

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Carol's Magnificent Vision in *Mainstreet*

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English,
T.U. in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

By:

Ram Padath Sah

University Campus

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

July 2009

Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

The thesis titled, Carol's Magnificent Vision in *Mainstreet* by Ram Padath Sah submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee:

Members of Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

.....

Head

Central Department of English

Date:.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt sincere gratitude and indebtedness must go to Mr. Shuvraj Ranabhatt, lecturer at central department of English, Tribhuvan University, since he paved an approachable path and let me walk along providing me adequate scholarly suggestions and invaluable guidance for the finalization of my disquisition work. In fact the concrete existence of my dissertation has its root in the relentless inspiration and motivation of various well wishers. The warm and incessant love and encouragement of my parents and other family members energized me to overcome all sorts of hindrances until the completion of this prolegomena.

Similarly, I deeply owe my honorable and candid appreciation to Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, the head of Central Department of English. Along with this I express respectful thankfulness and acknowledgement to all lecturers and teachers who have academically been guiding me since the initiation of my university study.

After all I am equally obliged to my cooperative and sagacious friends Rajesh, Saleem, Sunil, Umesh, Shiv Chand, Dipendra, Sanjeev and others for their moral support in my academic field.

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Ram Padath Sah

ABSTRACT

Lewis Clair's *Mainstreet* moves around the protagonist Carol's visions which are supremely magnificent and outstanding. Her arrival to the new place triggers her to attempt for bettering the Gopher Prairie by persuading the villagers. But the public are much prejudiced and male-centric. Men have always plotted against her and her visions which are drastic. This customary population cannot tolerate the sight of the course she has directed and this is what the reason her goal remains suspended. She consequently loses hopes and ultimately realizes that men are accountable for her crush. Hence she is much serious and probing. She can winnow between rice and pieces of stone. She sees through the male mentality which is preoccupied with the quandary that women are inferior and incompetent of launching drastic changes in the society. Carol is much world-shattering in the sense that she is devoted to keep on combating for betterment and prosperity for the town Gopher Prairie. Even her husband thinks that she is poignant and does not have cogent power. Therefore he soothes her and tries to mollify her repulsive state. She lives an captivated life, and seems as cool and simple as an apple.

I. Introduction

Writer and his works

Harry Sinclair Lewis was born on February 7, 1885 as the third son of Dr. Edwin L. Lewis and Emma Kermott Lewis, in the small Minnesota town of Sauk Center, which would ultimately provide the model for the town of Gopher Prairie in *Main Street*. An awkward youth, Lewis did not have a very happy childhood. His father, a physician, led a strictly disciplined life, and his mother died when he was six. Lewis himself has admitted that Dr. Will Kennecott in *Main Street* was the prototype of his father. The dreamy Lewis cared for books more than sport and felt limited by his rural home-town. In *Main Street*, Carol Kennecott represents the author himself in many ways, as Lewis himself was a boy with rebellious attitude always carrying the spirit of change as Carol is shown in the novel. He attended Yale University where he became an editor of the college literary magazine, but he fared little better in Yale than he did in Minnesota. He remained unpopular and was distinguished only by his unattractiveness as a result of a skin disease.

After college, Lewis became a reporter and freelance writer and married his first wife, Grace. His first novel *Our Mr. Wren* was published in 1914. Five more novels followed in the next five years, but each failed to attract critical or public attention. The publication of *Main Street* in 1920, however, secured Lewis's literary reputation. The book was a runaway bestseller, with millions of copies flying off the shelves in one of the biggest publishing events in American history up to that point. Virtually, overnight, Lewis became a wealthy, internationally recognized celebrity.

In a poll conducted in 1948, Lewis was ranked second to Eugene O'Neil. Although he continued to write novels throughout his life, his popularity declined after his splendid decade of 1920s. Mark Schorar has made his final judgment about

Sinclair Lewis. He writes: “He was one of the worst writers in Modern American Literature” (813). Lewis was known as “an alien cynic” who has been seen by Vernon L. Parrington as an American Diogenes by Carl Van Doren as a man of outspoken courage telling the true story of the American village and by Robert Spiller as an honest man crying out against the blindness and hypocrisy which destroy elemental human values. He has been seen by many critics as primarily an anatomist of society, an anthropologist and a collector of specimens. For Carl Van Doren, he was the voice of the liberal decade before 1929. For Mark Schorar, he was a novelist trapped in his own hallucination of the world as a trap. Lewis has also been called the “Bad Boy” of American letters and he was a social rebel who had no friends and was apart from the “Gang”.

Lewis was always more inclined to express his admiration for gifted contemporaries than to talk about the great writers of the past. He had widely read H.G. Wells and G.B. Shaw and was highly influenced by their social novels and dramas. His affinities to Dickens his favorite novelist, and as late as 1939 he described himself as “a romantic mediaevalist of the most incurable sort”. But whatever Lewis wanted to be, what he was, first of all, was not a romanticist, and not even a realist, but a satirist. Reviewers praised the novels of Lewis and abused them with equal vigor. Again, thousands of people bought them. H.L. Mencken thought it one of the great satires of all time and compared Lewis with Voltaire. Like Thoreau, Whitman, and Twain, Lewis too could see the difference between the idealization and the actuality. Lewis was always carrying around the works of Thoreau. Thoreau’s *Walden* is about: “The most searching contemporary account of the desire for a new kind of life[...] the total renunciation of the traditional, the conventional, the socially acceptable, the well worn paths of conduct, and the total immersion in nature”(78).

