

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Ann Petry's first novel, *The Street* published in 1946 studies how gender discrimination and racial prejudice bring the white and the Black into conflict, and make the latter's lives difficult and miserable during the 1940s in Harlem, New York City. The study examines the attempts of a Black female protagonist, Lutie Johnson, who tries to resist double marginalization. In the novel, Petry presents Lutie taking recourse to isolation for her independence and self-possession from the miserable and claustrophobic environment in which she lives. Eventually, she ends up committing murder in an attempt to defend herself. Lutie's ultimate violent reaction against her boss and society and self-chosen isolation are the manifestation of her attempt to break away from the role determined by the racist patriarchal social system and to assert her individuality.

In the novel, the protagonist Lutie Johnson finds herself trapped in a miserable situation because she is a woman as well as a Black. Although she is educated and talented, her efforts to qualify for civil service post or to become a night club singer prove fruitless in a white dominated society. She is forced to take the most menial jobs which leave her tormented and frustrated throughout her life. Moreover, her beauty, which does little more than identify her as a sex object is worthy only of being exploited, thereby increasing her vulnerability. Thus, as a Black female, Lutie Johnson becomes a victim not only of racial prejudice but also of gender discrimination.

Ann Petry was born on October 12, 1908 in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. She grew up middle class in a predominantly white community. Her parents both had a professional status in the community. This status helped to shield her from a somewhat hostile community environment. Petry first began writing while in high school. She started out with creating a slogan for a perfume company. From this she went on to writing one-act plays and short stories. When she graduated from Old Saybrook High School in 1929, she had not yet chosen writing as a career. Instead, she went on to graduate from Connecticut College of Pharmacy in 1931 with a Ph.D. With this she returned home to work in the family drugstore for a period of five years. Then for two years she managed the other family drugstore in Old Lyme. During her time as a pharmacist she observed the customers who she later included in her writing.

Petry first encountered racial prejudice when she was on a Sunday school outing at the age of seven. This, along with other experiences of racial prejudice and oppression, brought about a feeling of outrage within her. This outrage remained with her for many years. The memories that Petry holds of her family are those of a caring and protective environment. Her parents created an environment that enabled her to survive against the effects of bigotry and isolation.

As a writer, Petry revealed her knowledge of how the interconnections of race, gender, and class can shape tragic experiences for both Blacks and whites, and showed her desire to represent Blacks in all of their humanity and complexity. Critics have attempted, however, to enclose her in the narrow space of the naturalistic tradition. She has overcome this through her writing,

exposing the limits of naturalism by creating a narrative space to fit her unique perspective of telling not only one story of Black oppression, but telling many stories of Black struggle and survival. Black women have suffered more than their white counterparts as they have to put up with the suppression at the hands of whites and Black males at the same time.

### **Black Women in Racism**

Black women have found themselves in a unique and extremely difficult position in racist American and European societies. They are forced to deal with the oppression that arises from being Black in a white-supremacist culture and the oppression that arises from being female in a male-supremacist culture. The Black women have gone through bitter experience because of their being Black and female. So, it is very difficult for Black women to survive in the white dominated community.

Racism makes Black women and girls especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation and keeps them trapped in the sex industry. In this regard, Scot Bowels says,

Racism does this by limiting educational and career opportunities for African-Americans in this country. It does this through a welfare system that has divided the poor Black family. If a mother works, or her children's father contributes to their support, her check and food stamps are cut by that amount. (9)

Thus, poor Black women are left alone to find for themselves and their children on inadequate Aid to Families with Children grants.

Racist stereotypes in the mainstream media and in pornography portray Black women as wild animals who are ready for any kind of sex, any time, with anybody. Arlene Carmen describes the plight of Black women:

Additionally, strip joints and massage parlors are typically zoned in Black neighborhoods which give the message to white men that it is alright to solicit Black women and girls for sex – that we are all prostitutes. On almost any night, you can see them slowly cruising around our neighborhoods, rolling down their windows, calling out to women and girls. And we got the message growing up, just like our daughters are getting it today, that this is how it is, this is who we are, this is what we are for. (13)

Many people have said that prostitution is tolerated in the Black community. They are wrong. Prostitution is not tolerated; it has been imposed upon Black women. It has been imposed upon them since the days of slavery, when the master came out to the field and chose whichever Black woman he wanted to have sex with. Light-skinned slaves, known as "fancy girls," are sold at high prices in the marketplace and later "rented out" or sold to brothels. Deborah G. White describes the nature of white man:

Today, middle-class white men from the suburbs drive through the ghettos of America to pick out whichever Black women or girls they want to have sex with, as if our cities were their own private plantations. No, prostitution is not tolerated in the Black community any more than African-American slaves tolerated it on the plantation; it is imposed upon us. (16)

Once a Black woman gets into prostitution, it becomes harder for her to get out than for a white woman. Racism in the courts results in Black women paying higher fines and doing more jail time than white women. "Racist probation officers and child protection workers can create nearly impossible case plans for Black women, setting them up to fail and resulting in their being returned to jail or losing custody of their children" (Lambert 34).

The lack of culturally sensitive services designed by members of the Black community, for women in the Black community, keeps women trapped in prostitution. Black women who are seeking to escape abusive and exploitative situations are forced to go to white agencies for help. This creates a double bind. First, there is a strong taboo in the Black community about talking to outsiders, particularly whites, about problems within the Black community. Second, even if women overcome that obstacle, white-dominated agencies are ill-equipped to understand and deal with the problems of poor Black women.

The problem can be as simple as a language barrier. Black women who use ghetto slang as a form of expression are viewed as "stupid" because many social workers have difficulty in understanding them. (Lewis 67). On the other hand, the problem can be as complex as "appropriate parenting skills" (Lewis 69). To spank or not to spank has become a bone of contention between white, child-protection workers--and often white, battered-women's advocates--who view spanking as child abuse, and African-American mothers who believe it is an appropriate and necessary form of discipline.

A deeper problem is the failure to understand Black emotional pain, the pain that African-Americans experience due to their inability to acknowledge,

take pride in, and be at peace with their own individual African-American identities. The root cause of Black emotional pain is white racism. Other causes are the subtle and overt ways that Blacks have internalized the values of the white culture: straight hair is "good" hair; thick, tightly curled hair is "bad" hair. Light skin is "good"; dark brown or Black skin is "bad" (Byod Franklin 58). Programming developed by and for white women is not necessarily useful to Black women, even when provided by a Black professional who has adopted the agency's approach to problem solving. For example, traditional "talk" therapy or groups that require disclosure on the part of the client have proven unsuccessful with African-Americans (Bell 21). Additionally, class differences between the middle-class Black professional and the poor client can often foster distrust.

An African-American underclass has developed in the United States which has at its core a culture shaped by the legacy of slavery and which is defined by drug and alcohol abuse and addiction. The Black underclass includes second- and third-generation welfare recipients, has gangs as a social institution, and has an underground economy built on drug traffic and prostitution. Today, the Black underclass includes increasing numbers of the rural poor, as well as those who were raised in large urban environments.

Ann Petry's *The Street* also centers on the concept of 'the emergent woman' who tries to empower herself through her talent and hard work in the community of Black women. This shows that there is a gradual transformation of the Black woman, which gives her an inkling of her true identity and endows meaning to her life. However, the protagonist fails to establish her Black

female identity due to discrimination. The above mentioned feminist discourse has helped us to generate arguments and justify the protagonist of Ann Petry's novel *The Street*, Lutie's behavior amidst male-dominated society. The discourse has given us a perspective to observe and analyze the novel in a meticulous and a scrupulous manner.

Prejudice is a central concern in Ann Petry's writing. In almost all of her works, complex relationships develop among individuals prejudiced against each other for reasons of race or gender. But her fiction contains few characters who are either victims or oppressors. She imbues even her most objectionable characters with humanity. The would-be rapist, Boots Smith in *The Street*, for example, has been a victim of racial prejudice. While Petry does not excuse his behavior, she does acknowledge the pathos of his life. Likewise, in *The Witness* provides the delinquent boys with a social context. They are intelligent young men, stifled by both church and school, who have no positive outlet for their myriad frustrations.

