she portrayed the incidents as she had witnessed around her, true to life, not changing anything in the course of the story, remaining faithful to the original occurrences. The reason could be what she herself had said numerous times: to expose the ugly underbelly of life as she had seen it. To portray the rot the way it was, not mincing words. Because her sole intention was to create awareness among people, the general public, about these things, which none observe, or care to observe. Sarah evoking Krivenko (2009) states that she wanted to put across the facts about women who live in communities with practices and traditions that are discriminatory and prejudicial to them. Thoughsuch women are often regarded in the feminist literature as victims, who are influenced, unable to decide, oppressed and in need of guidance and help from the outside, Sarah argues that theyhad no choice but

to condone such practices and traditions. In this chapter we have already gone through the classification of her protagonists, which helps to draw a better picture of the victimisation of women on various grounds. The category of the 'flightless' and 'fledglings' are case in point.

But in her later fiction, one cannot miss to see her resolution as a writer. She started crafting stories which ended positively for the protagonists, creating new, tangible role models, who were identifiable, and lived in the world around us. The tragic stories that she saw around her, would be the themes; but she would craft a happy ending to instill an optimism in the reader. Sarah gives us the images of 'new womanhood', which she felt would help change the scenario. In this chapter, while going through the classification of characters, we have discussed the category of the women 'flying high', which can be considered as a set of examples of the images of 'new womanhood', wherein she has claimed to create new role models. This change in the strategy of her writing is marked in her collection *GaganaSakhi* (Aboobackar 2007) and many other writings thenceforth.

Sarah's conviction is that although literature cannot bring about significant social change, it can illuminate aspects of our collective existence often left untouched by political and economic practices. According to Sarah, the lack of economic equality is both a cause and an indication of other gender gaps. It translates into, less political voice, less social and cultural freedom, less agency in general. To address this inconsistency, should be our principal concern.

"There was absolutely no need for me to go in search of themes for a story because I had grown up listening to and seeing hundreds of tales, filled with woes and sufferings that the women folk of our community had to endure"…Sarah Aboobackar

5.1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter deals with the quantitative aspect of this research. As we have seen in the first chapter, there is hardly much use of quantitative methods in the literary studies. Researchers are more bent upon choosing textual analysis of literature rather than statistical analysis of the readership survey, interview data or data on literary output, etc. In literary studies, we contemplate more on the ways of thinking about knowledge than the tools to acquire knowledge. Over a period of time, the researcher's psyche in literature is more sunk into believing that questionnaires, data analysis, graphic illustrations, etc, are probably the domain of social sciences rather than literature. Surprisingly, when we talk much about interdisciplinary studies in the contemporary scenario, this has remained a reality in larger part of the world.[97]The present study believes that by the interdisciplinarity, literary study has only to gain further and not to lose anything. Therefore, the present study has taken up the quantitative method. It is also true that Sarah Aboobackar has spent much of her life in Mangaluru. The realities and ethos of Mangaluru and the surrounding area has been the setting of much of her fiction. Therefore, the youth of Mangaluru (and the nearby Udupi), embedded in the socio-cultural ethos as that of Sarah, it was thought, could be the respondents to a questionnaire containing questions regarding Sarah, and the issues she raises. The Karnataka PU Board making one of her stories as part of the text for the Pre-University students of Kannada language has acquainted a good number of Pre-University students with Sarah's name.

In the fourth chapter we have analysed Sarah's fiction, and have come across the various shades of exploitation of women. An effort has been made in this chapter to identify the literary readership of Sarah and to juxtapose the opinions of Sarah vis-à-vis her readership with reference to issues of women and ethnic minority. We do this

[97]The area of Digital Humanities is slowly catching up in some Universities of the developed world. Though it has opened up new ways of thinking about literature and has a great potential for exploration, much of the literary world is yet to encounter the phrase in any meaningful way.

with the help of data collected, and reader response, both through interviews and questionnaires. We also do the analysis and interpretation of data collected from students in the age group of 16-25years[98] regarding the portrayal and representation of the society in Sarah's fiction. The data was collected through structured questionnaire, interviews and ethnographic method.

The pilot study was conducted with the help of a questionnaire. The sample[99] size was 90. The respondents were in the age group of less than 18 years, students of II Pre-University Course (PUC), at Alva's college, Moodabidri of D.K. District, in Karnataka State. The main study was conducted with the help of a questionnaire. The sample size for data collection was 500. The sample group was students of degree courses at the Undergraduate (UG) level, between the age group of 18-25. The pilot study rather gave a uniform response. This was because most of the students were in the age bracket of 16 to 18 years.

Compared to the PUC students, the UG students displayed a more consolidated political stand (as evinced in focus group meetings) regarding the day-to-day incidents around them.[100] Therefore, it was thought fit to have them as respondents for the survey. Evening college students were also included in the sample. Hypotheses were formed for the pilot study. The main study was more of exploratory nature. The questionnaire used in the pilot test was modified for the main study, to suit the nature of the exploratory research, and hence, had four sections, namely:

i. Demographic
ii. A-Psychographic
iii. B-Sociographic and
iv. C-Reader response.

[98]For the pilot study, the pre-university students were in the age group of 16 to 18 years and for the main study, it was in the age group of 18 to 25 years.

[99] In statistics, there is a distinction between the concepts, population and sample. The population consists of the set of all measurements in which the investigator is interested and is also called the universe. A sample is a subset of measurements selected from the population (Aczel et al: 4).

[100]It is not that the political stand of the students would be immediately discernible with a question, though sometimes it may. To certain questions, they might show an equivocal political response. However, on a general scale of comparison, it was possible to note that their political awareness was more detectable than that of the PUC students. This is important and welcome since gender and community related questions – the ones on the questionnaire – are after all, political questions.

The respondents were asked questions regarding themselves in the first (demographic) section. In sections A, B, and C they were asked to respond to the given questions on a scale of 1-5 and Likert scale[101]was used to get a range of responses.

Before we go forward, let us clarify the need to form hypothesis and the meaning of it in social sciences: Hypothesis is usually considered as the principal instrument in research, suggesting new experiments and observations. Usually, from a layman's point of view hypothesis means an assumption or some supposition that a researcher proves or disproves. But for a researcher hypothesis is the crux of the research problem and the research question itself that he intends to address. And in research hypothesis is a statement which is tested by scientific methods. The hypothesis is tested to see its relation with an independent variable to some dependent variable.[102]

Null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis: In the context of statistical analysis, we have what is termed as null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis. Suppose we want to compare method A with method B, with the assumption that both methods are equally good, then the assumption is known as null hypothesis, which is generally symbolized as H0. But if we think of either method A or B as superior or inferior to each other in comparison then this assumption is known as alternative hypothesis, which is generally symbolized as Ha. The null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis are chosen before the sample is drawn. Alternative hypothesis is usually the one which one wishes to prove, having all other possibilities. And a null hypothesis is the one which we try to reject.

The level of significance: Through level of significance, we could do the hypothesis testing. Usually 5%of significance is seen as accepted; but this should be chosen with care, thought and reason. Several tests of hypotheses exist. These tests can be classified as: parametric and non-parametric. Important parametric tests or Standard tests of hypotheses are, z-test, t-test, χ^2-test and F-test. Among Non-parametric tests or

[101]Likert scale is a variation of the summated rating scale. This scale asks a rater to agree or disagree with statements that express either favourable or unfavourable attitudes toward the subject. The strength of attitude is reflected in the assigned score, and individual scores may be totalled for an overall attitude measure (ibid: 718).

[102]Variable is a frequently occurring term in quantitative method and suggests a concept of varying values.

Distribution-free tests of hypotheses, we have Sign tests, Fisher-Irwin test, McNemer test, Wilcoxon Matched-pairs test, Rank sum tests, the Krushkal-Wallis test or H test, and chi-square test (Kothari 2004).

5.2. PILOT STATISTICAL STUDY: ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The pilot study was done with a simple questionnaire for II Pre University Course (P.U.C) students at Alva's college, Moodabidri of Dakshina Kannada district, Karnataka, and the result is as follows:

5.2.1. Chi-Square Tests: Analysis of Reader Response to Sarah's Fiction

Chi-square test is an important test amongst the several tests of significance developed by statisticians, symbolically written as χ^2. As a non-parametric test, chi-square can be used (i) as a test of goodness of fit χ^2 test enables us to see how well does the assumed theoretical distribution fit to the observed data, and (ii) as a test of independence χ^2 test enables us to explain whether or not two attributes are associated (ibid). In this study χ^2test is used as a test of independence, χ^2 test enables us to explain whether or not two attributes are associated.

5.2.1.1. Association between Sexes and their response to Sarah's fiction: that her portrayal gives a 'true picture' of the society.

Question number 1 to 12 included some demographic questions and a certain closed ended questions regarding Sarah.[103] The question No.13 holds more significance in the questionnaire of the pilot study, 'Do her stories give a true picture of the society?' The phrase 'true picture' could be constructed as problematic since what is 'true' is highly subjective across factors such as gender, race, class, caste, nationality and so on. However, it is important to deploy the already accepted traditional notions about literature to make the questions more comprehensible for eighteen year olds. The question was important to know their assessment as to if Sarah's was 'true picture' because the response would tell us how many of them would merit Sarah's literature as 'authentic and authoritative', which would further motivate them to read Sarah. If the respondents did not agree that it was a 'true picture', it would tell us that those

[103]Refer to Appendix 1, for questionnaire of the Pilot Study.

respondents, in the first instance considered Sarah's literature as artificial or even false (may be in varying degrees).

It was decided to determine the relation between the demographic element 'sex' of the respondent and the above question, since the association of demographic variable with the question was potentially significant. To determine the association between sexes and their response to Sarah's fiction, regarding her portrayal the following hypotheses were framed.

H_0: There is no significant association between the sexes and their response to Sarah's fiction regarding her portrayal, wherein she gives a 'true picture' of her society.
H_a: There is significant association between the sexes and their response to Sarah's fiction regarding her portrayal, wherein she gives a 'true picture' of her society.

Table 1: Chi-square Test for the association between Sex and response to the item 'True picture'

Sex	True picture		Total	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value	Fisher's Exact p
	No	Yes					
Male	0	13	13				
Female	1	76	77	0	1	1	0.856
Total	1	89	90				

Source: Research Data

Fisher's Exact Test[104]shows that there is no significant association between sex and their opinion regarding Sarah's representation in her fiction (p=0.856)[105]. Hence we accept the null hypothesis as true. Which means that there is no difference of opinion and both the sexes agree that her portrayal is 'true to life', that her stories do give a 'true picture' of her society. This authenticates her portrayal, vesting her with

[104] Fisher's exact test: When one sample is cross-classified on two dichotomous characteristics an exact test developed by Fisher should be used. This is also used when one or more cells of a contingency table contains a zero (0). Here we compute the probability of type I error.
[105]*p* value: probability of observing a sample value as extremes as, or more extreme than, the value actually observed, given the null hypothesis is true(Cooper et al :721). Since it is more than 0.05, as we saw earlier, it is considered 'not significant'.

authority to her claim that her stories are based on true incidents, which she had witnessed[106].

5.2.1.2. Association between sexes and their 'Agreeing with Sarah's opinion'

To determine the association between sexes and their response to agreeing with Sarah (the 14th question in the questionnaire), the following hypotheses were framed.

H_0 : There is no significant association between the sexes and their response to agreeing with Sarah's opinions

H_a : There is significant association between the sexes and their response to agreeing with Sarah's opinions

Table 2: Chi-square Test for the association between Sex and their 'Agreeing with Sarah'

Sex	Agree with Sarah		Total	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value	Fisher's Exact p
	No	Yes					
Male	2	11	13				
Female	0	77	77	6.069	1	0.014	0.019
Total	2	88	90				

Source: Research Data

Fisher's Exact Test shows that there is significant association between sex and their response to agreeing with Sarah's opinions (p=0.019). Hence we reject the null hypothesis. This means that there is a difference of opinion regarding agreeing with Sarah's opinions. In other words, the males and the females differ in their agreement regarding Sarah's opinions.

[106] We have discussed these incidents at length in the third and fourth chapters.

5.2.1.3. Association between sexes and their response to Sarah's opinion in the matter of 'education for girls/women'

To determine the association between sexes and their response to Sarah's opinion in the matter of education for girls, the following hypotheses were framed.

H_0 : There is no significant association between the sexes and their response to Sarah's opinion that education helps girls.

H_a : There is significant association between the sexes and their response to Sarah's opinion that education helps girls.

Table 3: Chi-square Test for the association between Sex and response to Sarah's opinion in the matter of 'educating girls'

Sex	Education helps Girls/ Women		Total	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value	Fisher's Exact p
	No	Yes					
Male	2	11	13				
Female	1	76	77	3.175	1	0.075	0.054
Total	3	87	90				

Source: Research Data

Fisher's Exact Test shows that there is no significant association between sex and their response to Sarah's opinions in the matter of education of girls (p=0.054). Hence we accept the null hypothesis as true. Which means that there is no difference of opinion and both the sexes agree with Sarah that education is important and is of great help to girls/ women.

5.3. CONCLUSION OF THE PILOT STATISTICAL STUDY:

The pilot study was done with 90 P.U.C students in the age group of below 20 years, out of which 14.4 percent were male and 85.6 percent were female. Majority (96.7 percent) of the respondents agreed that education helps girls/women in their lives and

had heard about Sarah, whereas 94.4 percent had read her. Most of them (98.9 percent) agreed that her portrayal is true to life and 97.8 percent of the respondents agreed with her sentiments. Fisher's Exact Test (2) shows that there is significant association between sex and their response to agreeing with Sarah's opinions (p=0.019). Since there is an association between the sexes and their response to Sarah's opinions, there is a difference of opinion regarding agreeing with Sarah's opinions. But there is no association between sex and the other two variables – 'Sarah's literature as true picture' and 'the importance of educating girls'– which means there is no difference of opinion. The respondents agreed that Sara portrays reality as seen around us, and that education helps girls/ women, hence girls should be educated. The majority of Sarah's works portray the lives of the women of her Beary community. The sample group had almost uniform opinion regarding issues raised in the questionnaire, save for one question. We are aware that this is not correct when we look at the larger society and that the people from Sarah's own community would have different opinions about her literature. Therefore, for further study we decided to take Students as the study group, whose political stance, as observed before, is much more consolidated because of the age and therefore, also more varied.

5.4. MAIN STATISTICAL STUDY: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The sample size was 500. The data was collected from 5 colleges - one day-college, a professional college and an evening college from D.K District and 2 day colleges from Udupi District. The sample group was UG students of different courses. The colleges were

i) Canara College (C.C)-Mangaluru
ii) Besant Evening College (B.E.C)-Mangaluru
iii) Srinivas Institute of Technology (S.I.T)-Mangaluru
iv) Mahatma Gandhi Memorial (M.G.M) College-Udupi
v) Bearys College (BRY's)-Kodi, Kundapura.

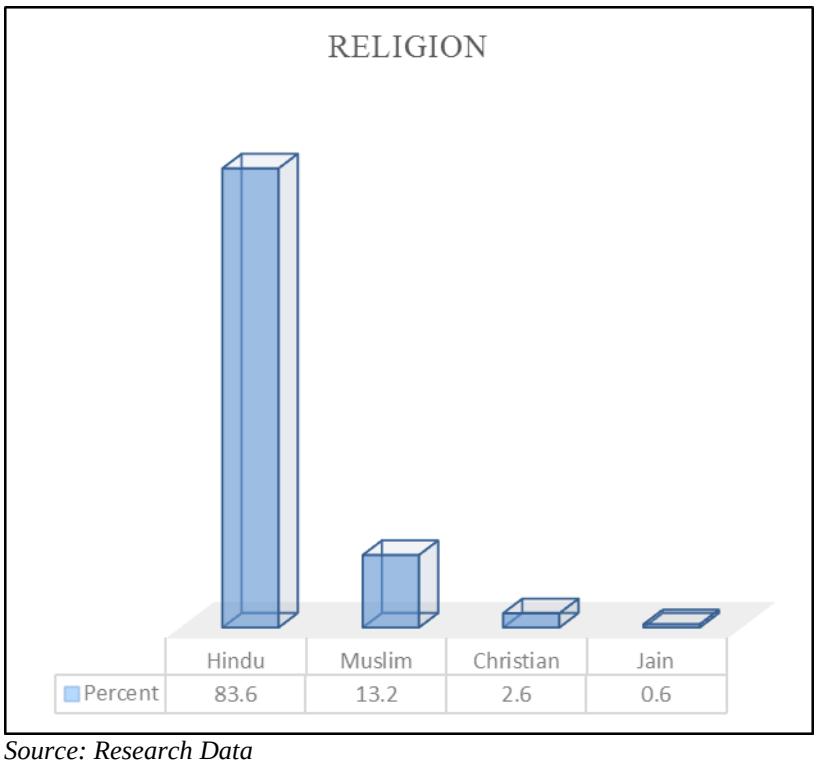
The main criterion in selecting the sample was that the respondents should have studied Kannada as their second language at the PUC level. The reason, as stated

before, was they had a lesson in their Kannada text "Niyama Niyamagala Naduve", a short story written by Sarah Aboobackar, which dealt with the issue of *talaq* and the inhuman custom of 'one day's marriage'.[107]

The data was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire, having four sections, viz- Demographic, Psychographic, Sociographic and Reader Response. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to gauge the difference in the outlook among the respondents, differences in awareness of gender factors, as well as their response (based on reader-response theory) to the position of women in society in general, and in particular, the representation of Muslim community, which forms the bulk of Sarah's writings.

5.4.1: Data Analysis: Demographic Data

1. Religion



Source: Research Data

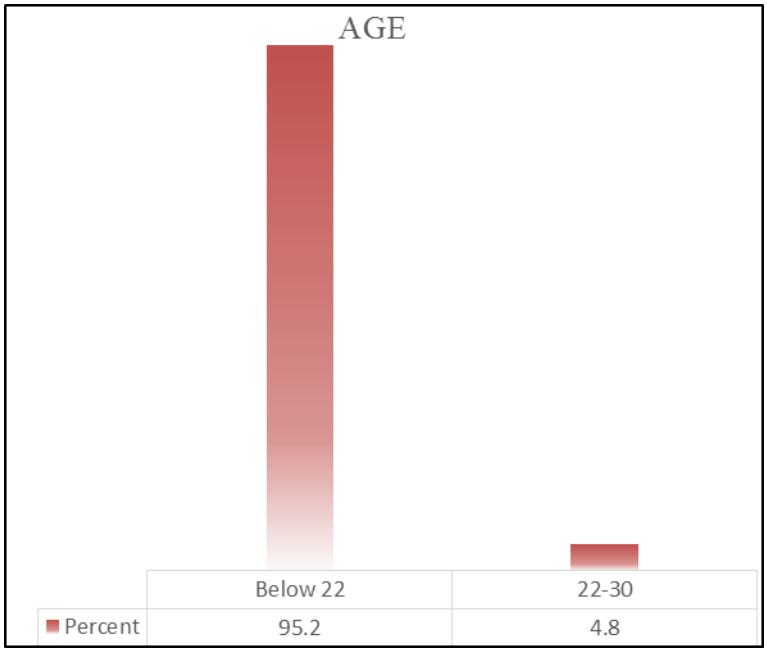
Figure 1: The percentage distribution of respondents according to Religion

The distribution of respondents according to their religion showed that 83.6 percent

[107]We have discussed the story in the fourth chapter.

were Hindus, 13.2 percent were Muslims, 2.6 percent were Christians and 0.6 percent were Jains. This largely represents the percentages of population even at the national level where the majority are Hindus, followed by Muslims, and Christians. Jains are very less in number.

2. Age

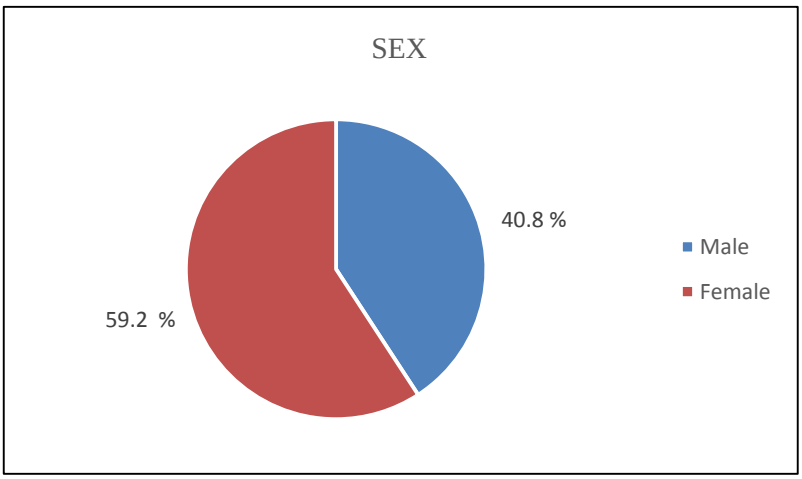


Source: Research Data

Figure 2: The percentage distribution of respondents according to Age

We can infer from fig.2, after a certain age (> 22) the number of people opting for formal education dwindles.

3. Sex

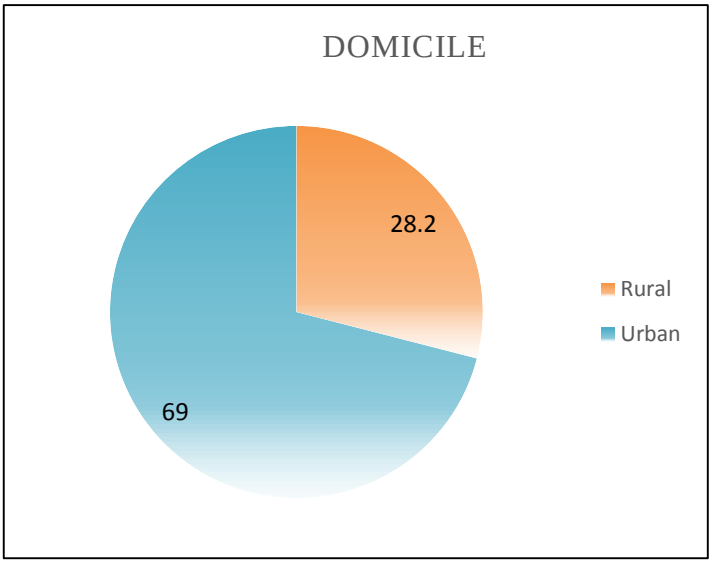


Source: Research Data

Figure 3: The percentage distribution of respondents according to sex

From the distribution of respondents according to their sex as shown in the fig.3, we come to know that females are more in number than males, which can indicate the importance given to education, irrespective of the sex of the child. More importantly, it should also be noted that the respondents were from Arts, Science and Commerce colleges, except one college, where the number of girls could be more since less number of girls take up professional courses. This could be confirmed with the data on college-wise sex ratio. One could also think about the possibility of girls taking Kannada at the PUC level much more than boys.

4. Domicile

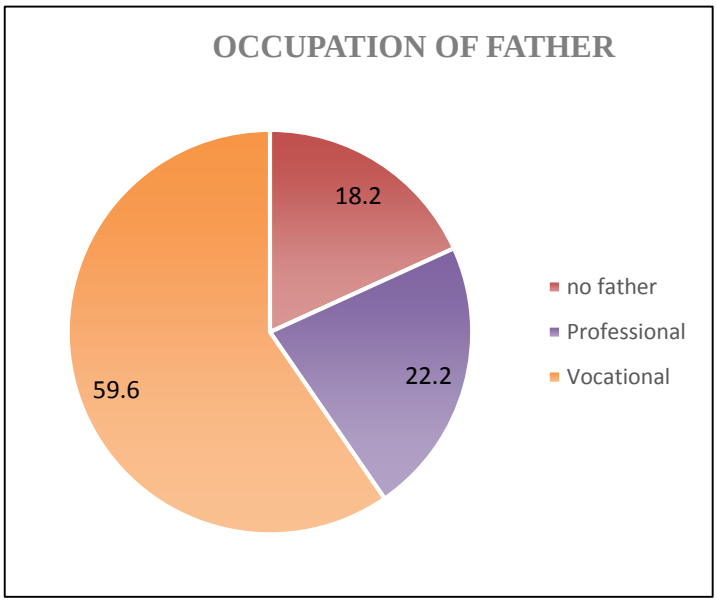


Source: Research Data

Figure 4: The percentage distribution of respondents according to domicile

Figure 4 showed that 69 percent were from the urban background and 28.2 percent were from the rural background. Since the survey was undertaken mostly in the urban limits of Mangaluru, Udupi and Kundapura, it naturally is expected to have more students from the urban limits

5. Occupation of Father

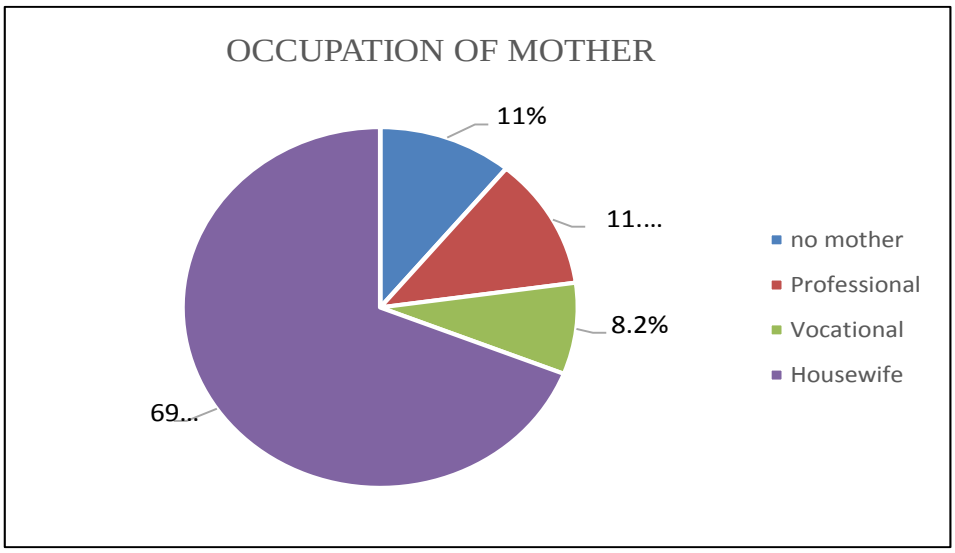


Source: Research Data

Figure 5: The percentage distribution of respondents according to their father's occupation

The distribution of respondents according to their father's occupation showed that 60 percent were from the vocational background (electricians, plumbers, tailors, etc.), only 22 percent respondents' fathers were from the professional background and 18 percent of the respondents had lost their father. The inference drawn from the above data is that people who never held a white collared job, those who came from a vocational background, wanted their children to be formally educated, which is a very high percentage of sixty; however, we need to realise that they sent their wards to Arts, Science and Commerce colleges, since they were not able to send them to a professional course like engineering.

6. Occupation of Mother

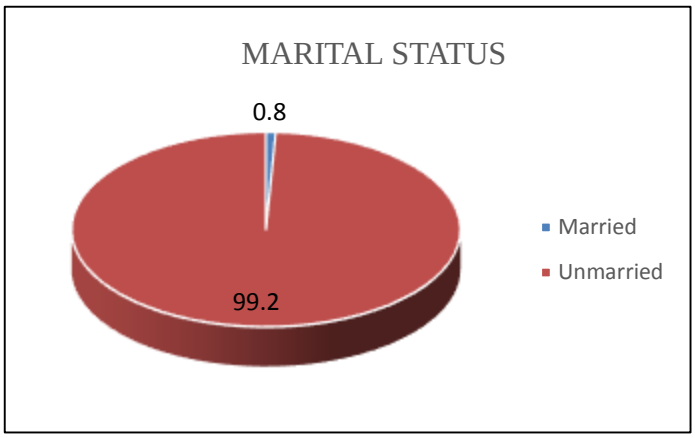


Source: Research Data

Figure 6*:* The percentage distribution of respondents according to their mother's occupation

The distribution of respondents according to their mother's occupation showed that 69 percent, the majority, were housewives, 12 percent were from the professional background and 11 percent of the respondents had lost their mother.8 percent were from the vocational background. From the above data we can conclude that majority of the women are home-makers (housewives).When compared with their fathers, mothers who were professionals, is half the numbers.

7. Marital Status

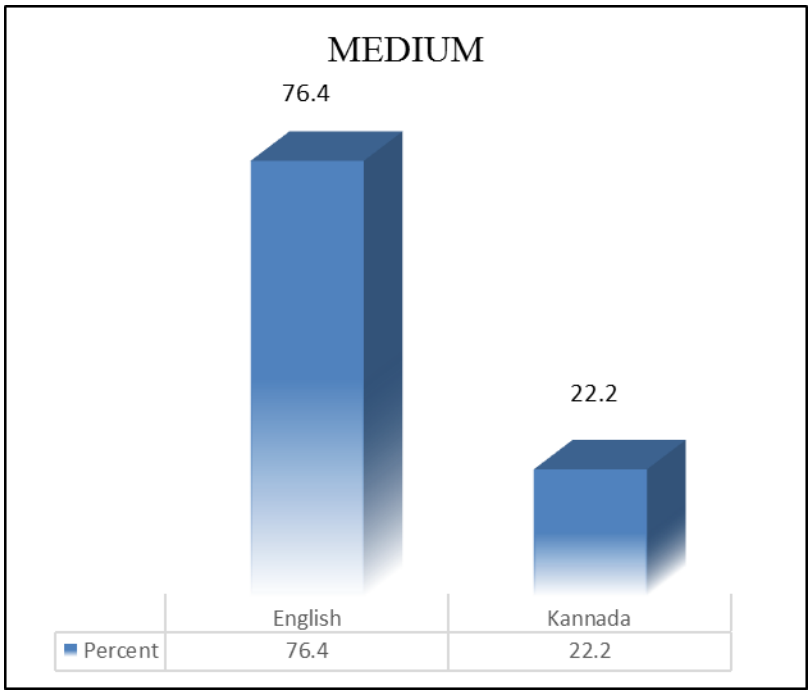


Source: Research Data

Figure7: The percentage distribution of respondents according to their marital status

The distribution of respondents according to their marital status showed that 99.2percent were unmarried and 0.8 percent were married. The respondents of day colleges were mostly unmarried, and the respondents who were married, were mostly from the evening college, who were determined to pursue their education.

8. Medium

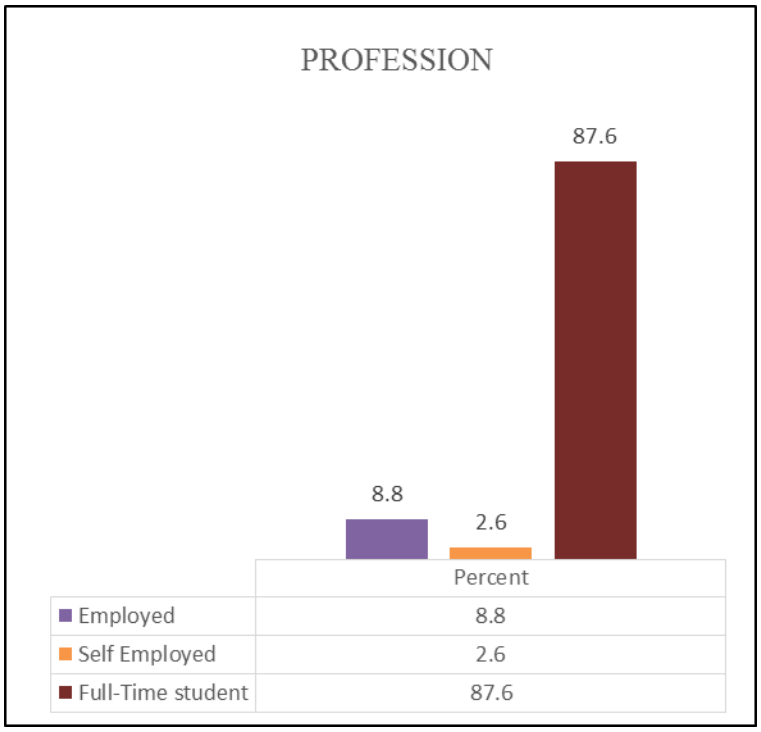


Source: Research Data

Figure 8: The percentage distribution of respondents according to their medium of instruction

The distribution of respondents according to their medium of instruction showed that 76.4 percent were from English medium of instruction and 22.2 percent were from Kannada medium. Though they had shown preference to Kannada as a second language during PUC, most of them prioritised English as medium of instruction. It proves that more are opting for English medium, given the importance of the language when it comes to making a successful career and of getting a job.