All of this, item by item, even to the last, not only appealed to Sinclair Lewis but in fact formed the positive element in his largely negative representation of American life. Thus, the Thoreauvian ideal of individual freedom and native integrity, that Lewis had always in mind. Making a photographic representation in the novels, Lewis attacks the American economic system, intellectual rigidity, theological dogma, legal repression, class convention, materialism, social timidity, hypocrisy, affectation, complacency and pomposity. Perhaps for this particular reason, he has been called the most successful critic of American society.

Lewis has some other impressive qualities; among them the ability to create a gallery of characters is the most prominent one like that of Dickens's. Those characters have independent life outside the novels and some of them have been archetypal figures. Walter Fuller Taylor views the characters in the novel as ridiculous caricature of American people. Commenting on *Main Street*, he writes that the book is not realistic fiction but: "a satirical problem novel in which the ridiculous is heightened for purpose of caricature, and in which the characters, far from being made true to life, are so created and disposed as they drive home the author's controlling thesis" (384).

Synopsis to *Main Street*

Main Street is seen through the eyes of Carol Kennecott, a young woman from Minneapolis who marries a small-town doctor and settles in his hometown. In many ways, Carol's desire for social reform and individual happiness reflects her particular post-war era, when Labor Movements grew and women at last achieved the right to vote in 1920. However, much of the power of the book transcends its period, stemming from Lewis's careful rendering of local speech and customs. While the

author attacks his small local town people and at the superficial intellectuals who look down on them.

Main Street is the story of Carol Milford, a young energetic lady who marries Dr. Will Kennecott after graduating from Blodgett College and working as a librarian. Then she goes to Kennecott's home-town Gopher Prairie and finding the town to be ugly and townspeople to be provincial and narrow-minded, determines to change them. She starts revolting against the social conventions but the middle-class American values, its contemporary and cultural imbecility force her to readjust with the society.

Carol Milford attends Blodgett College in Minneapolis and dream about settling down in the Prairie Village and transforming it into a place of beauty. After graduation she works as a librarian at St. Paul for three years. She meets Dr. Will Kennecott at a friend's house, and he begins courting her. After courting for a year, they marry and move to Kennecott's hometown of Gopher Prairie. Disappointed by her first impression of Gopher Prairie, Carol finds the town to be ugly and the townspeople to be provincial. The townspeople gossip all the time and are completely uninterested in cultural and social issues. Mrs. Bogart, the Kennecott's neighbor, proves to be a religious hypocrite who idly gossips about everyone. However, Bea Sorenson arrives in Gopher Prairie on the same day as Carol. Bea is awestruck by the magnificence of the town, which is larger than the town she has ever seen, Bea decides to stay and becomes Carol's maid.

Carol refurbishes Kennecott's old fashioned house with modern furniture and makes elaborate preparations for a party, a party unlike any party the town has ever seen. However, Carol discovers that the dull townspeople do not like change. Furthermore, she feels disheartened to learn that the townspeople constantly watch her

every move and criticize her for being different from them. They criticize the way she dresses and the way she acts. She finds few friends in Gopher prairie; except for the lawyer, Guy Pollack, and the high school teacher, Vida Sherwin. Carol also becomes friend with her maid, Bea, and the town's handyman, Miles Bjornstam. While the townspeople treat Miles as an outcast because he supports socialism and the Democratic Party, Carol finds herself drawn to him.

Carol tries to get the people to build a new city hall, school, and library, and a more comfortable rest room for the farmer's wives. However, no one shares her interest in constructing new building or helping the town's poor. Everyone tells her that they do not want to spend money on unnecessary things like buildings. Carol idealizes Guy Pollock, thinking that he shares her interest in reforming the town. However, she eventually finds out that he does not care for social reform and that he has settled down to enjoy small town life. As Guy explains to Carol she has the "Village Virus".

Carol joins the Jolly Seventeen, the women's social club, and the Thanatopsis club, the women's study group. When she tries to change the unimaginative club programs, the other members ignore her suggestions. Along with a group of friends, Carol forms a drama group and stages a play, which turns out to be mediocre. Appointed to the library board, she eagerly makes suggestions to how the library could encourage reading, but the local librarian opposes her suggestions, preferring to discourage readers in order to keep the books clean.

Carol and Will Kennecott have a bitter argument in which he accuses her of feeling superior to everyone else in town. After they make up, she begins to fall in love with him all over again. She idealizes him as a heroic doctor and witnesses him amputating a farmer's arm one night. But life in Gopher Prairie continues to offer

Carol no challenges. She gives birth to a boy, whom she names Hugh after her deceased father. Kennecott's aunt and uncle, the Smails, come to live in Gopher Prairie and prove a constant irritation to Carol.

Meanwhile Ben and Miles Bjornstam marry. The townspeople still shun Bjornstam and do not visit his household. Unfortunately, Bea and her son Olaf die of typhoid. Heartbroken Bjornstam leaves town, and the townspeople blame him for his family's deaths. Then Carol's friend Vida Sherwin marries Raymond Watherspoon, another local. When World War I breaks out, Raymond joins army. Although Kennicott also wants to enlist, the medical council requests that he stay in Gopher Prairie to provide his service.

