

## **I. Towards Counterculture: Lesbianism and the Women's Movement**

There were different political movements during the 1960s that called for social change in the United States. These movements include the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the environmental movement, student movement etc. Supporters of these movements questioned traditional practices about how people were treated. But they did not use the traditional methods of political activity. Rather they took direct action such as public marches, rallies, sit-ins, teach-ins for changes at the local, state and federal levels.

Social change movements erupted in the 1960s for several interrelated reasons. First, since the Depression era many Americans had come to believe that the "federal government had the power and responsibility to protect them from unfair and unjust social forces" (Encarta 2007). Secondly, the Cold War between United States and USSR was both a political and moral crusade to demonstrate that Western democracy and acknowledgement of personal freedom is superior to collective action of Communist system adopted by the USSR.

Thirdly, the 1950s and 1960s were periods of relative economic prosperity for most of the country, making economic disparity in the United States more obvious. Those who did not get share in the new national prosperity began to look for the reasons why. Discrimination often played a major role in their impoverishment. With inequality so clearly a part of society, they began to organize and win national attention.

Fourthly, an emergence of national culture contributed in uniting all Americans more closely than ever before. This national culture was largely produced by an interconnected marketplace of goods, services, and information that was strongly shaped by a powerful mass

media. Interstate highways, widespread ownership of cars, national radio and television networks drew the nation closer together.

Finally, the “baby-boom” generation that attended colleges and universities had the freedom to question the moral and spiritual health of the nation. These educated young men and women would become a vital component of the social change movements of the 1960s era.

The major protest movements began with the civil rights movement that became prominent during the 1950s and early 1960s. The civil rights movement “fought to end long-standing political, social, economic, and legal practices that discriminated against black Americans” (Encarta 2007). It influenced later movements for social change, both by inspiring Americans to fight for change and by using methods of direct action, such as protest marches, rallies, and non-violent civil disobedience tactics like sit-ins.

Student movement is one of those later movements. Many of its early organizers had first become politically active in the early 1960s working alongside blacks in civil rights protests. Composed mainly of white college students, the student movement worked primarily to fight racism and poverty, increase student rights, and to end the Vietnam War. They were guided by the notion that all Americans, not just a small elite white group should decide the major economic, political, and social questions that shaped the nation. Free Speech Movement was part of the Student Movement.

The Anti-Vietnam War Movement established especially in the 1960s to raise a voice to end US involvement in the Vietnam War. United States’ involvement in the war was due to the fear of communism. But protestors against Vietnam War were of the opinion that United States had not right to interfere on the business of Vietnamese. While anti-war activists came from all

elements of American society, most were white, middle class, and well educated. Colleges and universities were among the most important sites of anti-war activism.

It was in the late 1960s began the environmental movement with an increased concern about the natural environment. Biologist Rachel Carson contributed to this awakening with her best-selling book, *Silent Spring* (1962) where she detailed how chemical use becomes potential threat to environment and public health. Borrowing a tactic from the anti-Vietnam War movement, protestors held teach-ins in school and universities, staged rallies around the nation.

Among these later movements, the gay rights movement and women's movement are movements that became successful in granting equal rights to homosexuals and women. Women's movement fought to bring full equality to American women and the gay rights movement tried to end traditional biases and laws against homosexuals. Although gay rights movement includes both male and female homosexuals, female homosexuals found themselves more close to women's movement than to gay rights movements because they identified themselves first as a female and then as a gay. Therefore, there is close affinity between lesbianism and women's movement.

Prior to the reemergence of the feminist movement and the birth of gay liberation of the 1960s, lesbians were largely ignored and rarely studied. When radical lesbians- as women first and gays second- adopted Women liberation as their primary need for identification, national consciousness drew toward them.

The lesbian love and sexuality is distinctly feminine in both form and expression. From the outlook and other behaviors, lesbians can not be distinguished from heterosexual females. The only difference between them lies in the choice of the sexual partner. They are women first and gays second so they identify themselves with straight sisters than with gay brothers.

Lesbianism has always suffered from sexist and male-dominated society. There are very few studies that give true picture about the lesbians because there happens to be very few studies about homosexuals. If there are any, they are about male homosexuals and what was found about male homosexuals automatically applies to females. This is one of the most serious mistakes because there lays huge difference between male and female homosexuals and homosexuality.

There is no absolute definition about lesbian or what sort of behavior constitutes female homosexuality. Female homosexuality is rather a matter of degree. There is a continuum which runs from complete homosexuality to bisexuality to complete heterosexuality. There is no immutable scientific fact to prove lesbian identity, however, we can consider about some dimensions in order to get reasonable definition. These dimensions include: how often a female engages herself in the same sex relation; how she would like to define herself and her gender preference; how she views a man and whether she is sexually aroused only by female or by males too. Thus, it is possible for a woman to be a 'lesbian' in terms of some of these dimensions and not in others.

In his research based book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, Alfred Kinsey considered following three dimensions in order to define Lesbianism: *self-identity*, or how a person defines her gender preference; *subcultural involvement*, or the degree of one's participation in the homosexual scene; *romantic preference*, or potential for becoming emotionally involved with men versus women.

There is a myth prevalent in the "straight" society that the lesbian looks like a 'man' trapped in the female body or she is very ugly that she can not date heterosexual males so she turns toward female. In fact, lesbians look as normal as their straight sisters from their outlook.

There is no possibility of being rejected by males rather they tend to be unsatisfied with the male. Many researches show that many lesbians experience the heterosexual relation in their love. Some of them do stay for a time being in the heterosexual conjugal life. But they are simply unsatisfied with the man and drop that relationship. The fact that they are aroused and share their emotional life with same sex partner is their active choice, not an alternative. They choose woman over man because they prefer woman over man.

Because most lesbians are indistinguishable from their heterosexual sisters, they are socially less visible. Adopting a homosexual identity does not seem to have such a drastic effect on the social lives of the lesbians. They remain less involved in the more public forms of the homosexual community, and participate in homosexual activity mainly in the private place. The lesbian tendency to privatize her sexual relations and to lead a conventional life makes her invisible. Society also unknowingly covers her slip-ups because even if they show lesbian behavior with their partner in the public like kissing, hugging, walking arm in arm and hand in hand, they pass unnoticed because it is considered only as a display of affection between friends. Similar kind of situation bears different reaction if they are male homosexuals.

It does not mean that social life for a lesbian is very easy and comfortable. Many heterosexual males see lesbian as a challenge to be met, conquered and enact in chauvinistic sexual fantasies of conquest with the supposed aim of converting her to heterosexuality. They take her as sexually inexperienced who need one satisfying relation with a man and she will be converted as heterosexual.

Many lesbians consider themselves as having achieved a sense of independence from the grip of men. They do not need man in order to define themselves. They can complete their life without a male intruder. The world of lesbians is the no-man's land. They have created their

own identity and that identity is distinctly theirs. The long-established 'Self/'Other' hierarchy gets blurred because they are 'self' and the 'other' at the same time.

The love relation between women is unique from the heterosexual one. In the heterosexual relation, man confuses sex with conquest. There is no reciprocal relation. One is always active and the other is always acted-upon. On the other hand, lesbian relation is more warm and affectionate because this relation is more about sensuality than about sexuality. Since, sensuality has no specific sex and is rather a general expression of mutual affection, its symbolic value, power wise, is nil. Lesbians themselves confess that they can share their feelings and love more comfortably with their female partner than that happens between the heterosexual couple. French writer and feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* puts that love between women is contemplative. There is no struggle, no victory, and no defeat; in exact reciprocity each is at once subject and object, sovereign and slave. Therefore duality becomes mutuality.