Similarly, Clarence V Reynolds takes the novel as the most successful and best-selling book. According to him, "In *The Street* and other novels, Petry portrayed brave and truthful characters confronting racism and struggling with personal failures and fears" (15).

While comparing Petry's *The Street* with Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, Amanda J. Davis finds striking similarities between the two works. He writes:

Both Ann Petry's *The Street* and Walker's *Jubilee* carefully examine how attempts to find and maintain a home are continually met with violence and thwarted by prevailing social

and economic injustices that pervade the boundaries of home and threaten to disrupt any resistance that has been forged. (29)

As Petry is a female writer, there has been a tendency to view her works from the feminist point of view. Petry is a Black but she is also a woman.

Thelma J. Shinn appreciates and honors the struggle of Black female characters in Petry's fiction in these words:

Particularly for Lutie Johnson in the *The Street* the struggle for survival alone is so demanding that even her attempt to struggle also for some status as human being – despite poverty, racial and sexual stereotypes and loneliness – gives her more stature in her failure than most people earn in victory. (71)

Petry's *The Street* presents a true picture of the subhuman condition of the Blacks in American society. So, Heather J. Hicks calls the novel a realist and says, "The protagonist in the novel suffers from the violations of privacy that segregation and its attendant overcrowding engender in 1940s Harlem" (89).

Although the aforementioned critics have touched the issue of racism in the novel, they have not really focused on the miserable condition of the protagonist who becomes the victim of double suppression. She not only suffers from discrimination at the hands of the whites and Black males. Her whole life becomes disintegrated as she is compelled to leave her own family and social responsibility in the end. So, the present research focuses on how racial prejudice and gender discrimination bring miseries and sufferings in the lives of the Black during the 1940s in Harlem, New York City. The study

delimits itself to examine the miserable condition of a Black female protagonist, Lutie Johnson who, despite her hard struggle, fails to lead a free and dignified life in white dominated society.

The present research work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents a short background to the novel, an introductory outline of the present study and short critical responses. The second chapter tries to briefly explain the theoretical modality applied in this research work. It basically discusses feminism and Black feminism. On the basis of the theoretical modality outlined in the second chapter, the third chapter will analyze the text. It will analyze the protagonist's miserable situation and struggle to lead a free and dignified life by resisting double marginalization. It sorts out some extracts from the text as evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research work.

## Chapter II

### Theoretical Discourse: Feminism

#### Feminism

The term "Feminism" originated from the French word "Feminisme" which was coined by the Utopian socialist Charles Fourier. The term was first used to denote the support for women's equal legal and political rights with men. Now feminism also refers to any theory which sees the relationship between the sexes as one of inequality, subordination or oppression. Thus, the aim of feminism seems to identify and remedy the sources of all kinds of oppressions and subordinations.

Feminism is concerned with the marginalization of all women that is, with their being relegated to a secondary position. It represents one of the most important social, economic and aesthetic revolutions of modern times.

Feminism is a political movement which has become successful in giving due place to writing of non-canonical women writers. Feminism comes into practice as an attack against female marginalization as our society and civilization is pervasively patriarchal, that is, it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic (Abrams 89). It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature- which is described as feminine. By this cultural process the masculine in our culture has come to be widely defined as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative, the feminine by systematic opposition to such traits has come

to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional.

(Abrams 89)

Feminism conjures up various images and ideas regarding the women's issues. In spite of diversity feminism is often represented as a single entity and some how concerned with gender equality and freedom. The penguin dictionary of sociology defines feminism as a doctrine suggesting that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society and advocating equal opportunities for men and women (Beasley 27). The penguin dictionary of politics considers the main common theoretical assumption as shared by all branches of the movement that "there has been an historical tradition of male exploitation of woman" (Beasley 27).

Feminism refers to all those who seek to end women's subordination. It is an aggressive conscious feeling of women who begin to reject their passivity. Feminism came into existence for the sake of women rights and human equality. The main aim of the feminist movement was to develop women's personalities. It, therefore, studied women as people who were either oppressed or suppressed or rejected the freedom of personal expression. All women writers who struggle against patriarchy to contain their womanhood were generally considered feminist. Men may also be feminist but they cannot be pure feminist because of lack of femininity. That's why, unlike ancient women, today's feminists are proud of their femaleness and has made a vital tool to femininity to perceive their existence. In this relation Toril Moi, a feminist, has defined in this way: "the word feminist or feminism is political labels indicating support for the aim of the new women's movement" (67).

To sum up the objective of feminism is to end sexism, though because of its relation to other forms of oppression, it will require efforts to end other forms of oppression as well.

### **Prominent Feminist Theories**

Feminist Criticism, enunciated as a movement in literary criticism since 1960, emphasizes a different kind of reading to literature breaking the traditional monolithic way of examining literature from feminist point of view. Feminist literary criticism establishes its relation to the movement of political feminists for social, economic, and cultural freedom and equality as it emerged as an out put of the two centuries old struggles for women's rights. In the concern of feminist criticism Toril Moi says: "Feminist criticism then is specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice, committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature" (204).

She has indicated the advantage of recognition of feminist criticism and theory which are useful to learn social institutional and personal power relation between the sexes. Likewise, Elaine Showalter has said:

"Feminist criticism has demanded not just the recognition of women's writing but a radical thinking of the conceptual of literary study . . . feminist criticism is international in its sources and feminist critics criss-cross national boundaries" (181).

However feminism is a recent political ideology, if we look back many female writers were found conscious about their sexes and they all had the same echo that women should also secure the chance of human right. Liberty, right to

liberty and different kinds of books are most necessary to increase knowledge in several fields. Before feminism many women writers were related to feminist concern. They were Madame de Steil, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Margaret Hiller, Rebeca West, Sarah Stickney Ellis, Virginia Wolf and Simon de Beauvoir among others. Feminist movement is the result of male domination over the females. In our ancient and medieval literature we find that women's status was lower than that of the slaves. In the course of defining, showing the poor status of women Raman Sheldon says: "In pre-Mendellian days men regarded their sperm as the active seeds which give form to the waiting ovum which lacks identity till it receives the male's impress" (134).

In this way, they underestimated females by comparing them with waiting ovum. They argue that males are something superior and definite having separate identity and history. As pointed above male members of the society continued to dominate the society to their best. Females were behaved as the second sex. That is why directly or indirectly females started revolting against this kind of suppression and patriarchy. In the same way feminist criticism sometimes raises the anger against the patriarchy to create a less oppressive environment for women writers and readers. Likewise, feminist critics, sometimes use wit to deconstruct the male dominated ways of behaving and seeing. Although, numerous writers were raising question against patriarchy yet some of the outstanding feminist writers of the 20th century are Virginia Wolf, Elaine Showalter, Mary Ellman, Helene Cixious, Juliet Mitchell, Toril Moil, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Feminine is a second

and cultural constructive form of women. When women reach a certain age and understand their gender, they are of cultural norms reversed for the female. Society considered anything unfeminine and unnatural, if she tried to disobey the social norm. In this concern, Toril Moi has presented Beauvoir's view in *Feminist Literary Criticism*: "Femininity is a cultural construct. One's not born woman, one becomes one" (Jefferson and Robey, *Modern Literary Theory* 209). The role of women in the society are cultural constructs because female infants don't know what they are, they are just like clay and it is the society which shapes them as a female. Power is an essential weapon in human society. Likewise Kate Millet has said in *Sexual Politics* (1969): "The essence of politics is power" (205).

Feminist criticism is a politically powerful tool whose main task is to make the patriarchal society realize that their rigid rules and regulation and to make women conscious of the age. Millet reminds that faultfinding primary condition of feminism. Feminism accepting Foucauldian theory, thus, see power being exercised by men who pretend to have knowledge about everything including women. A power relation varies according to circumstance the power of men no longer holds constancy. They envisage a crumbling of male power which will pave way to several alternatives. Jane Flax argues that feminist theory is necessarily postmodern in that it challenges the fixed and universal definition of gender relations. From post-modernist, post-structurlist stream developed gynocritics, post-colonial feminism, queer theory and the like. To set out in literary field with pluralistic choice of literary methods and theories, the feminists had to act as a socialist with a great

patience. Thus, Millet emphasizes pure pluralistic feminist to determine in their field by coming out from the marginalized position.