Erik Valborg, the son of a Swedish farmer, comes to Gopher Prairie to work as the tailor's assistant. Fern Millins, a young teacher, also arrives in Gopher Prairie and boards in Mrs. Bogarts' house. Carol finds the company of these two new residents stimulating because they share her love for books, music, dance and drama. Bogart, the leader of the town's gang of boys and Mrs. Bogart's son, ruins Fern's reputation when he falsely accuses Fern of getting him drunk and making sexual advances on him. forced to resign from the school, Fern leaves Gopher Prairie.

Erik finds himself attracted to Carol and goes out with her for long walks. Kennicott knows about the close relationship between Erik and Carol but does not really mind because he knows that the two are only good friends who share the same intellectual interests. As Carol and Kennicott's marriage deteriorates, he begins an affair with Maud Dryer. However, after Fern leaves town, Kennicott decides that Carol and Erik should stop seeing each other to avoid another scandal. Erik leaves Gopher Prairie.

Carol's experience in Washington helps her acquire maturity and a new outlook towards life. She determines that she can at least play a small role in changing life in Gopher Prairie. When Carol returns, she accepts the small-town and its people as they are. However, she still fights small battles to make the town a better place. She gives birth to a daughter, hoping that the child will continue the fight. In the closing lines of the text, while Carol talks about her struggle to reform Gopher Prairie, Kennicott only half-listens to her and thinks only about the weather.

Thus the novel reflects the position of women in America at the turn of the century which is also called the progressive era. The novel opens in about 1906, with Carol Milford still a student in Blodgett College and ends in 1920, when, after her revolt and attempt to escape Gopher Prairie, she subsides into it again. The whole World War I occurs within this period and Carol's changed attitude at the end of the novel is the result of the change brought by the Great War.

Critical Reception

A huge number of critics have entirely focused on the female protagonist, Carol Milford since she pervades the entire text, *Main Street*. Each and every action in the text happens due to the Carol's direct or indirect involvement. She appears everywhere and she is a promising lady who tends to bring about a drastic change in the Gopher Prairie in order to promote life standard of people. She looks reformatory and open-minded. But the society antagonizes against her and her steps. Sonia Brown states:

The story follows Carol's continuous cycle of romantic, idealistic endeavor followed by disappointing reality as she vainly tries to make an impact on the stolid town. She finds a wide variety of people in Gopher Prairie, but their lives

are dominated by gossip and a conformity that narrowly restricts behavior and thought. She becomes subject to what another intellectual resident, Guy Pollock, calls the “Village Virus”. (21)

Brown reveals the cause of conflict that has ever been between the villagers and Carol in the extract above. People in Gopher Prairie are conservative and are indoctrinated with the concept that they should move beyond their prevalent state. Carol with progressive intention gets entrapped in the net of traditionalism of villagers. She in one sense becomes victim to the stubbornness and rigidity. After all, she conforms to the traditional trend of the society as she is unsupported by the entire community and even by her husband Dr. Kennecott.

William Penn speaks about the text:

The novel describes the class structure of the town, which consists of a largely Yankee upper-class-people such as Sam Clark and Ezra Stowbody and the Kennicotts-and a lower class made up mostly of Scandinavian and German immigrants who work as farmers and servants-people such as Miles Bjornstam and Bea Sorenson. The upper class, a business class, rules over the town with the “sedate pomposity of the commercialist. (9)

The coming together of new and old Americans, native and immigrant communities, is one of the interesting dimensions of the book.

An Indian critic, Raja Rao opines that Mr. Lewis is forever running about the world and giving out interviews about how *Main Street* is to be found everywhere. He is probably right for he takes it with him wherever he goes. He further reveals the fact:

The terrible judgments which he pronounces upon the provincial civilization of America flow from the bitterness of a revolted provincial. Mr. Mencken is a savage at times, but there is a disinfectant on his battle-ax, because he is in no way turned morbidly in upon himself. Mr. Mencken is not a revolted Puritan. (91)

His entire observation is on Mr. Mencken and says that he is not a revolutionary Putitan. On this ground he is conservative and adopts whatever rules there are in his society. The text, *Main Street* is about the fact that everything is in the foreground and in the same, ugly furniture and hypocrisy, dull talk and greed, silly mannerisms and treachery. This makes the text clear. In fact Lewis by portraying the character Carol, revolts against the Puritan civilization which had of course to include an attack on the evangelical churches.

Similarly Rebecca West avers in the concern of *Main Street* as such:

Main Street was a good book. One was as glad that it attained the incredibly tremendous triumph of being an American best seller as one might be when a thoroughly nice girl wins the Calcutta sweepstake. It was a sincere, competent, informative, even occasionally passionate piece of writing.[...] He describes with deadly malice the proceedings at the lunch of the Zenith Boosters' club. (23-4)

His entire focus is on the text and its significance. He is far-reaching in the sense that he has understood and studied the broad criteria of the text. After all, Lewis' *Main Street* is about a newly volatile mix of small-town people groping towards a constructive social equilibrium for Gopher Prairie. Their search is best illustrated in four characters: Carol Milford Kennicott, her schoolteacher friend and critic Vida

Sherwin Wulterstpoon, Carol's husband Dr. Will Kennicott and his best friend and social inferior, merchant Sam Clark. Thus the text moves around these characters and basically focuses on the protagonist, carol. Feminism as a theoretical methodology is going to be applied to deal with the text, *Main Street*.