9. Profession

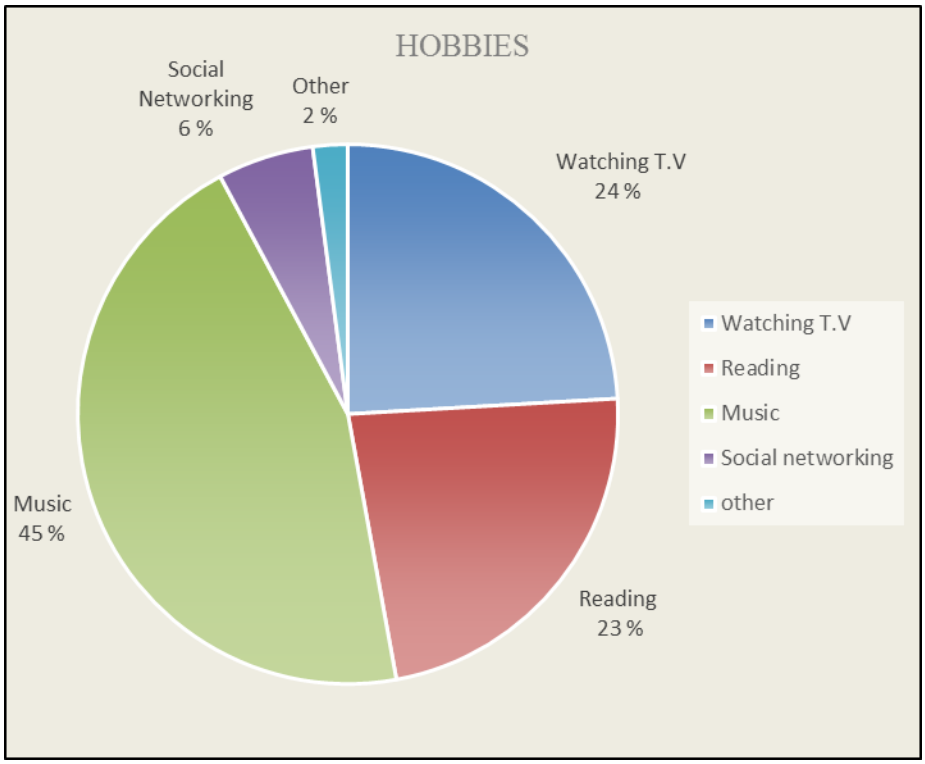


Source: Research Data

Figure 9: The percentage distribution of respondents according to their profession

The distribution of respondents according to their profession showed that 87.6 percent were full time students, 8.8 percent were employed, and 2.6 percent were self-employed. Since we do not have the culture of earn and learn, the education of the majority is financed by their parents, only a very small number (11 percent) work in their free time and continue their college education. Respondents of evening college work and attend college in the evening.

10. Hobbies

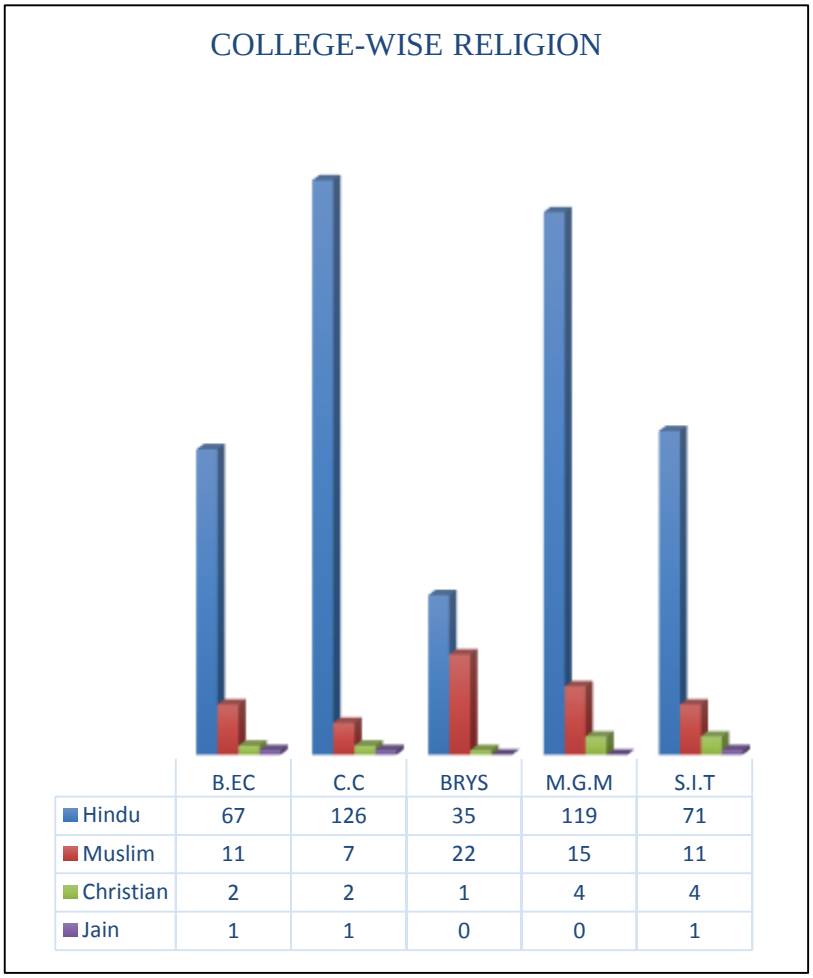


Source: Research Data

Figure 10: The percentage distribution of respondents according to their hobbies

The distribution of respondents according to their hobbies showed that 24 percent watched T.V; 23 percent had reading as their hobby; for 45 percent, music was their hobby; for 6 percent it was social networking and the remaining 2 percent had a hobby of sports, trekking, gym and a mix of all these hobbies in different permutations and combinations.

11. College-wise Religion Cross Tabulation



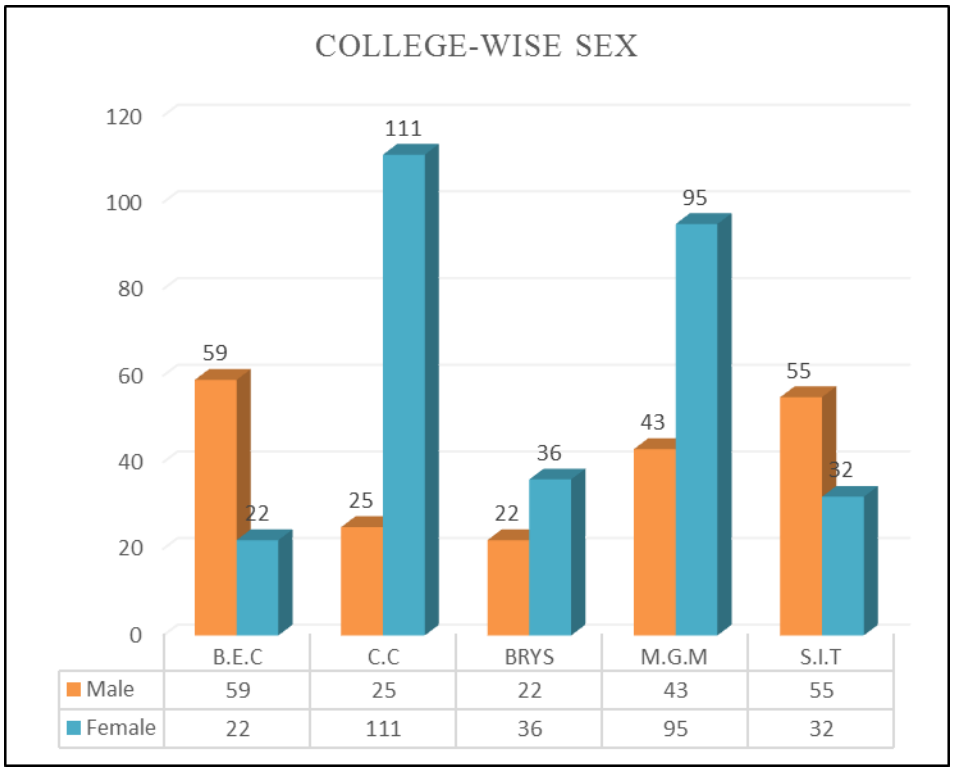
	B.EC	C.C	BRYS	M.G.M	S.I.T
Hindu	67	126	35	119	71
Muslim	11	7	22	15	11
Christian	2	2	1	4	4
Jain	1	1	0	0	1

Source: Research Data

Figure 11*:* Distribution of the respondents according to their religion

From the data shown in the above fig11, it can be inferred that in all the colleges Hindus are the majority, followed by Muslims, Christians and Jains Respectively.

12. College-wise Sex Cross Tabulation



Source: Research Data

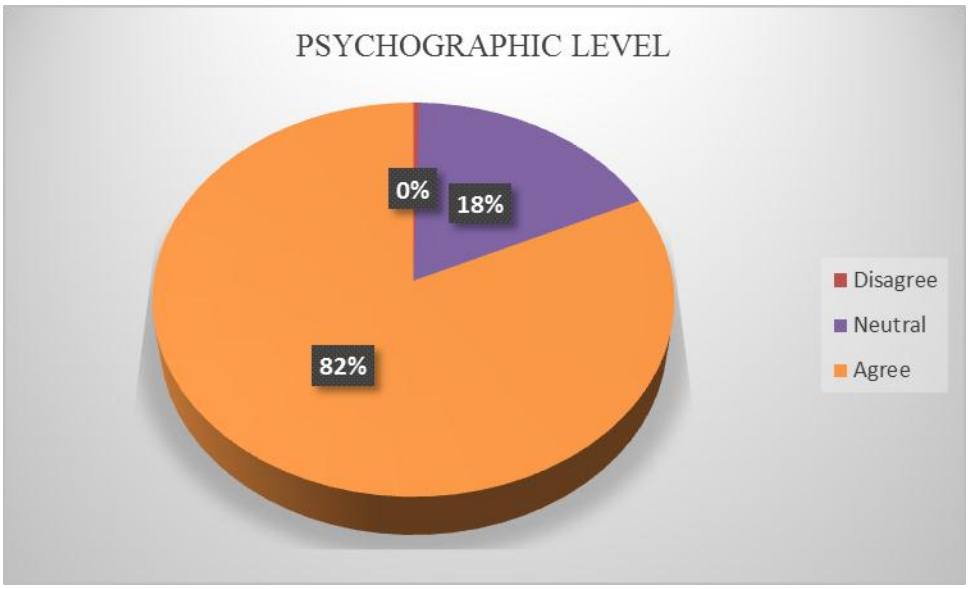
Figure 12: Distribution of the respondents according to their sex

From the data shown in the above figure 12, it can be inferred that the number of females in a professional college (S.I.T) and evening college (B.E.C) is less than males whereas in First grade day colleges (C.C, BRYs, M.G.M) offering UG courses in Science, Commerce and Arts the females are more in number.

5.4.2: Distribution of respondents according to Psychographic Level.

In psychographic area there were 22 items, corresponding to section A in the questionnaire, with scores ranging between 1 and 5. The minimum score is 22 and maximum is 110.This was arbitrarily divided into three equal categories as Disagree (22-51), Neutral (52-80), and Agree (81-110).

13. Psychographic Levels



Source: Research Data

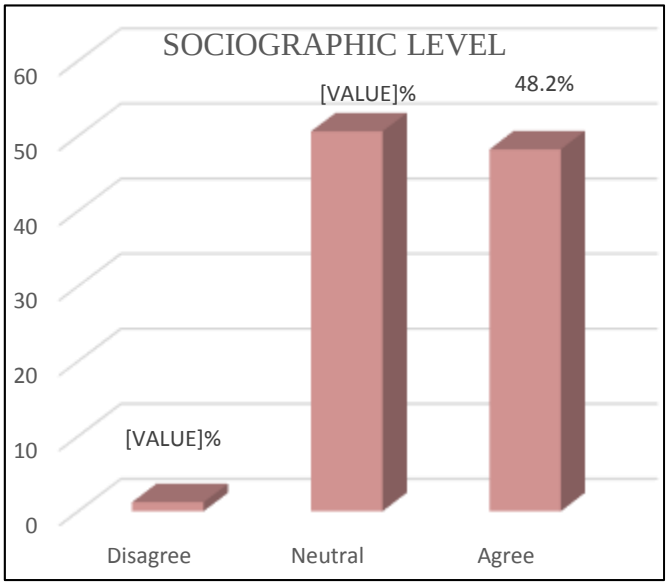
Figure 13: The percentage distribution of respondents according to psychographic Levels

Distribution of the respondents according to the psychographic levels shows that the majority of them (82 percent) agreed with the statements in the questionnaire and only a miniscule number (0.4%) did not agree. Less number of respondents had a neutral attitude (17.6 percent).

5.4.3: Distribution of respondents according to Sociographic Levels

In sociographic area there were 15 items, corresponding to section B in the questionnaire, with scores ranging between 1 and 5. The minimum score is 15 and maximum is 75.This was arbitrarily divided into three equal categories as Disagree (15-34), Neutral (35-55), and Agree (56-75).

14. Sociographic Levels



Source: Research Data

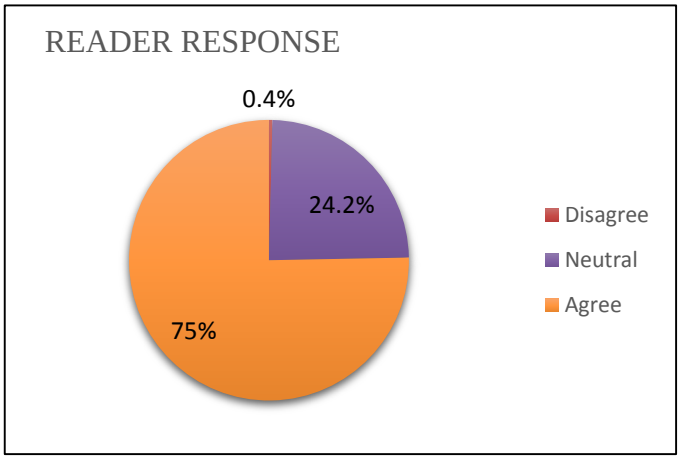
Figure 14*:* The percentage distribution of respondents according to sociographic levels

Distribution of the respondents according to the sociographic levels shows that nearly half of them (48.2 percent) agreed with the statements. Half of the respondents had neutral attitude towards the statements (50.6 percent) and a small number (1.2%) did not agree.

5.4.4: Distribution of respondents according to Reader-Response (R.R) levels.

In Reader Response area there were 16 items, corresponding to section C in the questionnaire, with scores ranging between 1 and 5. The minimum score is 16 and maximum is 80.This was arbitrarily divided into three equal categories as Disagree (16-37), Neutral (38-58), and Agree (59-80).

15. Reader Response Levels



Source: Research Data

Figure 15: Distribution of the respondents according to the reader response levels

Distribution of the respondents according to the reader response levels shows that most of them (75 percent) agreed that Sarah's fiction was true to life as well as with her views. A quarter of the respondents (24.2 percent) are neutral in their opinion and only a miniscule number (0.4%) disagree with her views and portrayal.

Table 5:Descriptive Statistics for Psychographic, Sociographic and RR scores

Statistics n=500

	Psychographic	Sociographic	Reader Response(RR)
Mean[108]	87.12	55.05	63.40
Median[109]	87.00	55.00	65.00
Std. Deviation (S.D)	8.262	7.623	9.474

Source: Research Data

The above table 4, shows that the mean psychographic score was 87.12 with Standard Deviation (S.D) 8.262. This reveals that on average the respondents had a positive attitude. The mean sociographic score was 55.05 with S.D of 7.623, which reveals

[108]Mean: the arithmetic average of a data distribution (Cooper et al: 719).

[109]Median: the midpoint of data distribution where half the cases fall above and half the cases fall below (ibid).

that the social awareness of the respondents was average. The mean of the reader response score was 63.40 with Standard Deviation 9.474. This shows that on average the respondents agreed with Sarah's opinions expressed in her literature.

5.4.5: Table No: 6. Percentage-wise Response to a Few Select Important Statements from the Main Statistical Study Questionnaire[110]

Q.No As in the Questionnaire of Main Statistical Study (Appendix No III)	Statement	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %
A12	I believe that education is equally important for girls	2.4	3	94
A14	Girls/women should work for their living/have a regular income	5.2	15	79.2
A19	Husband and wife have equal status	6.2	8.4	84.4
B8	Yes, I have heard of domestic violence	8.4	19.4	71.6
B14	I know that girls/women are treated badly	20.2	22.6	56
B15	Domestic violence should be eradicated	8	14.6	76.6
C 1	I love reading Sarah Aboobackar	5	25	69.6
C 3	She writes about life as we see around us	2.4	14.6	82
C 7	Yes, most of what she writes is true	3.8	19	76.4
C 9	She has courage to write about her community	6.8	21	70.6
C11	She is a great writer	3.8	16.4	79

[110] As we see in the table, three statements each from Psychographic (A) and Sociographic (B) sections and eight statements from the Reader Response (C) section have been represented here.

Table No 6 continued				
C13	We need more writers like her	2.8	12.2	84.4
C15	Yes, through literature we can create awareness	4.2	17.2	77.4
C16	Yes, social awareness can better the social conditions	3	13	82.6

Source: Research Data

In the above table, responses to individual statements from the main statistical study have been represented in percentages (%).[111] The column 'agree' represents both the 'agree' and 'strongly agree' options of the Likert scale in the questionnaire added together. Similarly, the column 'disagree' represents the option 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' added together. Without exception, we observe the majority respondents agreeing with the statements, towards being 'politically correct'. It is heartening to note that 94% of the respondents agree that 'education is equally important for girls'. Then, we could see a range of response. The lowest agreement in the table of response is with regard to the statement that the respondents 'know that girls/women are treated badly'. 56% of the respondents agreed and 20.2% disagreed on this.[112] This means that 20.2% of the respondents were not aware of women being treated badly and not that they disagreed with women being treated badly. Majority of the respondents loved reading Sarah Aboobackar (69.6%) and 84.4% of them agreed that '[w]e need more writers like Sara'. On the whole, it could be said that if on most factors, the respondents display a large amount of agreement, the factor related to gender discrimination and domestic violence tells us that general awareness on that front should be increased. We do need more writers like Sarah, apart from the policy measures of the welfare state in this regard.

[111] There were always a few questionnaires without responses to certain statements and never a single statement has received full response.

[112] The respondents had been briefed about the statements in the questionnaire and were clarified in this case that 'treating badly' could refer to subtle kind of discrimination to physical violence.

5.5. Data Analysis: Chi-Square

The respondents were divided into two categories based on their median scores. Less than median was taken as 1 and more than median was taken as 2. Then the chi-square test was applied to determine the association between psychographic levels, sociographic level and reader response with the demographic variables given in the tables below.

5.5.1: Chi-Square test for association between Psychographic levels and Demographic variables

To determine the association between psychographic levels with the demographic variables the following hypotheses were framed.

H_0 : There is no significant association between psychographic level and the demographic variables

H_a: There is significant association between psychographic level and the demographic variables

Table 7: Chi-Square test for association between Psychographic levels and demographic variables.

Demographic Variables	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value
Religion	0.179	2	0.914
Age	1.839	1	0.175
Sex (Gender)	13.201	1	0.00028
Domicile	0.687	2	0.709
Occupation of Father	4.872	2	0.087
Occupation of Mother	1.140	3	0.768
Marital Status	0.213	1	0.644
Medium	5.197	1	0.023
Table No 7 continued.			

Reading Habit	0.331	1	0.565

Source: Research Data

From the above, we can infer that there is a significant association between the psychographic level and the demographic variables such as sex (chi^2 =13.201, p=0.00028) and medium of instruction (chi2=5.197, p=0.023). That is, as the sex and medium of instruction changes, the difference in the psychographic level become significant. This means that respondents differ in their opinions and attitude, with the change in their medium of instruction or sex. There is no significant association between psychographic level and the remaining demographic variables (p>0.05).The distribution of sex and medium according to the psychographic levels is given in the tables below.

Table 8: Cross tabulation of Sex with respect to psychographic Level

(Gender) Sex		Psychographic Level		Total	Chi-sqr χ^2	d.f	p-value
		1	2				
Male	Count	124	80	204	13.201	1	0.00028
	% within sex	60.8%	39.2%	100.0%			
Female	Count	131	165	296			
	% within sex	44.3%	55.7%	100.0%			
Total	Count	255	245	500			
	% within sex	51.0%	49.0%	100.0%			

Source: Research Data

Psychographic Level: 1:≤87, 2: >87

The data presented in the above table indicates that among males 60.8 percent have a psychographic score of below median, and only 39.2 percent have a score of above median. On the other hand, 44.3 percent of female have a psychographic score of

below median and 55.7 percent have a score of above median. Hence, it can be inferred that females have a difference in their outlook when compared to males. There is a definite relationship between sex and the psyche (p-value 0.00028).

Table 9: Cross tabulation of Medium with respect to psychographic levels

Medium		Psycho		Total	Chi-sqr χ^2	d.f	p-value
		1	2				
English	Count	184	198	382	5.197	1	0.023
	% within Medium	48.2%	51.8%	100.0%			
Kannada	Count	71	47	118			
	% within Medium	60.2%	39.8%	100.0%			
Total	Count	255	245	500			
	% within Medium	51.0%	49.0%	100.0%			

Source: Research Data

The data presented in the above table indicates that among the respondents from the English medium background only 48.2 percent have a psychographic score of below median, and 51.8 percent have a score of above median. Whereas in the case of the respondents hailing from a Kannada medium background 60.2 percent have a psychographic score of below median and 39.8 percent have a score of above median. Hence, it can be inferred that the respondents from English medium are different in their outlook from their Kannada medium counterparts. There is a definite relationship between medium (of instruction) and psyche (p-value 0.023).

5.5.2:Chi-Square test for association between Sociographic levels and Demographic variable.

To determine the association between sociographic levels with the demographic variables the following hypotheses were framed.

H_0 : There is no significant association between sociographic levels with the demographic variables

H_a: There is significant association between sociographic level with the demographic variables

Table10: **Chi-Square test for association between Sociographic levels and Demographic variable.**

Demographic Variables	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value
Religion	2.378	2	0.305
Age	2.065	1	0.151
Sex (Gender)	5.891	1	0.015
Domicile	1.381	2	0.501
Occupation of Father	2.116	2	0.347
Occupation of Mother	2.380	3	0.497
Marital Status	0.330	1	0.566
Medium	4.333	1	0.037
Reading Habit	1.940	1	0.164

Source: Research Data

From the above we can infer that there is a significant association between the sociographic level and the demographic variables such as sex (chi^2 =5.891, p=0.015) and medium of instruction (chi^2=4.333, p=0.037). There is no significant association between sociographic level and the remaining demographic variables (p>0.05).The distribution of sex and medium according to the sociographic levels are given in the tables below.

Table 11 : Cross tabulation of Sex with respect to Sociographic Levels

Sex		Sociographic level		Total	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value
		1	2				
Male	Count	119	85	204	5.891	1	0.015
	% within Gender	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%			
Female	Count	140	156	296			
	% within Gender	47.3%	52.7%	100.0%			
Total	Count	259	241	500			
	% within Gender	51.8%	48.2%	100.0%			

Source: Research Data

Sociographic level: 1:≤55, 2: >55

The data presented in the above table indicates that among males 58.3 percent have a sociographic score of below median, and 41.7 percent have a score of above median. Whereas 47.3 percent of females have a sociographic score of below median and 52.7 percent have a score of above median. Hence, it can be inferred that females respond differently to sociographic factors from males. There is a definite relationship between sex and the level of social response. We can surmise that girls, in comparison to boys, are more aware of gender discrimination and domestic violence

Table 12: Cross tabulation of Medium with respect to Sociographic Levels

Medium		Sociographic		Total	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value
		1	2				
English	Count	188	194	382	4.333	1	0.037
	% within Medium	49.2%	50.8%	100.0%			
Kannada	Count	71	47	118			
	% within Medium	60.2%	39.8%	100.0%			
Total	Count	259	241	500			

Table 12: Cross tabulation of Medium with respect to Sociographic Levels

Medium		Sociographic		Total	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value
		1	2				
English	Count	188	194	382	4.333	1	0.037
	% within Medium	49.2%	50.8%	100.0%			
Kannada	Count	71	47	118			
	% within Medium	60.2%	39.8%	100.0%			
Total	Count	259	241	500			
	% within Medium	51.8%	48.2%	100.0%			

Source: Research Data

The data presented in the above table indicates that among the respondents from English medium 49.2 percent have a sociographic score of below median, and 50.8 percent have a score of above median. Whereas in the case of the respondents from Kannada medium 60.2 percent have a sociographic score of below median and 39.8 percent have a score of above median. Hence, it can be inferred that the respondents from English medium respond to sociographic factors differently from those studying in Kannada medium. There is a definite relationship between medium and the level of social response. It can be inferred from the result that students from the English medium of instruction are comparatively more aware of gender discrimination and domestic violence in society.

5.5.3:Chi-Square test for association between Reader Response (RR) levels and demographic variables.

To determine the association between RR levels with the demographic variables the following hypotheses were framed.

H_0 : There is no significant association between RR level with the demographic variables

H_a: There is significant association between level with the demographic variables

Table 13**:Chi-Square test for association between Reader Response (RR) levels and demographic variables.**

Demographic Variables	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value
Religion	0.444	2	0.801
Age	0.208	1	0.648
Sex (Gender)	21.236	1	0.000004
Domicile	3.557	2	0.169
Occupation of Father	0.588	2	0.745
Occupation of Mother	2.483	3	0.478
Marital Status	0.123	1	0.726
Medium	0.552	1	0.458
Reading Habit	0.579	1	0.447

Source: Research Data

From the above table 12, we can infer that there is a significant association between the R. R level and the demographic variable such as sex (chi^2 =21.236, p=0.000004) There is no significant association between Reader Response level and the remaining demographic variables (p>0.05). The distribution of sex according to the Reader Response levels is given in the table below.

Table 14: Cross tabulation of Sex with respect to Reader Response Level

Sex		Reader Response level		Total	Chi-square χ^2	d.f	p-value
		1	2				
Male	Count	135	69	204	21.236	1	0.000004
	% within Gender	66.2%	33.8%	100.0%			
Female	Count	134	162	296			
	% within Gender	45.3%	54.7%	100.0%			
Total	Count	269	231	500			
	% within Gender	53.8%	46.2%	100.0%			

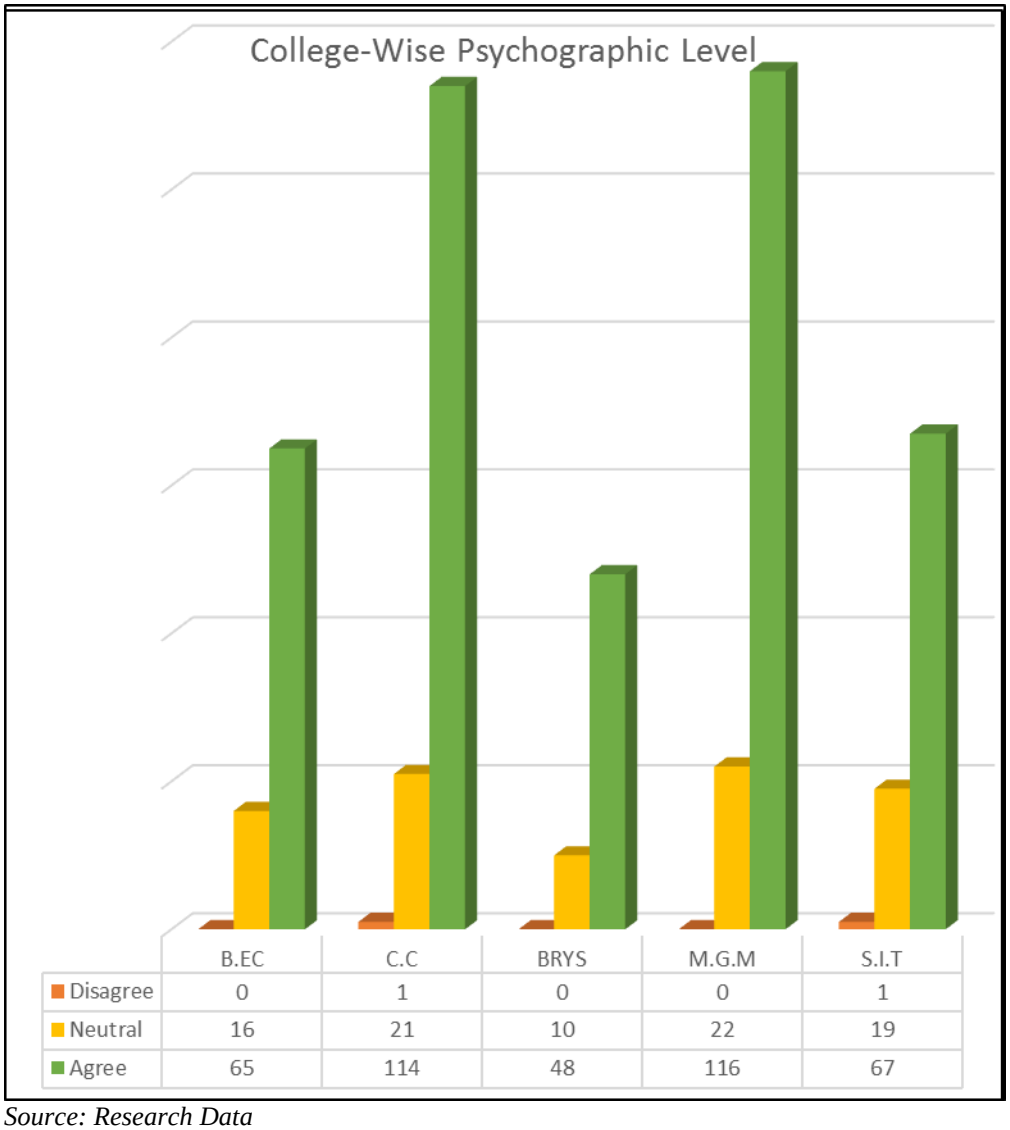
Source: Research Data

Reader Response level: 1:≤65, 2: >65

The data presented in the above table indicates that among males 66.2 percent have the R.R score of below median, and only 33.8 percent have a score of above median.

Whereas 45.3 percent of females are having the R.R score of below median and 54.7% have a score of above median. Hence it can be clearly inferred that females agree more with Sarah's views than males. They are more in agreement with the author, than the males, on the issues related to oppression of females, which Sarah portrays in her fiction. There is a definite relationship between sex and Reader Response (p-value 0.000004).

16. College-wise Psychographic Analysis



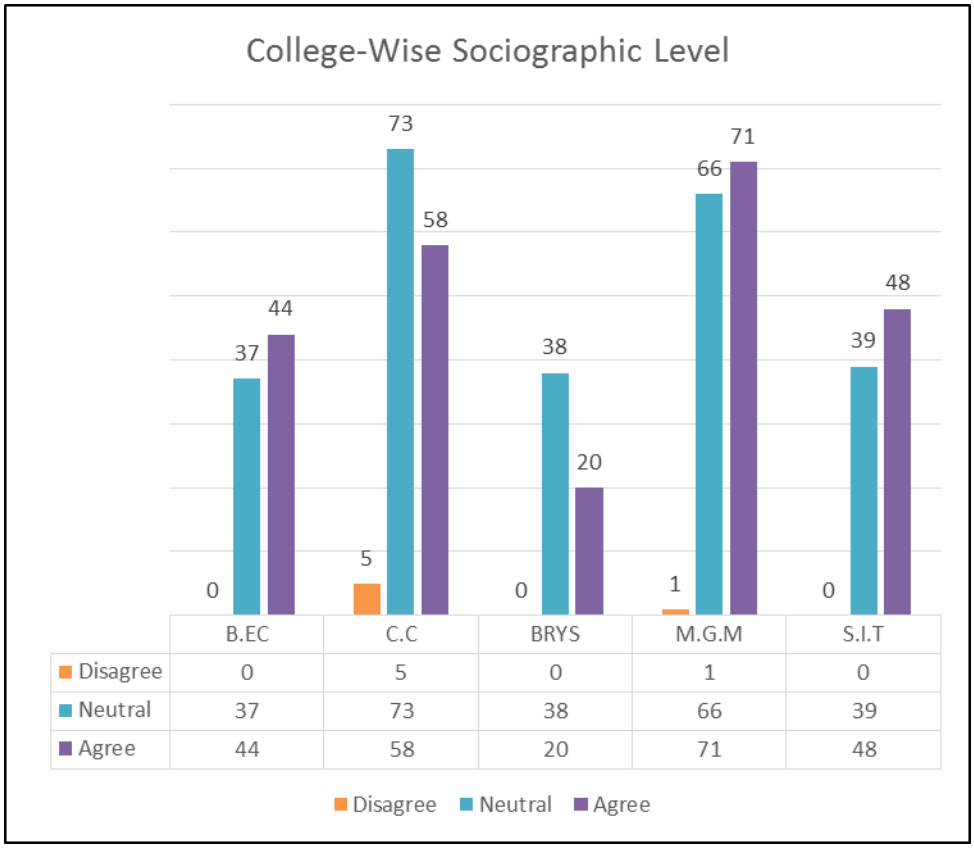
	B.EC	C.C	BRYS	M.G.M	S.I.T
Disagree	0	1	0	0	1
Neutral	16	21	10	22	19
Agree	65	114	48	116	67

Source: Research Data

Figure 16: Distribution of the respondents according to their Psychographic Analysis

From the data shown in the above figure 16, it can be inferred that according to their psychographic analysis, the respondents who disagree are negligible, few have a neutral mentality and the majority agree with the psychographic factors.