Male chauvinistic society gives adjectives like 'magical' and 'mysterious' to the lesbian love relation. This means, they do not take it as normal process as it is between a male and female. But Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, lesbians themselves, problematize this concept through their article, *Lesbian love and Sexuality*. They write:

There is nothing mysterious or magical about lesbian lovemaking (except, perhaps, for the two people involved). ... the mystery and the magic come from the person with whom you are making love. Everything that a woman does to another can be done also by a man, but for a lesbian that would change everything. It isn't actions or the act; it is the woman involved who makes it more that just "physiological changes". (241)

About the realization of the lesbian identity, many lesbians discover about their real sexual identity when two very close emotional friends come to the close physical situation and suddenly explode the 'self' that was repressed in the psyche until that moment. In an article *Loving Another Woman*, by Anne Koedt, an anonymous lesbian woman shares her experience about the realization of her lesbian identity. It reads:

I wasn't conscious of it until one evening when we were together, and it all just sort of exploded. But looking back, there are always signs, only one represses seeing them. ... The mind-blowing thing is that you aren't all conscious of what you are feeling; rather, you subconsciously, and systematically, refuse to deal with the implications of what's coming out. You just let it hang there because you are too scared to let it continue and see what it means. (247)

On the same topic about the exploration of lesbian identity, Denise M. Cronin in the article titled *Coming Out Among Lesbians*, argues:

The development of lesbian identity seems to be tied in a very dramatic way to the development of an intense affectionate relationship that a woman progresses from a friendship in which tokens of intimacy are seen as lacking in sexual intent to a relationship of great mutual affection and erotic arousal. In this context, each woman learns to associate the tokens of intimacy and endearment that each confers on the other with sexual intent, and thus gradually recognizes the sexual significance of the relationship. (270)

In the matter of sexuality, female homosexuals do not appear to differ significantly from heterosexual females. Both of them contrast with a male in terms of sexuality. For a male, love and sex are two different things. Many males experience sex before they practically fall in love

with a female. So it is an autonomous activity for men. On the other hand, pursuit of sexual gratification without romantic involvement is not attractive for females. It can not be separated from love and affection. In this ground, lesbians also identify themselves with their straight sisters. Similarly, male believes in assigning sex-roles whereas both groups of females are against this idea. That is why; lesbians actively took part in the Women's Liberation Movement which challenges the very nature of sex role system. Some lesbians identify themselves with radical feminists on the ground that they argue for the elimination of the sex roles.

While dividing females in terms of binaries of heterosexuals and lesbians, still another category of females remain unaddressed. They are 'bisexuals'. There are many females who call themselves lesbians but their sexual behavior is directed toward opposite sex and still there are some who live in a heterosexual marriage relationship but have experienced the lesbian relations and enjoyed them. This means, they experience and enjoy both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. In order to understand females of this category, we have to keep in mind that homosexuality is a matter of degree. In the continuum which runs from complete homosexuality to complete heterosexuality, bisexuals fall in between. The traits of homosexuality or heterosexuality in an individual are the personal characteristics.

Male-centered society associates homosexuality and bisexuality with mental illness and abnormality. That is why, lesbians and bisexuals feel hesitated to reveal their true identity in the public. So, women who are to adopt these identities must first struggle against this view in order to place themselves comfortably into these categories.

Similarly Women's liberation movement also began in the late 1960s when women began to question the traditional roles assigned for women in the US society. During the 1950s and early 1960s, society pressured women to marry, have children, and then remain at home to raise



those children. The prevailing view was that women's abilities in the workplace and in the public life were limited by their physical fragility and their roles as mothers. Women were expected to stay at home and to depend on men to provide their financial support.

As a result, women were routinely excluded from high status or well-paying jobs. When in 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan, was published, it spoke about many women's dissatisfactions with the role that society expected of them. It encouraged women to work for change.

The women's movement was not a unified force with a single ideology or goal. Some activists fought for equal job-opportunities; others focused on changing relations between men and women. They questioned traditional gender roles and tried to change society's view that a woman's worth was based on her physical attractiveness. An important issue for many women was control over their bodies. They legalized abortion in 1973. By mid-1970s, discrimination against girls and women in school was banned. In the field of education, they brought the debate about co-education. This debate was resolved when many of the men's and women's colleges adopted co-education. One of the Seven Sister Colleges, Radcliffe College merged with Harvard University in 1970. Radcliffe is now the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in Women's Studies, of Harvard University; and Mississippi University for Women also changed its educational policies and became co-educational in 1982.

Females were deprived of intellectual job or career opportunities. They were still considered 'things to be enjoyed' and full-time homemakers. Job opportunities like Stewardess were offered to females. Even in this job, they were fired once they get married. Therefore, career would end for her in the early twenties. Therefore, in the period of Women Liberation, organizations like ALSSA (Air Line Steward and Stewardesses Association) fought long battle

to get equal right in employment. Through organizations such as NOW (National Organization for Women) discrimination in the work place on the basis of sex was made illegal.

Moreover, the main focus of The Women's Liberation Movement is its rejection of the sexual role assigned by the society. Therefore, on this ground, the affiliation of the lesbians with the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s was inevitable. They are complementary to each-other. The main concern of the movement was to reject the sexual role play. This movement not only encouraged the hidden lesbians to come out and assert their identity, but also increased women's nonsexual positive feelings toward one another. It argued that not only female-female emotional bonding, but also sexual bonding might be a welcome alternative to the unsatisfactory heterosexual relationships. Feminists who used to look down upon lesbians started to provide great support for them. On this regard, anonymous lesbian in the *Loving Another Woman*, by Anne Koedt says:

The main point of feminism is to understand that we as a women are a political group living on the margin of a male society, that sex roles define our interior "place" for us, and that radical feminism means the ultimate destruction of that role system. Within that perspective, sleeping with and loving women is only one possibility, and becomes a purely personal solution to living within a sexist society unless it is seen in the larger light of destroying the sex roles altogether. (255)

The new ideology of Women Liberation is that women should be allowed the same set of feelings toward one-another that they had hold toward men. If they can love each-other in the sisterly fashion, they should also be permitted to love one another sexually. Indeed, more radical feminists insisted that sexual involvement with another woman is important and even equals to political opposition. Thus, many women experimented on their sexuality and many of them discovered their lesbian or bisexual identity. Philip W. Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz also feel that Women's Movement supported lesbians to develop positive feelings about their sexual identity. They write:

The Women's Movement in some measure endorsed the notion that Lesbianism is a valid form of sexuality and that it would be appropriate to be able to be sexually involved with one's sisters. Often our respondents cite how affectionate they have come to feel toward other women whom they have known in the Movement, and have agonized over the "blocks" they felt which stopped them from sexualizing these friendships. These women worried about the contradiction between the new legitimacy of homosexual behavior, the strength of their emotional ties to other women, and their inability to integrate these into a proper sexual script. (284-85)

On these grounds, lesbians and heterosexual feminists identified with each-other. Both lesbians and their straight sisters reject the long-established condition of woman as 'second-class citizen'. Their common enemy is chauvinistic male. Both of these groups strive to develop self-respect and dignity. Hence, Lesbianism and The Women Liberation Movement supported each-other for their common interest.

Likewise, one commonality among all these movements that rose in the context of 1960s was their "marginality" or relegated status and their way of protest. They are all unaddressed parties of society. But in order to make their voice heard, they do not follow the traditional style. They did not use traditional methods of political activity. Instead of voting for a political candidate and then hoping that the elected official would make good policies, these protestors believed in a more direct democracy. They took direct action against authorities.

Still there was one group existed in 1960s America. They are the people from margin but do not involve in the protest movements because they have no hope that the situation will change favorably for them. So they adopted attitude of indifference to the protest campaigns. Their method of protest was different than those street protestors i.e. they adopted culture and life-style that they like, never raising voice of protest on the street. They are identified as counterculturists.

## II. Counterculture: A Critical Introduction

The term Counterculture is made up of two parts: 'Counter' and 'Culture'. The term 'Culture' is derived from the Latin word "cultura" a noun refers to organic cultivation. With its wide use and ongoing refinement, the term by now expresses the "complexity of general human history" (Brooker 50). To put this concept in the simple way, culture is the way of life of a social group; the group's total man-made environment including all the material and non-material products of a group life that are transmitted from one generation to the next. The classic definition of culture, which most sociological definitions have followed, was stated by E. B. Tylor who defines culture as "That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1).