II. Socio-political Perspective

The Women's Liberation Movement is the most controversial, as well as the most far-reaching of the new social movements: the ecology movement, the alternative movement, the peace movement, and the others. By its very existence it provokes people. Whereas one can lead a dispassionate intellectual or political discourse on the ecology question, the peace issue, the issue of Third World dependency, the woman question invariably leads to highly emotional reactions from men, and from many women. It is a sensitive issue for each person. The reason for this is that the women's movement does not address its demands mainly to some external agency or enemy, such as the state, the capitalists, as the other movements do, but addresses itself to people in their most intimate human relations, the relationship between women and men, with a view to changing these relations. Therefore, the battle is not between particular groups with common interests or political goals and some external enemy, but takes place within women and men and between women and men. Every person is forced, sooner or later, to take sides. And taking sides means that something within us gets torn apart, that what we thought was our identity disintegrates and has to be created anew. This is a painful process. Most men and women try to avoid it because they fear that if they allow themselves to become aware of the true nature of the man-woman relationship in our societies, the last island of peace, of harmony in the cold brutal world of money-making, power games and greed will be destroyed. Moreover, if they allow this issue to enter their consciousness, they will have to admit that they themselves, women and men, are not only victims, on the one side (women), and villains (men), on the other, but that they are also accomplices in the system of exploitation and oppression that binds women

and men together. If they want to come to a truly free human relationship, they will have to give up their complicity. This is not only so for men whose privileges are based on this system, but also for women whose material existence is often bound up with it.

Feminists are those who dare to break the conspiracy of silence about the oppressive, unequal man-woman relationship and who want to change it. But speaking up about this system of male dominance, giving it certain names like 'sexism' or 'patriarchy', has not reduced the ambivalence mentioned above, but rather intensified and broadened it.

There have been contradictory responses to the new women's movement right from its beginning at the end of the sixties. The women who came together in this movement in the USA and in Europe began to call themselves feminists and to set old women's movement in the twenties, began to talk about the problem without a name (Freidan 1968) each of us had listened, time and again in private conversations, to one of our sisters telling us how badly they had been treated by fathers, husbands, boy-friends. But this was always considered the private bad luck of this or that woman. The early consciousness-raising groups, the speaking-out sessions, the all-women's meetings, the first spectacular actions of women who began to separate themselves from the mixed groups and organizations were all occasions where women could discover that their apparently unique personal problem was the problem of all women, was indeed a social and political problem. When the slogan, 'The personal is political' was coined, the taboo was broken that surrounded the 'holy family' and its sanctum sanctorum: the bedroom and the sexual experiences of women. All women were overwhelmed by the extent and depth of sexism that came to the surface in these

speaking-out sessions. The new concern that arose, the commitment to fight against male dominate, against all humiliation and ill-treatment of women, and against continuing inequality of the sexes created a new feeling of sisterhood among women which was an enormous source of strength, enthusiasm and euphoria in the beginning. This feeling of sisterhood was based on a more or less clear awareness that all women, irrespective of class, race, nation, had a common problem and this was: how men treat us badly', as the women of the 'Sistren Theatre Collective' in Jamaica put it in 1977 when they were about to start their grouping Kingston.

Whenever women come together to speak up about intimate and often taboo experiences, the same feelings of indignation, concern and sisterly solidarity can be observed. It is true for the women's groups emerging in underdeveloped countries as well. In the beginning of the movement, the hostile or contemptuous reactions from large sections of the male population, particularly those who had some influence on public opinion, like journalists and media people, only reinforced the feelings of sisterhood among the feminist who became increasingly convinced that feminist separatism was the only way to create some space for women within the overall structures of male-dominated society. But the more the feminist movement spread, the more clearly it demarcated its areas as all-women areas whereas men were out of bounds, the more were the negative or openly hostile reactions to this movement. Feminism became a bad word for many men and women.

In the feminist discourse words are used to denote and explain the problems women are suffering from in our societies. The terms 'subordination' and 'oppression' are widely used to specify women's position in a hierarchically structured system and the methods of keeping them down. These concepts are used by

women who would tell themselves Marxist or socialist feminists. The latter usually do not talk of exploitation when discussing the problems of women, because exploitation to them is a concept reserved for economic exploitation of the wage-worker under capitalism. As women's grievances go beyond those of wage-workers and are part of the private man-woman relation, which is not seen as an exploitative one, but an oppressive one, the term is avoided.

If we do not talk of exploitation when we talk of the man-woman relationship, our talk about oppression, or subordination hangs somewhere in the air, for why should men be oppressive towards women if they had nothing to gain from it? Oppression or subordination, without reference to exploitation, becomes then a purely cultural or ideological matter, the basis of which cannot be made out, unless one has recourse to the notion of some inborn aggressive or sadistic tendencies in men. But exploitation is a historical-and not a biological or psychological-category which lies at the basis of the man-woman relation. It was historically created by patriarchal tribes and societies. Hence women in houses are exploited as housewives and in industries as wage-laborers.