17. College-wise Sociographic Analysis

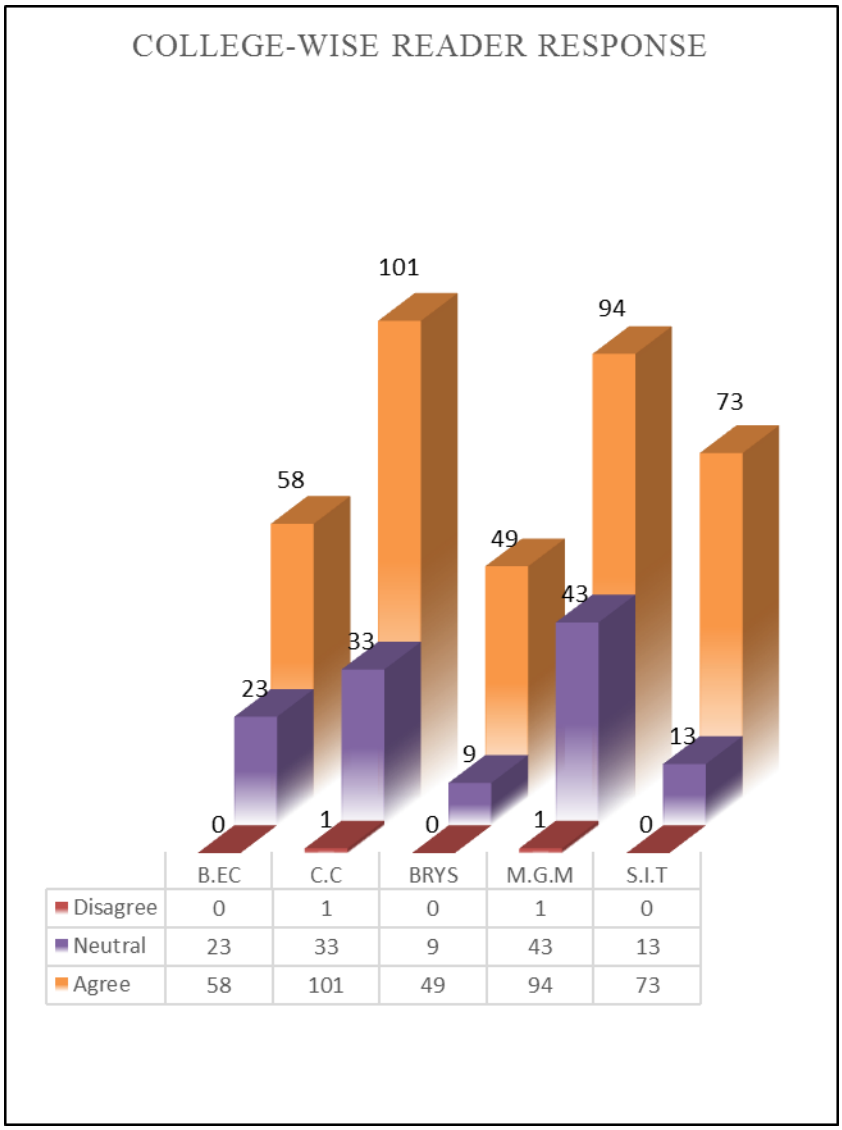


Source: Research Data

Figure 17: Distribution of the respondents according to their Sociographic Analysis

From the data shown in figure 17, it can be inferred that according to their sociographic analysis the respondents who disagree with the sociographic factors are negligible. More number of respondents are in the average bracket compared to the ones who completely agree with the social factors.

18. College-wise Reader-Response Analysis



	B.EC	C.C	BRYS	M.G.M	S.I.T
Disagree	0	1	0	1	0
Neutral	23	33	9	43	13
Agree	58	101	49	94	73

Source: Research Data

Figure 18*:* Distribution of the respondents according to their Reader-Response Analysis

From the data shown in figure 18, it can be inferred that according to their Reader Response analysis, the respondents who disagree with the views of Sarah and her fictional representations/portrayal are negligible. Few respondents are neutral in their opinions whereas the majority of respondents agree with Sarah's views as well as with her portrayal, which they agree mirror the social realities as seen around us.

5.6. KRUSKAL-WALLIS TEST

Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine if there was any difference in the Psychographic, Sociographic and Reader Response (R.R) scores among colleges. To determine the difference in the psychographic, sociographic and Reader Response (R.R) scores among colleges the following hypotheses were framed.

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the psychographic, sociographic and Reader Response (R.R) scores among colleges.

H_a: There is significant difference in the psychographic, sociographic and Reader Response (R.R) scores among colleges.

College wise comparison in the scores was made and the result is given in the table below.

Table 15: Test Statistics

	Psychographic	Sociographic	Reader Response
Chi-Square	5.630	12.201	7.087
df	4	4	4
p-value	0.229	0.016	0.131

Source: Research Data

The above table14, shows that there is a significant difference only in the sociographic scores of different colleges (p=0.016).

Table 16: Descriptive Statistics

College	n	Psychographic		Sociographic		Reader Response	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
B.E.C	81	87.86	8.846	55.88	8.880	63.01	9.381
C.C	136	87.17	8.161	53.22	7.949	62.71	9.382
BRY's	58	86.45	6.443	53.91	7.099	65.22	9.703
M.G.M	138	87.85	8.352	56.54	7.465	62.96	9.293
S.I.T	87	85.62	8.726	55.53	5.640	64.33	9.821
Total	500	87.12	8.262	55.05	7.623	63.40	9.474

Source: Research Data

The above table 15, shows the college-wise mean and standard deviation (S.D) of Psychographic, Sociographic and Reader Response scores.

5.7. ANOVA

Further the mean of Psychographic, Sociographic and Reader Response scores of different colleges were compared using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), the results of which are given in the table below. ANOVA is an extremely useful tool concerning researches in the field of economics, biology, education, psychology, sociology, business/ industry and in researches of several other disciplines. This technique is used when multiple sample cases are involved (Kothari 2004: 256).

ANOVA tests the null hypothesis that the means of several independent populations are equal; test statistic is the *F* ratio used when we need *K*-independent sample tests (Cooper et al: 709).To determine the difference in the mean of psychographic, sociographic and Reader Response (R.R) scores among colleges the following hypotheses were framed.

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the mean of psychographic, sociographic and Reader Response (R.R) scores among colleges.

H_a: There is significant difference in the mean of psychographic, sociographic and Reader Response (R.R) scores among colleges.

Table 17: ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F Ratio	Sig. p-value
Psychographic	Between Groups	340.024	4	85.006	1.248	0.290
	Within Groups	33721.248	495	68.124		
	Total	34061.272	499			
Sociographic	Between Groups	913.116	4	228.279	4.024	0.003
	Within Groups	28080.634	495	56.729		
	Total	28993.750	499			
Reader Response	Between Groups	372.737	4	93.184	1.039	0.387
	Within Groups	44415.461	495	89.728		
	Total	44788.198	499			

Source: Research Data

ANOVA also reveals the same result as Kruskal-Wallis test. There is a significant difference only in mean sociographic scores (F=4.024, p=0.003) of different colleges. No significant difference was found in the psychographic and reader-response scores. From this we can infer that the level of awareness varies among the respondents from different colleges, and though the majority of them are in the same age group, their comprehension of the social mores is different and not the same. The main factors from the demographic variables which did have an effect on their understanding capacity were found to be sex and the medium of instruction.

5.8. CONCLUSION OF THE MAIN STATISTICAL STUDY:

i. From the data analysis we can infer that females have a different outlook, when compared to males. The females also respond to sociographic factors differently from males. They are more aware of gender discrimination and domestic violence in society than their male counterparts. Females are clearly more in agreement with the views of Sarah and her fictional portrayal, agreeing that her depictions –regarding the pathetic conditions of women – reflect the realities of the society.

ii. There is a difference between the respondents studying in the English and Kannada medium. The respondents studying in the English medium seem to respond differently to psychographic and sociographic factors when compared to their counterparts studying in the Kannada medium. Students of English medium of instruction were more aware of gender discrimination and domestic violence than their counterparts in Kannada medium.

iii. The level of awareness varies among the respondents from different colleges. Though the majority of them are in the same age group their comprehension of the social mores is different and not the same. The demographic variables which indicate the differences in the way they respond to the world around were found to be sex and the medium of instruction.

5.9. ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

Interviewing is a research method for collecting data in qualitative studies, and interviewing the live author is an important research method for mining data. Two formal, structured interviews and one impromptu interview with Sarah Aboobackar was conducted. And for ethnographic details, six individuals, four from Beary community and two from Muslim community were interviewed, apart from an interview with a non-Muslim respondent. Also a group interview with Post Graduate Muslim students was conducted. The individuals who were interviewed are educated and are from a literate background. The respondents were less in number because many did not agree to be interviewed. The ethical issues are taken into account and the interviewees were informed that the purpose was for a research study and the data would be kept confidential and would be used only for academic purposes. The interviews in some cases were more in line with life history, and the interviewees were requested to speak about the women in their families and themselves.

5.9.1. Major Points from Interviews with the Author

5.9.1.1. The interviews conducted (two formal and one informal) with Sarah Aboobackar: When we analyse the interview data, it gives us valuable insight on different aspects of culture, gender and patriarchy. Sarah mentions the great support the male members of her family, before and after marriage, had given. The fact is that

education was the prime factor which helped the author to overcome a lot of obstacles, apart from giving her a positive, assertive attitude. Hence, Sarah says, it proves that education is a must and girls must be given education if they are to be emancipated. Feminism –in this case it is distinctly Islamic Feminism –is justified in fighting for the cause to do away with degrading cultural practices like instant divorce, bi/polygamy, one day's marriage, to name a few. Sarah admits that she was lucky to be born in a family which never had a gender bias and hence, she was treated at par with her male siblings, which is not the case in general. Another peculiarity which comes to the fore is that women practiced 'sisterhood' which is advocated by Western feminists to subvert patriarchy. Sarah opines that the two 'contributions' of mankind to the twenty-first century are "Gang rape and Honour killing" (Aboobackar, II interview data). Her plea is to treat the women/ girls with respect. She believes that writers have to portray the society around them as they see it, not worrying about the consequences. She strongly feels that literature should not be tainted with any religion. Sarah states that the onus lies with the writers to create awareness which is what the society of today is in need of. Her call to all is to become a human first, and treat both the sexes in the same manner, impartially.

When questioned about the issue of 'love Jihad' (explained in the next paragraph) Sarah rejected the allegation that these kinds of incidents occur. She did agree that Muslim boys do love and marry Hindu girls, in some instances high caste girls. But she was emphatic in denying that they were divorced later. She gave many examples from her own family, where boys had 'brought home girls' and in some instances they were converted. But she said that they were leading happy lives (Aboobackar III interview data).

When questioned about her appeasing the Hindu fundamentalists, because she spoke against the religious dictates of Islam, she laughingly answered in the affirmative and said that they were indeed happy about it. But she needed to portray the ills of her community, which is what she was doing. But then, they too were no better when it comes to fundamentalism. And that no fundamentalists should be encouraged, be it from any religion (Aboobackar III interview data).

Sarah did agree that writing was her language, in retaliating against the oppressive religious practices. When questioned about her being neglected by her community, especially the Beary Academy, she said that she is better off without them, that she did not want to come into contact with their politics. At one point she said that she would like to be identified as a 'Mapilla'[113] than a Beary (Aboobackar III interview data).Being a female writer in a patriarchal society, Sarah raises issues on gender, patriarchy, violence and exploitation of women in the name of religion, daring and challenging women to change their images.

Since gender is a social construct, it is appropriate that feminism speaks for the abolishment of gender disparity, because patriarchal system values the male sex over female. Sarah makes a plea to treat the women/girls with respect. She emphasises that we should become humans first. She thinks writers should portray the society around them just as they observe it, without any botheration or worry about the results. She strongly feels that literature should not be polluted with any religion. Sarah says that the responsibility lies with the writers to raise awareness. Sarah vehemently argues that although literature cannot bring about significant social change, it can light up aspects of our collective conscious often untouched by political and economic practices.

Sarah is emphatic in her belief that the lack of economic equality is both a cause and an indication of other gender gaps. It translates into no political say, less social and cultural freedom, in general. In spite of Sarah's work for the cause of women, especially Muslim women, who are doubly marginalised –being a woman, and a *Muslim* woman, who are made to obey the dictates of the shari'a–add to this lack of education which means economic dependence, and their situation in most cases is pathetic; Sarah is neglected by her own community, where she is seen as someone who is against Islam.

5.9.1.2. Interview with a respondent (non-Muslim) studying a UG Course: We come across the usual stigmatised and prejudiced views regarding the Muslim community

[113] An ethnic community of Malayali Muslims, who hail from northern part of Kerala, sometimes occupying the same terrain as that of Bearys'. They speak Malayalam, while the Bearys speak Beary language. Since Sarah's native is Kerala, she feels that she should rather be away from the politics of the Beary patriarchy that has cheated her and finds Mapilla community friendlier. This has been explained in the second chapter.

in some of these instances. The respondent in question was an activist of the Akhila Bharatha Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)[114]and was the only one who was willing to be interviewed and had formed a strong opinions regarding the shari'a, Islamic courts, etc., which according to him should be banned. He narrated many incidents which 'he had witnessed or read in newspapers'. According to him, one reason why society was biased against Muslim community was that they were treated deferentially by vote bank politics, which has created a public grouse. Another reason according to him was due to a peculiar issue which was gaining currency in the Dakshina Kannada district. It was popularly known as 'love jihad' wherein Muslim males married non-Muslim females by converting them to Islam. And later these girls were given *talaq* purposely. The intention, according to him, was conversion.[115]

5.9.1.3. The interview conducted with two Muslim colleagues (a male and a female): The male respondent opined that women of the previous generations, though with less education, managed better than the women of today, who irrespective of the educational qualifications, do not know how to manage things efficiently. He felt that the children should be given space, so they could learn things on their own. The female respondent agreed that though her grandmother wanted her daughters to study, she was scared about the society and worried about the future of her daughters, if sent to school. They also had adopted family planning. The interview data shows that the women in their families (mother, grand-mother, and aunts) were competent despite not having formal education and were capable of handling difficult familial issues;[116] but the women had realised the importance of education and economic independence of women. Hence the respondents as well as their siblings were educated and in some instances were working.

5.9.1.4. The interviews conducted with two male acquaintances from Beary community: The interview data shows that Sarah is admired for her candidness; but the respondents agreed that she has neither received recognition nor respect from her

[114] ABVP is a right-wing Hindu student outfit that is quite strongly present in coastal Karnataka.
[115] Sarah strongly rejected this allegation (Aboobackar, III interview data; refer to the section 5.7.1.1).
[116]This could be a strong argument against formal education in these families, creating a 'common sense' that it is not really important to go to school and learn; but rather learn in the school of life to know how to manage 'real' things.

community, which she deserves. It is ironical that the community has failed to recognise a great feminist in their midst who is fighting for the betterment of women of her community. They said that the Muslim society could have made use of her viewpoints, but has failed to do so. They agree to the fact that except for her not wearing a burkha, she observes Islam religiously. They think that Sarah can be considered as a role model in their society. That She encourages and helps people if they approach her. That she writes in an easy and understandable language, and what she writes, they agree, is about the real social problems that Muslim women suffer. They said that mostly she writes about how the religious stipulations have hampered Muslim women. In the midst of people who wanted their womenfolk to be house wives, Sarah wanted them to occupy the mainstream. She wrote about the problems their women face, and the shortcomings of the society, which people did not like. Thus she did not get any backup from their society or community. "One thing was she wrote about the community. Secondly she spoke Malayalam, not the Beary Bhasha of our community. And her writings were in the state language of Kannada. I think all these distanced her from our community" (interview data- Respondent 4). They admit that Sarah is a courageous Muslim woman, and wish that she writes more about these issues. Their conviction is that if what she suggests is implemented, definitely their society can improve and progress. They believe her writings are effectual in that manner and that can help build a better society.

5.9.1.5. An informal group discussion with the Postgraduate students (MBA), who belonged to Beary community helped in understanding their customs better. They discussed various rituals of theirs, apart from discussing the holy book of Quran, which did strengthen the views conveyed by Sarah Aboobackar.

5.9.1.6. Two Post graduate students (Muslims, Male) – one belonging to the Beary and the other from Hanafite community – were of the opinion that they have now realised the value of education. They said that their cousins (females) have even gone abroad to work and study. But the condition was that they should be accompanied by some male members of the family. They are not sent alone. Apart from this, it could be understood that the education level increased from one generation to the next. One of the respondent, who was a Beary said that he is proud to be a Muslim, and that

their culture is very good, but was unhappy about the ways it was and is being misused. He was aware that unless he gains knowledge it was impossible for him to help his community in any manner. And he said that if girls are educated, it adds to the growth of the country. The Bearys belong to the Sunni sect. The Muslims belonging to the Sunni sect speak the language of the region they live in, whereas the Muslims of the Hanafite sect speak only Urdu, irrespective of the region they live. But it is a fact that Muslims, at least a small percentage, are being aware of the need for education. Though the females are sent to schools and colleges their freedom is curtailed and they are expected to be within certain bounds. Sarah also has spoken about these views the Muslims have, which she sees as restricting, not allowing one free movement.

5.10. CONCLUSION

From this empirical study, we come to know that most of the respondents, who are UG students, agree with Sarah and would like to have more writers who can raise awareness among the common populace. On issues related to gender equality too the majority of them were politically correct in agreeing with the statements. It can also be inferred that sex and medium of instruction play a major role in the mental attitude and formation of perspectives and sensibilities. The study also shows that females are more in agreement with the sentiments and views of Sarah than males, which shows their sensitiveness to women's issues. They also showed higher acquaintance with gender discrimination and domestic violence in society than the boys. Similarly in comparison with students from Kannada medium, the ones from English medium showed a higher awareness of gender discrimination and domestic violence. All the respondents agreed that education was a very important factor, especially it is beneficial and a must for females. The majority of the respondents – both in the pilot study and the main study – agreed that Sarah's portrayal rings true and that her representations were real, and identifiable.

Keeping in view our discussion, one may safely say that yes, Sarah writes about her community – a community of Muslims, still struggling to coming to terms with modernity: boys just beginning to get professional education and girls, just starting to get collegiate education and trying to find vocabularies of equality; a community

where religion takes the shape of patriarchal law and rules over the powerless. But she also writes about that larger community of which she is a part: a community, which is making an attempt to accommodate minorities on the one hand and shun them on the other; a community where both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalisms are keeping those two communities apart; a community which also has a long history of living together, but is in a moment of crisis. In fact one of the tragedies of our times is that we are fast losing the act of reflecting on the self, in the absence of which doubts and suspicions mount on the other and leads to violence. Writers like Sarah always call for peace by teaching and urging the communities to introspect: to look within and be self-critical. And this needs courage. Literature, such as that of Sarah, provides the courage as well as space to introspect.

"It is my emphatic belief that the reality of non-Muslims appreciating and honouring me, a Muslim lady, is definitely a silver lining in the dark cloud"… Sarah Aboobackar.

6.1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter concludes this study which is an attempt to better understand Sarah Aboobackar's fiction and to make sense of what it means to be a Muslim woman writer in Kannada at this juncture in Karnataka, locating her in the long literary tradition of Kannada. Our attempt was to critically discuss the process of evolution of Sarah as a writer through her autobiographical writings. The study also aimed to identify the literary readership of Sarah in relation to issues in women's writing, as well as to take into account opinions of Sarah vis-à-vis her readership, with reference to issues of women and ethnic minority, which were empirical in nature. Three short stories and an autobiographical chapter were translated with a view to provide illustrations of her plot, the issues she discusses and the concerns she raises among the readers. This chapter makes a brief overview of the important findings after having critically discussed the author.

6.2: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The present study was interdisciplinary in nature –a hallmark of Comparative Literature – taken up with an intention to create an improved understanding of social, cultural and historical contexts of literary writings. The study also tried to grasp the lived-in realities of women of coastal Karnataka. Sarah's fiction depicts their daily lives, their aspirations, the oppression and suppressions faced by them. The understanding thus created is hoped to open up a lee way to address the situation in favour of women, trying to mitigate gender inequality.

The introductory chapter states the reason for taking up the present study and briefly outlines the research methods used in conducting this study, as well as sketches the remaining chapters of the thesis, giving a bird's eye view about each chapter briefly. The texts discussed in the course of this research are illustrative, but not exhaustive.

They are symptomatic of the social psychopathology of discrimination and cruelty against women in Indian societies.

The second chapter briefly traces the history of women writing in Kannada and tries to place Sarah in a tradition taking into consideration some of her viewpoints regarding religion, race, ethnicity, state, human rights and women. This chapter tries to create a richer understanding of social, cultural and historical contexts of literary writings by locating Sarah in a wide socio-historical framework. The chapter also tries to trace the legacy of women writers. Sarah belongs to the Navyothara (post-modernist), and the Bandaya movements, the movements which emerged as a reaction to the Navya or the modernist movement. These movements reject the dominant cultures forcefully making their identities and demand for rights felt. Navyothara writers like Sarah were sensitive to women's issues, and saw women as either rebels or dalits. Sarah is one such gifted writer who believes she can create awareness solely through her writings.

In an effort to appraise her with select Muslim women writers of postcolonial India, prominent Muslim women writers like Qurratulain Hyder, Ismat Chughtai and Banu Mushthaq are taken up for the purpose of juxtaposition, who are known to be the most outstanding voices emerging from the margins and, who have unflinchingly articulated against the social inhibitions and cultural taboos laid down by the society. The comparative study of Sarah with Hyder, Chughtai and Mushthaq speaks about the oppression meted out to women, irrespective of their age and occupation. It singularly comes out that irrespective of their social class and educational background, the women are always at the receiving end. In some instances it is the religious dictates and in some the social structures, which are responsible for subjugating women to the patriarchal dictates.

The third chapter analyses her autobiography and helps us to understand her better, as a woman in her different roles, primarily as a writer. Three in-depth interviews are used as supporting material in this endeavour. This chapter examines how the marginalized voice of Sarah questions the relevance of archaic socio-cultural practices. Unquestionably, the two strong women in Sarah’s life– her paternal

grandmother and mother – have influenced her thoughts and the importance of being assertive in one's life. And her writings are a proof of that. Sarah has portrayed the unsavoury social customs of her religion unflinchingly, without as much giving a thought to the fundamentalists, for which she has paid dearly in the form of various assaults/scandals. Sarah states that a women should have an optimistic outlook in life; believe strongly in herself and should know when to say 'no' to the oppression (or know when exactly it begins to be oppression) in her life. Sarah propagates that women should not see themselves as victims and should assertively fight for what is due to them. A distinction that comes through in her writing constantly is that between the 'pure' religions represented by the Quran and the 'interpretations' of that through the oppressive shari'a, which are to uphold patriarchy. She urges Muslim women to see through this. Though she is positive in her outlook, she warns them to strongly hold onto their identity and to recognize and regain their voices, which is lost in the hustle-bustle of patriarchal discourse. The retrieval is necessary in projecting a new image and goes a long way in securing them a meaningful life.

The fourth chapter makes an attempt to study her writings – ranging from short stories, novels, novellas – to discuss her women protagonists, trying to look at the patterns of oppression and response to that from the female protagonists. Sarah depicts the patriarchal oppression in its myriad forms. There are very conspicuous violence to subtle ones, difficult to counter, and numerous forms in between. Through this depiction we could identify three prominent characteristic responses of women with the metaphor of flight: 'Flightless', Fledglings', and the ones 'Flying High'. 'Flightless' are the ones, who do not put up any resistance to the patriarchal violence that is perpetrated in the family of society and succumb silently. 'Fledglings' are the ones who try to voice out, who make feeble attempts; but may not come out successfully either because their attempt is feeble or because they do not have the necessary support system around them. The ones who are 'Flying High' are the ones who have made their mark against the patriarchal oppression, with or without the support from their kith and kin. We also examine her stories to see if they are stereotypes or to see her response to religious communalism in a riotous situation.

Sarah Aboobackar locates herself as a humanist first and then a feminist who recognizes that women are subordinated in society and who acknowledges that this recognition is the first step towards bringing about a change. One must recognize Sarah for giving us the images of *New Womanhood*, which she felt would help change the dismal situation, the psyche of the oppressed females in our society. Stories written in her later phase of life are filled with new optimism, which instils a new confidence among women of the present era. Thus, much of Sarah's writing can also be seen as a strategy against patriarchy and oppression against women. One can easily notice that Sarah is a role model herself and represents the image of the *New Womanhood.* Though she came up as a writer in her early forties, she has undeniably made her mark.

The fifth chapter deals with a juxtaposition of Sarah's representation of women, with the realities seen around us today. This is an empirical study, exploratory in nature and is done with the help of questionnaires and interviews. An effort has been made in this chapter to identify the literary readership of Sarah (among college students) who are administered with the questionnaire for responses regarding Sarah's writings, issues on women's equality, domestic violence, etc.

From this empirical study we can discern that females are more aware of the social mores than males and that they are also more aware of gender discrimination and domestic violence than their male counterparts. The females are more in agreement with the sentiments and views of the author Sarah than males, which shows their sensitiveness to women's issues. Similarly we found that the students from Kannada medium were comparatively less aware of gender discrimination and domestic violence than their English medium counterparts. The respondents agreed that education was a significant factor, especially it was a must for females. On issues of gender discrimination and domestic violence, the respondents agreed with the statements and were politically correct. Majority of the respondents agreed that Sarah's portrayal was 'true' and her representations were 'real', identifiable.

6.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the study which is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Though quantitative methods are rarely used in English studies, in this study, we made use of it as a conscious effort to make a survey of Sarah Aboobackar's readership. Sarah paints a vivid picture of the plight of women, especially the women of Beary community. Though the Sarah's writings mostly portray the Muslim women of her community, her representations are identifiable, the oppression of females being a common enough occurrence and cuts across class, race, religion, ethnicity etc., which the comparative study of Sarah with Hyder, Chughtai and Mushthaq shows.

Sarah in her interviews with the researcher has mentioned that women too should rebel against the unjust system. And unless all join hands, it is not possible to uproot the exploitation. She has wistfully remarked that she would like to see herself placed along with the ones who fought against Hindu fundamentalists. She says she too is a crusader against the Shari'a which sanctions unhealthy practices and is fighting with Muslim fundamentalists. She is fighting for the abolition of *talaq*, marriage for a day, and polygamy which is practised in the name of shari'a and religion. Sarah, who was alone initially in raising her voice, has her voice ricocheting now with other writers such as Banu Mushthaq and the likes emerging in the Kannada scene.

6.4. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has strong possibilities for further research. Firstly, it is always interesting to see what a writer brings into a literary tradition afresh. Specially, when a writer emerges for the first time from a community contributing to a literary tradition, he or she is sure to bring in new energies, new experiences and a new life-world which they share with the readership. Sarah has been one such example. Such experiences from various literary traditions could be brought in and compared keeping in view the socio-historical context in mind. Secondly, in the Indian context, the use of quantitative method has hardly been taken up for literary studies. The mind-set of literary academics is still rejecting the idea of

making good use of statistical methods to literature, which its sister disciplines of Linguistics and Sociology have embraced long back. We should realise that there is nothing to lose by the use of quantitative method and that it is not going to either replace or override the established method/s. When a new method functions as the handmaid of research, one should rather open up and use the same. As Digital Humanities has come up in some universities of the world, literary study needs to come out of the binding traditional method and explore interdisciplinarity on a much bigger canvas.

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APPENDIX I

A Trip down the Memory Lane

Translation of An Autobiographical Chapter of Sarah Aboobackar
Kannada original: 'Hejje Hadi'

Aboobackar, Sarah. (2009), 'Hejje Hadi', *Chandragiri*. Sabiha, (ed).

The sun is slowly inching towards the west. The yellow clouds, tinged with vermillion are hovering around as if in anticipation of sundown. Though the sunset is not close at hand it isn't very distant either. Nevertheless doesn't every sunrise end in sunset? Dusk after dawn?

Though my gaze is turned westwards, towards the sunset, the image that is gradually forming on the canvas of reminiscences, is of a courtyard haloed with the first golden rays of the rising sun; and the picture of a little girl playing with kids (young goats)**.** The days that were spent playing, and gambolling around, which at times would end in disagreements, erupting in quarrels with the three elder and two younger brothers. Likewise, moist eyes glistening with unshed tears, redolent with the fond memories of long lost parents and siblings.

Right from the days when I was quite young, listening to stories was my favourite pastime. My mother would tell us stories when we were young, besides the elderly maids, who lent a helping hand to mother in her household chores. I distinctly remember Mariyamma, a maid who would sometimes behave rather strangely. She would start laughing and singing loudly, and used to mutter, god knows what. She had neither husband nor children, nobody to call her own, and my Umma (mom) had told us that a jinn (evil spirit) has possessed her. Mariyamma would recount very famous Mappala paat, folk tales of 'Badarul Muneer, Husanul Jamaal', during bedtime. But mother was scared to retain her because of her jinn problem, the belief that she was possessed by an evil spirit. My Umma was terrified that the jinn might trouble us! However it is true that without her tales I had to spend some sleepless nights, mooning around, long after she had left us. When I started reading Triveni's novels, I realized that Mariyamma' jinn was none other than her psychological imbalance, a

mental disease.Even then I didn't feel I ought to write something. The urge to write had not yet descended on me. Only at a later phase, reading renowned books written by well-known authors, must have awakened the novelist within me. Mariyamma, Ummali, Nafeesa, all began to crystallize as distinct images, in the cast of my protagonists.

There is yet another reason for these protagonists to linger in a nook and corner of my mind. During the month of Ramzan, a horde of poor women from my Umma's native would come over for zhakaat (compulsory donation). These women, in their younger days were either maids or had been companions to my mother. At times, women who were in charge of postnatal care in my Umma's family and relatives would also visit us. Compulsory donation means a person who has hundred rupees, in his possession, throughout a year, should compulsorily donate two and a half rupees. If he has jewellery worth hundred sovereigns he has to part with jewellery worth two and a half sovereigns. (Likewise from his harvest gains he has to donate two and a half percent of his yields) Businessmen, depending on their turnover have to donate the calculated amount. Despite the fact that my father wasn't a businessman, and there wouldn't be much to donate, these women would make use of this yearly opportunity which was theirs, to visit my mother. They respected my Umma a lot for the reason that she would have small talk with them enquiring about their lives. She also helped by giving off coconuts, rice, and old garments never sending anyone empty handed. She would be all ears and compassionately listened to their problems, which was more that their expectations and having the very rare luxury of someone listening to and sympathizing with them, they would pour out all their woes, and be lighter by the exercise. Their woes ranged across a wide spectrum. From talaq, their poverty, the problem of dowry, the sickness of their children, to their husbands' polygamy; there were hundred and one issues to be told. My brothers used to nick name this as either 'Annual report' or 'Deepavali special issue'! Rarely, when some request would come, in the form of an enquiry for a suitable alliance for their children, my Umma helped them out by acting as a mediator trying to settle the matrimony. All the protagonists of my novels like Khatija, Zulekha, Fatimah, are created from the painful expressions and epithets of these poor women.