For Clifford Geertz, the concept of culture is rather a semiotic one. He writes, "... man is an animal suspended in the webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (5).

Symbolic and learned, culture, thus, incorporates non-biological aspects of human society. It is a tool for the people to intercept their life and guide their action in the society. It varies from one society to another because every society has its own norms and values, history, religion, geography and way of life.

On the other hand, 'Counter' is to attack or to go against. *Oxford Dictionary* defines the term counter as an opposing response to somebody or something. This means counter is to behave in radical way so as to show dissatisfaction.

Then it becomes clear that 'counterculture' is to attack or protest against the prevailing culture of the society. Every society has its own way of life. Society dictates certain norms and values for its member so that it would work as an integrated whole. An individual is expected to meet these criteria in order to get an acknowledgeable position in the society. When an individual or group of individuals does not follow the straight pattern of the society, it is considered as a threat for the society. But when culture begins to leave many questions unanswered and many needs unfulfilled, when individual suspect their own emotions and experience only a blurred identity, those individuals raise their voice and try to push the cultural system aside. On this regard, J. Milton Yinger in his "Countercultures and Social Change" puts:

Some individuals and groups feel particularly strongly that the social order is unable to bring them the accustomed or the hoped-for satisfactions. Depending on their social location and on their personal tendencies, they attack, strongly or weakly, violently or symbolically, the frustrating social order-that is, the normative-power-reciprocity system. (834)

While counter-culture often entails a political dimension, it is not primarily political in its aims in not seeking directly to change or reform central social institution or, at least, differs markedly from the political movement in terms of its methods. The aim is to challenge dominant values directly through actions and lifestyle choices rather than to acquire power or to influence traditional political institutions and organizations. Cultural critic Kenneth Westhues defines counterculture on two levels:

There are fundamentally two ways of defining what counterculture is, the first on the ideological level and the second on a behavioral level. On the ideological level, a counterculture is a set of beliefs and values which radically reject the

dominant culture of a society and prescribe a sectarian alternative. On the behavioral level, a counterculture is a group of people who, because they accept such beliefs and values, behave in such radically nonconformist ways that they tend to drop out of the society. (9-10)

The definition published in *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* defines counterculture as "values, beliefs and attitudes of any minority group that opposes the dominant culture, but more precisely, does so in a relatively articulate and reflective manner" (90).

Countercultural milieu in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe included the traditions of Romanticism, Bohemianism and of the Dandy. Another movement existed in a more fragmentary form in the 1950s, both in Europe and the US, in the form of the Beatniks, followed in the 1960s by the Hippies.

Counterculture of the 1950s began in the United States as a reaction against the postwar social norms of the 1940s and 1950s, segregation in the Deep South and the Vietnam War. White middle class youths, for the first time since the Great Depression of the 1930s had a sufficient time to raise voice about social issues - especially civil rights, the Vietnam war, women's rights etc. As the 1960s progressed, widespread tensions developed in American society that tended to flow along generational lines regarding war in Vietnam, race relations, sexual mores, women's rights, traditional modes of authority, experimentation with psychedelic drugs and predominantly materialist interpretation of the American Dream.

The countercultural movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s is the paradigm of a counterculture. With antecedents in the earlier beatnik and hip subculture of the 1950s, this period saw a major movement among young people who sought a very different society from the one they had grown in; where there would be maximum freedom for the individual to pursue

self-realization free from the constraints of “straight” society and of its emphasis upon materiality, and hypocrisy. According to Roszak, it was the “repressive rationality” of the contemporary “technocratic society” that the counterculture rejected as failing to meet creative, spiritual, and non-rational needs.

Exemplified most radically by the hippies, the 1960s counter-culture preached a message of a better world through becoming better people. Transformation of the self; outlook, and mentality, rather than changing established institutions, the creation of an alternative society and tolerance of diversity and individuality was the hippy proclamation. This transformation would produce a more spontaneous and creative attitude to life in which role-playing would be replaced by authenticity in behavior and relationships.

But Bruce J. Schulman, who studied the text books, films and documentaries appeared after the Hippie movement and argues that many of them presented Hippies as mere “freaks” who have no concern for the social issues. He provides an example of 1990's award-winning documentary *Berkeley in the Sixties*. It juxtaposes:

New left Berkeley with countercultural San Francisco. On one side of the bay, desperately earnest college students with close-cropped hair (and even ties!) fight to end the war and install participator democracy. Across the bridge, long-haired hippies drop acid, attend free concerts in the part and tune out the system that brought on the war in Vietnam. The hippies only mock the seriousness and the continued political engagement of the "serious" antiwar protestors. (1531)

Another cultural critic Donald P. Costello has something other to deliver. He also analyzed films appeared after 1960s and finds that these films "purified and refined the counterculture"(187).

The 1960s counterculture emphasized on finding a way around the wasteful, capitalist consumer society through such things as free exchange of products, rejection of the work ethic, communal living, and “retribalization”. It upheld non-violence and peace and often denounced the institutions of the state and government.

A major theme of the counter-culture was sexual liberation. The sexual mores and values of the older generation were questioned and rejected. Not only sex outside marriage and general sexual freedom extolled but also marriage itself as an institution was frequently questioned.

Perhaps even more controversial and challenging than its sexual attitudes the counterculture took a very liberal view of drugs use. They strongly advocated the use of cannabis, peyote etc because for them, these substances would open and expand the mind to new realms of experience and would prove vital aids to personal, and thereby social, transformation. Cultural critic, David Buchdahl writes, “the idea of witnessing one’s own psychic and physical death became recurrent feature in accounts of psychedelic experiences” (472).

Yet another strand of the counterculture was an incipient environmentalism and emphasis on natural ways of living, avoidance of pollution, protection of the land and of the environment generally. Many adopted distinctive diets which emphasized natural, unprocessed, and whole foods.

The counterculture stressed the spiritual in contrast to the material aspects of life, which modern society in its view tended to neglect. In search of spiritual goals the counter-culture exhibited much experimentalism, bringing together themes from mystical thought, eastern religion, paganism, Native America, and other tribal traditions, as well as a host of wholly new and innovative ideas. That is why, Buchdahl opines that they “were closer to savage mind than to Western history” (474).



Because counterculture emerged as a reaction against mainstream norms and values, it rejects Christianity. Anti-religion is one of the tenants of counterculture. During 1960s, there were so many protest movements against religious beliefs. According to Darren E. Sherkat, there were interrelation between religious protest and counterculture because “most protestors were influenced by the counterculture, and there is strong evidence that most who were involved in the counterculture participated in the protests” (1095).

After considering all these tenants of counterculture, we can no longer argue that counterculture is a sole property of Beats or Hippies. It is for the no argument that the myth of counterculture emerged in America during the turmoil of 1960s but by now, the concept of counterculture has gained broader scopes. The most important thing about the concept of counterculture is; it is the weapon of the marginalized. It resists dominating institutions and ideologies. Everywhere there is a discourse of counterculture because “whenever the normative system of group contains... a theme of conflict with the values of the total society” (629) counterculture emerges.

There are many countercultural groups that have flourished after 1960s. They are Russian counterculture, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) counterculture and Asian counterculture etc because at the heart of these movements too there lay "unconventionality" as a weapon to fight against the prevailing culture of the day. Cultural critic, Roberta T. Ash also presents the same view about counterculturists:

It is fallacious to believe that this category contains only white middle-class college students; on the contrary, at the high school and community college level, white working class and black people are actually in majority; second, it includes adults whose radicalism can be resurrected... . For this reason, it is educational

institutions that are fairly likely to be hatching grounds for the actual units of the counterculture, be they communes or more explicitly political groupings. (122)

Therefore with the increasing frustration with the society that is heading towards material prosperity leaving behind the social and the spiritual aspect, different countercultural groups are emerging in the society. Some carve deep marks and set trends while some pass even unnoticed. Whatever may be their effect but the cause behind the emergence of these groups is the existence of inequality among people. Until and unless mainstream is incompatible to address the sentiments of all groups of people, counterculture will exist as a reality.