Most feminists do not want even to be equal to men in the patriarchal system. The discussion on housework has revealed that the emancipation expected from wage-work has not come true anywhere, neither in the capitalist nor in the socialist countries. If the latter, and all orthodox communist parties still restrict their policy of women's emancipation to the demands of equality and women's rights, basically bourgeois concepts, they ignore patriarchy as a reality of both capitalist and socialist society. And within a patriarchal system 'equality' for women can only mean that women become like those patriarchal men. Most women who call themselves feminist

are not attracted by this prospect, neither do they have any hope that the demand for equality could ever be fulfilled within such a system. It is, therefore, wrong, as many men fear, that the feminists only want to replace male dominance by female dominance, because that is what equality means for most of them: equality of privileges. But the feminist movement is basically an anarchist movement which does not want to replace one (male) power elite by another (female) power elite, but which wants to build up a non-hierarchical, non-centralized society where no elite lives on exploitation and dominance over others.

The term 'female' since the inauguration of human civilization has reserved its validity and conception as a biological contrast to male 'sex'. Indeed the natural biological contrast pervades each individual sex with distinctive features, physical qualities and assertions that are assumed to be essential and vital to sustain the true nature of human evolution and civilization. In fact the sex is the natural creation. Some social and cultural variations lie in terms of their behavior, manners, food habit, education and the attitude of society towards them. However, these discrepancies are apparently based on society. This is how some biased definitions, along with physical assertions are attached to each sex and they are bound to get identified with asymmetrical, hierarchical socio-cultural notions called 'gender'. Nature based female and male relation turns into society based women and men's feminine and masculine relation. The very relation exists as a hierarchical power relation where men dominate women in every social, economic, cultural and religious milieu of human life. The prejudice sustains itself in the form of male domination against female subordination through ideological practices. The patriarchy nurtures the gender based inequalities that present men superior to women and men more powerful than women.

Feminism is a divergent collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies, extensively motivated by the bitter and sweet experiences of women. Most feminists are especially concerned with social, political, religious, racial and economic inequality between women and men and some have argued that gendered and sexed identities, such as “woman” and “man”, are socially constructed. Feminists differ over the sources of inequality; the ways to attain equality and the extent to which gender and sexual identities should be questioned and critiqued. Variations in the issues of feminists are because of their distinct belonging and upbringing to and in diverse cultures and societies.

Feminism generally is a theoretical discourse advocating women's rights based on belief in the equality of the sexes. It is a doctrine redefining women's activities and goals from women-centered point of view and refusing to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority that reduces women to a sex object, a second sex, a submissive other. It seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex, and defend equal rights for women in a political, economic, psychological, personal and esthetic sense.

Though feminism became a dominant force in the literary studies only late in the 1960s, it had its origin from two centuries earlier by the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which is considered to be the first formal enhancement of feminist writing though many others tried their hands before her too. Wollstonecraft in this book, advocates for the political and social rights of women and argues that society never can retain women only in the role of convenient domestic slaves and alluring mistresses by denying their economic

independence and encouraging them to be docile and attentive to their looks to the exclusion of all else.

The feminist revolutionary spirit implanted by Wollstonecraft, however, could not accelerate so speedily for more than coming one century in the copy *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) by Margaret Fuller and *The Subjection of Women* (1869), by John Stuart Mill were only the two major works on feminism in the whole nineteenth century.

Virginia Woolf, by writing *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (1949), contributed greatly for the worldwide emergence of feminism in the first half of the twentieth century. Woolf focuses on situation of women authors throughout the history and their cultural, economic and educational disabilities within the patriarchal society which had prevented them from realizing their creative possibilities. The feminist trend of her time was concerned for absolute equality and the reassurance of differences between the sexes. But Woolf voiced for radical change as women's freedom and for their suppressed values affecting the concept of power, family and social life that had shaped by men in the past. Beauvoir on the other hand, says: "Femininity is cultural construct. One isn't born a woman, one becomes one" (209). The role of women in society is cultural construct because female infants do not know what they are: they are just like clay and it is the society which shapes them as females.

The advantage of working from Beauvoir's binary analysis of Self and Other rather than from revisionist versions of it such as Bamber's is that it provides an excellent base for the view that woman is always constructed negatively in an androcentric society, and always has been. In Aristotelian tradition, "a woman is not a

woman but a man who is defined by what she lacks” (51). Created second according to a Hebrew myth which Christians inherited as holy writ in the book of Genesis, “every woman enters history with a piece missing, whether it is a head according to St Paul or a penis” according to Sigmund Freud (52). Whatever the deficiency, men think of themselves as uniquely qualified to supplement it, provided women *Self* and *Other* manifests itself therefore in our value system as possession versus lack, and becomes the generative matrix for a series of metaphors which constitute variations on the same theme. The *Other*, that is to say, has not been accidentally ‘lost’ but deliberately ‘erased,’ and the business of a feminist criticism is to re-inscribe the feminine *Other* in a discourse still dominated by a masculine *Self* which, scandalously, has claimed to speak for women as well as men while in fact speaking solely for men.