My early schooling was in Chamanad. I stayed at my grandmother's house and went to a nearby Malayalam school. From eight to ten in the morning we had Quran classes. A Muslim maulvi would come to teach Quran, after which we had Malayalam lessons. It became quite easy for me to adjust since most of the students as well as the teacher who attended the school were Muslims. But the problem started when I was in second standard. I had really never progressed much in my Quran lessons and my granny was worried on this account. For her, my learning Quran was more important than my learning Malayalam. So I was admitted to a girl's school which was close by, where a Muslim lady taught Quran. The reason for this change was that someone had told my grandmother that the lady taught Quran excellently. I attended this school in the morning and my regular school in the afternoon. It gave me the distinction of attending two schools simultaneously! This continued for some time after which I became a pupil of the girl's school. No sooner had I passed from my second to the third my father who was on the alert, became ready to act. He was very much concerned about the education of girls of our community and probably he had decided that his daughter should be the one to set an example. With this in mind he admitted me to a girl's school in Kasaragod.

I became a fish out of water the day I was admitted to the Kannada medium school in Kasaragod. I was filled with sadness for not only had I lost my lingo, my ethnicity, my friends, but also I had to go through the second standard lessons once again. Adjusting to the new environment of an alien language and students from diverse communities was a punishment for me. This made me bunk my classes very often. I wouldn't feel like returning home after the weekend visits to my grandmother. My friends there also used to implore me, "stay here, don't go away to Kasaragod", hoping to persuade me, which was also what my granny desired. But since my grandparents knew about my father's attitude and way of thinking they never let me stay. Early on Monday morning my grandfather would set out towards our home, with me in tow.

My father was a lawyer and in those days the veranda like front room of our house served as his office. If we had to go out we had to pass through a door next to this room, with a view that ranged almost to our compound gate and it wasn't easy to dodge my father's ever watchful eye. If I delayed going to school he would get up

from his chair and walk in, searching for me. In spite of his busy schedule he was on the lookout and observed me, which made my escape quite impossible. Once it so happened that since I was late he took me along with him to drop me to school, on his way to the court. On the way, around a bend in the road, when he had gone forward, I managed to get away and had run back home. In this fashion I never let go of a single opportunity to miss my school. This abhorrence I had for school must have been an issue of great anxiety to my father who had fond hopes of educating me. But all this hatred was reserved only for my second standard. If my father had not taken such keen interest regarding my schooling most probably today I would have been like all those Muslim women of our hometown, completed fifth standard in Chamanad, married at the age of ten and living in some remote corner of Kasaragod!

I started changing from my third standard onwards. School was becoming tolerable as I learnt Kannada; progressed in mathematics and started making new friends. But my lessons in Quran had come to an end. It was compulsory that one learnt to read all the chapters of Quran. Along with that it was crucial that I learnt namaz and other such important things. For that reason every year, the one and a half months of summer vacation I would spend at Chamanad. There, apart from learning everything about our faith from my grandfather and the maulvi, I also used to read many sacred books my grandfather had in Malayalam and he would explain to me the things that were beyond my comprehension. Interestingly, though the town had no dearth of either mosques or maulvis, people would flock to my grandfather seeking his advice, if they had problems related to nikah and talaq.

I finished my schooling in this way shuttling between Kasaragod and Chamanad. Even in those days despite the fact that I liked reading books I had never dreamt of becoming a writer. After marriage when I had to live a life within the burkha, cut off from the world, so to say, my mind started inclining towards writing. There was absolutely no need for me to go in search of themes for a story because I had grown up listening to and seeing hundreds of tales, filled with woes and sufferings that the women folk of our community had to endure. All I wanted was someone to publish what I had written. There was a need for encouragement in the literary field. When that deficiency was fulfilled by Lankesh, all I can say is that I went ahead without any barriers to stop me.

Now, on the threshold of seventy, if I took a trip down the memory lane, when I gaze back and glimpse the road that I have taken, although in a way I am satisfied with my choice, I still am nagged by the sentiment that most probably I wasn't successful enough, and indeed have failed in stopping the society going back in the reverse gear.

When I started writing novels, short stories and articles, my three main themes were: the education of Muslim girls, the exploitation that is perpetrated on Muslim women in the name of religion and communal harmony. As I see it, in a way, through my writings, I believe I have taken up arms against the Muslim fundamentalists. At the time that I started writing or in all probability a decade earlier, when our people had just learnt to raise their heads, and were inclining towards progress and advancement, the Muslim fundamentalists had silently begun to propel and push our community backwards, to the seventh century.

Our society which had never given much thought to the burkha in the sixties started giving importance to it in the seventies. During my wedding the very same ladies who had made fun of me and had pulled my legs while helping me with my burkha, now all of a sudden started wearing not only burkha but also took to wearing gloves and socks, in an attempt to show off their religious fervour and piousness! Earlier the men folk who had gone to Mumbai in search of jobs, returning home after a year or two, though had brought burkha to their wives, they had seldom worn it. But with the onset of smuggling in Kasaragod, which resulted in a heavy surge of hard cash, things started changing. The people who could hardly afford two square meals a day all of a sudden became fabulously rich. The unheard of luxury went to their heads like wine, and if that wasn't enough they became drugged with a kind of religious fanaticism. Burkha became a symbol of richness and affluence. Concurrently the advent of job opportunities in the Gulf countries considerably improved their economic conditions and living standards. But unfortunately their advanced status also blinded and immersed them in a kind of religious fanaticism. From time immemorial it was customary for Muslim women, to suffer unquestioningly, the exploitation and injustice that was perpetrated on them in the name of religion, in silence and with bowed heads. To make matters worse the illiterate and the poor, thanks to smuggling, unexpectedly finding the tide turn in their favour, became the leaders of the society. According to an Indian proverb "there is no knowing what an ill-bred person might do

who is suddenly favoured by riches". Similar state of affairs became rampant throughout Kerala. Zeal without knowledge is a runaway horse. Adding fuel to fire, organizations like Jamaate Islam and Tabligue Jamaat, which had solid backup in the followers of Moudoodi, started further spoiling our society. Whenever I visited Kasaragod, though rarely, the stifling atmosphere would leave me gasping for breath.

I became fidgety and restive not knowing how to reign in this blind, religious obsession of our women folk. I thought that I could try to bring about a change in their ways of thinking through my writings or through literature. But it wasn't to be for the simple reason that none of the magazines encouraged me, and I had to put a stop to my activities in that direction. In 1980's the commencement of Lankesh's magazine cleared my path and opened a doorway to express my feelings which had been stewing in me for a long time. The flow that emerged from my pen had a force that was nothing less than the turbulent waters freed from the confines of a dam, the mad rush of eddying, swirling waters that sweeps away everything in its course.

Jamaate Islamic organization was slowly gaining control over women, and by way of influence was having a powerful sway on them. The process of brain washing Muslim women by filling their heads with fundamentalist, pious and dutiful thoughts had begun in real earnest. The people from these organizations would go to the houses of affluent people in Kasaragod, invite the poor, underprivileged women from the vicinity and would give them religious discourses. "Don't desire anything from this earth .God will grant you everything in the next world. You should never step out of your houses. Your sole responsibility is to remain inside the four walls of your homes and to take care and nurture your children…" this is a sample of how the discourses would run. In 1983 one of my friends had once taken me to listen to a discourse. After that first instance I have never ever set my foot inside again.

At the time when my first article was published, an event took place in the distant Bijapur. Some religious fanatics had attacked a lady named Nazima Bhangi, for the simple reason that she had gone to a theatre to watch a movie. These people had started prohibiting Muslim women from going to theatres and had curtailed their freedom in even entertaining themselves by watching movies. Nazima Bhangi was an unmarried, college lecturer. Her sisters too were unmarried. If I am not wrong I distinctly remember that she was suspended from college after this incident. Later

when I had visited her in Bijapur she seemed depressed. It looked like that she had been ostracized from the community and society. Muslim women were shying to visit theatres due to this one stray incident and the publicity that it had gained! In this manner these organizations were slowly but surely gaining ground in controlling our society.

Opposing this inhuman act of injustice and ban on Muslim women by an organization, Banu Musthaq and I had sent articles to Lankesh's magazine. One can safely declare that this article put me on the pathway of warfare against the system. The rules of Islamic Shari'a are impartial for both the sexes and the holy Quran virtually sees no difference between a man and woman. Both men and women have to observe Namaz five times a day, fast during Ramzan and if possible go on a pilgrimage to Hajj. Similarly if watching movies is erroneous, then it is applicable to men as well and I wanted to bring this to the notice of our society, and had written that article. Next I wrote the novel '*Chandragiri Teeradalli'* questioning the relevance of one day's marriage in the life of a Muslim woman, who is divorced through talaq. The novel '*Sahana'* was an attempt in unveiling the mental agony a woman endures as a reason of polygamy. In the Shabanu's case when the Supreme Court had given the judgment that a divorced Muslim woman (one who is given talaq), should be given alimony, the Muslim men throughout the length and breadth of our country had argued that divorced Muslim women lead quite a happy life with their parents and there was absolutely neither reason nor need to offer alimony. I wrote the novel '*Vajragalu*' to bring to light the insincerity and hollowness of this argument. This was my way of showcasing the exploitation and injustice that was perpetrated on women in the name of religion.

Already the men in our society were noticing and were becoming aware of my writings. Opposing the Shabanu verdict by the Supreme Court, the various religious organizations, which otherwise had rivalry between them, came together and spearheaded a nationwide agitation by Muslim men, with an intention to further exploit Muslim women to suit their whims, and managed to pass a bill by coercing the government, titled "the law to safeguard the rights of divorced Muslim women "in the Lokasabha (THE MUSLIM WOMEN (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS ON DIVORCE) ACT, 1986) , which had made me wonder, time and again, at the power the Muslim

men wielded in the concerned circles. What depressed me most was the knowledge that Muslim women too, had supported and seconded this campaign and I was left utterly clueless not knowing how to put up a fight against this. But it was against my conscience to keep quiet. I didn't have the necessary means and power to unite the Muslim women to take up arms for their cause or to create awareness in them. The one and the only path that was open to me to create awareness and to put up a fight were through my writing. The holy Quran clearly states that the divorced woman is to be given "mataah" (compensation given in a single instalment to safe guard her future), which had been concealed in this bill of THE MUSLIM WOMEN (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS ON DIVORCE) ACT, and my intention was to throw light on this serious breach of code of ethics, as to not give any alimony to the divorced woman. The chief Justice of the Supreme Court had given the verdict based on this statement from Quran. Arif Mohammed Khan; a Loka Sabha member had also seconded this judgment. But when the government was about to take steps to improve the lives of women, Muslim men were capable of altering the law to suit them! At that point of time they were not stalled by either the law of the nation or the dictates of the holy Quran. At about this time I was intrigued by a news item which had caught my attention. Syed Bhai of Poona was fighting against the easy divorce, the talaq system and polygamy which was weighing down Muslim women, as well as advocating the need of educating girls. He mirrored my concerns and we were like minded. What's more, he also supported the verdict of the Supreme Court and was a champion for equal civil rights of women. So he was quite happy when I contacted him and straight away visited me. Then the two of us along with Rahamat Khan from Bangalore, called a press meet in Bangalore to say that we were in favour of equal civil rights. We had also received some letters from Muslims supporting our cause. But the fundamentalist organizations were successful in stopping us from making any progress in this matter. The organization that we had founded by the name of "Muslim Pragati Parishattu" was short lived. Since Syed Bhai had organized some meetings in Madurai and Poona, I came into contact with a number of women who approved my view points and agreed to fight for it, which did give me some measure of fulfilment. Hafeesa, a lawyer in Madurai, had given a call to the government that this law, THE MUSLIM WOMEN (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS ON DIVORCE)

ACT, was damaging to women, a flawed one and had to be revoked. But the law to this day remains the same. In addition these fundamentalist organizations see to it that no woman, divorced through talaq, ever ventures near the court to file a case, and in case the petition is filed it pressurizes them into withdrawing the case and is successful in systematically keeping the women in total darkness.

Though socially I could do nothing against these fundamentalists, personally I felt I had to wage a war. In January 1985, The Bandaya Sahitya movement organized a seminar in Putter on "study of communities". By then, besides some of my articles, my novel *Sahana* was also published. The organizers invited me to present a paper on *Chandragiri Teeradalli*. In my schooldays I had seen a debate being conducted in school but apart from that, had no idea and was very ignorant about a seminar or how would one progress. My initial thought was that it would have been better if I could participate as a delegate instead of a presenter in the seminar. Is it feasible to request to be an audience before taking the dais? It wasn't possible and out of question for me to say that "I knew nothing" about the lives of Muslim women. Moreover, I did not want to let go of this opportunity of participating in a seminar and addressing a gathering; so I agreed. I wasn't even aware and had no idea that a plan was being hatched there to attack and manhandle me. I was accompanied by my husband.

Dr Vivek Rai presided over the day's function. After prof. Amrutha Someshwar presented his paper on the Koraga community it was my turn. As I stood up to present my paper a person from the audience said, "Since you are not wearing burkha, you are not a Muslim lady, therefore you have no right and should not talk about Muslim women". The next moment all hell broke loose with riots breaking out amongst the audience. Writer Fakir Mohammed Katpadi shielded me and prevented me from coming to any harm. The police too arrived on the scene and the situation was brought under control. Dr Vivek Rai to this day remembers it as the one and only occasion wherein he had come away without delivering his presidential address after having presided over the function!

Next day all the newspapers carried this sensational news and throughout the state it received extensive exposure. In some places it led to rallies in retaliation. It did come to my notice that Sharifa in Gulbarga and Banu Musthaq in Hassan had headed the rallies there and the incident was publicized widely. If these fundamentalists had not

attacked me in this manner most probably I wouldn't have received either such wide publicity or recognition and these many awards! So, in a way, don't you think that I need to be grateful to these people?

The police force of Putter never took any legal measures on these people after this unpleasant incident. "When Muslims assault Muslim women, we need not interfere and do anything!" might be the reasoning behind their inaction. I had also written and appealed to Ram Krishna Hegde, the then chief minister of Karnataka. His hesitation to get in the way might have been on the account of losing the Muslim vote bank! What if Muslims choose not to vote for their party?!

The very next day my younger brother arrived post-haste from Kerala. "In Kerala some writers do this for publicity. So you needn't worry unduly on this score. Good that this happened. Now without worrying write daringly, we are all with you" was his counsel and encouragement to me. But, though most of my husband's relations reside in Mangaluru, none called, not even a single person had the civility to call and ask what had happened! Am I not the dark sheep of the family? The one separated from the flock...?

To this day some question me, "Does your family consent to your writing?" If my family, my husband and my father's support wasn't there as my backup, it was not only impossible, I don't think I would have been able to write. Once a Mangalorean had come to my father saying, "Your daughter writes against the religion and is blaspheming the religious conviction. Advise her not to write like that". In reply my father had answered, "Who is to tell what one says is right or wrong? (He might have meant to say that none had such profound philosophical knowledge to judge others)I have read all that she has written, and I haven't found anything in opposition to our religion, in whatever that she has written so far". Since my father had immense knowledge in matters related to religion and was also a gold medallist in Mohammadan Law from Madras University, the person who had come to complain against me had left, knowing well that he wasn't capable enough to argue on the matter, and was no match to my father. Likewise some people have asked me, "What do your children say about your writing?" In reply to that query I have told them "I don't think I need my children's permission to write what I feel like writing. They are my children, whom I have borne, given birth and nurtured from infancy. They know

me and what I stand for, pretty well. I too never meddle in their lives. They are free to live their lives the way they want to". To be frank I was surprised by the very question of my children's opinion regarding my writing. I do agree that we might require our children's love and care during our old age. But I don't consent to their controlling our lives and being in charge of us.

Subsequently during a program, in the course of a discussion someone had asked, "Doesn't everybody in your community wear burkha? Wont people say anything if you don't wear one?"

To which I had replied, "The way I dress is my concern and not that of my religion"

Haven't I told that personally I had to take up arms against the fundamentalist organizations? Well, it happened after the unpleasant incident and riots in Putter. The focal voice of Jamaate

Islamic organization, a magazine named '*Sanmarga'* had in fact, tried hard to put a full stop to my writing. The magazine had slandered me as a Namadhari Muslim and a movie star. A few writers who used to author articles for this magazine came together and founded an organization called "Muslim Lekakhara Sangha" (Muslim Writer's Association). When I was in mourning, observing *Hidda*, on account of my husband's demise, this organization distributed circulars in town, giving a call to our society to excommunicate me from our caste and community. My younger brother-in- law had sent me a copy of the circular. I hadn't lost my patience till then. But this being the limit, I felt my endurance shatter. I decided to retaliate against the approach of these fundamentalists. I showed the articles printed in the magazine as well as the copy of the circular to my father, who was then living with me. I asked his counsel regarding the matter of approaching the court, whether I had the right to question this and file a defamation case, if what these people were doing was against the Indian penal code. My question was, who had given these people, who were civilians like me, the permission to take the law into their hands, meting out punishment against fellow civilians in the name of religion? Is our religion Islam, captive, exclusively belonging to a select few? The prophet, in his discourses, had given some guidelines to people with the intention that they should walk the path of virtue, and live accordingly. Nowhere is it made known that those who don't follow these rules should be excommunicated and ostracized. When this is the case how can some oppress others

in the name of religion, as if they were heirs to the religion and it solely belonged to them? In actual fact, with the exception of our sacred duties, Quran advises us to follow the social laws of the nation (like marriage, divorce etc.) to which we belong, as the citizens of that country. If we can abide by the criminal laws of this nation why can't we follow its social laws too? If we follow the criminal rules laid down by Shari'a, then a thief's hand should be cut. The punishment for adultery is being whipped publicly. Definitely men would be the ones to be hot and bothered by this. That's why this patriarchal, male dominated society decided to have the social rules according to the shari'a and the criminal rules according to the penal codes of that nation!

I am a citizen of this country. I am entirely eligible to all the constitutional rights the parliament of this country gives to its citizens. If today, I failed to question this ostracizing and the defamation articles, almost certainly in future no Muslim woman will dare to open her mouth or will take hold of a pen. Perchance even if she dares to grasp a pen, the grip on the pen will be in the hands of men! Therefore I decided that once and for all I had to teach these fundamentalists a lesson, so as they don't intimidate and oppress anybody in the future, and acted upon it. I filed a defamation case on this magazine as well as on the Muslim Writer's Association. The verdict came out after four years. These people have not yet complied with the ruling though twenty years have elapsed since the verdict! The injustice and suppression should be questioned and never capitulated in silence. I also wanted our women folk to learn a lesson from this example. The moment these people received the lawyer notice they sent their mediators to me requesting to withdraw the case and compromise. I replied, "Alright, I will withdraw the case, but they have to publish a single statement in their magazine, "we regret and repent for publishing those articles". They need not apologize". But with a lady, they were not even prepared to say that much! With the commencement of the case the writings against me stopped.

I still remember some of the questions their lawyer had asked me in the court during the hearing of the case. "What is your opinion about Salman Rushdie? Why aren't you wearing burkha? Why haven't you gone on a Hajj pilgrimage?" were his questions. It is noteworthy that the lawyer who had asked me these questions was a Hindu. To this day I have absolutely no idea what connection Salman Rushdie has

with my case. Therefore I told him that I am not going to answer that question. Then I informed him that I didn't have the necessary funds to go on a Hajj pilgrimage and wearing burkha is not compulsory. At the end of the trial the magistrate's verdict was in my favour.

The extent to which these people have gone to tarnish my reputation is hard to believe. Slandering remarks like I wasn't a Muslim and that I was a convert were used to defame me.

On one occasion I was taken to a Muslim Women's Association in Bengare by Rita Noronha, who worked for a private sector. The Muslim ladies there were quite friendly and we did have a very interesting conversation. I even presented them with some of my books. We parted happily with them requesting me to come over again. Sometime later when Rita Noronha chanced to meet me she said, "They have thrown us out just because we had taken you to the Bengare Women's Association". These people can't and won't tolerate Muslim women getting to see even a glimmer or ray of light. They are so very scared that these women might break free from their clutches!

Subsequently when a lecturer from Badria College came to invite me I became alert. I didn't want other people to be in a quandary on my account. None should get into trouble because of me, should they? I told him, "Ask your Management whether you can invite me, later on you shouldn't be in trouble". Some members of the Management hadn't even been inside a school in their entire lives and were illiterates. I have no knowledge as to what happened afterwards. My uncle Hajji M.Moideenabba was one of the founders of Badria School. He had donated a lot to this school and the mosque that was attached to it. In tribute his tomb is inside the mosque next to that of a saint. By that I don't mean to say that I am entitled and have a right to visit Badria College and give a talk there. It's just that I am saddened to witness the meanness of these people.

I have suffered in many ways for being a woman, and that too for being a Muslim woman. Sadashivam was felicitated with the Sahitya Academi Award for his translated Tamil version of my novel '*Chandragiri Teeradalli'*. But no recognition came my way although the original novel is mine. Does it signify that the original story was no good and only the translated version was deemed fit to receive the

award? That the translation was better than the original? When Macmillan Publishers gave the copyright of the English translation to Vanamala Vishwanath, who had translated this novel into English, I had to take them to task by sending a lawyer notice. C.Raghavan when translating the same novel to Malayalam had taken liberty with the novel by changing the end, wherein the heroine commits suicide in the river. So with the decision to take action, I requested K.K.Nayar to translate the novel which I had later published through Prabhatam Book House. It has come to my notice that very recently, a young man, a quite inexperienced lad from Mangalore, had produced a movie in Beary Language based on my novel. The people who used to say, 'there are no such rules in our society'; and I have written this novel for the sake of money, name and fame' have now stooped so low as to steal my novel to produce a film! Based on this novel Ponnvannan had produced a film in Tamil. But without resorting to shortcuts and unethical behaviour he had invited me to Chennai, paid me appropriate honorarium, then with my consent had made the movie, which has admirably showcased and reflected the problems of women and had the distinction of bagging the best movie award conferred by the Tamil Nadu Government.

I can by no means say that socially I have never received recognition and success after the publication of '*Chandragiri Teeradalli'*. First when I had written this novel people had denied the existence of these social evils, remember? Well as a matter of fact, now since almost a decade; newspapers have started carrying news items on these kinds of incidents which are being reported from Uttar Pradesh to Tamilnadu, from the north to the south of our country. If people overhear a husband, in a drunken stupor, telling his wife, 'I have uttered your three talaqs', then from the very next day they will not allow the couple to live like man and wife. In case they live together, the society will not only say that they are living in sin and start hounding them, but will also excommunicate them. After this issue was illuminated now at least some intellectuals have woken up from their nonchalant attitude. The reckoning that 'this law should be amended and even if the three talaqs are spoken at the same time, it should be considered as one and permission be given to the couple for reconciliation to lead a normal life' is gaining currency. What is more, an organization of Uttar Pradesh has already circulated a Fatwa to that effect. In Kerala a powerful movement has been initiated opposing this 'marriage for a day' (one day marriage). A professor

from Kerala is heading one such movement. He has authored a book called 'An Application of Anguish for Mothers' which speaks about the heartrending suffering women face due to social evils like polygamy, purdah and the easy procedure of talaq system. I believe that I too have a share in his outlook. If personally I have emerged victorious in court, and these budding new thoughts, which seem like an omen, add to my belief, that socially I have managed to achieve a modicum of success.

Yet another facet of my struggle is against communalism. During my childhood and school days, we never had any of these communal thoughts. Though ours was a single Muslim house plumb in the centre of the Hindu houses we were never an island nor marooned. We need to be grateful to our parents regarding this issue. All the neighbouring children were our friends. A house opposite ours belonged to certain Dr. Raghavendra Rao, who was a friend of my father. He had expired at an early age and his only son used to go to school in the company of my elder brothers. When my brothers went to Madras to pursue their higher studies it was decided that he should accompany them to and fro, and his mother was the one who had enforced this. My elder brother was virtually a big brother to many such young boys. He was also an excellent athlete and an outstanding swimmer, who could swim nonstop fourteen laps across the river Chandragiri. He was also a swimming coach to these lads from different communities- Brahmins, Billavas, Mogaveeras, Dalits etc., all with an easy camaraderie amongst them which was devoid of prejudice and superiority complex, there was never any mention of the word Hindu or Muslim of which I am aware and I had never heard anything to the contrary. Many a times when they were exhausted after a game of cricket in our backyard, my brother would climb the coconut tree; fetch down some tender coconuts which all would relish. Similarly when I couldn't go home for lunch after we had changed our house which was at quite a distance to school, one of my Konkani friends by force had taken me to her home and served me food, all the while forcing me for a second helping, in case I hesitated to have my fill, which is hard to forget. At a later stage, once in a blue moon when I used to visit her house with my kids, her mother would shower the same love on us, to which I was accustomed in my school days. When we were living in harmony like this, who has raised the walls now in our midst? Why? To this day no such walls exist in Kerala. But Karnataka? Through my writings I have tried to bring down these walls, to

crumble them. Forget the doing away; instead of disintegrating, day by day the walls are growing higher, with us watching helplessly. In our childhood days we had never heard words like Bhajaranga Dala, Sri Rama Sene, B.J.P, Jamaate Islami, Tabligue Jamaat, Simi, Terrorism, and Taliban. Except R.S.S. which was in existence and active. Nowadays the moment you open a newspaper aren't these words that grab your attention at first sight? Today our prime responsibility is to spew out the poison that people like Govalkar, Savarkar and Moudoodi have injected into the psychological space of the populace and cleanse the system.

The people of this country live adhering to the adage of "Live and let Live" and all are not steeped in communalism and racial hostility. The recent Parliament elections have proved this fact beyond a doubt. We need not have a dismal outlook on this score. Doesn't each cloud has a silver lining? It is my emphatic belief that this silver lining is none other than the reality of Non-Muslims appreciating and honouring me, a Muslim lady, which I see as a definite silver lining in the dark cloud, hovering over us. If people across communities realize this, then I will consider myself fulfilled, with what I have written not going waste and content in the knowledge that my efforts are justified. I am thankful to the Kannadigas for accepting and showering me with their love, respect and encouragement from the last twenty five years which amounts to almost a quarter century. I appreciate the honour accorded to me in the form of numerous awards, titles and felicitations, which I acknowledge with gratitude.

Birth

Kannada original: *Huttu* (Birth), A Short Story
Aboobackar, Sarah. (1992), *Payana Mattu Ethara Kathegalu* (An anthology of short stories)

From the past two days Khatija was in labour. But still there was no sign of the child being born. She was bearing the intense pain with tight lips and closed eyes, trying to swallow it. She felt like screaming when the pain became unbearable, and she would try to stifle it by pressing her palms tightly against her throat, for the fear of being heard. When it became unendurable she would moan "Ya Allah….."

"Is painless birth possible? Isn't it only after one suffers unspeakably can one give birth?" the midwife spoke in a consoling manner. Her brows furrowed. She had witnessed many a birth amidst these pains and groans. Her theory was that birth without pain was no birth at all. The end of every pain should be a birth.

Pain starts very slowly at first, like a dull ache, with lots of space between each one. Gradually the interval decreases, resulting in intolerable agony, giving way to whimpers and screams, and only then a birth takes place. Isn't it so?

Swallowing the excruciating pain Khatija thought; is this delivery possible by me? Do I have the strength to give birth?

When was it that I first experienced pain? It was not a recent one. The pain was quite old and had started very slowly. Her mind raced back to that day……..

She had just passed her fourth standard and was on the verge of entering her fifth. She had completed her tenth year, running on eleven, and her education had ended. When the term started without a sign of this smart girl, the teacher had taken the trouble to visit her home.

"Teacher, won't you please come in and take a seat" her mother had gone out of her way to make the teacher comfortable by inviting her in. Without beating around the bush, the teacher straight away had explained the reason for her visit.

"Umma, your daughter Khatija is intelligent. She is the one who always comes first in her class. Send her to school; please let her continue her education……"

Before the teacher had finished speaking her mother had intervened.

“Ayyo teacher, what is this that you are saying? Next year she has to get married. And when will she learn the household chores? Why do our girls need to study more? Are we going to send them out to work?”

Hearing about her wedding, Kathija had blushed and run inside shyly. Nonetheless she had felt sad because she couldn’t go to school anymore. She was sure she would miss the Kannada books with their stories about the prince and princesses, the easy camaraderie of laughter, gig and romp with her classmates, without any of these; she was worried about how to spend the days sitting at home?

A very small pain, a small ache. Negligible. None would be wiser. Forgettable pain. Isn’t that how the starting pain is supposed to be?

My bridal night. The night of my nuptials. Most probably I was just thirteen then. The memory is still fresh. With dreamy eyes I had watched my palms being adorned with madarangi (Henna). But…….

Adolescent dreams turned out to be wisps of illusion. He wasn’t able to knock the door of my heart, my groom, who looked much elderly. He was just a bee, who had come to sip the nectar. He neither realized the soft feel of the flower nor its delicate fragrance. What he realized was just this: that the flower has blossomed for his sake. He wasn’t even remotely aware that the flower has a world of its own and that he was just a visitor. He became the dictator.

Another pain. This time the pain was mirrored on her face. The inner sigh touched her mother, who too felt the pain.

“Men are like that my child, rough. What if your husband’s age is a little more than yours? You will want for nothing. Isn’t that very important for women?”

But……the face never forgot the mirrored pain, its shadow never quite lifted.

The pains which had to be born were refusing to see the day light. In the suppression of pains three years had passed.

This time the pain hit her with a massive force .She recoiled in agony.

That day…….

It was almost three years since their nuptials. When he entered their room she was busy with preparations of making her bed.

“Hey? Is there any possibility of your ever being a mother? Are you going to conceive or not?”He had roughly asked her.

“Is that my mistake?” she had asked in a barely audible whisper.

“What do you mean? Is it my mistake?” he thundered. Her answer was silence.

“Look here. I am not going to wait for long. Within a year I want a child!” She was dazed at his brutal order. She had to produce a child within the stipulated time! But how?

She ran to the shelter, the cool shade known as mother. She tried the doctor’s potions, but to no avail. Her womb remained empty, barren.

Another pain, more intense than the previous one, hit her. Unable to smother the pain, she groaned. The midwife hearing it said “none of these are intense enough. The intense pain after which one gives birth has not yet appeared!”

Yes……will that intense pain ever originate in me? Will the birth happen through pain?

She remembered the day…. she had remained unfruitful, though three years had lapsed since he had hoped to have a child. Wasn’t it the day when she was daydreaming about playing with a child in her lap, when he had opened the gate and walked in with a suitcase in hand? She had got up and was going towards kitchen, to prepare tea for her husband, when she was shocked to such an extent that she had stood rooted to the spot. A woman decked in bridal finery was following her husband into the house. She had felt as if she was standing inside a raging storm, with cold gusts of air engulfing her heart .Who was she? Why had this unknown woman come to her house?

Without even so much as a glance in her direction, her husband turned round, “come in” and led the woman into the house. Khatija followed them inside.

“Who is she?” it didn’t seem that I had any right to question the woman? He straight away conducted her to their room. Placed the suitcase on the floor, “change your clothes”, so saying when he came out, a stunned khatija looked at him questioningly.

“Why do you look at me like that? With what hopes was I not waiting for a child? I have finished with my patience. So I have brought her home after having nikah. *”

When lightning and thunder strikes, will it not pour in torrents?

The next pain crashed through her body with the intensity of splitting her in two halves. The force was such that she felt that the birth of the child was at hand. “Umma!” she shrieked as she slipped into oblivion. When she regained consciousness

she had not yet delivered. “No my child, the time has not yet come” consoled the midwife.

Most likely the time is never going to come.

The one who came like that was Ayesha. My room became hers. The lord of my home and hearth became hers too.

On one such day he called me and said “Remember the necklace of gold coins which I had given you? Give it to Ayesha!”

“I want it” for the first time in my life I retaliated. Immediately I was slapped “if you want to stay here obey me. Or else go to your mother’s place!”

Mother’s place! Ever since my father had expired, my brothers ruled the roost. It didn’t matter, after all how does it matter? Why should it matter? Hell is the same anywhere.

The intervals between pains were lessening. The pain was bearable. It had by now become routine. She bore each pain with resignation, biting her lips.

Children were born to Ayesha. Though she became the lady of the house, I wasn’t reduced to becoming a servant. Children addressed me as “auntie”. What does it matter whose children they were? They lit my life too. When Ayesha had delivered for a second time and was in her post-natal care, he had come in search of me, the memory of which was still green. Discarding when not wanted and retaining when wanted, what choice did I have? In the face of repeated insults I was not supposed to open my mouth which remained sealed.