The feminist movement emerged to raise the women's status to keep them alive in literature. During the period women writers became more excited and valued their sexes. They did their best to be recognized through their writing. The central point in Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is that both man and woman are perfect human beings. There shouldn't be any matter of superiority and inferiority. They are themselves a singular, separate individual. Caroline Bird in the cover page of the book *Born Female* has inscribed that the females are exploited brainwashed, under privileged being by birth (1961). Another American journalist, Betty Frieden challenged the femininity of women of feminine natured in her book in the *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that all women were happy as housewives. German Greer has shown the women's compulsion to bear man's cruelties in her book *The Female Enoch*, (1970). Thus, it is clear that all feminist, call for changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order to reduce and eventually overcome this discrimination against women. The bottom line of all this subordination is the lack of freedom. Of course several writers, theorists and scholars have underlined this issue from varied perspectives. Marriage has become one of the bondage that restricts women from realizing their independent self. It has been defined by men as a legal authority over women. Feminist addresses these issues to instill a sense of human existence which is devoid of sexual biasness.

Though issues for the rights of women had been raised by some male writers as well as women writers earlier, the feminist criticism lies behind two

centuries of struggle for women's right. This struggle was marked by such books as John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Margaret Fuller's *Women in Nineteenth Century* (1845). These writers in their books present very important lines of woman's thoughts. The first dominant women's voice for the right of women had come from Mary Wollstonecraft, British political thinker through her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in which she proves how essential it is for women to acquire rights.

Wollstonecraft argues that women are characterized as vulnerable to sensuality and passion but men also fall victim to love and passion. Wollstonecraft points out malpractice of men i. e. to confine women to trifling employment. Jane Freedman notes Wollstonecraft as saying "I shall think that women a working machine" (23). Another precursor who plays significant role on claiming for the women right in the modern context is Virginia Wolf. Her *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and other fiction and prose works as women authors and on the cultural, economical and educational disabilities raised women's consciousness against what she called the "patriarch" society.

Another existentialist feminist critic and writer from France Simon de Beauvoir strongly opposed the tendency of treating women as Second Sex born to assist their male guardians. She believes that existence always precedes essence. She says 'one is not born, rather becomes'. Beauvoir strongly objects to man's attitude of discriminating between sexes as 'self' and 'other', men being the former and women the latter. Men writers have described women as 'flesh' the one related to 'nature'. In the feminist world a subtle and radical critical mode was launched by Simon de Beauvoir, her book entitled *The Second Sex*

(1949) is very important on this ground. Through this book Beauvoir established the principles of modern feminism. She focuses upon pitiable condition of women in patriarchal society stating that where a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying "I am a woman. No man would do so . . . man defines the human, not women" (Seldon134). It reveals the fundamental asymmetry between the term masculine and feminine. Woman is riveted into a lopsided relation with man, he is the one, she is the other" (Seldon 135). According to her, all the male writers assume that the females as a negative "object or other to man who is supposed to be the dominating and defining subject". Here man is assumed to present humanity in general.

In the book, the problem Beauvoir emphasizes is that women to perceive man as self (as subject) and themselves as other. And she explicitly exposes the condition of women so that they could realize their existence. She says:

Women have been essential as the one born to be a wife or a mother. But she is stripped off motherly rights because motherly rights are also overpowered by fatherly rights. A wife's duty is to be in the bed to gratify the husband's lust but the husband is not aware whether he is gratifying the lust of his wife. (*The Second Sex* 145)

Myth for Beauvoir is explained by its usefulness to man. She defines myth as one of those snares of false objectivity into which the man who depend on ready-made valuation rushes headlong. Woman, therefore, is inessential in the eyes of men who want her to accept as 'other'. Further, she admits that "it is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself dealing with nature on

her own account in her emotional life." In the 1960s, with the advent of post-modernism and post-structuralism, feminist study also found a significant place in literary theoretical front. Besides its political and cultural alignment, several streams emerged to define women's studies and it received a notable form of a theory named 'feminism' which is such an elusive, elaborate and diversified field. After the 1960s, feminist literary criticism is closely interrelated with the movement called political feminism which denotes social, economic and cultural freedom and equality between males and females. In this connection, feminist criticism denotes a revolt against the male order or patriarchy.

Many writers started writing in the line of feminism after the 1960s. But some of the critics argue that feminists cannot be successful in this direction in that even if they revolt against patriarchy, they are bound to use the male dominated language since they don't have their own language in writing. They somehow are bound to express the male values. Thus whether they speak or keep silent, they suffer. The main interest of feminist critics has been to reconstitute all the ways we deal with literature so that we can do justice to female point of view, images of women. Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century women's conditions are still critical. Still such questions as "Are there women, really?" "Women are like man" human beings are raised by women. These are real in real abstract declaration, which are disliked by feminist critics. Today a feminist proudly defines her "I am a women." Beauvoir also agrees with this saying and recognizes to a certain sex, no fixed sex, no novelty. It is a goal to alert the society to be a woman writer, she prefers womanhood. Beauvoir's attitude is that each human has an ideology which directs human beings to a

goal. Likewise, it seems her femininity has influenced her to revolt against patriarchy. Dorothy Parker can be counted in as an ideal and humanitarian writer for her excellent idea that all human beings should be regarded equal. She dislikes the interpretation of particular sex. She writes in her book *The Lost Sex* "I cannot be just to books which are clear that she ignores the woman's physical formation and honors on what is she?"

Feminists always struggle against antifeminist's views which they claim are of narrow and conservative disposition. However life is a gift of nature. Human culture and religion also agree with this truth. But the man of society only conceives of anatomy as destiny. Even the great thinker and philosopher from Plato, Aristotle, and St. Augustine to Aquinas, Hobbes and Rosseau have also depicted women as inferior and immature in their intellectual potential. Plato went to the extent of disallowing women and servants to take part in politics and philosophy. He labeled women as grade three citizens quite incompetent in any important and serious matters that needed deep contemplation. The Greek critic Aristotle declared that the female was female by virtue of certain lack of qualities. This stands as a dehumanizing and demoralizing tendency of a philosopher like him. He said the rational soul is not present at all in a slave, in a female it is imperative, and in a child underdeveloped. This statement has demonstrated that a significant philosopher blundered in reasoning owing to his prejudices toward male centrism. St. Augustine asserted that daily man was in the image of God and woman was a partial being.

Similar types of sayings have been put up by other male writers as the female is half male. St. Thomas Aquinas thought woman to be an imperfect man. He said that form was masculine and matter feminine: the superior godlike male intellect impressed its form upon the malleable inert female matter. Rousseau considered that women should be educated to please and complement men. This was not, of course, an accidental opposition. It contains a long history of gender discrimination since mythical and biblical ages. Most of the societies since the remote past have been built upon the patriarchal foundation that therefore have invigorated and unduly authorized men folk to define the world and society. They defined every aspect of society and culture from their perspective and depicted that in the works of art and literature.

The ancient mythologies of the west have attributed some peculiar characteristics to women in the form of goddesses. Apollo represents wisdom, knowledge and supremacy while Venus and Eros represent beauty, sensuality and jealousy respectively. There is no God representing man's handsomeness nor is there a Goddess representing qualities of Apollo. Goddesses have inferior position; the Bible is one of the most discriminating holy books as it portrays women as credulous, deceiving and mediocre. Women are described as to have been created from a rib of man. This description has pushed woman into a degenerate and subordinate position. Mary Daly says the power of naming was confessed by God on Adam but not on Eve, and in naming the animals Adam took domination over them. In Daly's term, women will remain powerless until they exercise the power of naming (3).