The subjection of women, therefore, is brought about not by their ‘natural’ inferiority but by their classification as intrinsically inferior by a male-dominated culture they cannot avoid living in. the rival forces which compete discursively for the possession of ‘woman’ used to be called ‘nature’ and ‘custom’, or ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’.

In patriarchy women have in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, a position comparable in many respects with that of racial minorities in spite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of the human race. Further, this secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural feminine characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men. Women, in general, have failed to occupy places of dignity with free and independent existence to

associate with men on a plane of intellectual and professional equality. This condition has not only limited their achievement in many fields but also given rise to pervasive social evils that have had a particularly vitiating effect on the sexual relations between men and women.

Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) emphasizes that women should be given power to develop their personalities, economic status and literary career. She says "The essence of politics is power" (205). She claims that patriarchy is the main cause of women's suppression and it makes them inferior: "Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male. Power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life, to constrain women" (137).

In this way Shulamith Firestone proposed a world dichotomized by biology: male and female, where women are the unpaid means to social production of offspring. And males are the owners of the labor market; females are no more than the workers to the reproductive system. Oppression on women is due to the productive functions of a historical act, and the emancipation of women depends on the escape from the biological destiny. Firestone denied the emotional attachment of parents with their children, and spoke for undoing family unit. Freedman further demonstrates her: "Firestone maintains, to the dissolution of the family unit, with children over a period of time. Children would develop no special bonds with their 'parents' but would instead from love ties with people to their own choosing, whatever their age and sex" (70). Her revolutionary modification of familial structure throws doubt on the traditional belief in familial unity and solidarity.

Thus, feminist criticism is a politically powerful tool whose main task is to make the patriarchal society realize their rigid rules and regulations and to make

women conscious of the age in order to wipe out gender discrimination so that women can take free breath as men do in society. Her approach is concerned with the study of social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes because in patriarchal society the male is the overall and female is kept under male power and dominance.

Hence the concept of and movement of feminist literary criticism is also pertinent regarding the female issues mentioned in *Main Street*. Feminist literary criticism is at present a congeries of diverse practices, each of which is based on some idea-acknowledged or otherwise-of how a feminist who happens to be working in English studies might best spend her time there. A comprehensive book on the discrimination of feminisms would give not only a diachronic account of those literary movements which have been labeled 'feminist' in the past but also a synchronic account of different practices which constitute 'our' feminism, that is, the one which got under way in the late 1960s and presented its most provocative challenge to English studies in 1970 with the publication of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*.

Elaine Showalter invented the term "Gynocritics" to describe a study of women as writers, in which women are invited to speak for themselves whatever situation they are in. She divided women feminist critics into two groups. The first is the ideological which is concerned with the feminist as the reader. It offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature. The second mode is the study of women as writers. It considers history, style, themes, genres and structures of writings by women.

In *A Literature of Their Own* she says that like male writers female writers too have a tradition of their own. She examines British women novelists since the Bronte sisters from the point of view of women's experience. She divides the female into three phases. The first phase, the feminine, was from 1840 to 1880. In this stage women were so curious that they imitated the masculine mode because it was their first attempt and they had tried to perform through feminine concerns. The second, the feminist phase, lasted until 1920. It was a challenging period for women who were required to protect against male cruelty. The third that begins from 1920 is the female phase. In this period developing the idea of female writing and female experience of self-discovery, female writers showed more consciousness towards their own sex. According to her, though there is a profound difference between women's writing and men's, the female tradition is overlooked and undervalued by male critics.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is another brilliantly written massive book in historical study of feminism which stresses especially the psychodynamics' of women writers in the nineteenth century. Gilbert and Gubar in this book, according to M.H. Abrams:

The 'anxiety of authorship' that resulted from the stereotype that literary creativity is an exclusively male prerogative, effected in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected monstrous counter figure to the heroine [. . .]; such a figure is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. (236)

Gilbert and Gubar's main argument is that artistic creativity of that nineteenth century tradition, which is perceived basically as a male quality, is in fact patriarchal superimposition upon the women writers who are imprisoned within it. In the image

of 'Divine Creator' the male author fathers his text. But taking the same masculine cosmic author as their model, women end up copying or identifying with the dominant literary images of female writers first to struggle against the effect of socialization that becomes struggle against men's oppressive reading of women. But they further argue that the women can begin such struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal authority is possible.

According to the above held discussion, we can divide the development of whole feminist literary criticism into three distinct phases. The first phase was centered on "the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular male literature, and the exclusion of women from literary history" (Showalter, *The Feminist* 5). The second phase dawned the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate the culture. Hundreds of lost women writers were rediscovered, and territory of the female imagination and the structures of the female plot were constructed in this phase. And, the third phase of feminist criticism demanded a radical rethinking of the conceptual ground of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experiences.

Influenced by a great variety of theoretical emergencies, the feminism presently has been a broad concept which covers a broader scope and includes different aspects of humanity despite its focus on the entire issues of women. It, now, no more remains a unitary theory or procedure.

In 1970s and 80s, numerous black women writers rose to the literary and critical forum and started voicing out their agonies as marginalized, doubly oppressed in their works. Black feminists have indeed challenged white women's ability and Eurocentric and essentialist nature of some feminists. Bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) relates the history of black women in the United States and their relationship to feminism. Hooks has argued 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 now the US society perceives and represents black women as "fallen women, whores and prostitutes 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.