### III. Voices from the Margin in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*: A Study in Counterculture

*Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* provides platform for the marginalized to raise their voice against the repressing centre. The novel revolves around the concept of “freedom”. The characters in this novel can be divided into two categories: those who submit to the loss of their personal freedom like Julian Gitche, the Countess, and Miss Adrian; and those who believe the freedom supersedes even personal happiness like the Chink, the outlaw Billy West, lesbian couple Sissy and Jelly, and the last flock of wild whooping cranes. The novel generates interest by placing its dissenting characters in situations in which society attempts on command and conformity. But marginal characters hug unconventionality in order to expose their dissatisfaction in the radical way. They do not fit the mold dictated by the “straight” society and value personal freedom over everything. So, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* is an attempt to defy central cultural standardization by the all pervasive motif of unconventionality.

It is about hitchhiking, lesbianism, free-love, drug use etc. Inside the frame of a love story author nevertheless, covers topics from female rights to exploration and valorization of oriental myths and religion to animal rights. It stands as an opposition to American commercialism and reliance on rationality. It criticizes American perspective about normality. Moreover, it preaches anti-authority, anti-western, anti-progress and anti-technology salvos.

But then again, this introduction is not enough about the novel because it left the most interesting aspect of it i.e. its female characters. It is a novel “of” the females, “for” the females but not “by” the female. It is a novel written by a male but its strong and central characters are females. These females are doubly victimized- from the hands of American capitalism and from the male gender. Therefore, they reject the norms detected by the male-dominated society and create their own unique culture.

The main locus of the novel is Rubber Rose Ranch, described as “largest all-girls ranch in the West” (4). Ranch is occupied by “Cowgirls” not “Cowboys”. The concept of ‘cowgirl’ is itself countercultural because mainstream society accepts only the concept of ‘cowboy’. But Robbins provides us with the research about the cowgirls that verifies the long history of the existence of cowgirls. He brings the real life story of Ted Lucas describing her as “the greatest cowgirl who ever lived” (131). Similarly Robbins claims that there existed “*gopis*” (133) in ancient India earlier than in America who were the typical cowgirls of the orient.

But with the increasing male hegemony in the society, the concept of cowgirls was buried in the history. Men tried to pollute the concept of cowgirls giving those attributes like “sluts”, “witches” and “deviants” (215). Again when there is too much repression, there comes inevitability of explosion. These cowgirls are sort of explosion in the face of male dominated society in order to claim their existence. In order to “counter” the mainstream, they establish own life-style that rejects the norms and values dictated by the mainstream society of the 1960s.

Cowgirls are the people who have real countercultural spirit. Far from the grip of male dominated society, women have created a ‘no-man’s land’. Although the ranch is owned by an entrepreneur for the commercial purpose, girls have created their own laws and rules to run the ranch. Rejecting the established tradition of the cowboys, they herd ‘goats’ not ‘cows’. Most of all, they “counter” the concept of ‘heterosexuality’ and indulge in the lesbian relation.

Heterosexuality is the basis of male-centered society because it secures a high position for males a donor in the reproductive system and in the fulfillment of the biological need for sex. They are the challenge for the society that do not accept the concept of female sexuality at all, or have seen it as something only practiced in relation to men. Therefore, lesbianism is not simply

a way of life for the cowgirls but is a ‘weapon’ to fight with the male hegemony. It is a “declaration of independence” from the sway of males.

The main locus of the novel is the Rubber Rose Ranch where many important events drive it to out of the ordinary climax. This Ranch lies near Dakota Hill and Siwash Lake. The setting tells us that it lies far away from the urban civilization of the western world. It is a place where technology has not been able to pollute the environment. Similarly, it is far from the clutches of males. Ranch provides beauty treatment for the females. Therefore, guests and service providers both are females. There live cowgirls from the different parts of America but they are trussed by the common predicament. They are all victims of the patriarchal society. So male is their common enemy. On this regard, they are feminists.

The novel presents us with the unique love story between two women: Sissy Hankshaw and Bonanza Jellybean. Bonanza Jellybean is a cowgirl living in the ranch whereas Sissy is a model of the industrialist who owns the ranch. She is a lady born with unusually large thumbs. She came to the Rubber Rose for her modeling assignment. She is already married with the watercolorist, Julian Gitche. After she comes to the Rubber Rose, Sissy is introduced with Jelly.

At their first meeting, they display a sense of familiarity and nearness which is one of the important aspects of lesbianism. Before lesbians involve in the homosexual relationship, they have to be good friends because love in lesbianism grows out of friendship. When they meet for the first time, Jelly accepts Sissy very normally despite the obvious sight of Sissy’s mutation. In fact when Jelly comes to meet Sissy in her room, Jelly simply “grasped Sissy’s elbow and sat on the side of the bed” (127). Knowing that “Sissy stuck the thumbs under quilt”, Jelly “watched it go with eyes that suggested she would have liked to follow it” (132). Sissy immediately feels

enticed with Jelly because for the first time in her life, someone easily accepted her with her thumbs.

It was enough reason for Sissy to get attracted to Jelly who for the first time accepted the way she is. For Jelly, she has always looked up to Sissy as her role-model though she met her face to face only inside the ranch. Jelly credits Sissy for being her source of inspiration for her countercultural life. She says:

“Well, that part never interested me anyway. The Beatniks were before my time, and I never got anything out of the hippies but bad dope, clichés and the clap. But you, even though you weren’t a cowgirl, you were sort of an inspiration and motivation to me. The example of your life helped me in my struggle to be a cowgirl.” (128)

While Sissy, even though married to Julian, identified herself emotionally with Jelly than with her husband, because of their similar anatomical facts. Sissy confesses with Jelly that her marriage was a “need” on the part of her husband. She discloses that “For the first time in life, I was needed. It was a powerful attraction. By most standards, I’m not even a very good wife. On a conscious level, Julian does not appreciate or understand me a drop better than anyone else, but somewhere in him he knows that he needs what that only someone like me can offer”(146).

This emotional tie made them fall in love with each-other. As a token of love, Jelly then “kisses Sissy, half upon her mouth, half upon the chin” (147). After this incident, there are several instances that reveal the lesbian relation between these two girl friends. Robbins portrays the girl-love scene so well that readers completely forget that the ‘cameraman’ of those scenes is a male. When asked about this artistry, Robbins answers:

... in the early seventies, I lived with a darling young coed who happened to be actively bisexual, and it was her practice to pick up girls on campus and at concerts and bring them home for both of us to share. So I have done some firsthand research in the field of girl-love scene, up close and personal. (Reising 476)

Robbins describes in the novel that Sissy and Jelly discovered their lesbian selves in the wilderness of Dakota hill when they walked over the crest of the hill “naked” (150), having left their clothing at the cherry tree. He describes that love scene with very close look. He explains the love scene from the starting kiss to position of relaxes. He addresses Sissy:

... you leaned toward one another slowly, sliding cheeks, and kissed. ... Embraced, you toppled over in the wheatgrass. Her stetson fell off and rolled away in the direction of Oklahoma city. Maybe it wanted to say howdy to Ted Lucas. Your eyes sent an archeological expedition to Jelly’s face, and hers to yours; both unearthed inscriptions and pondered their meaning. She whispered that you were beautiful and brave. ... You were socked into one another now, it has been acknowledged and approved. ... Your clitoris was a switch without an “off”. She snapped it on on on and further on. You crooked your tongue around an erect nipple. ... You rocked each other in cradles of sweat and saliva, until you could see nothing. (155)

After becoming “one”, neither of them was embarrassed. They felt proud for what happened in the wilderness. While Jelly confessed that “something nice happed up there”, Sissy also admits “it was nice” (158). Jelly further adds, “it’s specially good when its somebody you really like a lot” (158).