Elaine Showalter, a prominent American feminist has entitled women's writing and culture in which she says that women have their own type of cultures, they have their own type of body, the speaking style, the languages, the capacity of thinking and believing, the psyche all are their own sorts and males have their own. Therefore, they are naturally different. In the discussion of women languages Showalter asserts that feminist criticism is the wilderness. In *A Literature of their Own*, Showalter formulates three categories to adjust British women writers in the past and present according to their intensity of female voice. They are feminine, feminist and female. The first phase dating from 1840 to 1880 and marked the female voice rising in literature though buried in so-called feminine substance and got immensely affected by male pedagogy. In this phase, women writers like G. Eliot and Bronte sisters imitated and internalized the dominant male aesthetic tradition and standards, which require that women writers remain gentlemen. The main area of their work was their immediate domestic and social circle. The second phase dated from 1880 to 1920 clearly demonstrated the determined efforts for political and social equality and women's literature was able to advocate minority rights and protested against the unjust treatment of women. This includes writers like Elizabeth Robins, and Olive Schreiner, who however remained dependent upon the prominent masculine aesthetic. The third phase dated from 1920 onward, dawned with Dorothy Richardson, Katharine Mansfield and Virginia Wolf who ventured to counterbalance the male dominated literary sphere and realized the historically ex-polarized tendency in literature. In this phase the dependency on opposition is being replaced by a rediscovery of women's text and aesthetics.

However they couldn't dispose the blames put upon them by male writers nor could they explore the actual physical experience of women. It was only with the coming of postwar novelists such as Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, etc. that we see female aesthetic and the distinct female view of life. They have countercharged men for their taboos stamped on women and have focused on all areas of female experience.

Showalter divided feminist criticism into two distinct modes. The first mode is ideological which she terms 'feminist critique'. It is concerned with the feminist as reader and it offers feminist reading of text which considers the images and stereotypes of women in literature. The exclusion and misconception about women in criticism and women assign in semiotic system. The second mode of feminist criticism, according to Showalter, is the study of women as writers. She calls it 'gynocritics' and provides the subjects, the history, style, themes, genres, and structure of writing by women, the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career and the devolution and laws of a female embraces different aspects of humanity despite its focus on the entire issues of women, several dimensions have been shown ranging from liberal attitude and the demand for equal rights for sexes to the radical one voicing out the extreme ideology that tends to theoretically turn the patriarchy upside down. Liberal and radical feminism are distinguished in terms of their intensity of demand and the arrogance. While alongside them, other feminists have developed with their affiliation to certain theoretical backgrounds. They include political

feminism, Marxist/Socialist feminism, Psychoanalytic, French feminism, Bio-Feminism, Post-modernist/post-structuralist feminism and others.

Modern feminist writers in the United States took their impetus from the civil rights, peace and other protest movements. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1977) signifies a significant stage in political feminist writing on literature. Seldon considers that Millet's use of the term 'patriarchy' described the cause of women. The feminist analysis of politics therefore rose from the fact women have been excluded from the exercise of political power. Feminist criticism is always aware of the suppression of women in society and literature as well. But several books about women experienced by women writers are marginalized one way or the other. Millet argues that the books of female writers are marginalized because of man-shaped literary values and conventions. During the eighties, a major text on feminism *The Madwoma in the Attic* (1979), by Gilbert and Gubar appeared, concentrating on the figure of the suppressed female connotes to the realization of female identity. Gilbert and Gubar locate the female territory in its larger context and examine the boarder in which women writers defined themselves as free as men writers.

Feminist criticism establishes the historical relativity of gender definition, the concept of patriarchy revealed as man-made idea for the interest of masculine purpose. Women who by now are well aware of patriarchy as male domination over female expose the true identity of patriarchy and realize the significance of their own identity. The three French feminists – Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and Irigaray challenge the inherited world view of patriarchal structures. They believe that western thought has been based on a

systematic repression of women's experience. They also tried to deconstruct the language, philosophy, psychoanalysis, social practices and the culture. They claim that it is not only culture and religion that support the male-domination but also the language which supports patriarchal domination.

Helene Cixous argues that when the females can express their sexuality in their language, they can overcome the phallogentric approach. She described the psychoanalysis of female. In her essay "Sortories" she raises questions like 'where is she?' Then she gives a sharp blow to the male-oriented differentiation between the sexes, putting forward the binary opposition between the sexes rooted in the side of passivity. Ontologically women have no place in society since authority goes directly to the side of the father and it is passed from father to son but mother is excluded even though father and mother are the source of the son and they have equal participation in begetting a son. This is so because, in the extreme, the world of being can function to the exclusion of mother. She, being influenced by Derridian Deconstruction, deconstructs the binary opposition between male and female, e.g. Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Man/Woman, Active/Passive, etc. which are deeply rooted in patriarchal society. In this sense that the active partner is always the richer, she suggests, male is the victor and female has always been marginalized by the cultural, traditional values of contemporary society. With the impression of Jacques Derrida's philosophy, she regarded women as the source of energy because women use new language for their writing.

Helene Cixous is a modern feminist critic like Showalter and Beauvoir, also gives importance to woman's body. She says: "More body, hence more

writing" (123). She also says, "Write yourself, your body must be heard, only then will the immense resource of the conscious spring forth" (125). She continues elsewhere, "I write women, women must write woman and man, man" (121). She further expresses her experience of a woman who is a unique being. In her famous essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous calls for women to put their bodies into their writing. She says, "A woman's body with its thousand and one threshold of order – will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language" (Seldon 151). Her total advice to women is to be aware of their own pleasure, libido, identity and existence. She views that women must be free to feel themselves as independent. H. Cixous argues the subordinating practices exercised by man upon women are like a functioning machine (Lodge 289). The modern feminist writers and theorists have been very vocal to the issues of women and thus have brought several changes in the society.

### **Black Feminism**

In the 1970s and 80s, several Black women writers rose to the literary and critical forum and started voicing out their agonies as marginalized, doubly oppressed (as Black women) in their works. Black feminists have challenged white women's ability and Eurocentric and essentialist nature of some feminisms. Bell Hook's *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) relates the history of Black women in the United States and their relationship to feminism. Hooks argues that the rape and brutal assaults on Black women during the period of slavery in the United States led to a devaluation of Black womanhood that permeated the psyches of all Americans. Even today the US society still perceives and

represents Black women as "fallen women, whores and prostitute that racism has taken precedence over sexism which is evident in the behavior of white women who turn their deaf ear to severe assaults upon Black women" (67).

Black feminists, along with majority of feminists, want to be counted as men and share the bounties of the dominant society such as equal wages, child care and other accepted social rights, while Black women have been marginalized within a paradigm in which, "they are ignored, romanticized or ghettoized" (Beasley108). Although the Black feminists were as conscious of the problems of women as white feminists, their situation remained the same. Being Black and women they were doubly suppressed. They were victimized by Black men as well as the white society. The Black female experience is characterized by the interlocking oppressors of race, class and gender. These oppressors are interwoven into social structures and work together to define the history of the lives of Blacks and women of color. According to writers like Bell Hooks, the history of these cultural oppressors can be traced Black to slavery. Within her book, *Ain't I A Woman: Black woman and feminism*, Hooks asserts that, "as far as Black slavery, white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex, that ranked white men first, white women second, though some times equal to Black men who ranked third, and Black women last" (53). Black women have been defined and categorized in dehumanizing term, term employed to attack the essence of Black women's sense of personal integrity and self worth.

Various writers argue that historically Black women have been stereotyped as sex objects and breeders. Black women's personal growth has

been impeded by the continuing myths of the Black matriarchy, a myth occurring Black woman of emasculating both Black and white men. Black women have also been stereotyped by both Black and white as the 'bad' women. The white women were also oppressing Black women. They always viewed Black women as sexual temptress of white men and prostitute. These stereotypes and myth have helped control Black women's characters in the society from the time of slavery Black women have always been exploited as the object of white male sexual assault. White men take pride in seducing Black women. They often become the victim of rape because sexism of white male was socially legitimized. Bell Hooks says "Rape was a method used to terrorize, humanized and [. . .] to trip the female slave of dignity" (*Ain't I a Woman* 36). Black men can no longer protect them because they themselves are in dehumanized situation.

Under white domination a Black man finds that his male ego is wounded. So he starts his endless cruelty on his women finding no other role model than that of the white man. White women and Black men both act as oppressors or are oppressed. White women may be victimized by sexism but racism enables them to act as exploiter and oppressor of Black people. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as an exploiters and oppressors of women. But Black women have no such "other" upon which they could act as oppressor (Hooks, *Black Women Shaping Black Feminist Thought* 15). It was the long term silence of the oppressed and the continual devaluation of Black womanhood that paved the way towards Black feminism. In addition to the sexual violence and cultural stereotyping Black

women faced, various authors suggested that women of color have been excluded from the women's movement.