The intense pain was also not without its appealing sweetness. What the medicinal potions had failed to achieve was realized without a hitch. But when I was suffering from morning sickness, nausea and dizziness Ayesha’s eyes had smoked in anger and jealousy. When I was swimming in happiness she most likely was stewing in her own steam. Why was it that my husband didn’t even have the patience to wait for at least a couple of years more? Endless, never-ending pains.

When Ayesha became the mother of five, I too became the mother of three children. The family grew. Income remained the same, limited.

One morning he had said “hasn’t your father been dead for long? Go ask your brothers for your share in your father’s property”.

I remembered an instance when I was young. I had played with a doll sending it off on a merry go round of its husband's and father's house.

"Haven't we married you off? Haven't we given you enough jewellery? Wasn't a dowry given to your husband? Which share is he talking about? Are we millionaires to give in to your whims and fancies? When all of you sisters were married off, we sons were left with only a shop. And now is your husband even asking a share of that? Let him marry four more wives and ask their shares too. Isn't he ashamed of himself? After hurting you so much is he not satisfied that he has made you ask for more?"

Which was typical of my elder brother. He was a run-away horse if, and whenever, he opened his mouth.

Another excruciating pain engulfed her, ripping her asunder. "Umma, I can't bear this". She moaned pitifully.

"Two more pains, you will give birth and it will get over" the tired midwife enthused. She had grown tired by encouraging from a long time.

Two more pains! By the time it gets over it is going to finish me too.

Oh yes, it is four years since I had visited my mother. Last time due to some complications, my delivery had been difficult and though I had to be hospitalized, my mother was not sent for. "Whether you came back dead or alive, they shouldn't be informed….." He had been adamant and unyielding on this score.

But I had come back, defeating death which had almost stared me in my face. Umma, had secretly sent through the midwife, Isamma, some 'lehya' a traditional homemade remedy , meant for post-natal care . The moment he came to know of it he had thrown out the jar of lehya, which lay in smithereens in the courtyard. I had stood watching with tears streaming down my face as the crows had made a feast of it. Were my tears tinged with red? The colour of blood which flows from a fresh wound?

Yet another pain. Why do pains always change into tears? Why don't they metamorphose into screams?

That was a red lettered day…..

Isamma had come in stealthily and had told "your mother has had a fall today and has been hospitalized with multiple fractures. Her condition is serious and she wants to see you. Can you make it?" "Tell my Umma that her daughter khatija has been buried

for quite some time now….." I had choked on the sentence and unable to finish, had darted inside.

A small pain which had started from the region of my waist was spreading upwards. A mild, weak pain minus the intensity to make one scream. "How is delivery possible with such pains?" the midwife was muttering. "Forget screams there isn't even a whimper?" she was uptight and feared the consequences, nervousness writ large on her face.

No. my mother did not die. She survived her illness and was discharged after a couple of months. It was as if she had vowed that she wouldn't die without meeting her daughter.

My constitution has become very fragile ever since I have conceived this time. With weakness as my companion, health is failing. I can't even retain the food. Who is there to look after me and take care of me? Elder daughter Summayya has school. Yes. My daughter Summayya should become literate. There shouldn't be any hindrance as to her education.

But rest is a luxury. In spite of the weakness I can hardly rest. When one can't even stay away from the kitchen, where is the time to nurse illness?

On one such day, framed in the kitchen doorway, glancing towards her swollen midriff, he had announced enthusiastically, "I am going on a hajj pilgrimage!"

Surprised, she was taken aback and had let go of the curry in her hand. "What's wrong with you? Can't you even hold a vessel properly?" Ayesha added her bit "it's not possible for me to cook again!"

After the dust had settled she unhurriedly spoke to her husband "my delivery coincides with the time of Hajj. Previous delivery too was difficult. God knows what is to happen now. Please….can't you postpone your visit to Mecca to next year?"

"No. Impossible. I am trying from three years. Are you holding me back when I am about to do a good turn? Aren't you afraid of god?" he then continued on a softer note "I will perform *duva* for you and pray."

"O.k. then, if you won't be here can I at least go and stay at my mother's?" she had asked him beseechingly, believing that the ice to have thawed and fondly hoping against hope that he might relent.

“What?” The rumble and roar of lightning and thunder claps started in real earnest. “Umma? Which Umma? Don’t you ever dare to speak of those who have cheated their daughter out of her inheritance…. you, what are you made up of? Have you still not given up your love for your mother?”

The rumbling increased and then the lightning crashed and thunder struck.

“Beware! If you are dreaming of going to your mother’s once I leave to Mecca, forget it. Even if you die in child birth your mother shouldn’t be called. She shouldn’t even attend your funeral. It is my final order. Do you understand?”

This time the intensity of the pain was brutal. The pain was cleaving her in half. The final pain, most probably. The midwife was alert in anticipation of the birth. Khatija neither whimpered nor screamed. She concentrated fully with the last bit of energy in her to contain it within her, repressing it.

No. This birth isn’t going to happen. It is not in me to give any more births. This child will never be born. Moaning she feebly cried “call my Summayya”.

With dilated eyes, looking at her ten year old daughter, she caressed her face and holding her hand in hers she called her “child, Summayya” in the same pathetic manner.

Yes mama, what is it?” The girl bent over her mother. Her eyes were reddened from crying copiously.

“Baby, never ever will I be able to give birth to a child; I can give birth to nothing. I don’t have it in me. I lack the vigour to give birth. My misfortune was that I had to bear never ending pain and anguish…..tomorrow, for my funeral, I am sure my mother, I mean, your granny and uncle will be here beyond doubt. Blood is always thicker than water and none can sever these ties. You go with them……no power on earth can stop you. No one has the right to stop you. Study to your heart’s content and become smart and highly educated. Earn your living, be your own master. What I couldn’t conceive and give birth to, let it germinate in you. Where I failed, I want you to succeed…..”

In Between Principles

Kannada Original: "Niyama Niyamagala Naduve".
Aboobackar, Sarah. (1996), *Ardha Ratriyalli Huttida Koosu* (An Anthology of Short Stories)

Three year old Rawoof screamed "give me the mango"

"I picked it up first, why should I give it to you?"

Biting into the fruit, five year old Mumtaz asked. In answer Rawoof tried to snatch it from her. What followed was a screaming, kicking duel, with both the contestants crying loudly. Hearing the ruckus, Granny Amina shouted from inside.

"Hey Johara….. Where are you? Can't you hear the children fighting and weeping? Are you dead?

Johara, who was forlornly sitting in the outer veranda, staring vacantly at some distant point, deep in troubled thought, was jolted out of her reverie and came down with a thud, listening to her mother's tirade. Slowly, carrying the weight of her full term pregnancy, Johara neared her children and hit them both. Then seizing the mango from her daughter's hand she threw it away. When the children started to shriek more loudly, she hit them once again, ordering them to "shut up". The children tearfully ran inside and embracing their granny, complained about their mother.

Amina held Rawoof closely and cursed her daughter "let your hands be severed". When Johara, who was counting days for her delivery walked in, looking more dead than alive, her mother's heart melted. Muttering "Ya Allah, why have you still kept me alive?" she neared her daughter and enquired lovingly "have the pains started?"

Johara moved her head in a gesture which meant "no" and went and dropped herself on the bed and lifting up her fingers began counting. How many months?

Today it is exactly three months, from the day when Khader divorced (*talaq*) me. What a difference in my life of now and then?

A small, cheerful family, with two kids. Though Khader had a small business he had never come home empty handed. Always he used to bring either biscuits or bananas for children. Fresh fish was the staple food, which both liked. A contented life, finding happiness in every little thing.

The small boat which was sailing steadily in the gentle breeze of a peaceful ocean was caught in a turbulent storm. Within seconds everything changed. The captain of the boat had gone missing. Why and how did this happen?

Johara had never seen the insides of a school. She had worked as a maid till she had attained puberty. There she had received enough advice on how to be like a woman, not to mention the spankings she had received from the mistress of the house. When she had complained about this to her mother there always was a stock reply, the answer never changed, it was always the same.

"Try to put up and adjust somehow. Haven't they promised to give two pavans[117]? If you stop working now we will get nothing. If you don't have at least four *alikaths* in your ears who will marry you?"

Yes, a female is born only to marry and have children. That too, how many hurdles in the way of marriage!

But Amina had finally succeeded in finding a suitable match for her daughter. Along with her fourteen year old son, Shafi, she managed to incur a loan from her mistress and adding what little she had saved to the two pavans her daughter had earned, she sent her daughter to her husband's house, adorning her with jewellery worth four pavans.

Johara had come to her mother's place for her first delivery, but her second confinement was at her husband's home. During those times whatever Khader earned would never make ends meet, and Amina used to lend whatsoever help she could. When Rawoof was of two years Johara had conceived again. This time, she was finding it difficult to cope up with the situation of caring for two children, her morning sickness, as well as the household duties; chores, which her mother-in-law had never shared.

Johara was six months pregnant, the day when Khader had come home and asked her "give me your alikaths and ear studs". Taken aback she had questioned mildly "why?"

"Why do you need to know all that? Do as I say"

"That…….I need to ask my Umma"

"You are my wife now, you have to give when I ask" he had said roughly.

[117] One pavan is equal to 8 grams

“In a few months’ time we’ll need them to tide over the expenses, I can’t give them now” already a film of tears had started to glisten in the corner of her eyes.

“Don’t I look after the expenses of your delivery? I am the one who has to spend, in the days to come. Now give that” he had spoken in an authoritative tone.

“I can’t give unless I ask my Umma” Johara too had replied stubbornly, wiping away the gathering tears with the corner of her sari.

Silence reigned supreme during supper that night. “Nowadays what kind of women are these! How can they say no when their husbands ask for gold? Why does anyone need such a wife?” Her mother-in-law had grumbled audibly.

Khader slept in the outer veranda that day. Johara couldn’t sleep properly and spent the entire night tossing and turning, in a restless manner. The baby, his baby, was making its presence known, by stirring in the womb.

The day dawned as usual. Khader standing in the doorway told his wife “get ready soon to go to your mother’s place” with an irritated look on his face.

Though Johara was shocked, without a word she got ready to leave. She couldn’t fathom his feelings looking at his face. Anyway going to her natal place was happiness indeed to her.

Amina warmly welcomed her daughter who had come home with her husband and kids. When she served tea and eatables to her son-in-law, he left in a huff, saying that he had just had his tea, without even properly speaking to his mother-in-law.

Amina was disturbed by the changed behaviour of her son-in-law. She started enquiring her daughter “what’s wrong with your husband? Have you fought with him?” Johara explained everything and then “I had toiled four years for the sake of those jewels, for which I taken the beatings of my mistress as well as cleaned the filth of her children. Just because he ordered me to give those jewels, has it come free? Would you have kept quiet if I had it given without your permission?”

“But still…” Amina hesitated “isn’t he your husband? You should have given when he had asked. You could have informed me later”

“How can we spend everything now? You don’t know the difficulties I had to put up with during my confinement when Rawoof was born”

“What to do moale? Amina had interrupted her daughter “isn’t it to suffer Allah has created us? Forget it, by the way why was it that he wanted money?”

“Will men ever tell women why do they need money?”

“Hmm, now that you have come, we’ll wait for some days, let’s see” Amina had consoled her daughter.

Some days elapsed. Some more days went by, without even as so much of a sign by the son-in-law. Amina called her son and told him “looks like your brother-in-law is furious, you go and bring him around”.

When Shafi went to meet his brother-in-law, he was greeted by Khader’s mother, sporting a resentful look, who called out to her son “your wife’s brother has come to invite you, now make haste” in a sour manner, loaded with insinuations.

Khader came out and said stormily “have you come to invite me? Your sister doesn’t need me. She fancies her jewellery more than me. Let her parade wearing her jewels!”

When Shafi retorted “no bhava it isn’t like that” Khader without even having the patience to listen snapped “no, nothing. Tell your sister that I am not coming. If she wants I will give her, her talaq.”

“Oh no, what is this that you are uttering bhava? Divorcing (talaq) for such small matters? You come home, I will make her give you the gold” Shafi countered in a soft manner.

“No need. Am I a dog to dance to her tunes? I will come if and when I want to. You may go now” Khader had replied angrily. His mother, made matters worse by her rejoinder from inside“You are right my son, good that you said what you did. Did she think that her husband is a servant?” she had fuelled the fire, which was already smouldering.

Shafi, a young lad of twenty, who had just started to sprout a moustache, hadn’t experienced anything like this in his life. At that moment he was quite naturally angry with his sister. Why should his sister had to be so very obstinate? If she had given the jewels when bhava had asked this angry scene wouldn’t have happened. Now who is going to take care of Akka and her kids?

The moment he reached home he told his mother the same thing. “Bhava is very angry. Akka doesn’t have any common sense”

Now even Amina felt that what her son said was the truth. What can a mother do if an expecting woman, with two young children in tow, come to her house? The loan which was incurred during the wedding wasn’t yet repaid. She had wanted to repay

the loan at the earliest, so that she could bring in a daughter-in-law, by arranging her son's marriage. Now with Johara and her children at home, she was worried whether it would be Shafi's lot to shoulder their burden.

Next Friday she once again pleaded with her son "Shafi, somehow try to cajole your bhava to come home"

"Okay, I'll go in the evening" he had agreed. But before that, he heard someone calling him from outside. Thinking that Khader had come, Shafi, followed by Amina, and Johara, came out. Alas! It wasn't the son-in-law of the house, but the mukri of the mosque, who had come to deliver the talaq (divorce), Khader had given Johara.

"The shaitan, how could he do this too?" so saying Amina began to cry. Shafi stood dazed, while Johara went to the kitchen and sat in front of the stove. She was preparing to cull her feelings and was trying to transform her heart into a stone slab.

Now Johara became the reason for anything that went wrong in the house. For any misfortune she was blamed. If the chicks were snatched away by eagles, Johara was scolded. If there was no sugar or coffee powder in the house, both the son and mother behaved as if it was all Johara's fault. The children who were habituated with having biscuits and plantains, often used to cry for these things. Johara who knew no work whatsoever and had never earned anything in her life, would weep along with her children. The mental agony which was perpetrated by the harsh words and behaviour of her mother and brother would find an outlet in her; through scolding and beating her children.

At times, lying down in her bed, Johara would ruminate deeply about what was meant by 'husband'. Was it so great an error not to comply with his wishes, of not giving her hard earned jewels to him? For such a silly reason did he have to abandon her and his own offspring? Was the relationship of husband and wife so very fragile, that it would sever with the utterance of three talaqs? Are those three words so very powerful so as to separate both of us forever, in spite of his child growing in my womb, his blood flowing in my body? Is it possible that I too could utter three words and free him? Questions which had no answers would worry her mind.

Johara gave birth to her third offspring. The reason it was a son gave a little solace to both the mother and daughter. But the poverty was intolerable. What comforts can a divorced (talaq) woman expect from her mother? Due to lack of proper food, Johara

wasn't lactating properly and when the suckling baby started whimpering for not getting enough milk, Johara's helpless tears dampened the baby's cheeks. When Amina brought in a feeding bottle filled with a little tea, the baby stopped crying and began to suck gratefully, while Johara dozed facing the wall.

The baby was three months old when one day, Johara, who was washing clothes in the stream, spied Fatima, a distant relative of her mother-in-law, walking briskly towards their house. She immediately rushed in and informed her mother. Amina received her, offered her a mat, as a way of welcome to sit down, and began to voice her miseries.

"What a situation your Khader has brought my daughter to? Apart from giving her talaq while she was pregnant, he didn't even send some money to tide over her delivery. Who is going to mete out punishment to men like these?"

"That's exactly why I have come. He is repenting now. He is also miserable and chafing for not having seen his children from long. He intends to marry her again. What do you say to this proposal?"

"Hmm…" Amina opened her eyes wide in shock. "Do you think it is so very easy?"

"Why not? We have to observe 'ojjath[118], isn't that so? What is so difficult about it? Let us do it" She said in a nonchalant manner.

"Will Johara agree to that?"

"How can she not agree? What options does she have? How on earth can she manage on her own with three small children? Then, in case he takes his children away, what is she left with? Somehow you need to try and make her look at the situation in a proper perspective, so that she agrees"

"The question here is not of her agreeing or disagreeing. After her delivery she hasn't menstruated yet. Isn't this marriage for a day impossible without her getting her periods? In some instances women don't menstruate for months together, or even for a year……"

The one who had come with the proposal, intervened without allowing her to complete. "Can one wait for so long? It's a miracle that he has changed his mind.

[118] One day marriage

What guarantee that he doesn't change his mind again? Why don't you go to a doctor, and get her some medicine to menstruate?" she suggested.

Amina sat thinking. Menstruation, conception are all work of nature and should happen naturally. How can one change these rules of nature to suit one's convenience?

Johara flared up in anger when she broached this issue with her. "What is this that you are saying? Wasn't he the one who had divorced (talaq) me? Now has he planned to punish me, further? Whose mistake was it? Was it mine or his?"

"Let us not discuss about whose mistake it was. Irrespective of who commits mistakes, isn't it always women are the ones, who suffer? Don't forget it is women who have to undergo the penance. It is best for all concerned, if we listen to what she had said. I will visit the doctor tomorrow itself".

"Umma, I can't go through this" she said stubbornly.

Hmmm……Amina's patience started giving way "you were always obstinate. When he had asked for the jewel, adamantly you refused to give. Now you are mulishly saying that you neither want this nor that. If you remain here who is going to take care of you and your children? How long can Shafi look after you? Isn't it essential that he too needs to get married and have a family of his own? Or have you decided to hand over your children to their father and remain here being a maid and char woman to your brother?" Amina started reprimanding Johara harshly. She had never listened to her daughter's arguments. The only thing she was concerned about was that her daughter's marital life, which had become stationary, should come to life and move forward. She was ready to go to any lengths to oil the rusty springs of her daughter's marital life. She was ready to sacrifice anything and wished that her daughter too should brace herself for any sacrifice.

Johara, though, hesitant initially, gradually began to accept the solution of 'Ojjath', which meant marrying someone for a day, to be divorced by him, the next day. She had found it a herculean task to feed her children properly. Her brother's insolence and rudeness, her mother's admonitions, her children's perpetual hunger, due to the lack of proper food; all frazzled her to a such a great extent, that one fine day she capitulated and told her mother that she was ready to undergo the ritual of 'ojjath-

marriage for a day', which meant sacrificing herself, her self-respect, her dignity, for the sake of her children.

Amina visited the doctor the very next day and started treating Johara with tablets and herbal concoctions. To keep up with the principles of religion, a grim fight against the principles of nature, began in real earnest.

Within a span of two days, Johara started running a mild fever. "Just a wee bit of temperature, that's all" thinking thus, both the mother and daughter didn't pay much attention, and neglected the issue. When Fatima came the next day Amina told her "the doctor has told that everything will be O.K., within a week. Let us decide everything after that" and sent her on her way.

As the days passed Johara began suffering from high fever, apart from the unbearable pain in her lower abdomen. Looking at her daughter's pain-wracked body and distress, Amina once again visited the doctor and fed Johara with tablets and brews. She even vowed to sacrifice a fowl at the Darga, after having circled it above her daughter's head, to ward off her sickness and ague.

Next day Johara started to bleed. Both, mother and daughter heaved a sigh of relief, thinking it to be a sign of happy ending. Alas! As the days passed the bleeding showed no signs of abating and the mother and daughter were shaken, and horrified. Johara began haemorrhaging heavily, and collapsed with weakness. But, at last, summoning every ounce of energy, Johara, managed to sit and beckoned her children to come to her. She embraced and kissed them both lovingly and with great difficulty told them "obey your granny". She then held her new born, who, not finding any milk even after repeatedly sucking the dried up breasts of its mother, was wailing piteously, in a fidgety manner. She caressed the baby for a second, before placing it in her mother's arms. "Umma....where is your son-in-law?.. Who made me go through so much misery.... your son-in-law who had divorced me, given my talaq….and once again wanted to marry me? ....where is he?" Johara slowly managed to utter these final words before she laid her head on the pillow and breathed her last, her eyes closed forever.

Slowly, dusk began descending on the house. Along with the yells and cries of the children, Amina too wailed in a heart rending manner, "ayyo, my darling daughter, how come you could leave us and go?" Beating her breasts in profound grief.

Voiceless Pains

Kannada original: Dwaniyillada Novugalu.
Aboobackar, Sarah. (1992), *Payana Mattu Ethara kathegalu* (An anthology of short stories)

It was the month of Ramzan and ten days since the fasting had begun. Except for the first few days, it seemed that the remaining days were winged, as they seemed to fly. From ten in the morning till seven in the evening, Zareena was busy without even a moment's respite. Somehow in between her daily chores she would eke out some time for her namaz, after which she would once again continue her work. But her face never for a moment registered boredom or fatigue, and despite her busy schedule she looked cheerful, as she attended to her work.

It wasn't that there wasn't any reason for that.

All these years her family was in the shadow of poverty and even in the month of Ramzan they never had any good food. For breakfast in the early morning they seldom had the luxury of fish curry, vegetables and savouries like others. As usual all she had was lentil curry and rice. Her mother used to milk the goat when she would heat up the curry and boil water for tea. Each had a cup of tea, laced with goat's milk and there ended their morning frugal meal. Only When it was quarter to seven in the evening did any of them think of having a drink of water, that too it was only after her brother had given his muezzin's call for the magrib namaz. Even the evening meal wasn't any different. Dumplings made from ground rice to be eaten with dry fish curry. It was fresh sardines, only on those days when fish was cheap. This was the regular fare for all at home. But since her brother was the Maulvi, people of the town would send him *akki roti*, chicken or mutton curry besides bananas and sweets and he would have his food in the mosque. He would send home a little of the lentil soup that came to the mosque, which the family members would share with him after their taraavi namaz, before going to bed. Thus their fasting of one day would end. They would get up at three thirty in the morning to read the Quran and pray, after having their morning meal. But for the Maulvi, who would go straightaway to the Mosque, they would go back to bed and get up later at ten.

Though Zareena had been married for three years now, there wasn't any change in their living conditions. She was married to Mustapha, a boy from the nearby town. He somehow had managed to study till the eight standard, after which he started loitering around without doing anything. He neither toiled in the small patch of land his father owned nor worked elsewhere. His parents fondly hoped that he would be back on tracks once married. If we have an eligible boy, interested in marriage, do we have any dearth of girls? Even if there is scarcity as far as other things are considered, do we ever have a scarcity of eligible brides? Isn't that the cheapest thing available in the market today?

The moment people came to know that Mustapha's parents were interested in getting him married, proposals started arriving.

His parents opined that a few thousand rupees and a little gold-say about thirty five to forty grams- weren't too much to ask for, as dowry. But their views were that if only he was a hard working lad they could have asked for more. His laziness was the reason for this concession! "Wasn't he a man?" his maleness, which was an endowment of nature, was the sole reason for asking dowry!

This was when Zareena's brother was in search of a groom for his sister. It was with great difficulty that the Maulvi took care of his mother, two younger brothers and three younger sisters. They had managed, through extreme duress of pinching and scraping, to buy ten to twelve gold earrings for Zareena to wear in her ear loops. A pair of gold bangles was yet to be bought. For the time being Maulvi thought that the matter could be solved by asking his wife for her bangles. But what about the two thousand rupees in cash? "Let us see, God is there. The people of the town might not forsake me" thinking thus the Maulvi went to meet Mustapha's father. The matter was settled on the same day. Even if the boy doesn't work now, once married and saddled with a wife, he might be responsible enough to work, were the thoughts of Maulvi too. After having a look at their house and surroundings he felt secure in the knowledge that his sister probably wouldn't face any hardships there. He returned home jubilantly, fixing the date of marriage.

Immediately after returning home he started collecting money for the dowry. He met and explained his situation to the affluent people of the Jamaat. Easily the requisite

amount was pooled along with generous donations of coconuts, good quality rice and such other things. The fly in the ointment was Maulvi's wife Zubaida.

She was naturally upset and furious when asked to sacrifice her bangles. "Why did you have to secure this alliance when you knew well enough that you couldn't meet their demands? You should have chosen one well within your means, suiting your status……." "Tupp" her speech was cut short. Her cheek bore the imprint of Moulvi's palm.

"If you want to stay in my house shut up and obey me. Or else I will have to jog your memory about your mother's place" boiling with rage he left to mosque. Zubaida lay on her bed weeping "All eye my bangles. Before my marriage I had toiled day and night, rolling beedies to acquire these bangles". Her mother-in-law came in, trying her best to console her "whenever it becomes possible we will buy new bangles for Zareena and return yours dear. Please don't fret and feel bad" was her advice to her daughter-in-law.

Later the Wedding celebrations went on without a hitch. Zubaida wiped her eyes and averted her face at the sight of her sister-in-law's shining wrists, adorned with her bangles. Grudgingly, with a glum expression she attended the feast at the groom's place.

The two thousand that the Maulvi had given to Mustapha's father went towards the expenditure of the wedding expenses. Good quality rice and mutton curry was cooked and the entire town feasted. The groom's party travelled to and fro in rented vans. When the wedding ended Mustapha's father had incurred a small amount of loan too.

After the wedding and with the arrival of a wife Mustapha was supposed to turn over a new leaf, which never materialized. As before, he loitered around in the company of his friends. Worse, he was happier than before. His trim moustache added a peculiar charm to his countenance. His grooming habits changed drastically. When earlier he never used to care much for his hair, now he oiled it daily, with the coconut oil prepared by his mother from the spoilt, inedible coconuts. Fashioning his hair properly by combing it, wearing the new white mundu and white shirt stitched for his wedding, inserting a hanky around his collar, he would step out of the house in his new slippers. Zareena would gaze at him oblivious of everything. In case he knew that his parents were not in, he would pinch her cheeks, caress and kiss her, and for

Zareena it was the seventh heaven, apart from which she was sure there wasn't any other. Standing near the door jamb she would watch him till he turned round the corner and disappeared.

But his father wasn't happy with the new developments. He disapproved of his son's grooming. "Have you seen your son's hairstyle? Look at the way he has grown his hair like that of kaafirs! The shaitan is sure to go to hell!" He would grumble with his wife and Zareena's face would fall listening to this tirade.

"Please don't upset the young lass, who is still new to these surroundings. Let her be carefree at least for a few days" The wife would try to soothe her husband.

But this didn't last for long. When the son himself was a burden, by bringing in a daughter-in-law the load had increased and Mustapha's father started worrying and became distressed thinking of the folly he had perpetrated by marrying his good for nothing son. He tried to instil some sense by advising his son now and then.

One day this led to an unforeseen event and things precipitated. "Remove and keep aside your white mundu and shirt. Either work in our land or elsewhere for daily wages. Learn to work for your keeping. Realize that you have a wife at home, who is your responsibility." the son was infuriated listening to his father.

"Thch, who is going to work for daily wages, I am going to do business, give me some capital to set up a business" the son argued with his father.

"Capital? Which funds are you talking about? I have yet to settle the loan which I had incurred for your wedding …." before the father had stopped speaking the son butted in loudly, in an insolent manner "Where is the money that came in as my dowry?" The father was incensed.

"Bloody Bastard, how dare you ask me the details about your dowry? From where do you think the money for your wedding expenses came? Was it sent by your grandfather?" This went on and on for a while and at last "you shouldn't stay a minute longer in my house. Get out with your wife, now, this instant" the father ordered his son.

His wife tried consoling him, "please have some patience. Just because children snap at us, does it mean that we too could behave childishly, like them? Does it look good if we behaved in the same vein?" he just about slapped her for her efforts to retain peace.

“It is because of your indulgence that he is a spoilt brat today. With what fond hopes did we marry him? Hoping that he will improve, realize his responsibilities, and come to his senses once married. But it looks like he has taken a turn for the worse and having a wife seems to be the reason for his sprouting horns! Isn’t he trying to gore me? Turning out of the house will teach him a lesson. From now on, if he so much as steps into the house I will hack his legs off” he thundered.

The son, was he any less than his sire? Wasn’t he his father’s son? Wasn’t he the chip off the old block? Feeling insulted in his wife’s presence he retorted angrily “never again am I going to step inside this house” and rushing towards his room ordered his wife, “hmm, pack your belongings”

Zareena, who had not yet completed fifteen summers, was shocked witnessing the frenzied row between the father and son. Not knowing what to say, she had stood there weeping, and the moment she heard her husband’s order, she came to life and hurriedly started packing her things into a trunk. He too threw his clothes into the trunk to join hers. When he called to her “hmm, set out”, she, dressed in her burkha, went to take leave of her mother-in-law and said “Umma, bye, see you some time” courteously, in a becoming manner. “Sure child, come back soon” her mother-in-law blessed her. Then she went to seek her father-in-law’s blessings, but he had already left and was nowhere to be seen. Zareena followed her husband.

In this fashion Zareena returned home, to her mother’s place. During the twilight hours when her brother spotted Zareena and Mustafa entering, opening the wicker gate of the courtyard, he welcomed them warmly. Sending his sister indoors he chatted with Mustafa about their wellbeing and later left to the mosque along with him.

Zareena explained the entire episode to her mother. For the time being she was pleased to be back. After she gossiped with her mother and younger sisters, cuddled her nephew and played with him, she felt better with all her pain and soreness forgotten, which were at the moment, a thing of the past. Since her husband was with her she didn’t think that she need be anxious about the unpleasant incident unduly. Neither her mother worried much. “The disagreement between father and son might blow over shortly, most likely in a few days” were her thoughts and she let the matter be. For now she was glad to have her daughter home.

However, the son-in-law who arrived thus, never left and became a permanent member. Earlier if the Maulvi had to feed only his sister, now he had to provide for his brother-in-law too. Just because his father had thrown him out it didn't mean that they too could get rid of him, they who had given their daughter in marriage, could they? What if he breaks up with his wife if addressed bitterly? In any case the marriage was solemnized. At present there was no course open, other than to suffer and put up with everything that came their way.

Mustafa, at times when his dad was not at home, would go and get some money from his mother by pleading and harassing her. When running short of cash he would at times, also pester his wife. By now some of the many earrings that adorned her earlobes had vanished. On occasions, he had left in a huff and not returned home for the reason that she had refused to part with her remaining earrings. Nothing escaped the watchful eyes of the Maulvi, who noted down all that was happening, to the smallest detail.

Before they knew, two years had passed in this manner. All of Moulvi's plans of his sister's living happily in her husband's house had turned upside down. Now he had to resort to nothing less than some drastic measure of providing him with a livelihood. Many of his acquaintances, who were working in the Gulf Countries, were sending home a sizeable amount. The upshot was that the Maulvi thought that Mustafa should be sent likewise and took a step towards this outcome.

He broached this issue with several of his associates. "It doesn't matter what sort of a job, enough if he earns a decent living. Instead of him roving about doing nothing here, it is better even if he works as a coolie there. Please send a visa" was his fervent plea.

Since one couldn't refuse the request of a person as important as the Maulvi of their Masjid, a visa did arrive, sent by some kind hearted fellow. The Maulvi with great difficulty managed to borrow an amount which was spent in buying an air ticket for Mustafa. On the eve of his departure to the Gulf, he had a lengthy tête-à-tête with Zareena.

"Zareena my dearest, from now on you will want for nothing. I will send you clothing and all your other requirements from there, along with some cash, every month, regularly" Zareena interrupted his flow.

“Wait….don’t send too much of cash. Put aside all the extra amount .We need to purchase a house of our own”. Mustafa was taken aback “since from when did you become so very smart?” He questioned her.

“We can’t go back to your father’s house because it is out of question. My sister-in-law too passes snide remarks such as both husband and wife have lodged here. So, I just had this idea that we are in need of our own house” answered Zareena, feeling secure reclining in Mustapha’s embrace. She had a streak of self-respect despite her tender age. The night was spent blissfully. In the morning after wiping her tears and patting her tearstained cheeks, he had left with a goodbye kiss. Maulvi had heaved a sigh of relief.

All this had happened nearly one and a half years ago. By now a Ramzan month and two festivals had elapsed in Mustafa’s absence. Every now and then he used to send some money to her brother. Last year during both the festivals he had sent some clothes and saris with some one or the other. “Instead of sending with anybody it would have been better if he had come at least once” Zarina had wished dearly many a times.

On every occasion, the arrival of her husband’s letter reminded her of the last night they had spent together; and the tête-à-tête they had shared. “Is Zareena happy? My blessings and wishes to her” was the only sentence that was meant as his message for her, in his correspondence.