Majority of black feminists yearn 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" (Beasley 108). 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 blacks 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 black women of color.

Various authors 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 women of

emasculating both black and white men. Black women have been stereotyped by both black and white as the 'bad' women as well. The white women did oppress as sexual temptress of white man and prostitutes. These stereotypes and myth have helped control black women's characters in the society. Right from the initiation of the slavery system, black women have always been exploited as the object of white male sexual assault. White men took pride in seducing black women. They often became the victim of rape, for sexism of white male was socially legitimized. bell hooks says: "Rape was a method used to terrorize, dehumanize and [...] to trip the female slave of dignity" (*Ain't la Women* 36). Black men could no longer protect them since they themselves were in dehumanized situation.

Thus under white domination a black man finds that his male ego is wounded. He starts his ceaseless cruelty on his woman finding no other role model than that of white man. Indeed both white women and black men act as oppressors. White women may be victimized by sexism but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism energizes them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black women. But Black women have no such "others" upon whom they could act as oppressors (hooks, *Black Women, Feminist Thought* 15). It was the long term silence of the oppressed and the continual revolution of black womanhood that paved a way towards Black Feminism. Besides the sexual violence and cultural stereotyping action by whites black women faced, several writers made it clear that women of color have been excluded from the women's movement.

In the text *Main Street* by Sinclair, the narrator portrays the character and personality of Carol the protagonist throughout. Carol Milford is a liberal, free-

spirited young woman, raised in the metropolis of Minneapolis. She marries Will Kennicott, a doctor, who is a small-town boy at heart; when they marry, Will convinces her to live in Gopher Prairie, where he was raised. Carol tries to convince herself that Gopher Prairie isn't so bad, and is compelled to reform the town from its dusty, conservative ways: she tries speaking with its members about potential changes; joins women clubs; divulges literature amongst the town-folk; attempts to hold exciting parties to liven up Gopher Prairie's inhabitants; is cordial and friendly all of which is in vain. Her efforts are constantly backlashed, and cannot find any source of remedy save a few kindred spirits, all of whom, in Carol's mind, aren't enough to make this conformist town bearable.

Carol eventually leaves her family to go live in Washington for a time, but she, inevitably, returns. However, Carol does not feel defeated: "I do not admit that *Main Street* is as beautiful as it should be! I do not admit that dish-washing is enough to satisfy all, women!" (12). Carol is discontented with life at Gopher Prairie, but she finds that life in big city is not so hot either. She learns to settle with Gopher Prairie and accept it for what it is. It is stated in *Wikipedia* "*Main Street* is important for a number of reasons-among them is the portrayal of a strong female protagonist, and what one might now call feminist themes by a male writer" (2). There is very little plot to the novel: description and satire take prominence over strong characterization and obvious action. Characters tend to be static; they are archetypes to display that these people in Gopher Prairie could be the same anywhere in the country. A good prophet-what we today tend to call a social critic, Rene Brush speaks "harshly but accurately about a flawed social order" (34). He further says:

In *Main Street* Lewis Sinclair speaks with a prophetic voice that

still rings true for our own culture. In many ways the new modern culture that Lewis describes in the early twentieth century-with its automobiles and telephones, its dominant commercial class and its American imperial hubris-is like our own, and we can apply his comments to our own time as well. (5)

The basic focus of the above extract is to show problems and conflicts between the old and new American culture. Furthermore the extract implicitly refers to the conservative society of America which could tolerate any better steps by females by the time since males were with the phobia that they would remain back in comparison to women. Carol's failure in her grand scheme for developing and reforming the extant society or village is due to the fact that has never been cooperated with by males even like her husband Dr. Kennecott.

III. Carol's Radical Vision in Patriarchy

Main Street by Sinclair Lewis centralizes on the prominent steps made by a female protagonist, Carol in order to bring about drastic changes in Gopher Prairie. Her efforts in course of facing challenges to do so are much praiseworthy and significant. She is tremendously bold in the sense that she dares to do something unexpected in the place which is extensively dominated by males. Though she fails to achieve her goal, she is great and along with this she attains awareness that women in patriarchy must not succeed due to the fact that men never want to see women as pioneers. Her desires and plans are much sacred and humanistic in the sense that she has ever preferred to reshape the society and liberate people from livelihood problems by bringing about them into the reformed community where they can better their life and can breathe in the free air. Her courage is of much significance and vitality. The narrator details her personality in the text: "She felt herself a great liberator. She put her hand to her mouth, her forefinger and thumb quite painfully pinching her lower lip, and frowned, and enjoyed being aloof"(10). Hence it gets pretty clear that Carol is greatly distinct from others and this is why she wants to remain alone. She has ever thought of liberating others undergoing difficulties and complications. She is presented here in such a way that she appears as if she is a baby in her doing and playing different limbs of her body. In the same vein she speaks further: "That's what I'll do after college! I'll get my hands on one of these prairie towns and make it beautiful. Be an inspiration. I suppose I'd better become a teacher then, but I won't be that kind of a teacher. I won't drone" (11). Her purpose of future is to become a path-maker who could inspire people to renovate the prairie towns and make them beautiful at any cost. She feels much energetic and ambitious that she will initiate in doing so. She tries to be inspiration and at the same time she wants others to become