The modern women's movement has also been accused of concentrating only on the perspective and concerns on white middle-class women. Women of color concerns and struggles have been marginalized, slighted and even ignored within the agenda of the white women's movement. Therefore, Black and women of color expressed their reluctance in aligning themselves with it. Hooks, in the book *Ain't I A Woman*, concludes that "the women's movement had not drawn Black and white women closer together, instead it exposed the fact that white women were not willing to relinquish their support of white supremacy to support the issues of all women" (136). White women were accused of refusing to let go of their white privilege in order to align themselves with the struggles of all women. They focused on oppression in terms of gender while ignoring issues of race, class and sexuality. In defining all women's experiences in terms of their own, this movement excluded issues concerning the interlocking oppressors of race, class and gender. In resistance to this marginalization, theories of Black feminism and womanism were forged. These two theoretical concepts were developed to call attention to the multiple oppressions experienced by women of color, reflecting and defining their everyday experiences in their own terms.

Black women developed a distinct perspective and understanding that helped them resist the mainstream culture. The basis of Black feminist thought focused on the related issues that define the Black female experience that had been previously disregarded by the women's movement. Black women came

together to form their own organization that focused on the issues related exclusively to Black women and their lives. They established agendas dealing with several themes. According to Gloria T. Hall and Barbara Smith, these themes included the necessity of "Black feminism's total commitment to the liberation of Black women and its recognition of Black women as valuable and complex human beings" (xxi). Other important tenets of Black feminist thought include the political awareness of how race, class and gender work together as oppressive forces. Barbara Smith states in the articles, "Some Home truths of the contemporary Black feminist movement", that "the concept of the simultaneity of oppression is the crux of a Black feminist thought consists of the personal and political awareness of how race, class and gender work simultaneously as oppressors. Therefore, Black feminism is comprised of theories created by and for Black women and women of color. Black feminist theory provides space for Black women and women of color to express their concerns in validating surroundings. Black feminist's thought addresses the aspects, according to authors like Hill-Collins and Hooks that have been marginalized and excluded within the white women's movement, links them to personal experience.

Many Black women viewed feminism as a movement that was exclusively for women and dedicated to attacking or eliminating men. The author and theorist Alice Walker coins a new word 'womanism' to this new movement. Walker's definition provides guidance where she notes that womanists are "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (In Search xi). Rather than supporting separatism, womanism promotes

universalism. Moreover, womanism appears to provide an avenue for the growth of stronger relationship between Black women and Black men, another very important political perspective.

Walker universalizes what are typically seen as individual struggles while simultaneously allowing space for autonomous movement of self-determination. In her book *In Search of Mother's Garden* she defines a womanist as a Black feminist or feminist of color, an outrageous and audacious woman who loves other women both sexually and non-sexually, a woman who appreciates and prefers women's culture, strength and emotional flexibility.

Bell Hook's analysis of feminism also adds another critical dimension:

To me feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels-sex, race, and class, to name a few- and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. (Hooks 194)

As a result of this struggle, African-American women's ideas and experiences have achieved a visibility unthinkable in the past. So the major breakthrough in the women's liberation movement is the humanist vision reflected in the works of contemporary African-American women intellectual.

Some of the Black feminist writers like Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and Tony Morrison protest the 'massive silence' of feminist criticism about

Black and third-world women writers and call for a Black feminist aesthetic that would deal with both racial and sexual politics. They celebrate Black culture, tradition and their genesis and believe that they possess rich cultural and sexual properties as Black and as female. They try to situate the study of Black women's writing in the context of Black history and culture and explore its thematic and stylistic correspondence with the literature of Black men as well as investigate its special use of language and imagery. These feminist writers have revolutionized the role of women in society and forged the concept of "the emergent women" (Washington 214).

These writers have also recognized the self-expression of the Black women writers' importance because this reflects the expansion of American literary sensibility and offers the possibility for studying Black women's lives in depth. Alice Walker also believes that the act of writing itself is a powerful tool for bringing about change in the lives of women. She describes how this sense of purpose affects her work:

In my own I write not only what I want to read understanding fully and indelibly that if I don't do it no one is so vitally interested or enable of doing it to my satisfaction. I write all the things I should have been able to read (*In Search of Our Mother's Garden* 13)

Ann Petry's *The Street* also centers on the concept of 'the emergent woman' who tries to empower herself through her talent and hard work in the community of Black women. This shows that there is a gradual transformation of the Black woman, which gives her an inkling of her true identity and endows

meaning to her life. However, the protagonist struggles hard to resist double marginalization at the hands of whites and Black males, but fails to establish her Black female identity due to discrimination. The above mentioned feminist discourse has helped us to generate arguments and justify the protagonist's resistance.

## **Chapter III**

### **Lutie's Struggle to Resist Double Marginalization: Textual Analysis**

The conflict in Ann Petry's *The Street* arises from the discriminatory attitude and behavior of the whites and Black males towards a Black woman who struggles to live a good, safe and meaningful life in a white-dominated community. Generally the street is the public road which different people use. In the novel the idea of "street" represents a forum from which the protagonist resists double suppression. It is a powerful, intensely gripping story of a Black woman driven to resist a Harlem tenement environment, pressure of racial injustice and gender discrimination. She tries her best to lead a dignified life by resisting discriminatory behaviors of whites and Black males. When it is too much for her to bear, she resorts to violence. Thus Lutie's ultimate violent reaction against her boss and society and self-chosen isolation are the manifestation of her attempt to break away from the role determined by the racist patriarchal social system and to assert her individuality.

### **White People's Discrimination towards Lutie Johnson**

Lutie Johnson grows up poor and unprivileged though she manages to get good education. She has been suppressed and controlled by white and Black males throughout her life. Her life is full of struggle for survival. She has no parents. Her husband leaves her as he is involved with another woman. As a result, she has to undergo many hardships and problems. By carefully observing her struggles we find how she attempts to find and maintain a home and how racial and gender prejudice make it impossible. She continually comes into conflict with the white and Black males and her struggle is thwarted by

violence and prevailing social and economic injustices that pervaded the boundaries of home. Lutie Johnson confronts the violence of racism, sexism and poverty while trying to make a home for herself and her family.

Although she is educated, she has to work in the kitchen as a domestic help for a living because she is Black. It is impossible for her to get good work. She works reluctantly in white people's houses in Connecticut. She works for Mrs. Chandler in order to bring up her son, Bub. Petry writes about Lutie's work in the kitchen:

So like it that might have been the same kitchen where she had washed dishes, scrubbed the linoleums and waxed it of termed. Then gone to sit on the small porch outside the kitchen, waiting for the floor to dry are maundering low much longed she would have to stay there. At the time it was the only job she could get. She had through it as a purely temporary are, but she had ended up by staying two years- thus earning the money for Bub to live on. (28)

Lutie is aware of the white's discrimination against her, which she tries to resist in various ways. Since she thinks that the job as a kitchen wife in Connecticut is temporary, it is hardly enough to feed family. She is in search of job. She sees an advertisement and goes to work as a kitchen wife in a White's house. She has to look after little Henry, and work in the kitchen. Because of poverty and racial and gender discrimination she has to work in other's houses. She has been washing someone else's dishes when she would have given time for Bub. She cleans others' houses and looks after another woman's child while her own

marriage is a failure. She remembers her happy days with her husband. Now her husband is running after another woman, and Lutie has become the victim as she has to support him. She mentions this as she says "earning money for Jim and Bub" (28).

Lutie Johnson grew in a society where two worlds, white and Black, were apparent. These two worlds are physically separated. Petry mentions: "There were white schools and Black schools, white churches and Black churches, white business and Black business, white graveyards and Black graveyards, and moreover, a white god and a Black god" (36). This is an example of institutional as well as communal racism. Thus, Black people like Jim curses gods and wishes to change color to get job. This apparently creates a gap between white and Black people.