Robbins proves that the relation between Sissy and Jelly is not just sexual but rather emotional through the letter that Jelly sends Sissy when she is admitted in the hospital. In the letter, Jelly addresses Sissy as “Dearest Sissy” (177). It reads:

Today, though, the first whoopers came back-on their way north to hatch their checks- and seeing them out there at the lake again was such a flash-back, and made me miss you so much, that I just had to take pen in hand, as they say. ...  
Sissy you are such special person. I can't tell you how much you mean to me. ...I love you. (177-78)

This letter is full of love and no less intimate than it happens between two heterosexual lovers. Each word and phrase was full of deep emotions. Certainly when Sissy read this letter, “new life began in Sissy” (178). Robbins writes that “whatever it was would be hard to name and hard to trace” (178). Sissy is a bisexual female. She is not completely lesbian as Jelly. Until Sissy met Jelly, she had no taste of lesbian relation. She was engaged in heterosexuality with out interest. That is why, when she took the taste of homosexuality, she liked it more than heterosexuality. Sissy belongs to the category of those females in the 1960s who did not realize about their bisexual characteristic until the women liberation movement. That movement instigated females to love one-another in more than a sisterly fashion. As a result, many women explored their bisexuality or lesbianism in that period of time.

Robbins provides us with other clues of lesbianism in the novel. Once when Sissy went to the Julian's apartment for the first time, she was introduced with Marie who was Julian's friend. When exhausted Sissy was lying in the bed, all of a sudden Marie came to her with some other intention. Marie, to Sissy's surprise:



... moved her bare bosom close to Sissy's. ... seized Sissy's free breast, quickly, like a monkey picking a fruit, rolling it about in her hungry fingers, rubbing it against her chin and cheeks. ... it was Marie who was climbing her, sliding around on her, pulling down her own panties with a wild hand. Marie nuzzled Sissy's calves, then her thighs. Marie's mouth, oozing hot saliva, apparently had a destination. (76-7)

But because Sissy did not feel any emotional tie with Marie, she felt odd and embarrassed. This incident elucidates the misconception in the mainstream society that lesbian views every other women with an erotic eye.

In the novel, it is important to consider the author's point of view to look at the issue of lesbianism. For Robbins, lesbianism is not 'abnormality' as mainstream society to the 1960s puts it rather "it's a cultural phenomenon, a healthy rejection of the paternalistic power structure that has dominated the civilized world for more than two thousand years" (244). Robbins is of the view that in order to "remind" men what love in reality is, "women have got to love women" (244). This means, he also takes lesbianism as a protest against male-domination.

Cowgirls who "have been in each other's pants" (158) also share the same view with the author. These went for countercultural life of lesbianism in order to challenge and protest against the male-centered society. The history of America, the protests that emerged in the era of 1960s has provided us with an example of the inevitability of relationship between lesbians and feminists. Though not all feminists are lesbians but most of the lesbians are feminists. These cowgirls are both lesbians and feminists. Cowgirls are divided into two wings in their ideology: cowgirl Debbie Del represents one wing, who argues:

... women who hate men turn into men. ... women re different from men and that that difference is the source of their strength. ... if women are to take charge again, they much do it in the feminine way; they mustn't resort to aggressive and violent masculine methods. ...it is up to women to show themselves *better* than men, to love men, set good examples for them and guide them tenderly toward the new age. (151)

On the contrary, Delores asserts that she is a visionary woman who is given task to “lead ... daughters against their natural enemy” from Mother Goddess-Niwetukame. She adds that the natural enemies of women are “fathers and the sons” (151). Other cowgirls in the ranch like Linda, Kym, Big Red, Gloria, Jellybean etc are divided along these two extremes.

This negative attitude toward males did not arise for any reason; rather they are victimized by the male-dominated society someway or the other that gave rise to this bitter feeling. From childhood, Bonanza Jellybean has wanted nothing more than to be a cow girl. When she was a child, her parents encouraged her dream by giving cowgirl outfit as a gift by Santa Claus, on the occasion of Christmas. But all of a sudden, at the age of ten, her parents told her that “you’re too big now; Santa doesn’t have any cowgirl suits that’ll fit you. How’d you like a Barbie doll with her fashionable wardrobe?” (128). That day she realized that “there was a lot bigger difference between me and my brother than what I could see in the bathtub” (130).

Patriarchal society applies two different rules for boys and girls. Boys never compromise with their dreams and ambitions. When a girl dreams something other than housewifery, desk-jobbing or motherhood, they “better hustle her off to a child psychologist” (130). The condition of cowgirls in the United States in the 1960s/70s was very pathetic. Though there were a lot of movies about Cowboys, a lot of advertisements but “there’s never been a movie about cowgirls”

(130). About Rodeos, there are just “two cowgirls in Rodeo Hall of Fame in Oklahoma city” whereas “the Rodeo Cowboys Association has more than three thousand members” (131).

This means cowgirls exist only as an image but society does not allow this idea of cowgirls turn into a fact. But Jelly was confident that if the idea of cowgirl prevails in the culture, the fact of cowgirls should also prevail. The tendency of mainstream society is to make child believe in Santa Claus, Easter Bunny who have no real existence. It is a tendency to cheat innocent children. But Jelly did not want the image of cowgirl be another image to cheat. Jelly asserts that she wants “every little girl- and every boy, for that matter- to be free to realize their fantasies. Anything less than that is unacceptable to me.” (132)

Cowgirls are of the opinion that marriage has trapped female inside the four walls of the house. The same institution of marriage has liberated men because it provides “food, bed, laundry, TV, pussy, offspring and creature comforts all under one roof” (63) whereas for women “marriage is a surrender” (63). They argue:

Marriage is when a girl gives up the fight, walks off the battlefield and from then on leaves the truly interesting and significant action to her husband, who has bargained to ‘take care’ her. What a sad bum deal not a climatic experience as women believe. Women live longer than men because they really haven’t been living. (63)

This issue of housewifery was one of the issues raised in the women’s movement of the 1960s that argued that a wife is an unpaid slave. Robbins provokes the issues raised in the movement through the mouth of cowgirls.

Another issue he raises in the novel is about ‘body-odor’ that was raised in the movement. A Countess stands as a debased capitalist who creates so-called “feminine-hygiene

products” in order to rid females from their ‘body-odor’. Due to some anatomical facts like menstruation or child-birth, he charges females as species having ‘body-odor’. He argues:

I loath the stink of females! ... They are so sweet the way God made them; then they start fooling around with men and soon they’re stinking. Like rotten mushrooms, like an excessively chlorinated swimming pool, like a tuna fish’s retirement party. They *all* stink. From the Queen of England to Bonanza Jellybean, they stink.” (64)

So, he creates several cosmetics for the females to “clean things up, rid the human race of its most pagan stench” (95). He asserts that he also owns a beauty ranch where women can go “to lose weight, remove wrinkles, change their hairstyle and pretty themselves up for the next disappointment” (95). There his staffs teach those clients to take care of “more intimate beauty problems” (95).

He is a true male chauvinist. In the name of service towards the females, he is chastening females for their anatomical facts. His products are so dangerous for the health of the females that government passes a legal warrant against those products. It reads that “the agency ... has been receiving complaints from consumers, some of whom suffered more serious problems” (94). This event reveals the fact that male chauvinists and commercialist does not feel hesitate even to risk the health of the females for their debauched interest.

In order to counter the notion of ‘body-odor’, cowgirls in the ranch, “grabbed a can of Dew spray mist from the table and slung it in the air” (137). In the place of those artificial sprays, cowgirls suggest those clients to “reach down with your fingers and get them wet with your juices. Then rub it in behind your ears” (137) because female juice is a “wonderful

perfume” (137). They argue that “not only is a woman’s natural essence nothing to be ashamed of, the truth of the matter is it’s a positive thing that works in our favor” (137).