“Zareena, do you have anything to convey to your husband?” Maulvi would always enquire with her while he was replying to his brother-in-law’s letters. Those were the moments when she saw her illiteracy as the cause of all her troubles, and wished that she was literate. That She could read and write. How pleasant it would be if she could put in writing her feverish yearnings for him and all the sweet nothings she wanted to tell her husband and in turn read his letter! The alphabet, which she couldn’t write would appear to her as coiled, twisted and crooked lines. Maulvi would once again repeat his question to his sister, who though silent seemed to be in deep contemplation, “Zareena, do you want me to write anything on your behalf in this letter?”

“Convey my salaams Anna, ask him to watch over his health properly”

She always felt shy and tongue tied in her brother's presence, to utter anything more. She wanted to remind her husband to save some money as to purchase a house for them. But since she didn't wish for her brother to write that, she somehow managed to contain the desire within herself.

These were the days when she was constantly besieged by her husband's memories. A young woman of eighteen, she had blossomed, and was awaiting her husband, similar to a patch of parched land which waits in anticipation for the very first showers of monsoon. This year Mustafa had promised to be there in time for the Ramzan fest and had sent a money order for three thousand rupees to Zareena. "Perform the religious fast agreeably and spend the days cheerfully" he had requested in a letter he had written to Maulvi. Hence Zareena was spending the days of fast very joyously. When her brother had shopped amply with the money sent by Mustafa, and had brought home the much needed groceries, all were smiles. Fresh fish and vegetables started appearing for the morning meals. Twice or thrice a week, Zareena would cook chicken or mutton, lavishly laced with coconut gravy. For their supper, akki roti had become a daily accompaniment. That's why all were buoyed with a fizz, bubbling with an unknown excitement this Ramzan. Zareena was pleased and content in the knowledge that this year at least, they too had spent their days of fasting in style, like that of affluent people.

Of late Zareena has started a countdown of the remaining days to the Ramzan fest, because it meant a reunion with her husband, which she eagerly looked forward to. If Mustafa would be there well in advance for the festival then naturally it meant that they may perhaps hope for new clothes too. Her only regret was that she hadn't been bold enough to tell her brother to write in his letter to Mustafa, her fancy for a blue sari with a zari border, which would have been lovely, the proverbial icing on the cake. But then she was timid and hesitant. Nevertheless she decided that she would personally inform him when he would return.

Lately, yet another intense desire was burgeoning forth from the innermost recesses of her heart. It was four years since they were married. True, from the past one and a half years he was abroad, but before that they were together, say for almost two and a half years. But still she had not conceived and had remained barren! None seemed to have been concerned about it at that moment. Probably for the reason her husband wasn't

earning then. Even her mother never gave it a thought, as to why she was childless. Now that he has started working in the Gulf her mother occasionally used to say, "Next time when Zareena's husband comes we need to take her to the "doctor" in Mangalore for a check-up".

Her mother's words had taken hold of her and germinated in the form of a new longing. How marvellous it would be if I too had a baby like that of my brother! Since my husband is working abroad, it shouldn't be difficult to purchase a small house of our own, within a couple of years. A modest house of my own, a little one, a caring and loving spouse ……..her future unfurled in her vision, surfacing from the bottom of her heart, like a beautiful, flowering garden.

Her thoughts race on. During the festival when Mustafa is here, wearing the new sari that he has brought for me, we should visit his parents. By now, after knowing that he is an earning member, in all likelihood my father-in-law's anger might have subsided. I too am bored living here and the change will be pleasant. If they force us to stay with them then so be it.

Zarina was sitting on the parapet of the well in her backyard, busy daydreaming, building castles in the air and her reverie was rudely disturbed when she heard someone calling out to her, "Zarinamma". She came down with a thud and glanced to see who had pulled her down from her exquisite cruise on the clouds. Korapalu was standing on the other side of the hedge. "Oh…it is you" Zarina ran towards her. She knew Korapalu from her childhood days and whenever they met they had a harmless tittle-tattle, which was the unwritten rule. The snippets of gossip would be on the subject of their neighbours; about the daughter-in-law from the big bungalow, whether she had gone to her mother's place or not, news concerning the theft of Aminattae's (Amina aunt's) silver chain, Aminattae who lived near the fields, about the havoc that a dreadful lad had caused by entering Fatima's cottage when she was alone; Zarina loved to listen to all these juicy titbits, thanks to Korapalu! As usual, after their customary round of banter Zarina requested "Korapalu, for this Ramzan festival please get me some madarangi leaves of good quality, which stain a brilliant red. Isn't there a plant in the "Piramar's" backyard, across the stream? Fetch me those leaves".

“What’s so special this year? Last year as far as I remember you hadn’t applied madarangi during the festival, had you?” In answer to Korapalu’s query Zarina’s eyes twinkled. Her cheeks were suffused with a crimson red hue. Blushing she replied “I just felt like applying this year”, without meeting Korapalu’s gaze.

“Oh …..I guess I know the reason! The one who is in Gulf will come home this year! Isn’t it so?” light-heartedly in a playful repartee Korapalu had teased her. Later,

“Zareenamma, when your husband comes isn’t he going to bring lots of saris? Please do give me an old one, I will get you a lot of madarangi leaves” Korapalu promised.

“Okay mate, but don’t get it now, bring on the eve of the festival. I will definitely give you a sari as well as sweetmeats too” so saying Zareena walked towards home in the gathering dusk.

Only four days were remaining for the festival. It was two weeks since Mustafa’s letter had arrived. “Most probably he himself might appear within a day or two, hence no letter” Maulvi had tried consoling his sister. Yet for some reason her over-sensitive mind had drooped. Though she had spent the one and half years without his presence, now she felt that she didn’t have the fortitude to restrain her for a few more days and it was becoming unendurable. Each single day without him was a torment, the hours seemed never to pass, giving the feeling that the lengthy day stretched forever, never ending.

That day as usual when Zareena was standing near the patio at eleven in the morning she spied the postman hastening towards their house and her heartbeats increased. In all likelihood her husband must have sent a telegram to inform them about the particular day he would arrive. Standing at the entrance she watched the postman until he reached their hedge and when he came in opening their wicker gate she moved out of sight, behind the door. When he said “Amma post” she extended her hand and received it, without coming out of her concealment. Only after the post man had moved out of their gate and was spotted on the path leading away, did she come out and glance at the post in her hand, turning it around. No it wasn’t a telegram. It was a letter. If it had been a telegram, to receive it, she would have had to make a thumb impression in the way of signature!

She had no doubts as to its origin that it was from the Gulf. How incredibly attractive was the long envelope with embroidered edges like that of a sari border! The picture

of an aeroplane on its cover was also very pretty. Isn't it how he has to arrive from the Gulf by flying in one such airplane? Unknowingly she heaved a sigh. If only she had known how to read these crooked, curved, long and short lines? Knew how to transform these twisted lines into alphabet?

She set aside the letter carefully. It was possible to know what the letter contained only after her brother came home from the mosque. At present there wasn't any other means. With bated breath she waited for her brother.

When the Maulvi came home after concluding the noon's prayer Zareena came running to meet her brother. "Anna, the letter has come", she was unable to hide her happiness and failing to curb her impatience, she, with twinkling eyes appeared before him. "Four or five more days to go for the festival" so saying she placed the letter in his outstretched palm.

When opened, the envelope seemed to contain two letters. Maulvi first read the small sheet of paper that his hand closed on.

"I have sent Abdul Kadar's daughter Zarina's three talaqs" signed, "Mustafa" the names of other four witnesses were also written in the letter.

Maulvi felt faint with shock. His sister never understood what her brother had just read!

"Umma…" Maulvi loudly called his mother from the outer hall. His mother, who was busy, preparing mutton for the supper, came immediately, keeping it aside.

"What's the matter child? What happened?" she questioned apprehensively.

Maulvi didn't speak for a moment .He was fighting to regain his composure. His face wore a grim expression. He removed his headdress and kept it on a nearby table. Then with the same gravity he said,

"Mustafa has sent Zarina's talaqs".

"Hmmm…ohh... Nooo…."involuntarily, unknown to her, Zareena let out a wailing shriek. Momentarily she stood rooted to the spot as if struck by lightning and the next instant when she regained her senses she darted into her room and threw herself on to her bed. It was as if her heartbreak had generated an intense heat from her bosom, drying up her tears. Her paralyzed mind refused to think about anything, not even the calamity that had befallen her.

But her mother who was standing near the door collapsed and started crying loudly. "Scoundrel, how could you punish my daughter like this? What wrong has she done to you?" She lamented beating her breasts mournfully. In between her weeping bouts she asked "hasn't he written anything else?"

It was then that the Maulvi remembered the other letter. He started reading that too.

"Dear brother-in-law, assalam alaikum. You might feel sad after beholding this letter. It is not different with me either. I too am feeling miserable to send this letter, but I had no other option. Please don't ask me the reason. You wed your sister to another suitable young man. In case there is any need to provide dowry I will contribute a thousand rupees. Salaam"

"Hmmm…." Maulvi uttered stridently. "Rascal, he says he is going to send a thousand rupees to get her married to someone else. Wretch that he is, who couldn't even treat a woman with proper decency, the dog… anyhow hasn't he crossed the waterway safely? So where is the necessity for a boatman? He doesn't need me anymore. Nor does he need my sister. Why should he want her now? People of this sort should be publicly beaten with slippers and skinned alive!" The words exploded from him, his anguish, and the misery that he couldn't hold back, found an outlet and flowed forth in the form of frenzied expressions.

"Anna, he was abroad, away from me from the past one and half years and hadn't even seen me during those eighteen months, let alone live with me as man and wife. Does our holy book agree to his divorcing me like this, without any of my mistakes, without a thought to justice, without even giving me an opportunity to speak in my defense? Does it give autonomy to a man to divorce his lawful wife, ruthlessly, in one single instance, to give her the three talaq and release her from holy wedding vows? Does our holy scriptures preach that one can behave callously, in this insensitive, brutal manner?"

When Zareena pathetically voiced these words, a direct result of her unbearable pain it sounded as a wail of distress to Maulvi and fell on his ears like the crash of thundering sea waves. Devoid of an answer he was speechless.

On the eve of the festival Korapalu arrived with Madarangi leaves and called loudly from outside "Zareenamma…..I have brought the madarangi leaves; give me an old sari". In answer, all that she could hear was a pitiful moaning which had the intensity

of piercing one's eardrums, issuing from the depths of the house which was eerily hushed.

Thoroughly alarmed she called once again "Zareenamma ……" In reply Zareena's mother came out. Wiping away the tears from her streaming eyes she told Korapalu,

"My son-in-law is dead Korapalu; Zareena doesn't need madarangi any more…."

APPENDIX II

Sample Questionnaire of the Pilot Statistical Study

Women Writing in Kannada: Sarah Aboobackar

We request you to please fill in wherever needed and to tick ✓ -against the one which you strongly agree.
(This questionnaire is designed for a research purpose and the data will be kept confidential)

1. **Name:**
2. **Age:**
   - ☐ Below 20 years ☐ 20-40 years
   - ☐ 40 -60 years ☐ 60 and above
3. **Gender:**
   - ☐ Male ☐ Female
4. **Marital status:**
   - ☐ Married ☐ Unmarried
5. **Educational qualification**:
   - ☐ Below X std ☐ X std
   - ☐ P.U.C ☐ Graduate ☐ Post graduate
6. **Medium:**
   - ☐ English ☐ Kannada ☐ Any other----------
7. **Profession:**
   - ☐ Employed ☐ Self employed ☐ Not working
8. **What are your hobbies?**
   - ☐ Watching T.V ☐ Reading
   - ☐ Social networking ☐ Any other----------

9. Do you have the habit of reading?

☐ Yes ☐ No

10**. I read:**

☐ News papers ☐ Magazines

☐ Novels/ short stories/fiction ☐ Journals

☐ Any other----------

10. **Have you heard about Sarah Aboobackar**?

☐ Yes ☐ No

12**. Have you read Sarah Aboobacker's short stories/ novels..?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

13**. Do her stories give a true picture of the society?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

14. **Do you agree with her?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

16. **If <u>NO</u> can you please state what is it that you <u>disagree</u> with?**

17. **Do you agree that education can really help girls/ women?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

18. Do you know anything more about Sarah Aboobackar?

<u>THANK YOU</u>

APPENDIX III

Sample Questionnaire of the Main Statistical Study

Questionnaire

Dear students,

I am pursuing a PhD program on Sarah Aboobackar's writings, at the dept. of Humanities, Social Sciences and Management at National Institute of Technology, Karnataka (NITK), Surathkal.

As part of my study I am conducting a survey of reader-response, as well as awareness created by literature- in particular, of Sarah Aboobackar, with Undergraduate students (Degree) as the study group.

If you could answer this questionnaire it would be very helpful. The information provided by you will be kept confidential and used for academic purposes only.

Thank you.

Ambika G. Mallya (Ambika Kamath)
Research Scholar
Dept of HSSM
NITK, Surathkal-575025

Women Writing in Kannada: Sarah Aboobackar

We request you to please fill in wherever needed and to tick ✓ -against the one which you strongly agree.(This questionnaire is designed for a research purpose and the data will be kept confidential)

1. **Name:**
2. **Religion:** ☐ Hindu ☐ Muslim ☐ Christian ☐ Jain ☐ Any other- please specify
3. **Age:** Below 22years ☐ 22 -30years ☐
4. **Gender:** Male ☐ Female ☐
5. **Place of Domicile(Home):** ……
6. **Occupation of Father:** ……
7. **Occupation of Mother:** ……
8. **Marital status:** Married ☐ Unmarried ☐
9. **Educational qualification**: U.G.(Degree)Course ☐
10. **Medium:** English ☐ Kannada ☐
11. **Profession:** Employed ☐ Self employed ☐ Full-Time Student ☐
12. **What are your hobbies?** Watching T.V ☐ Reading ☐ Music ☐

☐ Social networking ☐ any other, please specify----------

13. **Do you have the habit of reading?** Yes ☐ No ☐
14. **I read:** Newspapers ☐ Magazines ☐ Novels/ Short stories/fiction ☐

☐ Adventure ☐ History/ Mythology ☐ Journals ☐ any other

For the following statements please mark accordingly.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3- neutral 4- agree 5- strongly agree

A		1	2	3	4	5
1	I am happy being who I am.					
2	How my life goes depends on me					
3	My parents treat all children equally					
4	Compared to my brother/ sister I have got what I deserve					
5	Girls and boys should be given equal opportunities					
6	The opportunities I have in life are determined by the environment					
7	The opportunities I have in life are determined by the gender					
8	The opportunities I have in life are determined by wealth					
9	The opportunities I have in life are determined by the caste/ religion					
10	I often feel that other people have a controlling influence in my life					
11	I think that education is very important to succeed in life					
12	I believe that education is equally important for girls					
13	Education helps girls/ women to be assertive					
14	Girls/ women should work for their living/ have a regular income.					
15	Marriage is a very important part of life					
16	Marriage is more important to girls than boys					
17	Dowry system is not good and should be wiped out.					
18	Husband and wife should treat each other with respect.					
19	Husband and wife have equal status					
20	Girls/ women should be treated with respect					
21	Women are not the weaker sex					
22	Girls/ women are equal to boys/ men in all respect					

For the following statements please mark accordingly.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3- neutral 4- agree 5- strongly agree

B		1	2	3	4	5
1	I love reading					
2	I read for pleasure					
3	I read for knowledge					
4	I think that literature shows life as we see it in reality					
5	I came to know about many things in life which I did not know earlier because of my reading habit					
6	I came to know about many things in life which I did not know earlier because of watching T.V					
7	Society respects boys / men more than it respects girls/ women					
8	Yes ,I have heard about Domestic violence					
9	I came to know about domestic violence through reading.					
10	I came to know about domestic violence through T.V					
11	I have seen domestic violence in families					
12	I have seen domestic violence in neighborhood					
13	I have experienced domestic violence					
14	I know that girls/ women are treated badly					
15	Domestic violence should be eradicated					
Any other matter						

For the following statements please mark accordingly.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3- neutral 4- agree 5- strongly agree

C		1	2	3	4	5
1.	love reading Sarah Aboobackar					
2.	Sarah Aboobackar is my favorite author					
3	She writes about life as we see around us					
4	Many of the social evils I came to know after reading her books					
5	Her novels and stories are based on reality					
6	She mostly writes about Muslim-Byari community					
7	Yes , Most of what she writes is true					
8	It is not easy to criticize our own community					
9	She has courage to write about her community					
10	I admire her courage					
11	She is a great writer					
12	She deserves the honors she has received					
13	We need more writers like her					
14	She is one of the best writers in Kannada					
15	Yes, through literature we can create awareness					
16	Yes , social awareness can better the social conditions					

I would like to share :

APPENDIX IV

Transcriptions

A NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

In the case of interview data, an important part of the editing process is that the spoken word is first recorded and then transcribed.

The transcription has been done as per qualitative research guidelines.

Uwe Flick speaking about transcription says that "[d]ifferent transcription systems are available which vary in their degree of exactness…In language analyses, the interest often focuses on attaining the maximum exactness in classifying and presenting statements, breaks, and so on… Where linguistic and conversation analytic studies focus on the organisation of language, this kind of exactness may be justified. For more psychological and sociological research questions, however, where linguistic exchange is a medium for studying certain contexts, exaggerated standards of exactness in transcriptions are justified only in exceptional cases. It seems more reasonable to transcribe only as much and only as exactly as required by the research question" (Flick2006: 288-290).

Transcription: Sarah Aboobackar-I interview- Audio
D: 19 June 2012
Sarah Aboobackar's House.

Interviewer (I): Madam, I could not attend the program of Karavali Lekhakiyara and vachakiyara sanga. I wanted to know that whether you had attended the airing of the movie 'Byari', at Ravindrakala mantap in Governemnt College.

Sarah (S): when was this, no I was not aware of this.

I: I am not sure, but I saw the news item that on Saturday, they would air the movie, followed by a discussion. Weren't you invited to this program?

S: No, I was not invited to the program. But how can they air the film, when it is still in the court? The matter is not yet decided legally. Who was behind this?

I: I don't know about that. But that being the case, how can they get the movie *Byari* get Swarna Kamal Award madam?

S: yes, it is wrong. But by the time I had raised the issue the award was already declared in Delhi. But in Karnataka, they did not get any award, or recognition. I have heard that they did not even get the subsidy.

I: Madam, I wonder why they do these things! Earlier, I had attended an international seminar in Kerala. It was on adaptation, the theme being 'Fiction to film'. I could not get a copy of the movie *Byari*, and hence I could not write a paper on it. Because one has to read the book in the original as well as watch the movie, to be able to write a paper. My paper was on Triveni's *Sharapanjara.* The well-known director from Kerala, Adoor Gopalkrishna was the key note speaker and inaugurator of the seminar. During one of the technical sessions, a point was raised that today we don't see any adaptations, from fiction to film and most of the movies are either remakes or dubbed. It was also mentioned that most of the award winning movies were adaptations. This sparked off a discussion and someone remarked that there is a dearth of good stories too. I said that could it be that the producers are just picking up some points from various novels / short stories and then making movies. Because in this fashion they can manage not to give royalty to the authors. And that is where I brought in what had transpired with *Byar*i. I informed them that the author, Sarah Aboobackar herself had told me that *Byari* was based on her novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli.* And even

informed them the novel was filmed earlier in Tamil, and the producer had paid the royalty to the author. The resource person agreed and said that he too was aware of the controversy surrounding the movie *Byari*.

S: Yes, that is because earlier they had publicised in Kerala, that the movie *Byari* is based on my novel. And even the name of the protagonist is the same. Rohini Hattangadi (a renowned artiste of the Hindi cinema) too spoke about Muslim personal law and women's oppression. But isn't that what we see around us? Now for instance, am I not being cheated and taken for a ride?

I: Madam, I remember about an article in the newspaper a program about 'Muslim Samvada' (discussion on Muslims) that women have a lot of rights, which they are unaware of, is this true?

S: yes, it is true.

I: You have even said that when it comes to oppressing women all men come together, you had even cited the example of Shah Bano case. I had recently read your interview in Outlook and what you had said about the men, who had earlier denied the existence of these issues, were celebrating the movie. You had remarked that what they empathise on celluloid, they don't practice in real life. Now I am going through your novels madam, for my PhD work, and the other day when I read your novel *Sahana* and *Vajragalu* I couldn't control my tears. Is it true that girls are married at such young age, and does it happen even in the present times?

S: why of course, yes. They are now contesting the age of marriage, saying that it is in their religion. They want the girls to be married at an age of less than 15 years. This does not stop here. They don't even have a family planning in place and within a span of ten years the young girls will have a brood of children, with her health in decline. Our prophet had advised that girls should not be married until they mature properly. But who listens to all that? It is these clerics who are causing trouble. They argue in the name of religion. And when it is the question of religion, even the Supreme Court cannot overrule. The religion was good at the very beginning, when it was prophet's religion. Now all that we have is cleric's religion, which is very far off the mark. They don't even consider that education is important. After I had started writing, say from the 1990s now some send their daughters to school. The moneyed people can afford, and they will send them to study till their tenth standard, but what about the poor?

There is a reason even for this, it is because that Muslim boys have started asking for educated girls. They do not send their daughters to school, forget college. Even I have heard that Muslim girls really do well but are not allowed to go forward. They never will realise that education is important to girls, to the would-be mothers. In some instance they go to school/ college until they get married. Then education is discarded. They go back to school only they are in need of a certificate, that too, for the sole reason of joining their husband s abroad, for the sake of visa (laughs). This was told by the principal of the government Pre University College for women, in Car Street (an area in Mangalore).

I: Yes, even when our students while coming to college in the morning and while leaving in the evening, are seen wearing burkha, fully covered. I remember an instance in our college. The girl had joined MBA and was married. Since her husband was working in Dubai, she had come to continue her education. On the first day of her joining her mother and brother had accompanied her. I was very happy for all of them and even congratulated the mother. I allied her fears, saying that we have a very good work culture and the sexes maintain a distance even in classrooms, after which she seemed relieved. She knew only Malayalam, and her daughter translated what I had told.

S: isn't that the regular norm? Don't boys and girls sit separately in all colleges?

I: no, madam in some colleges they are given the freedom to behave as they want. But our college is quite strict in these matters and we follow a code, which has to be adheredS: most probably the girl's husband wanted her to study (laughs). Some boys are shrewd. They realise the importance of education, and have their eye on future job opportunities. Was she a beary?

I: that I did not ask, but they spoke Malayalam

S: in that case they are not Bearys. Because the Muslims of this region speak Beary language and those in Kerala speak Malayalam.

I: I am happy that we have some 7-8 Muslim girls. In engineering we have more girls.

S: Yes, if you go to PA College, many Muslims girls are studying. Yes, they come till they are married. Even most of the people from Kerala study engineering and medicine. But all said and done, and they can never come out of their burkha.

I: yes, you have said that in the 1960s when the Muslims tried to come out they were pulled back again. And that now they behave as if they are in the seventh century.

S: very true. For every single forward step they are pulled back by ten steps. I know of some instances in Trivandrum, where the very rich send their daughters to English medium schools, so that they can converse well in English. They study only till the fourth or fifth standard. Apart from that they never think of a proper education or degree. They never see education as important for girls. In Kerala a lady named Fathima Bibi was the first woman who was highly qualified. She was a lawyer and even went on to become the judge of Supreme Court. If I am not wrong she retired as a Governor of Tamilnadu. This is a recent instance, of about not more than 15 years. Now she is aged. In a place with such background now this is what is happening.

I: so you say that the people were more liberal minded then, than now?

S: Yes, that is true.

I: I remember this very well because I had translated your autobiographical chapter, which I has titled as 'Going down the Memory Lane' I remember these things very well. Your another example of Nazma Bhangi, and how the prophet has never differentiated between men and women.

S: yes, our prophet had given equal rights. Even in case of inheritance, our prophet has said that if sons get 2/3, then daughters should get 1/3 in the ancestral property. But who follows all these? Some do give a share to their daughters, but generally people celebrate the marriage of their daughters with lot of pomp, spend a lot and call it a day. They see the expenditure as their daughter's share of their property. And then divide the property between their sons. Daughters should be given dowry/ share for their security. The amount given should not be spent but invested in her name. Many insist on dowry for this reason. Because if not given during the time of marriage, she might never get her share of her father's property, and they invest it later in her name. If the son-in-law is from a decent family, then in such cases he invests the dower in the name of his wife. But that does not happen in most cases. And the girl does not have any security. In some cases parents are willing to pay any amount of dowry, but the only condition that the groom should be a doctor, engineer, police officer, forest officer; any such positions which brings in a lot of bribe. They are ready to pay even 50 lakhs. This is how the society ticks. Where is religion in this?

I: the rich can afford to pay, but what if the parents are poor?

S: in such cases they need to look for grooms within their capacity.

I: then it becomes a problem for the poor.

S: so, the first thing parents should do is make their daughters financially independent. Then let her marry the person of her choice. For instance, my nieces and nephews, who are abroad, have married foreigners, who were Europeans and Chinese. One of my nephew has married a Brahmin girl. Now one of my nieces is an ambassador to Tunisia. Her husband speaks Urdu. Like this in our family we have people from all over (laughs). We have no problem.

I: true, but your family is an exception. All families do not have such broadminded outlook and forget interreligious marriages, even inter-caste marriages are not encouraged.

S: Yes, we have members of all the religions of the world (laughs). Just imagine how does it look, if there is a function in the family and all these members turn up?

I: Yes, a cosmopolitan set!

S: most of them were born and brought up abroad, and these things are common occurrence in the West. We don't stop, because then it might lead to something else. We let things be, because it is the best course of action. In the instance of my nephew who had married a Brahmin girl, in the very beginning, her parents and family had ostracised her. But not for long. After a child was born they reconciled (laughs)

I: to be honest, after reading your stories I realised that we know nothing about Muslims/ Bearys though we have been living in close proximity all these years.

S: yes, many don't even know to pronounce my name properly. Actually my name Sarah is very common, important too, Abraham/ Ibrahim, both in Christianity and Islam. Like you have Sita in yours. My grandmother wanted a granddaughter, so she could give me her name Fathima as my second name and hence my name.

I: I know a little about your religion, but not much. It is not I know nothing.

S: Fathima was prophet's granddaughter. In those days a new born female baby was buried alive. Now it is female foeticide.

I: how come people think like this? Isn't one's wife and mother a woman?

S: true, for anything to be born a female is necessary, but no one realises this. For a male to be born a female is necessary, I tell this many times.

I: so, during the prophet's time they killed female children in this brutal fashion.

S: yes, that is why Prophet said that a female child should be treated equally to be given a fair share in the father's property. That if the son inherited 2/3 the daughter should inherit 1/3. That is because sons take care of the family, whereas daughters leave their natal home. Some do ask for half of the inheritance.

I: yes, even in Hindus we now speak about a fifty-fifty share.

S: forget fifty-fifty, we are happy with1/3. But how many actually give their daughters her rightful share?

I: even in Hindus now it looks like daughters are the ones who take care of their parents. The sons disappear once they get married. A son is a son till he gets married, whereas a daughter always remains a daughter

S: yes, daughters cannot leave their parents like that.

I: I was just now talking about your achievements with my husband. It is not an easy achievement madam, and I am surprised while reading your stories. While I was reading your *Sahana*, *Vajragalu*, when the protagonists speak that the moment a male child is born it should be killed. And in another instance looking at the new born baby girl sadly and wondering why it should have been born a female? Her exclamation that because of the three lettered word (*talaq* is a three lettered word in the Kannada script) her life is in ruins. Even in *Vajragalu*, how when Shafiulla wants to marry the divorced girl his mother objects and in reply he says that they who follow the words of the prophet do not follow in his foot-steps and emulate him, he, who had married a divorcee with two children. I have translated into English, some of these dialogues which have touched my heart. These lines, are actually the essence or core of the entire story/ novel.

S: if my mother was educated, she would have shone still more.

I: yes, you have written about the episodes which your brothers used to refer as Deepavali Visheshanka. Your each story comes alive, because as you have said earlier, you were a witness to the woes of these poor women, when they unburdened themselves to your mother. It really touches one in the raw, when one reads your novels/ stories. Especially in *Vajragalu*, when she is discarded by her husband, due to the underhand plans of her stepson, all for the sake of property, leaving her stranded is pathetic to say the least.

S: yes, that was a real instance which had happened in a family I knew, and the lady in question had to put up with a lot of hardships.

I : just happened to see that another of your novel *Illijaru* is released and that is why I have come. I will come again after reading these books, for further discussions, thank you.

Transcription: Sarah Aboobackar-II interview
D: 07 January 2014
Sarah Aboobackar's House.

I (Interviewer): Namaste/ good evening madam. First I would like to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. As you know I am conducting a research on your fiction. I request you to kindly answer my questions. Do you recall how your interest in writing originated? When did you first realize you wanted to be a writer?

S (Sarah Aboobackar): my father was a great reader. I never thought that I would write. But I used to read a lot and the atmosphere was conducive to reading. In our younger days we had books in Arabic scripts, but it was Malayalam. It was known as Arabic Malayalam. Mapilla pattu store, stories from Quran were in Arabic Malayalam. I think that reading habit of mine made me think that I too could write.

1: As a child, what did you want to do when you grew up?

S: I had no such ambitions. I never gave it a thought. That too for Muslim girls there wasn't any chance to even think of becoming or doing something when one grew up. Girls were married at a very young age. My mother was married at the age of ten. But whenever I saw a doctor I too wanted to become one.

I: What inspired you to write your first book? How did you come up with the title?

S: when I was young people if they wanted to go to Kasaragod they had to cross the Chandragiri River in a boat. For women they had to have someone, a male family member with them, or else it was not possible. So I saw this river as the rules and regulations of religion, which women could not cross on their own, that they needed someone with them. The easy divorce (*talaq*) all these rules were man made to keep women in their control. The prophet had told to divorce only in rare circumstance, so that both could lead happy lives. Now if the girls is not obedient enough, and for silly reasons, she is divorced. These rules were brought into practice to exploit women. Girls are not sent to school, nor do they have economic independence. So it is really sad when they oppress women. I has written this with the intention of eradicating it.

I: What do you think makes a good story?

S: I believe that portraying real incidents in itself makes a good story and we need not go in search of any.

I: Is there a message in your novels and short stories that you want readers to grasp?

S: my message is to reform the society, to do away with these wrong customs and create awareness. Like in my debut novel, when the protagonist commits suicide in the pool of the mosque, she seeks justice in Allah's court. Do we need such customs which induce suicide?

I: How much of the books are realistic? Are experiences based on someone you know, or events in your own life?

S: I believe all my books are created from real incidents. The ones which I have seen in my vicinity, like I have said in many of my books.

I: Can you tell us about your challenges in getting your first book published?

S: I did not publish. It was Lankesh who first published my book. When I first started writing I had written and sent to Sudha and Taranga, but it was not published. But after I became famous they requested me to send a story and I sent the ones which were rejected earlier and they were published.

I: Which books have influenced your life most? Who is your favorite author and what is it that really strikes you about their work?

S: One is Shivarama Karanth. His writings were pro-women. No, we cannot call him a feminist, but yes, he has written a lot which is pro-women. Ta. Ra. SU, A.N. Kra, all used to write well. Byrappa too wrote well, but then something went wrong with him and his recent book is a shame to any author. He has portrayed women with a lot of prejudice. It shows the mental attitude of men towards women.

I: If you had to choose, which writer would you consider a mentor?

S: Shivaram Karanth, because like I have said earlier he was empathetic to the problems of women. Then Triveni and Anupama Niranjana.

I: Which book are you reading now?

S: currently I am reading a book written by a new author, titled *Sankalpa*. The theme is the love between a Muslim boy and a Hindu girl. In my speeches I have spoken

about Honour Killings'. Because the boy and girl love and marry outside the caste and in some instances religion, they are killed by the parents, family. I have wondered many times how does it become 'honourable' if the couple is murdered? How does it bring back the *maryada* or prestige of your family? Instead of killing them if you don't like what they have done, sever your ties with them. Send them out of your town to a far off place, but why murder them?

I: Are there any new authors that have grasped your interest?

S: Nemichandra .

I: What are your current projects? Can you share a little of your current work with us?

S: no, right now I don't have anything that I can share. I am thinking about a project where the husband is up to mischief and his wife does not know anything about it.

I: What does your family think of your writing?

S: they are happy about it and from the very beginning they were supportive about it.

I: Name one entity that you feel supported you outside of family members.

S: I cannot remember any special support, I would like to say that all have supported me.

I: Do you hear from your readers much? What kinds of things do they say?