Lutie and her family is the suppressed victim of white, exploitative, industrialized world. Because of their color, their poverty and the white myth of Bad nigger, they are forced to lead miserable life as they cannot pay off the money they have borrowed. "There was the interest to be paid on to mortgage. It did not amount to much, but they did not have anything to pay it with" (30). She works for six months in Mrs. Chandler's house and compares her rented house with her house. She thinks that white house and its decoration is like something in the movies. She has to cook all types of dishes and look after babies. Although Mrs. Chandler loves her, she does not like her friend's behavior towards Black women. They think that Black woman are whores and if they keep them at home, they ruin white people's family. This is an example of overt racism. White people have really internalized that the Black people are

savage, animal. Lutie repeats the words of Chandler's friends and their behavior towards Black people. She did not like their behaviors as Petry says, "But she did not like Mrs. Chandler's friends much they came to the house to luncheon parties or to bridge parties in the afternoon" (40). It shows the vast difference between the life style of Black and white people. Lutie has to serve them and they accuse her of being Black. Though they admire her good cooking, they hate the colored girl kept at home. This is an example of overt racism. The writer says:

Whenever she entered a room where they were, they stared at her with a queer, speculative look. Sometimes she caught snatches of their conversation about her. 'Sure, she is a wonderful cook. But I would not have any good-looking colored wench in my house. Not with John. You know they are always making passes at men. Especially, white men.' And then, Now I wonder . . . (41)

It does not make her angry but contemptuous. They do not know that she has a handsome husband of her own. All these white women think that colored girls are whores. It is the prejudice which makes Lutie unhappy and consequently she hates white people from the core of her heart. Gradually she encounters the world where there is a wall which prevents her from mingling with the whites. She describes the new world as "a very strange world that she had entered" (41). She makes out that it isn't just because she is a maid; it is because she is colored.

Animal-like behavior of white people towards Blacks makes Negro women feel unhappy. Lutie is thought of as a means of recreation, object of quenching sexual lust of whites:

Apparently it was an automatic reaction of white people – if a girl was colored and fairly young, why, it stood to reason she had to be a prostitute. If not that – at least steeping with her would be just a simple matter, for all one had to do was make the request. In fact, white men would not even have to do the asking because the girl would ask them on sight. (45)

The idea that Black women are prostitute and they get source of livelihood by selling their body for white men for temporary entertainment makes her angry and knows the reality of white people's behavior towards Black people. She resorts to prostitution herself to earn extra money. One of the white men says to her, "Lutie, baby, don't you never let no white men put his hands on you. They ain't never willin to let a Black woman alone. Seems like they all got a itch and a urge to sleep with 'em. Don't you never let any of 'em touch you" (45).

When Lutie gets a letter from her husband, she leaves Chandler's house. She used to work in white woman's house to feed her husband and son. On the other hand, her husband also leaves her thinking that she worked in white man's house. This shows a Black man's discriminatory attitude to his wife. She is alienated, frustrated. She is not only exploited and segregated due to prevalent color and racial discrimination but also due to outranging gender discrimination. Now after she leaves Mrs. Chandler's house, she gets only

contempt and laughter from her husband. At the time of separation Petry describes the pitiable condition of Lutie:

He only shrugged and laughed that was all she could get out of him – laughter. What's his use – what's the point – who cares? If even once he had put his arms around her and said he was sorry and asked her to forgive him she would have stayed. But he didn't. So she called a moving man and had him take all the furniture that was hers. (55)

She is earning her living either by washing dishes or working in a laundry but now she does not want to work as a domestic. Now she lives on Seventh Avenue which is crowded, fearful; she wants to improve her situation by earning money. She is living alone with Bub. There is no one to take care of her, and her son. She has understood the reality of Black women who used to serve white people all day and night and they had to work for their own families. She feels destitute and suffers double domination. The writer describes their miserable condition: "They have been out all day working in the white folks' kitchens then they come to their house and cook and clean for their own families by the night" (65). This realization of discrimination against the Blacks outrages Lutie.

In the novel "street" symbolizes the place where Black women work hard for their identity. The women in the street trudge along industriously, overworked. Black women have to neglect their own home while they look after someone else's. White men on the streets wander along empty-handed, well-dressed and carefree. Women become the sexual object for white men in

the street. Men wander to look at beautiful women on the other hand; women have to return home being tired of working whole day. This prejudice that women are for providing pleasure for male has made Lutie and other women undergo vicious circle of problems.

When Lutie sees the Shoes Polish Box on her son's hand, she compares Black and white children's behavior. Blacks are for polishing shoes whereas white people's children are busy with study. She says, "I am working to look after you and you out here in the street shining shoes like rest of these Little Niggers, you know little Henry is wearing gray flannel suits and dark blue caps" (67). This has created a gap between the whites and Blacks.

White people want colored people to do hard and dirty work. They physically and mentally exploit Black people. They think that Black people do not have mind and intellect to do good work and official job. White people's exploitation of the Black is described in Lutie's own works:

You see, colored people have been shining shoes and washing clothes and scrubbing floors for years and years. White people seem to think that's the only kind of work they are fit to do. The hard work. The dirty work. The work that pays the least. (70)

Lutie feels uneasy and leads hard life due to white people's biasness that colored people are inferior and should please white people by doing hard and dirty work. Her son does not know the real attitude of white people towards Black people. White people do not want Black children to go to school and become intellectual person. They want Black child to shine shoes. Bub asks his mother, "Mom, why do white people want colored people shining shoes?" (71).

So, Black people have internalized the white ideology that white are good, intelligent, boss whereas Blacks are savage, uneducated, and damned by god. This type of cultural influence makes Lutie dejected and lonely throughout her life.

Lutie faces very different sorts of problems from that of most American heroines in other narratives. She never gets the opportunity to be dependent. She, being woman, feels lonely and unprotected. So, she decides to get married to be secure:

The only way of getting out was to find a man who had a good job and wanted to marry her. The chances of that were pretty slim, for once they found out she did not have a divorce they lost interest in marriage and offered to share their apartments with herself. (72)

She must find her way in the discriminatory world on her own. This is her major problem. White people's dream for material comforts to lead successful and sophisticated life has its impact on her, which leads her to failure in her life. She seems materialistic; she dreams of better job, a cleaner apartment, a more decent neighborhood. But this desire only becomes her dream because for a Black woman these desires are as far as the stars.

Lutie, though educated and has high ambition in comparison to other Black women, tries to escape from 'the street,' yet she is compelled to lead a handicapped life due to social prejudices. Every route off "the street" which symbolizes the poverty and its concomitant walls which she is trying to escape seems to be through offering herself to some man for the alternative he can

offer her. Again such behavior is expected of her: "Sure, Lutie thought as she walked on, if you live on this street you are supposed to want to earn a little extra money sleeping around nights. With nice white gentlemen" (57).

Because of the influence of bad habit of people living in the street she is compelled to slap her son Bub. He gets attracted towards Lil, Junto, a white man, and other people who do not want him to be a great man, but want him to become shoe-cleaner. Wherever she goes, she is thought to be a source of providing sexual pleasure for white and Black males; finally she even commits murder. When the man she has hoped to borrow money from locks her in his apartment and intends to sleep with her and then to pass her on to his white boss, Junto, she rejects. Boots says to her, "I don't take that kind of talk from dames not even good looking once like you. May be after I beat the hell out to you a couple of times, you'll begin to like the idea of sleeping with me and with Junto" (256).