Similarly, Robbins provides us with the information that Christianity is the real culprit for the present pathetic condition of the women. The pagan heritage had provided women with respectable position but it is with the entry of Christianity that women lost their powerful position and relegated to the margin. He reports:

... if you scratch back part the Christian conquest into your true heritage, you will find women doing wondrous things. ... women controlled the Old Religion. It had few priests, many priestesses. ... The Great Mother- creator and destroyer – instructed the Old Gold, was his mama, his wife, his daughter, his sister, his equal and ecstatic partner .... (233)

Robbins, at the end, presents a climax where cowgirls are made to suffer from the hands of men standing in the position of authority. Cowgirls were saving the lives of endangered flocks of whooping cranes, providing them food and shelter inside the ranch. But the whole government force stand against them blaming that act as an illegal activity. It may be an illegal act of those people in authority but for those innocent cowgirls, it was just a help to the birds from their side.

Despite the arms and power of the government agents, cowgirls showed no sign of fear. They cried, “better no cowgirls than cowgirls compromised” (324). Delores adds, “I’m prepared to battle! Furthermore I’m prepared to win! Victory for every female, living or dead who’s suffered the temporary defeats of masculine insensitivity to their inner lives!” (335). But none can negate the practicality that the government agents with arms and guns can easily overthrow cowgirls who had no weapon despite their courage. At the end, Robbins provides no Due sex

Machine to rescue cowgirls from the clutches of men and Jellybean faces tragic death with the barrage of bullets. The novel also could not negate the reality existing in the society. That is why “Even Cowgirls Get the Blues”.

Apart from lesbianism and issue of feminism, Robbins holds an opposition to the mainstream concept of normality and its treatment to the people with disabilities. In fact, the novel follows the life of Sissy Hankshaw, a Richmond Virginia girl born with unusually large thumbs. Her thumbs are so impossibly large that she is impaired from performing mundane tasks such as buttoning and unbuttoning her dress. Her misshapeness sets her apart from the society. Due to her mutation, she becomes a matter of joke even in her own family. She remembers the remarks passed by her own father and uncle when she was three or four:

“you are lucky that she don’t suck’em.”

“She couldn’t suck’em; she’d need a mouth like a fish tank.”

“... lord, I reckon this young would never make a mechanic.”

“Nope, and not a brain surgeon, neither.”

“One thing... that youngun would make one hell of a hitchhiker [...] if she was a boy I mean.” (11-2)

Her thumbs made her different. This difference relegated her to the marginal position. The treatment she got from the family and society discloses the treatment that the people with mutation get from the mainstream society. Robbins discloses in the novel that during 1960s “several hospitals in both America and Denmark had been privately following a policy of letting deformed babies die” (169). It was such an irony that America, a so-called ideal democratic nation, was seizing the birth-right from the innocent babies. It was because “man has pronounced bias for order” (207) where paradoxical balance between ‘order’ and ‘disorder’

regulates the natural world. Moreover, “man not only refuses to respect or even accept the disorder in Nature, in life; he shuns it, rages against it, attacks it with orderly programs.” (207).

Robbins juxtaposes two cultures- mainstream Western culture and culture of the marginalized, the American Indian culture-in the context of their treatment to their abnormal members. If Western civilization uses the terms like ‘witch’ or ‘misfits’ to rationalize the cruel and unusual punishment to its abnormal members, American Indian tribes respects them as ‘special beings’. The latter recognizes them as “having a gift, the power of visions” (80).

There are several characters in the novel that stand for the mainstream American people in their treatment towards Sissy. One of them is Countess. Countess stands for American commercialist. He uses the natural beauty of Sissy for his artificial cosmetic products but he “never photographed her hands” (58). On the ads, her “hands were never in the picture. They would be behind her back, or cropped out, or some tropical foliage or gondola prow would be obscuring them” (58). Instead of embellishing those aspects of life which are unique, unexpected and spontaneous, he attempts to conceal them is an effort to forget their existence.

But to the reader’s surprise, Countess also gets to live the same fate of disabilities when doctor announces that due to brain damage, he “may never again function as a normal human being” (269). Slap of Sissy’s “unsound” thumbs was so powerful that Countess is left to suffer the fate of the handicaps. Perhaps, Sissy also for the first time realized the hidden power within her thumbs.

On the similar vain, Julian, a person belonging to margin for his origin as Mohawk Indian but is a caricature of mainstream male due to his education at the Yale, loves Sissy but not her thumbs. Robbins writes, “... it took more than a sardine of courage for the watercolorist Julian Gitche to marry the “unsound” Sissy Hankshaw” (91). Husband of Sissy, though not ardent as

the countess in his attempt to overlook the peculiarities of life, symbolically views Sissy's thumbs as "an obtrusion on the exquisite lines of an otherwise graceful figure, as though Leonardo had left a strand of spaghetti dangling from the corner of Mona Lisa's mouth" (8). It is so ironical that professionally he is an artist but he has not respect for the experimentation within the nature. So he is a sham artist and true replica of mainstream white male American.

Unlike Julian and the Countess, the Chink, an outcast in the western society, views them with admiration, respect and love: "He squeezed them, caressed them, covered them with wet kisses. All the while, he cooed to them, telling them how beautiful and exceptional and incomparable they were" (218). He is an escapee from the Japanese internment camps, rejects urban life and spends his life in the hills of Dakota, near the Ranch. He is fascinated by the unpredictable exceptions to the laws, such as the peculiarity of Sissy's thumbs, the uniqueness of Rubber Rose, or the striking of the clockworks he has constructed. He so admires, respects, and comprehends the laws of nature that he recognizes how truly special any spontaneity or unpredicted occurrence is. Sissy is the paragon of the Chink's philosophy in that she defies societal expectations by turning her deformity into a defining characteristic.

Likewise, Bonanza Jellybean, a cowgirl that Sissy meets on the Ranch also accepts Sissy with her thumbs. Jelly is also living a countercultural life, away from the grip of western civilization. Far on the hills of Dakota, she is living a carefree life with other cowgirls. She is relegated to margin for her 'female' gender. As one marginal group identifies with other marginal group, she identifies herself with Sissy. Moreover, she takes her as her role model.

Sissy always identifies herself with her thumbs. She says, "I am thumbs" (220) which means she has no existence without her thumbs. She has no shame or regret for nature's experiment with her. Sissy asserts, "It's the people who have been deformed by society that I



feel sorry for. We can live with nature's experiments, and if they aren't too vile, turn them to our advantage" (62). As she said, she turns her deformity into her strength. Whenever she observes her thumbs she realizes that they were "not a handicap. Rather they were an invitation, a privilege audaciously and impolitely granted, perfumed with danger and surprise" and "inviting her to live life at some "other" level, if she dared" (43).

Apparently heeding the call of her own destiny, she develops a love of hitchhiking. She hitchhikes everything from an "ambulance" to "wallpaper". For her, destination is not important rather the act of hitchhiking itself gives her personal freedom which she values above all. Sissy shares:

I have hitched and hiked over every state and half the nations, through blizzards and under rainbows, the deserts and in cities, backward and sideways, upstairs, downstairs and in my lady's chamber. There is no road that did not expect me. ...  
I am the spirit and the heart of hitchhiking, I am its cortex and its medulla, I am its foundation and its culmination. I am the jewel in its lotus. (47)

Her act of hitchhiking can be compared with Beat's and Hippies' wanderings without destination. They have identified wanderings with an escape from conformity of American capitalism. Similarly, Sissy also takes hitchhiking as "freedom of movement" (43). She opines that she is born to "direct traffic" (47). Road was a space which invites her to live a free and carefree life where there are no brothers to tease and no father to mock at her. It is the weapon with which she fights with the society that did not address her. She adopts hitchhiking to 'counter' the societal norms and values.

Sissy runs away from her oafish parents at the age of seventeen and becomes one with the road. A girl indulging herself in the act of hitchhiking, leaving the family was a 'countercultural'

life in the context of 1960's America because Robbins writes that during 1960s, "one thing the citizens of South Richmond agreed upon was that it was not fit, proper or safe for a little girl to go around hitchhiking" (17). Even though Sissy, who, values "freedom" even above "personal happiness" (174), adopted countercultural life for the sake of freedom.