S: yes, they call and write to me sometimes. But there isn't anything special in what they think or say. Earlier, yes, they used to tell me, that I should also write about Hindu communities.

I: What has been the toughest criticism given to you as an author? What has been the best compliment?

S: I don't remember any criticism as the toughest nor compliments as best. I never give much importance to these things. Compliments keep coming. Earlier, when is started writing, especially for my novel *Shahana*, which is about polygamy I think I must have received a lot of compliments as well as criticisms. And the 'Puttur' incident, where I was tried to manhandle, had created a lot of unwanted publicity. My brother saw it as a good publicity, and he told me in Kerala authors purposely stage

such protestations, to create public interest and make sure their books are sold. And because of this my name became known all over Karnataka and Kerala. Coming back to *Sahana*, if a man does not earn and take care of his family, why do women need such husbands? They are better off without such men in their houses. My maid says I am the only person who speaks like this.

I: How long does it take you to write a book?

S: it depends. Once I have written an entire novel in seven days.

I: What was one of the most surprising things you learned in writing your books?

S: no, nothing that I remember. But the three books that I treasure is *Chanragiri Teeradalli*, *Sahan* and *Vajragalu.*

I: Do you see writing as a career?

S: no, I don't see it as a career. I don't have any other career and I am free. So I write

I: If you had to do it all over again, would you change anything in your latest book?

S: no, I have never felt like that, and I have portrayed the incidents like they had happened. Especially in my debut novel, even the name of the river is the same, the entire incident happened on the banks of river Chandragiri, hence the name. And the river, as I have explained earlier metaphorically stands for the religious stipulations, which women cannot cross on their own. Now things have changed. The river has a bridge. Bu when I wrote the novel, people had to use boats to cross over, and had to be accompanied by any male member of the family to cross over.

I: Is there anything you find particularly challenging in your writing?

S: no, nothing like that.

I: On what grounds did you select the novels you have translated from Malayalam to Kannada?

S: I had selected the novels on the basis of the seriousness of the issues. One was Rashida Begums novel which I have translated as *Mumbelaku*, it speaks about female genital mutilation, and another is about communalism and the incidents that happened when emergency was declared, during the emergency period as *Turtu Paristhithiya*

*Karala Mukhagalu.*I take up serious issues to translate, one that I have liked very much. The world is full of violence.

I: What was the hardest part of writing your books? What were the challenges (research, literary, Psychological, and logistical) in bringing them to life?

S: No I never had any such issues because I never wrote from imagination. I had depicted the incidents which have happened around me. So these things did not bother me. While writing there was no difficulty. The difficult part was proof reading.

I: What made you write your autobiography? Did you have any opposition from your family members?

S: first it appeared in the form of my short story "Muslim Hudugi Shale Kalittaddu". I was asked to write about my school days. They wanted to know how it was possible for a Muslim girl to go to school in those days. Then I wanted to write mu full autobiography I asked my father. He told me to write and write all that had happened. He told me not to hesitate while writing. My father was my strongest ally and supports. He had a very broad outlook. No, I did not have any opposition from my family members.

I: Do you have any advice for other writers?

S: my advice would be live and learn to live as human beings.

I: Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?

S: they should learn to read and read a lot. Especially students should internalize this reading habit. Teachers and parents should encourage reading. It improves our knowledge. Only reading habit can really benefit us towards becoming humans.

I: What was your favorite chapter (or part)/ book to write and why?

S: my favourite work is my novel *Vajragalu*. As a youngster I was touched by the subject and having seen the difficulties of the woman in question, I wanted to write a book on that. Because Muslim men have projected that women are taken care like they are jewels/ diamonds and those who are divorced *(talaq*) lead happy lives in their natal homes and lack nothing. I wanted to showcase the hollowness of it.

I: What, in your opinion, is the hardest step in creating a masterpiece? Which do you

think is your masterpiece?

S: no I don't think there need to be any hard steps. For me as I have said earlier, the situations and events around me fuelled in me this passion to write. I consider *Vajragalu* as my masterpiece.

I: What were your upper most thoughts when you were conferred with the Nripatunga award?

S: I was happy. But there weren't any special thoughts as such. I have received many awards. But yes, I did think of my father, who had educated me. It is because of him that I am here today.

I: Do you see yourself as a feminist? Where do you place yourself as a writer?

S: first I would like to see myself as a Humanist. We need to become humans. Then probably yes, I would like to be known as a pro-feminist rather than a feminist writer. It is always women who are made to suffer and exploited. Now take the instance of my maid. Her husband is no good, does not earn, does not care for his family, spends what his wife earns, but she still wants him. He on his part sponges his wife. Who is suffering here? Earlier we had hear of rape. Now it is gang rape. Honour killings. This is our contribution to the 21st century. What are we coming to? So my sentiment's is first be a human being. Hindu, Muslim, these religions were not made by God, it was our creation. Be a human first is my call to all.

I: And finally, I would like to request you to share three to five images/ incidents and tell us a little about each.

S: all those touching incidents have taken shape of my novels, novellas and short stories. These days women are coming up in life but men are coming out with new ideas of oppressing women. What can be done?

i) Recently I was disturbed with the case of Kavitha Halappanavar, which happened abroad, who being a dentist, was denied abortion, though the pregnancy was fatal to her. She died a premature death. She did not have any say in saving her life because of the anti-abortion law. Which laws are you talking about? I had thought these laws were only in our country. When the question is about saving a human life, the question of any law should not surface. They are fighting a legal battle, but a valuable life is lost. What is religion if it can't save a human life? Religion should be for the

happiness of mankind, not to bring him sorrow. But what are we seeing now? The incidents of extremists, terrorists? Islam has never spoken about murder. Which religion are these people talking about?

ii) Then we have road accidents. Young boys hardly out of their teens dying on the roads. I feel sorry for their parents. The other day my daughter-in- law was speaking about her cousin, and an accident she had seen. Bike and a bus. Why can't the youngsters wear helmet? That is sure to protect them at least to some extent.

iii) The other incident was about a young mother, from Surathkal who committed suicide with her three children. She first threw her children one after the other into the river and then jumped in. According to report when the children saw the siblings being thrown into the river, one of them ran away and she caught hold of her child and threw it into the river. This happened recently on the Ullal Bridge. Her husband was working in Gulf country and she was staying with her in-laws. If a mother has to take such drastic steps of killing her children, who knows how much she might have suffered, to behave like that. Any mother feels bad even if the child falls sick. Isn't it so? Who knows what went wrong? She reportedly said that she wanted to visit her parents, visited them and then committed suicide. Whom do we blame here? God knows what she might have been going through. Because she was wearing burkha they knew she was a Muslim.

iv) In another incident a mother threw her four children into the well, then jumped herself and committed suicide. These types of news are becoming common. Who is at fault?

v) The case of film star Umashree, who is now a minister. She has written an autobiography. Married at a young age, she wasn't given proper food at her husband's house. Her mother-in-law ill-treated her. She came back to her natal home, but was thrown out by her adopted mother. Where should she go with two children? Hunger is very bad. She then started acting, and the rest is history. I admire Umashree because instead of suicide she turned towards life and brought up her children, that was her achievement in life. It is very difficult to raise children as everyone knows. Women once they are married lose their place in their maternal natal home. Thrown out of her husband's house, not allowed to enter her natal house, what should she do? In most

cases the women have neither education nor financial backup. Hence they commit suicide, along with the children. Because they don't want their children to suffer.

Comparatively women in Kerala are more courageous because of the matrilineal society. In Kerala if a daughter returns home, she is not rejected. They will take her back into the family. Women are oppressed but not as much as I see here, in this region. In Kerala in olden days women of the backward classes were bare waist upwards. We, Muslims taught them to cover themselves. My short story 'Kuppasa Tottavalu' is about this issue.

Even in this region we have some matrilineal societies. In Tuluvas, what we call as 'aliyasantana'. We Muslims have this custom in some parts of Kerala, after Kozhikode, Tallishery and in between Kannur, this custom is alive even to this day and women never go to their husband's house. They stay put and the husbands have to live in their wives' home. They were converts, because of the Arab influence. But they have not changed some of their earlier customs. Women have some power in those instances. Probably the exploitation rate is also less, because she does not have to stay with her in-laws. From some angles even I feel that is better. Though Muslims they have negotiated between principles and customs.

I: thank you madam for your invaluable time and goodwill.

Transcription: Sarah Aboobackar-III interview
D: 25 March 2015
Sarah Aboobackar's House.

I (Interviewer): First I would like to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Last time when i was here you had spoken about conversion and the custom of bare bosomed women in Kerala, and on which you had written a short story 'Kuppasa Tottavalu' could you please add something more on it? Were these women not allowed to wear blouses?

S (Sarah Aboobackar): No, they were not allowed to wear cover their bosoms. When I was young I have seen women, those who sell jaggary, fisherwomen etc., they wore a cloth which is called 'Mundu' in Kerala and sideways wore a towel. When new Islam entered the region, these people converted to Islam and as is the custom of Muslims started wearing long blouses. Islam entered Kerala with Arabs, in the 8th century, who had come for the purpose, unlike in Northern India. The Muslim invaders Ghazani, Gori etc. had come with a sword. These Arabs came as traders. With the new converts wearing blouses, the term "one who has worn a blouse" became idiomatic meaning that those people had converted to Islam. Those who did not want to change their religion remained as they were. That is how I too have seen these women. Old ladies were completely bare waist upwards. Once when we were travelling in Kerala, we chanced to see an old lady, with bare bosom and I told everyone to have a look at the topless women of Kerala. I have written a new novel and some short stories recently, and I have explained these things in detail. The theme of the novel is infertility in men, which most people are unaware of. They think infertility means women. In some instance though the men know about their infertility they never tell anyone. Women too think that they are barren and even the society blames women and never the man. The title of the novel is *Kanike* (Gift).

I: you have said that through Lankesh you entered the literary world. Have you ever tried to publish before?

S: yes, I had this reading habit and I loved reading M.K.Indira, Triveni and Anupama Niranjana. I came to know about mental illness only after reading Triveni, and it was then that I realised the peculiar behaviour of cases of possession of jinns (evil spirits),

of some Muslim women of my acquaintance, was due to mental illness. Even the jinn problem had different shades, like Islam Jinn, Kafir Jinn etc.

Previously I had sent short stories to Udayavani, Sudha, Taranga etc. they never got back to me. I would have appreciated feedback of any sort. But no, there was complete silence. Naturally I thought that I did not know how to write and that my stories were not good enough to be published. At this time Lankesh started his magazine *Lankesha Patrike*, which I used to read. He spoke about Communalism and wanted to unite his people.

I had not experienced any communal prejudice when I was growing up. In fact though I was the only Muslim girl, I neither knew nor experienced anything untoward. There was a lot of difference in the awareness levels of people on the either banks of Chandragiri. On the side of Chamanad, girls were sent to school, at least till 5th standard. Even the poor attended school. They used to teach Quran in between the Malayalam lessons. To learn Quran people would send their daughters. The education was good in those days, not like what we have now. It was enough if a girl studied till 2or 3 standard. She could read and write well. But on this side of the river, the Kasaragod side the girls were never sent to school.

In his magazine he gave a call for all the backward classes – Minority people, people of backward castes and Dalit – that they need to be united and together should fight against communalism. Forget about being united, that has still not happened, nor will happen, and I wrote an article on "Komu Sauharda" (Communal harmony) and sent it across. It was published. (Here she narrates the incident of Nazma Bhangi, which is discussed in chapter 3).these Muslim organisations, for eg this Jamate Islamic organisation, these are destroying Islam. In reaction to the attack on Nazma Bhangi, both Banu Mushthaq and I had sent our articles to Lankesh, which were published together. That was my second article. In that I wrote that in Islam we don't have two different set of laws for men and women and all are equal.

I: who is your favourite author? Why? And whom would you like to be identified with? Which author in Kannada literature?

S: Shivaram Karanth and Triveni. It could be said that I started by reading Karanth. Then we had a Kannada teacher, K.S. Sharma, who taught us Kannada for three years, ninth, tenth and eleventh standard. His lessons and teaching methods were just great.

If I am in the Kannada literary field, it is because of him. The one hour session would seem to pass in a matter of minutes. None of us would miss his classes. I have written about this in my autobiography. He is no more.

I: Madam, in today's milieu, which author do you think is good, and especially which themes do you like? Whom do you earmark as the next best in upcoming writers? For instance, we came to know a lot about your community through writings. What should be eradicated from your community. Likewise have you come across any other writer who has written about themes which no had broached earlier?

S: All write about different themes. Yes, I think Ganga Padekal is one such writer. She hasn't studied much. She must have studied till seventh standard. But she writes really well. I remember a book of hers titled *Pula Pedi*. It is about a custom present in the Brahmin community. In the earlier days, a Brahmin girl was supposed to be married before she attained menarche. If they failed to get their daughter married before she attained puberty, and unfortunately an unmarried girl attains puberty, then she was to be discarded in a jungle that too, blindfolded. And then if anyone who touches her saying pula Pedi, she becomes his. She has to go with him. Ganga Padekal writes well and it was Anupama Niranjana who introduced me to this novel.

I: madam, what is your opinion about choice of language as the medium of writing? Because it is usually understood that women saw writing is a form of resistance/ revolution, and started to voice their feelings the system. What do you say about this?

S: women wrote before too, and yes they used writing as a tool to fight against the system. Giribale (Saraswathi Bai Rajawade) was a revolutionary writer. Even Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba was a revolutionary writer. She wrote about the oppression of widowhood. Masti had criticised Tirumalamba, which had stopped her writing. The same had happened to Rajawade too. She had written about how widows were being sexually exploited by priests in the Udupi temple, which was the reason for the harsh criticism. Karanth is said to have criticised her, but she did not stop writing, which speaks for her courage. Men cannot tolerate women writing against the. So, this is nothing new. The same is happening to me in my community.

I: Coming back to the choice of language, why did you choose Kannada? Your mother tongue is Beary Basha, you are from Kasaragod and speak Malayalam. Then why Kannada?

S: I speak Malayalam, not Beary Basha. It is the Muslims of this region who speak that language. We from Kerala speak Malayalam. These days I have started telling that I am not a Beary and would like to be known as Mapilla. I don't them to pull me into their politics because I am a Beary. There is not much difference. We are all Muslims. I wrote in Kannada because I could not write in Malayalam, as I had studied in Kannada medium. Sometimes I wonder what might have happened if I had written in Malayalam.

I: do you think that probably you would have been better off if you had written in Malayalam?

S: no, no nothing of that sort.

I: Madam when you started writing and now after all these years, do you think there have been changes in the condition of Muslim women?

S: Oh, yes, definitely. Now more girls are studying. In Kasaragod many girls have done their engineering.

I: so, you believe that awareness has been created? And things have changed?

S: yes, earlier in Kerala we did not have this kind of blind religious fanaticism. Keralites had not even heard of burkha. The girls were not sent to school and women never went out in the daytime. Apart from that there was not much oppression. For my wedding women had never worn burkha. But in the Mangalore region these customs were very much there. Now this custom has reached Kerala too. It has reached such a state that even small girls, hardly aged sex and seven wear burkha. In our Quran, there is a statement made by our prophet. Wherein he speaks about the importance of women's education. He has said that it is the mother, women are the one who raise children, hence it is very important that she be educated, and he has even said that if need be, we should even send our children to China for studies. Until I had spoken about this, many people did even know that such a statement existed in Quran. Both my father and grandfather were progressive in their outlook and so I was sent to school. They knew this statement in Quran. When British had come to India, Muslims were frightened that they would convert all. And they were brainwashed not to send their children to school. In the 1930s it was Sir Sayyed who first realised the importance of modern education and started creating awareness in the Muslim community that if they were to progress as a community, then Modern education was

a must. He even built colleges. My father had once told me that the main reason for sending me to school was that other people in our community too should send their daughters to school. "I want them to emulate you. If you behave badly then you are going to close the doors of school for the girls of our community forever". They had troubled me a lot while going to school. See what is happening now. They are making wearing burkha compulsory. Some colleges ban burkha, and this leads to a showdown and the girls stop going to college. This is exactly what these fundamentalists want. They want to put a full stop to girls' education. Because girls are really smart and study well. Then they will not agree to marry uneducated boys. They are frightened of that. The same thing is happening in the Brahmin community. They don't get brides. It si not that there is a lack of girls. It is simply that educated girls have become choosy.

I: when you started writing in the 1980s Hindu fundamentalism was on the rise. Is there any relation between your writing at a period when the Hindu fundamentalism was on the rise? Was that coincidental or did you write seeing the rise of the Hindu fundamentalism?

S: no, no there is no relation as such. I had wanted to write what I have written from a long time. I think it was just a coincidence that it happened at the same time. I remember when I was in the tenth standard, the incident of *talaqs* and 'marriage for a day', was something that remained with me for a long time. I wanted to write against these inhuman customs. Because no self-respecting woman would agree for marriage for a day. Only in very poor families, since they do not have any other recourse, they agree to this. Then with the advent of Bandaya movement, even I thought that we too should revolt against inhuman customs, apart from the fact that these issues were stewing in me from years. But until I started writing none had spoken against this custom, had not even given it a thought that it was wrong. That it might not be a part of Quran.

I: so, there is no relation to your emerging as a writer and the rise of Hindu fundamentalism.

S: no, of course not. In your Hindus they used to burn the widows on the husband's funeral pyre, the sati system. But there were many who went against this Hindu fundamentalism and stopped sati system. You have put a full stop to such archaic

practices. So I thought even we should put a full stop to the archaic systems which are there in our community too. I would like to see myself with the people who fought against the Hindu fundamentalists. I am fighting against Muslim fundamentalists. Even the custom of tonsure (shaving head) for widows has stopped now. I remember seeing Konkani (a Brahmin sect) widows in either red or white sarees covering their bald head with one end of their sari. They used to come to gather the colaccasia leaves from our compound. So, it is not the question of women of this religion or that. It is the question of exploitation of women in the name of religion. Why it is that women should be exploited? We need to stop this. Influenced by Bandaya movement, though I had started writing, to be honest I was afraid. But then I thought at the maximum they might blacklist me, write against me. I thought they would not try anything else. And I did not have to worry whether my daughter would get married at all in the future because I had only four sons. Sons will manage somehow.

I: what is your opinion about the Hindu fundamentalists who view your writing against Muslim fundamentalism and fundamentalists? Do you think that this has made them happy?

S: Oh yes, this has indeed made them happy. They are happy because there is someone inside the community who is raising the voice. And in a way people also came to know that we too have our share of problems. Like C.N.R had said once, we are all same, having problems, and there is no difference between us.

I: who is C.N.R. madam?

S: Dr. C.N.Ramachandran, was a university professor in the English department. He is in Bangalore now, and participated in literary get together.

I: Madam when I was collecting data, I wanted to interview the respondents. None were ready to be interviewed except for one boy. He said that he is from ABVP and he spoke about 'love jihad'. Is this a true allegation?

S: No, definitely not. I have recently written an article on that. I have openly challenged the Hindu fundamentalists, in my speeches, to show me at least four girls who are the victims of this love jihad. Now the allegations have stopped a little. People say all sort of things. In our family there are many Hindu girls who came, married and are living happily. They were neither divorced not oppressed. When the Hindu girls come with the boys what can we do? In some instances they convert. But

not all. There are many instances, close to thirty, that I know where the couples are living happily. No, I don't agree to the allegation of 'love jihad' (Sarah narrated some instances she knew, and in particular one, wherein the girl Usha was converted as Usma and an incident where the girl's father had committed suicide on account of his daughter's interreligious marriage). Shehanaz, who edits the magazine *Anupama* is a convert she has herself told me about this. That she does not know much about Islam because she is an outsider. These fundamentalists used her to write against me. Now I don't meet her. Once they come out the girls cannot go back. It is a point of no return and they have to listen to whatever there are told. There are looked after well, of course.

I: madam yesterday when I has called you, you spoke about the leftists, left wing movement and the right wing movement. Could you please explain these things to me?

S: Leftists or Left Wing people are the Communists. The Right Wing people are the religious people, who are Traditionalists. Communists or leftists don't believe in caste, creed and religion, and are advocates of equality. I too like those sentiments. Right wing people are like BJP, Bhajaranga Dala, our fundamentalists like Jamaate organisations etc. (she then spoke about the suicide case of D.K.Ravi, a highly placed government officer in Bangalore)

I: oh. Okay.

S: for example CPI, CPM these are all communists, Mamatha Banerjee, is also a little into this they recognise themselves with the labourers and brainwash them to go on strikes, demanding a share in the profits. (She then spoke of Nano car, Gujarat, Modi etc.).Kerala has progressed because of the education and the facilities people get there if a woman lodges a complaint in the police station, immediate action is taken. Here the police don't take any action. They know nothing about the Indian constitution. Now they have even started moral policing. If they see a girl and a boy talking to each other, especially if they belong to different religions, they are arrested. Her parents were called and her education was cut short. Her parents took her back with them. What happens if two young people have tea together? It is common in friendship. Instead of troubling the girls they can take action against the boys. In one of my speeches I had told that police should be taught a course in Indian constitution. Last

year there was an incident. Some girls were found smoking cigarettes in a hotel and for that reason they were arrested. Shouldn't girls smoke cigarette? Is there any such law? Last year during the Tulu Abbakka Utsav, in my speech I had brought this up. MP of Karnataka, Nalin Kumar Kateel was also there. They speak about culture. Culture is different from constitution. Who gave police the power to behave in this fashion?

I: So according to you there should be no gender inequality. Both the sexes should have the same freedom of choice.

S: yes, in our constitution there is no gender difference. All are equal. Men will always be men. In Kerala the Namboodiri men had exploited the low caste Nayar women like anything. He would have his regular family at home and Nayar women as mistress. They never inherited the paternal property and thus the matrilineal system was in place. After Islam came to Kerala some of these people embraced Islam and came out of the suffocating social customs. But their retained the matrilineal system of their ancestors. There is a family called Arikkal, Sarikkal. Arikkal bibi in which one line is Muslim and the other one Hindu. To this day they meet during some functions. Probably the conversion must have taken place three generation earlier. But they do meet and celebrate. Hindus and Muslims. Blood is always thicker than water. So whether Muslim or a Hindu some traditions will never change and are the same.

I: Thank you madam for this very insightful interview.

Transcription: Respondent 1
D: 25 January 2014
Canara College, Mangaluru

Respondent no: 1, is a student, studying in a undergraduate course. He is an activist and a member of ABVP. He was the only one who agreed to be recorded. He had strong opinions about the way Hindu girls were taken advantage of by Muslim boys. He said they made use of "love Jihad" to trap girls.

I (Interviewer): what do you want to share with me about the issue of Muslims?

R (Respondent): We have a record of the missing women from Mangalore and Dakshina Kannada region. We have got a copy of it from the police records of Mangalore. From 2007 till now, in a period of about 5 years, we have a record of how many were victimised and more than 3000 girls have been reported missing. Out of which 2600 were traced, and found to be married. Once the girls are found, the case is closed. And the police too are not open about it. Because the real problem starts after marriage. And in almost eighty percent of the cases it is true.

I: what is your opinion about it? Do you think that they married Muslims?

R: yes, they married Muslims and were converted. One girl, who was traced in Kerala, has come back to Hinduism. According to her experience, the first four to five years, usually there is no problem. Then her husband married woman without her consent.

I: was she given *talaq*?

R: no, she was not given *talaq.*

I: that means that she had to adjust with another wife of her husband.

R: yes, she had not given her consent for her husband's second marriage. She could not even lodge a complaint because of the law.

I: because of the Muslim personal law, the shari'a, a man can have four wives.

R: yes, even after four marriages, if he feels he does not want her he can divorce her instantly by using the word *talaq,* thrice. And the women thus divorced have no legal support. Ayesha Banu, a girl from Panjimogaru (an area in Mangalore), too agrees with this statement. Hers was a love marriage, she was a Hindu. Now her husband has married another Muslim girl, and this lady is used for terrorist purposes.

I: as a human bomb?

R: no, for money laundering purpose. Money comes in from Pakistan. if this is one angle, the other one is a blue film (porn) racket. This happens to 80% of the girls who fall prey to this love jihad. They have asked us to keep this a secret. The girls are also threatened with blackmail, if they so much as try to reveal these issues.

I: what is the solution to this problem according to you?

R: solution according to me is uniform legal code. Everyone should come under the same legal code and the personal law must be banned. There should not be different laws for Muslims, Hindus etc.

I: yes, that's right, we all agree with that and second it. The civil laws should be the same to all citizens.

R: If they want to adhere to their personal law in terms of marriage, divorce etc., then they should be made to follow the same law, in case of punishments too. Because the shari'a has capital punishments listed, for instance if a person steals, then his hand should be cut etc.

I: Yes, exactly. Correct. For punishments they want our Indian penal code. But for other issues they want their shari'a. So your opinion is that they have for all purpose should follow any one of the legal codes for all the issues.

R: Yes. In Uttar Pradesh of North India they have come up with what is claimed as shari'a court, which runs parallel to our courts. I would like to narrate an incident. A father-in-law raped his daughter-in-law. This was brought to the shari'a court. The verdict was that she should live as the wife of the father-in-law and treat her husband as her son! Later I don't know what happened.

I: where did u read this?

R: in one of the dailies, and this happened in 2006, 2007. In other states like Gujarat for instance, the government has banned such proceedings. But in Uttar Pradesh it still is active. The men, in the name of religion, curb the freedom of women, and most of these cases never see the light of the day. Even in Kashmir, they had set down a *fatwa* against listening to music and had banned rock music. All these inhuman issues, practised in the name of religion should be stopped. I wanted to speak about love jihad.

I: so love jihad is real?

R: yes, only some incidents have surfaced, many more never get exposed, due to various reasons. Our girls have no brains. They are foolish and they fall for Muslim boys looking at their spikes and bikes. And once trapped they don't have a way out. They are sacred that the clippings of the blue films will go viral, if they so much as utter a single word against them. This should be stopped.

I: may I know your name?

R: Sujith, II B.Com, Canara College, Mangalore.

I: Thank you Sujith.

Transcription: Respondent 2
D: 29 March 2014
Srinivas Institute of Technology, Mangaluru
Respondent no.2 is my colleague and is a post-graduate in engineering.

I (interviewer): whatever you know about your grandmother and mother you tell me.

R (respondent): my grandmother got married at the age of sixteen and had 11 children, out of which 2 were boys and the rest 9 girls. My mom was the eldest. She got married at the age of 20 and had two children, my sister and in. My sister got married at the age of 22 and now has a three months old baby.

I: what was your grandmother's education?

R: she studied till L.S, ie passed seventh standard. She even got a job in school.

I: oh! When was this? In the 1950s or 60s? Did she work? What was your grandfather? His education?

R: No, her husband said no, she was not allowed to work. My grandfather was a farmer, and might have studied till 5^{th} or 6^{th} standard.

I: if your grandmother studied till L.S in those days, was her father an educated man?

R: no, I don't know about that.

I: what about your mother's education? Were all the girls allowed to study?

R: My mother studied till tenth standard. My grandmother had two sons, one elder than my mother, and one younger Yes all were allowed to study. Since it was a rural background, schools weren't there, they only studied till tenth standard.

I: which area are you from?

R: Shakaleshpur, Araelli Hoballi, near Hassan.

I: how does marriage happen in your community? Do the boys come asking for girls?

R: yes, that is the usual norm. Girl's side receive proposals. Nowadays, a little has changed, not much. It is not proper for girls' side to go. Any elders will do, except the boy.

I: but that is true in most of the communities.

R: in Muslims they marry family members. I: oh! Is it allowed?

R: yes to some extent. Like we can marry our cousin, aunts daughter, but not from the father's side. But nowadays they don't.

I: yes, even science has proof that it is genetically bad. When your grandmother married off her nine daughters, did she ask their opinion?

R: Yes, mostly they will look after the boy's side etc, but yes, they will ask the girls too. They are not like dictators. Proper communication was there.

I: so, your grandmother asked her daughters, and I can consider your grandmother very emancipated, was a lady with lots of awareness. So I consider your grandmother to be a highly qualified woman. Because in those days girls in your community never used to study much, no?

R: she is not there now, passed away.

I: how much authority did she have at home?

R: no, it is not like that. I did not find anything like that because she was managing everything. There was an equal share in decision making.

I: Ok. So your grandmother made her children study till tenth before she married them off? It is really great. Yes my uncles were married later.

R: yes, but the priority was different.

I: priority, like what?

R: Now everybody is educated. Being educated the system is still the same. It has not changed.

I: How? Still they feel that girls should not study, go out, and work?

R: now common sense is less.

I: Education is more but common sense is less. This a very nice point that I have got from you. And what was your grandmother's name?

R: her name was Rabia Bee from Aerehalli, Sakaleshpur. My grandfather passed away after two daughters were married. I wasn't born. My grandmother managed after that she was probably in her forties then. She managed with the help of her sons.

I: forty is young. And how old was her eldest son? And you say only two daughters were married?

R: twenty or twenty one. Yes all 7 daughters were married later.

I: yes, it's a young age. What was the age gap between your grandmother's children?

R: two to three years.

I: how many children did your aunts and uncles have?

R: Mostly two, but yes, some have one and some three. Her mother was alive when she passed away.

I: so, it means that all are into family planning. You say your great grandmother was alive when your grandmother passed away? What age was she? Healthy?

R: yes, she was 103, and quite healthy. She wasn't even wearing specs and did not have grey hair. She had worked really hard to educate her children. Her husband had expired at a young age and she brought up the children on her own. She worked in the farm. She had three sons and two daughters.one of my uncles was a school teacher in those days. She lived with her daughters.

I: so, though your great grandmother never had any education, she knew the value of education and she made your grandmother study till L.S and your grandmother educated all her nine daughters till tenth standard. This was in the 1960s, no?

R: yes, and my uncle studies B.com, in those days.

I: What about your uncle's wife?

R: no, she studied less than tenth.my grandmother while finding brides for her sons, looked for girls from poor families, who did not have parents. She thought they will live together, if given love.

I: that's great. Did she give any reasons for her selection of brides for her sons? No? Because all we see these days, irrespective of religion is greed for money. It's a plus point. She wanted to give them a home. So I see her as a much emancipated woman, even in those days.

R:I think things were better in those days.

I: you think so?

R: yes, I think so. Nowadays everyone thinks only of themselves. Earlier there was kindness. Now there is selfishness. Earlier wealthy people helped the needy. Now it is like wanting more and hoarding.

I: what about your aunts? Do you have to say anything about them?

R: in every place I have one.

I: so you say entire Karnataka is yours. No, I meant was there anything special about them? What were their ideas about education, women, marriage, etc.? Are any of them working?

R: nothing special, but all managed their houses well. When you see nowadays, girls are educated, but they don't know how to manage things, and cannot do without a maid.

I: is that so? You think like that? So according to you your mother's generation was self-sufficient.

R: yes, they were self-sufficient and they managed their children well. They did their utmost for educating their children. Now it is different. But now there are only two children, and they never really learn anything.

I: how many children your aunts and uncles have?

R: mostly one or two. In some cases three.

I: so they knew about family planning and were into it. It means that reality is different from that which is projected by the media. You know what I mean.

R; yes. But they managed things well.

I: so you think that irrespective of not having education, in the sense of today's world, they were good managers. That too, we are talking about people from rural areas.

R: yes, now though the education level is very high, they are poor in management. Earlier they never used to worry much, but today's generation worries too much. That is because now parents care too much. And children never get a chance to become independent. For example if a boy is in hostel he learns to manage things, but when at home he depends on his mother for everything.

I: so, you think, parents should not be overprotective? Should give space to their children.

R: yes, there is a saying. Give a child everything till they are 5. Then till they pass their twelfth standard, till they are sixteen be a little strict, then treat them like friends. One of my professors told me this. Give them enough freedom, but not more. If they are left to manage things on their own, they will learn. Like in the cases of my great grandmother and grandmother. Their husbands had passed away, they had no one to support them. They were self-motivated.

I: you even say that your grandfather was a farmer, so your grandmother even managed a farm, and raised her children. That was really great. Thank you for giving me this input.

Transcription: Respondent 3
D: 29 March 2014
Srinivas Institute of Technology,Mangaluru
Respondent no.3 is my colleague and is an engineering graduate.

I (Interviewer): what you know about your grandmother, how you see your grandmother, mother, aunts and your life.