She gets angry with Boots and Junto and becomes violent. She goes against white and male-dominated world. She grabs a heavy iron candle stock and attacks him:

A life time of pent- up resentment went into the blows first she was venting her rage against the dirty, crowded street. Finally, and the blows were heavier, faster, now she was striking get against the white world which thrust Black people in to a walled enclosure from which there was no escape. (266)

Lutie works hard, she works as a house wife, domestic worker, as big mother of children. But none of these works provide her enough salary. The more dutifully she works, the dirtier works she has to do at her Madam's:

Some of her madams had been openly contemptuous women who laughed at her to her face even as they piled on more works; acting as though she were a deaf, dumb, blind thing completely devoid of understanding, but able to work, work., work years and years like that . . . . (127)

Junto, a white man, who has a Bar, tells Lutie to earn her living by singing in the Bar. He praises her way of singing songs. But he refuses to pay salary. His real intention is to quench his sexual lust. That is why he applies the technique by giving her bait which is clearly known through these lines:

The only difference in the technique was that he had placed a piece of bait in front of her – succulent tantalizing bait. He was waiting, watching to see whether she would nibble at it or whether he would have to use different bait. (151)

She is fed up with this "street" life and white world. She realizes to have been suffered due to her philosophy of self-confidence. She thinks this world is one of great contrasts. Her feelings have been expressed in this way:

It would be better to have been born blind so you couldn't see it, born deaf so you could hear it born with no sense of touch so you could not feel it. Better still born with no brain so that you would be completely unaware of anything so that you would never know

there were places that were filled with sun light and good food  
and where children were safe. (155)

Lutie knows very well that white men hate Blacks. White people think of themselves superior to Black people. So, Black people must not get superior job. She knows the reality why white people dominate and hate Black people. She realizes that as Petry writes:

And she knew, too, that this was a reason white people turned scornfully to look at Negroes, crazy niggers who swooped past then on the highways with autos' in the way they looked. Because they sensed that the Black men had to roar past them, had for a brief moment to feel equal, feel superior; had to take reckless chances going around curves, passing on hills, so that they would be better able to face a world that took pains to make them feel that they didn't belong, that they were inferior. (158)

This above quote shows how white men nurture hatred towards Black men in the white-dominated communities. Thus, the white's prejudice and discriminatory attitudes towards the Blacks make the latter's lives miserable and painful.

### **Attitude of Black Males towards Lutie Johnson**

Lutie suffers a lot because of male domination. Even Black males do not realize her miseries and suffering. They take her to be an object of plaything for males. They behave as if she has no sense. Male brutality of on Lutie is illustrated clearly when Boots captures her for fulfilling his sexual desire:

Her mind sought some plausible way of frustrating him without offending him. She could not think of anything. He was holding her so lightly and his mouth was so insistent, so brutal, that she twisted out of his arms, not caring what he thought, intent only on escaping from his ruthless hands and mouth. (161)

Desperate and frustrated Lutie goes back to Harlem after she does not get money from the Bar owner. She consults Pop and starts looking after street children. But it also does not last long. Again a white woman comes there and takes the children away despite Lutie's earnest request to her. When the white woman takes the children away, Lutie again becomes jobless and curses white people:

Damn white people, she thought. Damn them. And then – but it's not that woman's fault. It's your fault. That's right, but the reason Pop came here to live was because he could not get a job and we had to have the State children because Jim could not get a job damn white people, she repeated. (179)

White men treat Black people as animal. They could kill Black people if something they dislike happens. Without studying Black people well, they take them as natural criminal and animal. So, they do not really see what any Black looks like. They think that Black is not an individual. Petry mentions one of the white man's remarks about the Black man, "He was a threat, or an animal, or a curve, or blight or a Joke" (199). Same kind of behavior happened to Lutie at Chandler's and their friend's in Connecticut, who looked at her and did not see through her, "but saw instead a woman with no moral who would be easy to

come by" (199). She is dominated and taken as a sexual object by males. So, she suffers double suppression which makes her unhappy and lonely. She is again dominated and exploited by another male Jones. The writer says:

She tried to scream, and when she opened her mouth no sound came out; and she thought this was worse than any nightmare, for there was no sound anywhere in this. There was only his face close to hers- a frightening, contorted face, the eyes gleaming, the mouth open- and his straining, sweating body kept forcing her even near the partly open cellar door. (136)

Discrimination on the ground of color, treatment of Black women as animal, and object of hatred and quenching sexual desire frequently occur when she haunts employment agencies seeking jobs. She is hated, looked at, and thought as monster and sexual object. She realizes in Petry's words:

She began thinking about the period in her life when she had hunted employment agencies seeking works when she walked in them, there was an uncontrollable revulsion in the face of the white people who looked at her. They stared amazed at her enormous size, at the Blackness of her skin. They glanced at each other, tried in vain to control their faces or didn't bother to try at all, simply let her see what a monstrosity they thought she was. (241)

Once when she was eating and chewing bone and leaning over the garbage cans, she saw a white man coming behind her and he scolded her for going ahead of him. He thought that Black should always remain aside and

behind white people. It is his prejudice that Blacks are inferior to white. He examines her with the chicken bone in her hand, the ragged coat tied around her, the men's shoes on her feet. He says, "You are going through this stuff ahead of me" (243).

The white prejudice, superiority and inferiority, hate and love between white and Black becomes clear when Junto and Boots talk about the war between America and Germany. Boots says, "White guys in the army on fighting for something. I ain't got anything to fight for" (259). The Black people work under white people. They have no identity of their own because they have no country and nationality. Boots says, "Any saying "Yes sir," "No sir," until my throat was raw with it until I felt like I was dirt" (259).

White man's domination on Black women is very serious. Junto, a white man does not like Lutie walking with her head up. He wants to entrap her by pretending that he loves her very much. He is proud of being white man. His behavior shows as if he is born to rule over Blacks and Blacks are born to be ruled over by whites. His real intention towards Lutie is expressed by Petry:

It was simply that he didn't like the idea of anyone possessing her, except of course himself. Was he in love with her? He examined his feeling about her with care. No. He just wanted her. He was intrigued by her. There was a challenge in the way she walked with her head up, in the deft way she had avoided his attempts to make love to her. It was more a matter of itching to lay his hands on her than anything else. (263)

Black people do not have names; they are called just "niggers." They are regarded as porters, whores and thieves. They are treated as animals which are sold. The Blacks are told to dance and fight for the entertainment for the whites. When the Black people get job, they are ordered and commanded like "Here boy, You boy, Go boy, Run boy, stop boy, just hate, no longer hunger. Yes, sir, No sir, of course, Sir" (267).

Junto and Boots make her sing song in their casino for sometime persuading her that they would pay her. But they only want to fulfill their desire by making her a puppet, a source of entertainment. Their behavior shows the color and gender discrimination prevalent in Southern province. As she is not given payment at the casino, she feels frustrated, and she expresses her anger and hate towards white and Black males. She remains still in that street full of dirt, noise, ravage and different types of discriminations. At this Petry writes:

Her thought returned to Junto, and the bitterness and the hardness increased. In every direction, anywhere one turned; there was always the implacable figure of white man blocking the way, so that it was impossible to escape. If she needed anything to spur her, she thought, this fierce hatred, this deep contempt, for white people would do it. She would never forget Junto. She would keep her hatred of him alive. She would feed it as thought it were a fire. (315)

Again, she finds an advertisement showing, "Singers Needed Now for Boarding Shows, Nightclub Engagements." She talks to Mr. Crosse who praises

her for her soft singing voice. This job is also impossible for her because she has to pay training fee of hundred and twenty five dollars. He repeatedly asks her to earn easy money in Harlem. He also misbehaves with her and sees her as inferior and sexual object. All these treatments meted out to Lutie shatter her hopes to live a good life. She is anguished and remembers all the people who deserted her and prevented her from getting out of the street life:

She thought of Mr. Crosse with a sudden access of hate that made her bite her lips; and then of Junto, who has repented her from getting job at the casino. She remembers the friends of Chandlers who had thought of her as a nigger wench; only of course, they were too well-bred to use the word, 'nigger.' And the hate in her increased. (323)

Prevalent racial discrimination is clearly projected in the novel through Miss Rinner, a white woman, who works in a Black school. She does not like to work in that school. She thinks that they are like animal. That place is like a jungle for her, she shows the white superiority:

They're like animal – sullen-tempered one moment, full of noisy laughter the next. Even at eight and nine they knew the foulest words, the most disgusting language. Working in this school was like being in a jungle. It was filled with the smell of the jungle, she thought: tainted food, rank, unwashed bodies. The small right braids on the little girls' heads were probably an African custom. (333)

Lutie always wanders here and there in search of job. That's why, most of time she is outside and away from Bub. She is influenced by white people who take money as everything in life. She also wants to be self-dependent which she learnt from Chandlers. Being self-dependent means being in a better position to resist suppression. This affects Bub; consequently he sometimes starts shining shoes, and sometimes stealing. Bub is accused of stealing letters from the letter box. He is kept in the Reform school. Lutie knows it and there is no other way for her to get him out of there. She becomes desperate, and makes plan to go to a lawyer. Petry reports that "her eyes were blood shot, the lid swollen" (391). She has to pay two hundred dollars to the lawyer to take Bub from Reform School. Boots, in loving manner, agrees to give her the amount of money. She goes to his house to borrow money. She finds a white man, Junto and Boots talking in the room. Boots, a Black man, wants to please Junto by persuading Lutie to sleep with him. Instead of understanding and helping Lutie with her problem, Boots and Junto want to quench their sexual desire by forcing her to sleep with them for two hundred dollars. Boots says, "All you got to do is to be nice to him. Just be nice to him as long as he wants and the two hundred bucks is your. And being nice to Junto pays off better than anything else I know. At this, she gets startled and furious. She wants to revolt against white people. She says, "Get him out of here. Get him out of here. Get him out of here quick." (423). This shows how she tries to resist the male power.