Countess tried to mark full-stop on her hitchhiking by setting her marriage with a Mohawk Indian. For the time being she left hitchhiking falling "victim to the tyranny of the weak" (88). But when her thumbs began to "hurt", she realizes that she has "made a mistake" (88). Eventually she decides to hitchhike and Julian is left alone to say that "Those thumbs of hers, those unfortunate redundancies; they are of no significance, yet how they complicate our lives" (100).

This incident shows that though mainstream society wanted to "tame" (93) the countercultural girl, she never compromised her need of freedom. She could not put herself inside the frame that society puts around a girl. Therefore, she again heeds to the road for her ultimate journey toward freedom. Robbins writes, "Sissy Hankshaw never has any bad luck because nothing seems bad luck to her. She's never been disgraced because there is nothing which she'd acknowledge as disgrace." (61).

Free-love is another counter-cultural aspect that is prevalent in the novel. Sissy Hankshaw besides the fact of being a wife of Julian Gitche, develops love relations with teenaged cowgirl Bonanza Jellybean and hyphenated American, the Chink. When she meets Chink, Sissy admits that her relationship with her husband was that of conquest. Sissy and Julian stand as thesis and anti-thesis. There is nothing common and uniting between them. If Sissy loves freedom, spontaneity and randomness, Julian prefers system and society. He does not "understand her in the least, yet ... helplessly attracted" (86). He perceives her as

“extraordinary” and “articulate” (85). After marriage, Sissy life also goes through a U-turn. After all, marriage has tamed Sissy. Her life after marriage was “flashy but there was no real joy in it, no substance or spontaneity” (88).

It is when she meets Bonanza Jellybean and the Chink in the Dakota, far from the grip of her husband; she realizes that her relation with Julian was not satisfying. When she compares her sexual relation with Julian and Chink, she realizes:

With Julian it's fast and furious. It's always been sort of desperate. There's such *need*. We *cling* to each-other, like we are holding on with our genitals to keep from falling into emptiness, a kind of lonely void. I have a feeling that it's like that with lot of lovers. But with Chink, it was completely relaxed and smooth and slow and well, nasty. He giggled and grinned and scratched all the time, and could go for ages without orgasm. A real Road master. ...I felt like we were couple of baboons or something. I liked it. (218-9)

But simultaneously she admits that she misses the relation with Chink “but no more than I miss it with Jellybean” (219). This remark discloses the fact that she enjoys homosexuality than heterosexuality.

Sissy does not care whether society tags these relations as adultery because she far beyond societal values. Her attraction to both of them is due to their easy acceptance of her with her deformity. All three of them are people belonging to margin. The Chink belongs to margin due to his origin as a hyphenated American, Jelly is marginalized because of her gender and Sissy is marginalized for her deformity as well as her gender. All of them revolt with that order which discourages an individual from living a free and happy life. Robbins holds his characters

responsible for their own happiness. He declares that anyone who feels trapped by the accepted limitations of the society will fail to achieve happiness until freed.

Sissy and the Chink carry themselves not only in the normal sexual intercourse, but also practiced anal-intercourse this considered as sexual perversion in the norms of the society. Hints of anal-intercourse can be traced in the lines:

Although her mind was aware that Marie Barth, not to mention millions of Arabs, enjoyed it regularly, Sissy's body had not yet decided whether the unfamiliar pleasure of anal intercourse compensated for the unfamiliar pain. The Chink, with yam oil as a lubricant, had just performed for a half-hour in Sissy's fundamental orifice, and now she rested belly-down on a blanket in the sun. (228)

Frustrated with the contemporary state of affairs of the American society, Robbins also preaches anti-western, anti-Christianity, and anti-technology salvos in the novel. He delivers these ideas through his mouthpiece, the Chink. He valorizes primitive pagan culture above western civilization. This is one of the tenants of the counterculture that emerged in the 1960s. Robbins identifies civilization as a "mutant beast that emerged from the shattered egg of primitive stability" (208). Primitive man enjoyed greater stability for he "took from the land only what he needs, thus avoiding the hassles that result in modern economics from imbalances of scarcity and surplus" (208).

Another important aspect about primitive culture is, it "deified forces of disorder as well as order" (208). On the contrary, civilized man confused stability with "rigidity". According to Robbins:

Stabilization to them means order, uniformity, [and] control. And that's a half-witted and potentially genocidal misconception. No matter how thoroughly they

control a system, disorder invariably leaks into it. Therefore totalitarianism grows in viciousness and scope. ...true stability results when presumed order and presumed disorder are balanced. (208)

The problem with established “center” is, it perceives “everything in Nature is ordered and there is no randomness” (205) but Chink, a counterculturist, views life “as dynamic network of interchanges and exchanges” and recognizes that “balance of tension between the order and the disorder ... keeps it from completely collapsing” (205). But because western civilization could not incorporate the opposites, it has become:

Riots and rebellions, needless wars and threats of wars, drugs that open minds to the infinite and awesome advances in technology and confusing decline in established values, political corruptions, demonstrations, and counterdemonstrations, recessions and inflations, crime in the streets ... this, that and the other. (229)

*Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* identifies Christianity as a culprit for the spiritual poverty among western people. This is because Christianity is an “eastern religion” (231) and “eastern spiritual currency is simply not negotiable in ... western culture” (230). Throughout western world, people are seen practicing Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Zen for the spiritual solace but these efforts are not going to help westerners because “to turn to Oriental religious philosophies may temporarily illuminate experience for them, but ultimately its futile because they’re denying their own history, they’re lying about their heritage”(230).

Even Christianity is no help for the westerners because when “Christianity came out to the easy, its origins highly suspected, [and] its dogma already highly perverted by the time it set foot in the West” (231). True and original religion of the west is Paganism. Their God is not the

“eastern alien Jehovah” but the “Old God” who provided “rich harvests and bouncy babies” (231). He loved music, dancing and good food. He “puts pleasure ahead of asceticism because jealousy and vengeance were not in his character” (232). But when Christianity entered into western territory, it twisted the reality of paganism for its own benefit:

The church set about to willfully transform the image of Lucifer, whom the Old Testament informs us was a shining angel, one of God’s chief lieutenants. The church began to teach that Lucifer had horns, that he wore the cloven hooves of the lecherous goat. In other words, the leaders of Christian conquest gave to Lucifer the physical traits .... They cunningly turned your Old God into Devil.  
(232)

Christianity was not a bad religion in itself. As Buddha and Rama of the eastern religion, Jesus Christ was also a “living manifestation of light” but “by the time his teaching were exported into the west , Saint Paul had trimmed the wick, and Jesus’ beam grew dimmer and dimmer, until around the fourth century, it went out altogether” (234). On the other hand, Old Religion was directed toward enlightenment but “unfortunately, it was subverted and enervated by Christianity before its warmth could be widely transformed into light” (234).

Again there is a fact that westerners can not go back to the history of paganism, because technology has shaped the psyche and environment of the west. Western people are too much in side the grip of technology and modernity that they are “permanently alienated form the Nature to make extensive use of their pagan heritage” (234). In order to reestablish the broken link of spiritual development and western civilization, people should to some extent free themselves from the grip of technological advancement and direct life to nature. “... we’ve got to put the technology in its proper place, which is that of a tool to be used sparingly, joyfully, gently and

only in the fullest co-operation with nature. Nature must govern the technology not the other way around” (177).

Another countercultural issue raised in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* is drug use. Especially cowgirls in the novel are shown addicted to drugs. These girls not only use drugs themselves, but also feed drugs to birds in the ranch. Cranes, the endangered flock of birds come to the Ranch for sometime as their migration schedule but when they are “drugged”, they forget their typical behavior as well as their migration pattern. But the novel has not treated drug as something bad and dangerous. Cowgirls reject the established notion about drug because every food is a “chemical composition” and “changes our body chemistry” (325). Every food affects our mental state and our way of life so what is so peculiar and “drastic” about drugs (325)?