R (Respondent): I hardly remember my grandfather who passed when I was very young. I remember my grandmother very well. She is no more. My grandmother was a very hard working lady. She took good care of us. She wasn't educated, but when my mother was studying, she used to look and she too wanted to read/ study. She studied by herself, she didn't want to go out to study. My grandmother got married at the age of ten. My grandmother had three children, two daughters and a son. My mom is the first one. My mother was married at the age of 14 and my dad was of 24, so they had a gap of ten years. My mother studied only till second standard, she wanted to go to school, but her uncles, ie my grandmother's brothers did not want her to go to school. My grandfather was interested to educate his children. Though my grandmother was scared thinking what others might say, he sent my mother to school till second standard. It was enough for those days. She can read and write. My aunt studied till third standard, one class more than my mother, but actually she did not want to study. And she would skip school, go to neighbours and play. My uncle did his BA and is a businessman. My mother had eight children, four girls and four boys. I am proud to say that all are educated. My elder brother did his BSc in computer science and working abroad, in Bahrain now. My eldest sister studied till PUC and settled abroad, not working, is a housewife. My third sister too studied till PUC, got a seat for Bed, but she was carrying then and couldn't continue her studies. My two elder brothers studied engineering (civil and Mech respectively) and are working abroad. Another elder sister of mine has studied PUC, married and is abroad. One my of brothers has done his BA and is at home looking after our land and parents. Because if all go abroad, who is there to take care of our parents? I am the last on, I have done my BE here in this college and working as a lecturer. All children of my parents are educated, married and leading happy lives.

I: was it your mother's decision or your dad's to educate the daughters?

R: they both jointly decided that they have to educate their children. It was a village area, we lived in a village. Even at the time my elder sisters were studying, my parents have faced certain criticism. Like “why are you sending your daughters to college? Primary is enough for them” etc. at that time no one went to college. Especially girls.

I: was this is in the eighties?

R: yes, 1990 and in 1995s also this kind of criticism was common.

I: so even in this age, we have people who think like this! You were fortunate to be born in a family who thought education was important.

R: yeah. They have not listened to anything. They just started sending to college and we got our education.

I: what is your opinion about education?

R: education is very important to live. We should have the knowledge, we have to study something. Education is important. Without education your entire life is a waste. We can’t do anything. Basic manners and characters, we can gain or improve, only after having education.

I: now that you are all educated and you are working, what are the people saying about it? Are they against you?

R: no, now they are all repenting that they did not send their children, especially daughters to school. That they don’t know anything. Now if they have to teach their children they can’t do that, whereas my sisters teach their children. Not to some tuition classes.

I: now the people who have criticised your parents, they are repenting?

R: yeah, they have to send their children to some tuition classes, they can’t do by themselves, and they don’t know.so that’s the case.

I: when you think of your grandmother, how do you see her?

R: in what way?

I: no, you said your grandfather passed away at a young age, but in spite of that she brought up her children, she was a woman who knew her mind?

R: yes, she wanted her daughters to study, but at the same time she was also scared about the society. Whether others will speak badly about her children, whether it will

affect their future. She was worried for their future, like whether they will get good proposals etc.

I: you said your grandmother had three children. So were all children married when your grandfather passed away?

R: yes all were married.

I: so that means that unlike what we hear, that educated Muslims id know about family planning and practised it.

R: yes. And my aunt who did not like school, her children are not educated to the level of us, they have finished high school and PUC and are in business. My uncle has three children. Two daughters and a son. The eldest daughter has done her MBA, the second one is doing her engineering and the youngest one, a son is studying in PUC.

I: what are your plans for future? Do you intend to work? What does your husband say?

R: no, I believe that a woman has to work till a certain age and then take care of her children. Father will be working and there will be no one if even the mother works. So I have decided that after a certain period I will resign. No one has told me or forced me to work or not to work, it is my decision and this is what I feel.

I: thank you so much for this insight.

Transcription: Respondent 4
D: 29 March 2014
Mangaluru
Respondent no.4 is from Beary community.

I (Interviewer): I am conducting a research on Sarah Aboobackar's fiction. Could you please tell me what do you know about her? And what is your opinion about her?

R (Respondent): I have not read much of Sarah Aboobackar's books, but I know her. I have listened to her speeches. Not only in our D.K, district, but in the whole of Karnataka we have only Sarah Aboobackar and Banu Musthaq, two Muslim women who write about the problems of Muslim women. In all her speeches she has spoken for women, especially she has addressed the fundamentalism in the Muslim society, problems of Muslim women and the fundamentalist attitude towards women, like they should not go out of the house, that they should not go to the mainstream, etc. She had also spoken about how her novels / stories were hijacked and picturised without her knowledge. The movie *Byari* too was such an incident, but the society never gave her any support. Her writings were against Muslim fundamentalism, like one should wear burkha. But she never wore burkha, and was always seen in a sari. She daringly wrote about the issues. Though her family as a conservative one, she had the support from her husband, and now I think that her children support her. I have observed this whenever I had gone to her house, to fetch her to attend programs. She participates in all programs. But mainly I would like to say that the Muslim society never used her to improve. Our Muslim society could have made use of her viewpoints, but has failed to do so. We need to agree to the fact. Except for her not wearing a burkha, I think she observes Islam properly.

I: yes, she is a devout Muslim.

R: yes, it across in her words, but as a society we have failed in knowing her. I: Do you think she was right in her opinions?

R: attempts were made to ostracise her. When I was young I have heard about her being attacked, etc. In the midst of people who wanted their womenfolk to be house wives, Sarah wanted them to occupy the mainstream. She writes about the problems our women face, and the shortcomings of the society, which people did not like. She did not get any backup from our society or community. One thing was she wrote

about the community. Secondly she spoke Malayalam, not the Beary Bhasha of our community. And her writings were in the state language of Kannada. I think all these distanced her from our community. She in her speeches used to speak about Kannada language which she revers.

I: so according to you, you feel that your society and community could have utilised her principles. And could have improved the status of women.

R: yes, I feel so. For example, her views about education. Our community lags behind in education. These days people have started sending their children to school, and Muslim girls are much more intelligent than Muslim boys. And the skills which the Muslim women possess is not found in Muslim boys. We might do business, but we are not utilising the skill sets our women possess. There are many people who write in different magazines about the issues Sarah writes. But since Sarah was not backed by the community, she was never seen as a role model and she was not seen as an influence in the community. And in Dakshina Kannada district we speak Beary Basha, in Kasagod district it is Malayalam. Though she speaks Beary basha and Malayalam, her writings and speeches were in Kannada. This probably was the reason for the lack of attachment.

I: so you think this could be the reason for no attachment with the community people.

R: yes that is my opinion.

I: you spoke about Banu Musthaq. I am doing a comparative study about both Sarah and Banu. What do you know about her?

R: I just know that she is a Muslim lady who writes about our Muslim society. I have come across her name in papers.

I: yes, she is an author and a lawyer.

R; yes, she is visible hence I know her. Sarah I know more because she is in our vicinity and I have listened to her speeches.

I : what is your opinion about her themes. Do you agree that whatever she writes is true? Many say that such issues are unheard of. She is sad about the blame. And she has said many times that she writes about such issues, not with an intention to criticise the community, but to create awareness, so that women can come up in life. What do you think?

R: according to me D.K district has become a communalist centre. If a Muslim boy talks to a Hindu girl or vice-versa, people thrash them, which is one kind of a communalism. Another type of communalism is oppressing women. It is there in many communities. But it is more in Muslim communities. Even is a double graduate girl is married, she has to stay at home. As an author one has to build a society. Not break it. When Sarah writes about issues, if it was lies, then she would not have ascended to the heights she is at now. Her experience of thirty to forty years, if she had been writing a tissue of lies, she would not have got the recognition, she has now. I think that allegation against her is not true and the allegation is not the one to be accepted.

I: do you have anything else to say about Sarah or her writings?

R: Though I have not read many of her books, I wish that our society and community needs many more Sarahs. And it is our responsibility too to encourage such writers. We need to encourage Sarah, because even at this age she strives to create awareness in people, which should be recognised and appreciated. We wish many more Sarahs to be born.

I: thank you.

Transcription: Respondent 5
D: 29 March 2014,
Mangaluru
Respondent no.5 is from Beary community.

I (Interviewer): what do you know about Sarah?

R (Respondent): we had her novel *Chandragiri Teeradalli* as a text, when I was studying in the tenth standard, Kannada medium, Kerala Government. The text had issues which was important for us to know. We were proud of her, as a Muslim woman writing about our community. Her writings are people centric and she is a good writer, which makes us proud. Later when I had the opportunity to listen to her and talk to her, I realised that she indeed cares for the community people. She can be considered as a role model in our society. She encourages and helps people if they approach her. She writes in an easy to read and understandable language, and what she writes, as I have said earlier, is about the social problems that our Muslim women suffer. Mostly she writes about how the religious stipulations have hampered Muslim women. She is a courageous Muslim woman, and we wish that she writes more about these issues.

I: do you agree that her writings are about the reality, that the issues she writes about is real?

R: Yes, she portrays reality. As per my knowledge, what she has written and is writing is very much there in our community and I feel that she is portraying the reality, real incidents.

I: so, you feel that your society should put a stop to these atrocities perpetrated on women, and should try to improve?

R: Yes, definitely. If what she suggests are implemented then definitely our society can improve and progress. Her writings are effectual in that manner. We can build a worthy society.

I: would you like to say anything else?

R:. She has reached a certain level as a writer. Though aged now, she still writes but not as prolific as earlier. I wish that she writes much more, which can benefit our community.

I: Thank you

Transcription: Respondent 6
D: 24 April 2015
Srinivas Institute of Technology, Mangaluru
Respondent no.6 is from Beary community. He is an MBA student.

I (Interviewer): You can speak about the women of your family. You can start with your grandmother, mother, aunt, sisters, anyone. Okay, whatever you want to tell.

R (Respondent): Okay, hello everyone, I am proud to say that I belong to Muslim community.

I: Are you a Beary? So you can say that as well, because Bearys are an ethnic minority.

R: yes, I am a Beary. Nowadays Muslims have many communities and I am proud to say that I belong to Beary community. I would like to share some information about our community. Nowadays Bearys means Muslims who live in South Canara district (Dakshina Kannada district). Earlier they never used to go to school and colleges, they were satisfied with their lives doing small business for their livelihood. But now they are improving themselves. They have started going to schools and colleges. To learn and study. They have started thinking about the future of their children. They are thinking what they can do for their children, especially in the case of women. These days you can see women going to school and colleges and studying for their degrees and post-graduation. So, what happens is, it is not only beneficial to them, but it will be a contribution to overall India. So that our GDP or national income will increase. Earlier they used to have more children but nowadays they are sticking to family planning and having two or maximum five children. And about the rules and regulations of our Beary community is so perfect. But some people are not following it. Our culture is so good, but what happens is in some places people are misusing the culture that we have. They are disturbing the other religions. That is bad, bad signs of our Muslim community.

I: can you remember anything about your grandmother?

R: our parents and ancestors used to marry at a young age, what we call as child marriage. But now it is not happening. All are mature and they what is the value of their life and families too are not forcing for arranged marriages. It is their wish. It is what the children want and they are agreeing to whatever their children say. Now all

are happy. We could still improve. I have to first improve myself, only then can I contribute something to improve my community. So that I can share my knowledge, my experience with my youngsters.

I: do you know at what age your grandmother was married and how many children did she have?

R: my grandmother was married at the age of fifteen, and she had ten children. Eight sons and two daughters. My mother's mother.

I: your mother was the eldest?

R: yes

I: at what age was your mother married? What about your sisters?

R: my mother was married at the age of twenty one, and I don't have any sisters. We are only two sons and I am the eldest.

I: so, there is a change. Do you know anything about your paternal grandmother, at what age she was married etc.? Would you like to tell me about your aunt and uncles?

R: no, I don't know anything about my paternal grandma. But yes, my aunt and uncles they give tuitions to their children at home. In olden days even though the children went to school, they could not study at home because their parents could not teach them. That has changed now. Parents themselves help children in studying at home after school.

I: Would you like to say anything else? That's all? Thank you so much.

Transcription: Respondent 7
D: 24 April 2015
Srinivas Institute of Technology, Mangaluru
Respondent no.7 is from Muslim community. He is an MBA student.

I (Interviewer): yes, anything. You can say that you belong to Beary community and can start from there.

R (Respondent): I am Sheik Mohammad. I am from Sheik community. My mother tongue is Urdu. I will speak about the education of my grandparents. My grandmother studied till about fourth standard and my grandfather till about second standard. Hen from Karnataka they shifted to Bekal of Kerala. There educational facility was available till tenth standard. My mother studied till seventh class. After that for two years she went to a stitching classes and then was married to my father. Now there is educational facilities in our area. My cousins have gone abroad for studies as well as to Mangalore for higher education. There are, any professional in our family, like teachers, lawyers etc.

I: what about your sisters?

R: my elder sister studied till twelfth standard and then got married. My younger sister is studying in eighth standard.

I: Anything about your aunts? What about the culture? Is it the same? As far as I am aware all Muslims follow the Quran and the culture is same. Do you think there is any difference in the culture of Beary community and yours?

R: no, no difference is there. We allow our girls to study or work abroad too, but they cannot go alone. Someone must be with them.

I: they must be accompanied. The difference in language. You speak Urdu, whereas the Bearys speak Beary Basha. Is there anything that u would like to share?

R: about language, people from Kerala speak Malayalam. And now we have learnt to read, write and speak Malayalam.

I: so you mean to say that Muslims adopt the language of the region they stay?

R: no, mother tongue depends on the family background. In our religion we have four *Masabs.*

I: Hmm, yes, what we call as faith and tenet.

R: as per our *Masab*, we are Hanafi, we speak Urdu. Then there is Shaafi, who speak Bihari, Malayalam. Then we have Ambeli, who speak Urdu, Arabic and the fourth one is the Maliki,who speak Arabic. They are called the Shiyas.

I: the other are all Sunnis?

R: yes, mostly all are Sunnis, but now that differs as per their culture.

I: thank you.

Focus Group Interview-Audio
D: 22 September 2012
Srinivas Institute of Technology, Mangaluru
The respondents belonged to Beary / Muslim community and were MBA students.

I (Interviewer): this is for a research purpose and I promise the data will be used only for research purposes. I am working on Sarah Aboobackar and I would like to know about your religion, culture etc.

R1 and R2 (Respondents): I would like to speak about our marriage rituals. The boy and the girl are not supposed to see or speak with each other. They are allowed to see each other only after the Nikah is over. But now times have changed, we can see the photo. My granny used to tell us that she saw her groom only after the wedding it seems. She was twelve –thirteen years old. She says that we are lucky and can see the photo. It is forbidden to ask for gold and jewellery. Only if the bride's father gives on his own they can take it. But demanding is forbidden.

During *Nikah* along with the bride's father and the groom there will be two witnesses and they will tell an amount which is called the *Mehr* (dower). The groom promises to look after the bride well and the girl's father hands her over to the groom. In some instances the groom stays at the bride's place on the wedding day, and in some cases the bride goes to the groom's house. After the nikah everyone hugs the groom.

I: Probably congratulating him on his wedding.

R3: our Islam we have five pillars. The first is *Khaleema* ie one God and Mohammad is his prophet; the second pillar is *Namaaz* ie daily prayer, 5 times a day; the third is *fast*, fasting during the month of Ramzan; the fourth is *zakat* ie compulsory donation and the fifth is *Hajj* pilgrimage. And when we go on Hajj we are absolved of all our sins. We have two ways of absolving our sins. If we give birth normally all our sins are forgiven. In Islam we have 4 imams. Shafi, Hanafi, Ambal and Mali. Actually we need to fast even on certain weekdays. But it is not compulsory. There is a story about fasting. Our prophet fasted the throughout the entire year and he requested with Allah to make it easy for people. Hence fast of the month of Ramzan. It is because no one would donate to the poor, and when we fast we will know what hunger is, and then we too will start donating. And we should give¾ and not 1/ 10 of our property. But no fasting on Fridays, marriage day and Eid. And on Fridays men should pray. On those

days we should eat and make merry. And prayer five times a day. The morning namaz is the *Subahe*, the second namaz is *Lohar*, the third is *Taravii*, fourth is *Magrib* and the last one is *Esha* namaz. Each has its own timings and we have to pray only at that time, not when we want. And during the time of fast they say that the doors of Heaven will be open. And

I: do you all pray five times a day?

R: yes, we do. Even if we are attending a wedding, if there is space we should pray. Except in college, where we can't pray.

I: do you pray while attending weddings? Does it take long?

R: yes, if space is provided we pray. No, it hardly takes five minutes.

I: actually it is really nice to know this compulsory prayer which is there is Islam and Christianity. We too have, but it is not like you have.

I: can you sing Maapal Pattu songs. Is this exclusively Beary's?

R: during mehndi we sing, clap and dance. Usually granny will be wearing those earrings, called as Alikath.

I: so nice, we don't have anything like this. You have to tell me the meaning of this, in simple terms. You can sing even your wedding songs (song is sung).

R: The meaning is it is telling the groom that his bride is on her way (all laugh). The groom will be ragged.

R: if husband dies, they have to perform a ritual called as *Hidda* and they cannot see anyone. And wear only white. She can see only her brothers and no one else.

I: what if the wife dies? Is this only for women?

R: yes, if the wife dies they will marry again. And *Imams* (priests) come and pray. All will pray who have gathered, but the imams will pray loudly. The funeral procession is called as *Maiyyath*, and women cannot go to the cemetery. They place the body at an angle, and the face will be turned towards the West, i.e. Mecca. We are not supposed to touch the dead body. And we should not allow even a fly to alight on the dead body, because it is very painful it seems. These days they even beat themselves out of grief, which is strictly prohibited. Zakat is offered and it is believed that the good tidings of the donation will go to the deceased.

I: any other rituals after that? You don't mark the grave no? Like Christians do?

R: no, but we can go fully covered and pray.

I: What about remarriage?

R: about *talaq*, if they say it thrice they are divorced. After the *talaq*, if he wants to marry his wife again, she should sleep with someone for a day. She has to marry someone for a day, and then he will give her t*alaq*, and then he can remarry her. Nowadays no one cares for all these.

I: isn't it against Quran, to give three non-stop talaqs.

I: Whatever Sarah has said is it true? Like *talaq*, marriage for a day etc.?

R: yes, it is true.

I: don't you think it is wrong? Can the wife also give *talaq*, no, it is only for men? There are lots of restrictions for women in only society. But with education things have improved. Like you said now you can see the boy before marriage. Actually every religion preaches good things. It is people who change things. I remember Sarah had written that the prophet had given equal rights to women. And he had honoured women and he had preached that women should be respected like your mother.

R. but women in those days were very good and never used to go out. Now we come to college.

I: but just going to college does not make you bad. I really admire Muslims for following the religion. I remember reading what Mohammad Irshad had written about gulf countries. He had written that in the Middle East countries, during the month of Ramzan, prices are brought down so that even poor people can buy goodies and make merry. But here it is the reverse. Prices go up and become more expensive.

R: we have some days in Ramzan, and if people go pray their sins will be dissolved.

I: yeah, it is really good that unless you fast you will never realise the value of a full stomach and understand the plight of poor people. This is something I always think when I cook. Accidentally when I come into contact with the flame, I remember the bride burning incidents in North India. So, it is equally true that unless you experience hunger, you will never understand what hunger is.

R: what your prophet has said is very nice, but nobody follows it. And it is true that praying should be a life habit.

I: when I wanted to make this study, many asked why is it I have taken up to study Beary community? I told them that I know nothing about an ethnic race which is very special to this region.

R: in Islam Jihad meant something good. Now it means very bad.

I: yes, I remember Sarah had said, that it is politicians who build the walls, and the media has given unwanted colour. She remembers Mangalore was backward compared to Kasaragod, about wearing burkha etc. and they lived happily with people of all religions. These days jihad means suicide bombers. It is good that you spoke to me. Now I know what it really means. This racial issue is a reality everywhere.

R: yes it is happening abroad, burning prophet's image etc.

I: yes, you should never ever insult anybody's religion. India is secular and we can practise our religion. But do you know what is happening in Pakistan. There everything is wrong. All this, babri masjid etc., happens because of politicians. It is common people like us are harmed, people who have grand ideas. Sarah has said that she feels suffocated whenever she visits Kasaragod.

R: yes for us Quran is necessary, we should know how to read Quran. But if we don't the meaning what is the use.

I: yes, Sarah says that women should be educated. Do you agree? You yourself said that if you don't know the meaning of what you read it I of no use.

R: yes. Madam, is Bhagavad-Gita compulsory for you? I had read somewhere that a Muslim had written Ramayana and Mahabharata.

I: no, our religion is so flexible that we choose what we read, and want to read. And don't believe what you read. It is these politicians who make up things, so that we Hindu and Muslims start to fight. Common people are living peacefully. Any way thank you all.

APPENDIX V

List of Publications based on Ph.D. Research Work

Sl. No.	Title of the paper	Authors (in the same order as in the paper. Underline the Research Scholar's name)	Name of the Journal/ Conference/ Symposium, Vol., No., Pages	Month &Year of Publication	Category *
1	The Marginalized Voices: Towards Creating Counter Images	Ambika Mallya and Dr Shashikantha K	***Asian Quarterly: An International Journal of Contemporary Issues,*** Vol.No.11, Issue No. 4, ISSN 2229-581X.	February 2014	1
2	"Is There a Kodava Cinema?" by Sowmya Dechamma translated into Kannada as 'Kodava Cinema Embudideye?	Ambika Mallya	***Lokajnana: A Triannual Research Journal of Cultural Studies in Kannada***, Vol: 2, No. 1, ISSN 2321-001X	January-April 2014	1
3	Indian Women Writing: Voices from the Periphery-Feminism's quest towards gender egalitarianism and erasure of violence against women.	Ambika Mallya and Dr Shashikantha K	***Post- Feminism in India: Myth or Reality?*** ISBN 978-81-8435-378-5, Adhayayan Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.	2012	5

4	The Unheard Voices: An Analysis of Select Short Stories of Indira Goswami	Ambika Mallya	***Exploring North-East Indian Writings in English, Vol-1,*** ISBN-978-81-7625-725-1, Sarup Book Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.	2011	5
5	Feminism and the Gendered Body - Sarah Aboobackar's '*Sahana*': A Saga of Mute Agony	Ambika Mallya and Dr Shashikantha K	***Contemporary Women's Writing in India***, (eds) Varun Gulati & Mythili Anoop. Lexington Books: Lanham, Boulder, New York, London. ISBN 978-1-4985-0210-8(Print), ISBN 978-1-4985-0211-5(electronic).	December 2014	5
6	Culture, Patriarchy and Religion with Reference to Indian Feminism: Autobiographical Musings of Sarah Aboobackar	Ambika Mallya	***Illuminati-A Transnational Journal of Literature, Language and Culture Studies,*** Volume 5, ISSN NO.2229-4341.	January-December 2014-2015	1

APPENDIX VI

RESUME



AMBIKA KAMATH (AMBIKA G.MALLYA)

Academic Affiliation: Assistant Professor, Dept. of Humanities
Srinivas Institute of Technology, Valachil, Mangalore
Research Scholar (Part Time) @ NITK, Surathkal, Mangalore.
ambikagurumallya@gmail.com
ambika_mallya@rediffmail.com

Permanent Address:
W/O Gurudutt Mallya
Sri Ram Dham
Cosmos Enclave
Kadri Kambla
Mangalore-575004
Karnataka
Phone; +918242225617
+9886812967

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EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

Course	Name of Institution	University	Year of passing	Grade
Ph.D. **Comparative Literature**	N.I.T.K,Surathkal	N.I.T.K,	2010 Course Work	AB CGPA:8.67
M.A(English)	Karnataka State Open University	Mysore	2003	7th Rank
B.Sc. (BZC)	Canara college, Mangalore	Mysore	1982	I Class
P.U.C	Besant National Girls Junior College Mangalore	Board of P. U. Education	1979	I Class
S.S.L.C	Government High School, K.R.Sagara, Mysore	Karnataka Secondary Education Examination Board	1977	I Class

WORK EXPERIENCE

8 years in the stock market as an independent investor and trader. Have handled a part of Security Analysis & Portfolio Management for the MBA students, 2007-2008, @ NITK, Surathkal.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

1. Teaching Experience (in years) : 11 Years
   - i) UG level : 11 Years
   - ii) PG level : 08 years
2. Area of Specialization : English Literature(Comparative Lit)
   Translation Studies

Gender Studies

Managerial/Business Communication

Communication Skills

Currently Handling:

Managerial Communication (12MBA 16) - MBA (VTU)

Communication Skills (09HUM 1.7) – B.Arch. (VTU)

Functional English- B.E (VTU)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE- INSTITUTIONS

1. Srinivas Institute of Technology	2008-	Full time.
2. National Institute of Technology, Karnataka Surathkal (NITK)	2007-2008	Full Time (Contract)
3. Besant Women's .College	2004-2007	Full Time
3. S.D.M College of Business Management	2004-2005	Part Time

PROFILE PERSONA

Name	:	Ambika.G.Mallya (Maiden Name: Ambika Kamath)
Husband's Name	:	P.Gurudutt Mallya
Date of birth	:	11-12-1961
Sex	:	Female
Religion	:	Hindu
Marital status	:	Married
Nationality	:	Indian

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

English, Kannada, Hindi, Tulu, Konkani.

SEMINARS/WORKSHOPS ATTENDED RELATED TO RESEARCH WORK

- Presented a paper titled ***'Patriarchy and Women: A Quest for Change in the Sociocultural Practices- A Socio-Psychological Perspective of Z Disparity'*** co-authored with Dr.Shashikantha K, in a one day National Conference, MANEGMA 2014, on Changing Trends in Management, IT & Social Sciences, held on 9th April, 2014 @ Srinivas Institute of Management Studies, Pandeshwar, Mangalore.

- Presented a paper titled ***'Swami Vivekananda-The Crusader of Women's Empowerment'*** in a two day national seminar, YUVA, on Swami Vivekananda: Youth Icon and Apostle of Social Harmony in the Current World Order @ Besant Evening College, from 21-22 March 2014.

- Attended a one day workshop on 'Gender Sensitization in the Workplace' conducted by the Dept. of HSSM, NITK, Surathkal, on 22 November, 2013.

- Presented a paper titled **'*In The Name of Religion: A Critique of Sociocultural Practices of Sarah Aboobackar's Fiction',*** co-authored with Dr.Shashikantha K in a two day International Seminar on ***'Ending Gendered Violence: From Theory to Practice*'** organized by the department of English, All Saints' College, Trivandrum, in collaboration with Centre for Women's Studies, University of Kerala, from 18-19 November, 2013.

- Participated and presented a paper titled *"**Dynamics of Language in relation to Gender Disparity: A Critical Analysis of Select Writings of Sarah Aboobackar"*** in a two day National Conference on **Language Beyond Boundaries: Explorations in Pedagogy, Cognition and Communication** from 14-15 December, 2012. Organized by the Dept of Humanities and Social Sciences, Manipal Institute of Technology, Manipal, Karnataka.

- Participated and presented a paper titled ***'"The Marginalized Voices: Towards Creating Counter Images"*** in a three day **International Conference on Language, Literature and Culture** from 10-12 December, 2012. Organized by the Institute of Advanced Studies in English & Forum for Innovation and Transformation, Aundh, Pune 411 007.

- Attended a three day **Faculty Development Programme on Data Analysis for research** @ MIM, Manipal which was held from 5TH to 7th October, 2012.

- Participated and presented a paper titled *'**Adaptation-The Dynamics of a Hybrid Medium-Triveni's Sharapanjara: Portrayal of the feminine from a psychoanalytical perspective',*** in a three day **International seminar** on **Fiction to Film-An Interdisciplinary Approach**, from 14-16 March, 2012. Organized by the Dept. of English, Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

- Paper titled '***The Cage of Identity: Media Representations of Femininity'*** ;selected to be presented in a two day national seminar on '**Emerging Perspectives On Media Studies**', organized by the Dept. of English, Government College for women, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, held from 23-24 february,2012.

- Translated; ***Hejje Haadi'*** as '**A *Trip Down the Memory Lane'*** an Autobiographical chapter, from Dr.Sarah Aboobacker's '***Chandragiri'***, her Felicitation volume, on her request on 24/4/2011.

- Participated and presented a paper titled ***'Women Writing: Voices from the Periphery ,Quest for Gender Equality and Erasure of Violence against Women'*** in a two day National Seminar on '***Violence & Violence Around'*** conducted by Besant Evening College, Mangalore, from 5-6 April,2011

- Attended a two day national seminar on *"***Marginalized Voices in English Fiction**" on 8th and 9th November 2010 @ Sri Bhuvanendra College, Karkala.

- Participated and presented a paper titled **'*The Silent Cry: A Critical Study of Sarah Aboobacker's Short Stories in Relation to Gender Equality and Empowerment'*** in a two day National Seminar on **'New Trends in Nationalist Writings '** conducted by Besant Evening College, Mangalore, on 23rd and 24th April 2010.

- A workshop on '**Research Methodology**' at Manipal Institute of Management, Manipal held on 23rd and 24th March 2007.

- Participated in a two day National Seminar on '**Are Indians Development Programmes Women oriented**' conducted by Besant Women's College, Mangalore, from 12th -13th march 2007.

- National Seminar on '**Women Empowerment issues, problems and concerns**' at Vijaya College, Mulki held on 8* December 2006 to 9th December 2006. Was **moderator** for the First technical session on 9th December 2006.

PUBLICATIONS

1. Mallya, Ambika G. and Shashikantha, K.(accepted) "Women and the Glass Ceiling-A Comparative Sketch of Prominent Voices from the Margins: Sarah Aboobackar, Qurratulain Hyder and Ismat Chugtai" accepted for a proposed book on **Indian Literature in Translation,** R.P.Singh, eds., (Associate Professor of English, Department of English and Modern European Languages) University of Lucknow .
2. Mallya, Ambika G. and Shashikantha, K. (accepted) "Purusha Pradhana Samajadalli Stree – Sarah Aboobackar ravara Mahila Patragalu: Ondu Vishleshane" is published in ***Hoovininda Naru***, Tumkur University.
3. Mallya, Ambika G. and Shashikantha, K. (Jan-Dec. 2014-15). "Culture, Patriarchy and Religion with Reference to Indian Feminism: Autobiographical Musings of Sarah Aboobackar", ***Illuminati-A Transnational Journal of Literature,***

Language and Culture Studies, Volume 5, January- December 2014-2015, ISSN NO.2229-4341.

4. Mallya, Ambika G. and Shashikantha, K. (Dec. 2014). "Feminism and the Gendered Body in Sarah Aboobackar's 'Sahana': A Saga of Mute Agony", ***Contemporary Women's Writing in India,*** Varun,G. and Mythili, A, eds., Lexington Books: Lanham, Boulder, New York, London. ISBN 978-1-4985-0210-8(Print), ISBN 978-1-4985-0211-5(electronic).

5. Mallya, Ambika G. and Shashikantha, K. (Jan-April 2014). "Is There a Kodava Cinema?" by Sowmya, D., "Kodava Cinema Embudideye?" ***Lokajnana: A Triannual Research Journal of Cultural Studies in Kannada,*** Nithyananda.B.S, eds., Vol:2, Edition:1, ISSN 2321-001X.

6. Mallya, Ambika G. and Shashikantha, K. (Feb. 2014). "The Marginalized Voices: Towards Creating Counter Images", ***Asian Quarterly-An International Journal of Contemporary Issues,*** Vol.No.11, Issue No.4, ISSN 2229-581X.

7. Mallya, Ambika G. and Shashikantha, K. (2012). "Indian Women Writing: Voices from the Periphery-Feminism's quest towards gender egalitarianism and erasure of violence against women", ***Post- Feminism in India: Myth or Reality****?,* Sudhir, N.S and Dalvir,S.G., eds, ISBN 978-81-8435-378-5, Adhayayan Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.

8. Mallya, Ambika G. (2011). "The Unheard Voices: An Analysis of Select Short Stories of Indira Goswami*",* ***Exploring North-East Indian Writings in English****,* Vol-1, Swami, Indu,S., eds, ISBN-978-81-7625-725-1, Sarup Book Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.

9. Mallya, Ambika G. (Jan. 2010). "Effective Communication and Relevance of Soft Skills", ***The Journal of Engineering Education***, 91ST Quarterly Issue, VOL. XXIII No.3, ISSN 0971 – 5843.

MEMBER

1. CLAI (The Comparative Literature Association of India).
2. IACLALS (Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies).
3. Muse India, ejournal.
4. Signs journal of women in culture and society.
5. ILLUMINATI