Even after Junto leaves Boots' apartment, Boots traps her by feeding beer. He wants to quench his desire and make others quench it by making Lutie

a prostitute. He tries his best to make her believe; when she does not agree, he slaps her. He thinks that she has no sense and power. Women for him are just to provide sexual pleasure to males. He demonstrates his power as man. He thinks women should not do other jobs except sleeping with males to earn money. The brutal and inhuman activity towards Lutie is clearly seen when the writer describes his action, "And he reached and slapped her across the face. And as she stood there in front of him, trembling with anger, her face smarting, he slapped her again" (428). This brings her into conflict with the white and Black males.

Boots exhibits his male power in front of Lutie. He wants her to be passive either by scolding and beating or by persuading. His behavior shows that women should always obey male and they should stay under male. They are to please male. For him women are dames and he does not want to talk to them in formal manner. He says, "I don't take that kind of talk from dames. Not the good looking ones like you. May be after I beat the hell out of you a couple times, you'll begin to like the idea of sleeping with me and with Junto" (429).

Boots is the person who has struck her. He even threatens her with violence and with forced relationship with Junto and with himself. At this situation, she becomes mad with rage. But she is weak, powerless due to double domination. When it becomes too much, she becomes violent and goes against these dominations. The white and male exploitation is unbearable for her. She thinks that due to color and gender discrimination her life is shattered and broken into pieces. She strikes Boots, symbol of male power, with the candlestick. She not only goes against male domination but also against white

world, which has thrust Black people into a walled enclosure where there is no escape. The writer describes Lutie's revolt against male and white world:

Finally, and the blows were heavier, faster, now, she was striking at the white world which thrust Black people in to a walled enclosure from which there was no escape, and at the turn of the events which had forced her to leave Bub alone while she was working so that he now faced reform School, now had a politic record. (340)

In her anger, Lutie kills Boots and thinks of herself to have been a murderer. She is afraid of her own life and Bub's. The oppressive white and male dominated society makes her a criminal. It is oppressive discrimination of racism and gender that forces the Blacks like Lutie to revolt against the male and white world and to become criminal. Because of the domination and cultural barrier as such she is forced to leave her son alone for goods. Her entire life is filled by a sense of failure, inadequacy and constant fear. She has access only to menial jobs, substandard housing and sub-standard food. Lutie is condemned to choose a substandard life due to white racist and male-dominated society.

It is not her will to murder and to become a murderer, but for her own defense she kills Boots by beating him with candlestick. In the core of her heart she has a burning resentment against the white and Black males which thwarts her ambition at every turn of her life and keeps her poor and in abject misery. She is deprived of the opportunity even to live a meager life because she is a poor Black woman. Her fear increases because she is going to leave her son;

she thinks she will not be accepted in the society as fit and true mother but as a murderer. Now, though she is desperate and willing to keep Bub with herself by giving lawyer two hundred dollars and taking him out of the Reform School, she thinks it is not possible. She thinks that "the only thing she could do was to go away and never come back, because the best thing that could happen to Bub would be for him never to know that his mother was murderer" (433).

So far, she has been in search of job and good place for herself and Bub. But, unfortunately, now she is in search of hiding place. For this she wants to go to Chicago. She thinks that getting good job she can resist the injustice in a better way. But her life is ruined and she thinks that Bub will also be lost without her. Now she is aimlessly wandering. Lutie Johnson, alone now in Chicago, running from the law, has abandoned her child. She had thought that she would lead a free and dignified life by getting good job but because of racial and gender discrimination, no where is she free and becomes a murderer. So, she leaves her society and her obligation to bring up her child. All her struggles, strength and industriousness, though end in failure, reflect her resistance against suppression.

In this way, we can conclude that this novel *The Street* deals with the resisting struggle of the Black woman, Lutie Johnson. Due to racial prejudice and gender discrimination against Black people, she lives a miserable and abject life. Wherever she goes, she becomes the victim. Her hope to lead a dignified and free life remains just a dream. But she never gives up her struggle. At last, she abandons her own loved son, Bub. In Chicago, she becomes just like a mad woman with no one to help her, and no home, no place

to go, and no aim. Her madness and non-conformity with social responsibility is her resisting act against double suppression.

## Chapter IV

### Conclusion

The elements of racial and gender discrimination play a pivotal role in Petry's *The Street*. Petry's protagonist Lutie Johnson is set to resist the vicious circle of racial and gender discrimination as she struggles hard for her social, political and economic freedom. She suffers throughout her life because of racial prejudice and discrimination. The novel chronicles Lutie's fatigueless struggle to change the course of her life through hard work, discipline, thrift and ambition. Left to survive by her own wits after the untimely death of her mother and grandmother, Lutie unwisely hires herself out as a live-in maid to the wealthy Chandlers. She has no other alternatives as she is a Black woman. As a Black woman, her presence in the Chandler household brings her face to face with alcoholism and adultery that lie beneath the surface of their glitzy, upper middle class veneer and marks the beginning of her disillusionment with the American dream.

Racial as well as gender prejudice prove fatal for the Black women as they have to suffer a lot. So, in the novel it is Lutie who bears much of the burdens of discrimination. As her desires and ambitions are shattered, her husband leaves her companionship and love of his life. Her husband Jim involves himself with another woman and eventually abandons Lutie and their son, Bub. Ultimately it is the woman who suffers most.

In the novel, the white society has chased the Blacks from the community; it has isolated them from the main stream of humanity. The racist patriarchal society has treated them mercilessly as if they are animals. The

Black people are subject to subjugation and exploitation. Lutie in the novel finds herself imprisoned in narrow cells of white law. Petry, through Lutie Johnson, who suffers from double subordination, exposes racial as well as gender discrimination that make the Black women's lives miserable.

When Lutie severs ties with her husband and employer, and moves to Harlem, she retreats even further from her dream of success, leaving herself more vulnerable than ever. Trapped in the world where slum conditions and racial discriminations are the norm, Lutie discovers that her efforts to qualify for civil service or become a night club singer count for little. Due to her color, she is offered only the most menial jobs, and she finds herself trapped in the subhuman conditions of a steam laundry. Her vulnerability is increased by the beauty which does little more than identify her as a sex object worthy only of being exploited. While Lutie rejects Mrs Hedges' offer to capitalize on her youthful beauty, Lutie is not so successful at counting the sexual advances of the degenerate superintendent Jones, the powerful white Harlem businessman Junto, or his sidekick Boots who is a Black himself. But he tries to exploit Lutie to please his white boss. This shows Lutie becomes victim not only of racial discrimination but gender discrimination as well.

Lutie's act of resistance with the white and Black males reaches climax when she kills Boots to ward off a sexual assault, but she is not successful in saving herself or her son from the attending ugliness of the sordid world they must inhabit. In conclusion, Petry suggests that Bob will possibly go to reform school while Lutie boards a bus for Chicago, maintaining her hope of putting her life back together but no closer to the illusive dream. Lutie emerges as a

heroic but tragic victim unable to control her own life due to racial and gender discrimination. In this way, her act of killing a Black man at the end is her ultimate reaction to the double marginalization.

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