Robbins himself is a premier psychedelic practitioner. He is one of the LSD users in the Anglo-American writing culture. Appreciating LSD, he reveals with Russel Reising, in an interview:

It made me less rigid intellectually, emotionally, and I guess I could say spiritually. Certain boundaries and barriers just seem to dissolve. The differences between so-called reality and the so-called fantasy, between wakefulness and dreaming, between animate and inanimate, between the world of living and the world of dead were no longer so distinct. I think that acid might have increased the range of my mobility and awakened my appreciation of the tricky balance of opposites. I could move back and forth between conflicting states of mind with much greater ease. (Interview 467)

Cowgirls are also shown to have similar characteristics like Robbins with the drug use. They are shown fearless and ready to fight with the obstacles in the life. Defending the flocks of Cranes on the issue of drug, they argue “they were afraid of bad weather and humans. That’s why they migrated and kept to themselves. But the peyote has enlightened them. It’s taught them there is nothing to fear for fear itself.” (326).

Similarly, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* opposes the unquestioned human faith on ‘logic’ and ‘rationality’. In the novel, Robbins creates several characters whose spiritual bankruptcy results from the materialistic and flawed logic of ‘civilized’ man. In contrast, several characters attain enlightenment only after rejecting societal conventions and pursuing a more unique, freer life-style. He pinpoints logical thinking as a flaw of civilization. Among many characters, Robbins chooses to represent a dependence on rational thought, Dr. Goldman, the head psychiatrist at the clinic Sissy attends, is representative of the type of thinking Robbins considers most dangerous. Commenting on Sissy’s acceptance and admiration of her excessively large thumbs, Dr. Goldman states,

Pardon me, but the concept of introducing a deformed thumb to poetry is one I find rarefied and imprecise, one that most people, afflicted or otherwise, would consider utter nonsense. Nonsense, if you let me speak, is of no help to anyone except as it might manifest itself in a neurotic fixation upon which one’s stability depends. (239)

He is determined to “cure” Sissy of her obsession with hitchhiking, and convince her to stay with Julian, despite the fact that Sissy is having an affair with the Chink and the cowgirl Bonanza Jellybean. Using Freudian theology and scientific reason, Dr. Goldman attempts to categorize Sissy as having one of many possible psychological disorders. His attempt is futile,



however, and he is foiled by the work of one of the other psychiatrists at the clinic who declares that there is absolutely nothing wrong with her. He is Dr. Robbins, who admits of being an author of the novel. He argues:

For many people, may be for the most people, being n love simultaneously with an old hermit and a teen-aged cowgirl may be horrendous mistake. For other people, it might be absolutely right. As for Sissy, She’s finding the situation a bit confusing. And I am not sure that, confusion in her mind is doing her any real harm. (243)

Dr. Goldman’s role is significant in that it demonstrates how close Sissy comes to being convinced she has a psychological disease. It is through this character that Robbins conveys that such “logical” categorization of people by arbitrary and impersonalized criteria is the cause of many of the problems of civilized man. Human beings are engaged in constant battle between the forces of intuition and logic. According to Robbins, true happiness and freedom result only when desire to act upon intuition overrules the desire to act exclusively with logical boundaries. Brain is just an “educational toy” (115) and “is governed by principles it can not understand” (140). It has no control over its thinking. It depends on the person, how he uses his brain to get the best from it. In the dialogue between thumb and brain, brain expresses:

Over centuries a handful of humans- poets, madmen, artists, monks, hermits, composers, yogis, shamans, eccentrics, magicians, anarchists, witches and rare bizarre subculturists such as the Gnostics and the Sierra Clock People- have used my thinking machinery in unusual and unpredictable ways, with interesting results. Perhaps, if more of these ‘off-beat’ kinds of thinking were done, I might be more useful to the universe. (317)

This extract drives home the fact that people should live their life the way they feel happy and free. Perhaps the words of Chomsky can best summarize Robbins' beliefs: "I realize that most people require externalized, objective symbols to hang on to. That's too bad. Because what they are looking for, ... is internalized and subjective" (227).

Therefore whatever the background and reason for the protest, the characters in the *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* are people belonging to the marginal space. Their voices have remained unheard by the mainstream capitalist society of the 1960s. Although society progressed materially, spiritually it remained impoverished. People could get no objective symbols or faith to hang on to. They realized no freedom. Hence, rejecting the suffocating atmosphere, they marched ahead for the personal freedom which they value above all. Countercultural life that they admit to is not just simply a way to pass days but is a voice of protest that they raise from the margin.

## Conclusion

Examination of the key issues put forward in the Novel and apprehending the spirit of counterculture clearly reveals that *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* is a countercultural novel. The elements of hitchhiking, indulgence on sex and drug, disobedience of societal values, opposition to authority, and revolt against the concept of normality are the key elements that make this novel, a countercultural document. Purposeless wandering practiced by the protagonist can be seen as an escape from the chain of conformity and constraints of society. Characters in the novel value freedom over happiness and step out to annex it. They are subverting the mainstream culture from their own position. If Sissy Hankshaw is practicing 'moving therapy', the Chink is practicing 'stillness' to fight against the conformity of capitalist society.

The characters in the novel are the rebels who lead their life in an 'unconventional' way in order to counter the prevailing cultural standard. These characters do not belong to any particular group like Beats or Hippies, rather they are the people from different spheres of life that are left unaddressed by the mainstream society. Sissy Hankshaw is downgraded for her gender and her mutation. Similarly, Chink represents the condition of the hyphenated Americans in the white American society. Likewise, cowgirls in the ranch represent the condition of the females and especially of the lesbians in the heterosexual society. The common tie among these characters is their relegated status. They are the victims of white male capitalist society of the 1960s and 70s.

As a written document of the mid 1970s which captures the time span of twenty years- mid 1950s to mid 1970s- the author is obsessed with the changes that took place in the history of these twenty years. He is influenced by the countercultural practices of Beats and Hippies, Gay Right Movement of the homosexuals as well as the Women Liberation Movement that come to

pass along these years. His ideas are so powerful and rich in philosophy that the simple account of a life of a lady with deformity turns out to be a cult novel. The remarkable aspect of this novel is its language. Robbins has put his serious ideas in very light-hearted and off-beat language.

The author also delivers anti-western, anti-technology, and anti-Christianity salvos through his characters. He displays special interest in the pagan religion contrary to existing mainstream religion of Christianity. He is of the view that modern technology, rationality and too much sophistication is leading the western civilization to catastrophe.

Ancient Paganism stands as a counterculture for the present day Christianity. Paganism valorizes freedom, mob activity, and Dionysian qualities that are considered as dangerous by the Christian religion. But Robbins is of the view that the only hope lies in the concept 'back to nature' if western society is to impede its march towards devastation.

Similarly *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* drives home the fact that homosexuality is the reality of nature. It has been surviving in the society from the very beginning of the human history. Therefore homosexuals should be acknowledged as the reputable members of the society. Moreover, lesbians who have been doubly victimized by the society should be provided with equal right and treatment. Understanding the interdependency and inter-relation between lesbianism and women's movement, he depicts cowgirls as having spirit of both of these movements.

The title "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues" reveals that the novel is a tragedy on the part of cowgirls. He paints cowgirls as being victimized by the people in authority because he is of the opinion that fight against the authority and power is impossible. Practically, marginalized people can not fight with the authority. The best way to resist the power is indifference. He remarks

that authority should be “ridiculed, outwitted and avoided”. We can not change the whole corrupt system just like that so we should change ourselves first.

Therefore, though the novel is somehow tragic on the part of cowgirls but it ends with optimistic note that freedom is the basic need of human beings and we should not compromise freedom in life. This novel is an attempt to show the grief-stricken and hopeless people of America that there is still hope if we pursue the path of spirituality and personal freedom. The novel is successful in retaining free-spirited feel of the 1960s.

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