inspiration in life. She differentiates her from teachers who teach at school. Rather she will become a reformer in the real sense. She is far-sighted as well and foresees future of the towns. Furthermore she boldly expresses her innermost feelings and attitudes towards her plan and wants. She does not sound as if she is frightened of any of external factors that would bring about any sort of obstacles into her life and block her from going ahead. Her husband is a doctor who does critically see each and every step she makes and he says: "You say a doctor could cure a town the way he does a person. Well, you cure the town of whatever ails it, if anything does, and I'll be your surgical kit" (23). Here he seems much evocative and he is always with her in course of reforming the town. On the surface he sounds very good but his statement might be ironical in the sense he suspects her capability since she is woman at the same time he is well-acquainted with the town dwellers how and what they think. She recalls distinct events in the past and restores energy that she would surely succeed in her plan and thus she becomes much sanguine. Hence Carol contemplates on the very issue:

She meditated-is the newest empire of the world; the Northern Middle west; a land of dairy herds and exquisite lakes, of new automobiles and tar paper shanties and silos like red towers, of clumsy speech and a hope that is boundless. An empire which feeds a quarter of the world-yet its work is merely begun. They are pioneers, these sweaty wayfarers, for all their telephones and bank-accounts and automatic pianos and co-operative leagues. And for all its fat richness, theirs is a pioneer land. What is its future? (28)

She is very much grave about her plans and thinks deeply how the newest empire has got erected and that empire is now capable of feeding almost one fourth of the people

of the world. She is confident enough that every new thing requires a lot of sacrifices and without them no great thing can be achieved. Along with this she feels she should be the founder of an innovative society by reforming the prairie towns. She observes every sort of progress and development of the Northern Middle West very minutely and keenly and makes the judgment over that. After all, her evaluation of the great empire is relevant and appropriate in the regard of evolving a new self within her so that she could do her level best to meet her target. There is some sort of conflict between Carol and Kennicott since he does not agree with her evaluation about the place, the prairie town. Thus he asserts: "I don't expect you to think Gopher Prairie is a paradise, after St. Paul. I don't expect you to be crazy about it, at first. But you'll come to like it so much-life's so free here and best people on earth"(33). Mr. Kennicott is not sure whether Gopher Prairie is a paradise. To Carol this place is magnificent and of great significance but her husband does not think so. She is crazy about the place but he wants to appease her boiling plans and desires. He opines that too much craze of something is not commendable. Hence it can be theorized that men do not tolerate the smartness and initiation of women since they think that they will remain as assistance to the women and that is the worst on their part.

The narrator reveals that Carol the freedom fighter does face difficulties and becomes disenchanted in her conjugal life as well: "But the advocate of freedom in marriage was as much disappointed as a sagging bride at the alacrity with which he took that freedom and escaped to the world of men's affairs" (35). Carol till unmarried, advocates a lot on the behalf of women and their fundamental rights in conjugal life. Her advocacy is pertinent in the sense that she is herself a woman and her attempts are of much vitality since they orient to beneficiating the oppressed in terms of gender. She indeed expresses all sorts of pain and agony generally women

suffer in the marriage on the basis of her cognition. Once she gets married, she feels how women genuinely suffer and get bound to distinct biased cultural practices and obligations which have never stood in the favor of women. Hence the narrator avers that Carol's experience in the marriage with Kennitcott is much observatory and cognitive about the rift ever extant in the conjugal life. However, she attempts her level best to do something more on her part to enhance the lifestyle of people in the town. She emerges as a very bold personality with insurmountable hope and wish. Thus she exposes her innermost desire: "I wish they did have to! Not now! Not till I've got hold of this job of liking the ash-pile out there! [...] I must shut up. I'm mildly insane. I'm going out for a walk. I'll see the town by myself. My first view of the empire I'm going to conquer!"(36). She is much anxious about the town and her eagerness is extremely appreciative in the sense that she at least thinks of reforming the town that has ever remained in very much unsystematic and without any plan. Now onwards she hopes that she will bring about a drastic change in terms of economic prosperity and other essential things over. She does confide others' reports about the town that is why she prefers to go herself and observe each and every thing much sharply. She is optimistic enough that she will overcome all sorts of problems and turn the town into a new shape whenever her victory gets proven and she will become a conqueror in the true sense. She takes the job of reforming the town as if she is going to conquer many countries and erect a new empire that is enormous and prosperous. After all she does whatever she has ever thought of doing but she does not become a victor. Her all efforts prove ridiculous in the sense that she fails to reshape the town and make it beautiful. It is a much complicated question why she fails despite her endless efforts and insurmountable spirit. Hence the narrator tells us a lot what happens: "She wanted to run, fleeing from the encroaching prairie demanding

the security of a great city. Her dreams of creating a beautiful town were ludicrous. Oozing out from every drab wall, she felt a forbidding spirit which she could never conquer” (38). Carol feels much obliged to making efforts to reshape the town since she thinks that she is more intelligent and aware the dwellers of that place. At the same she prefers to reform the town for sake of her selfhood in the sense that she is mentally grown and knows a lot of ways of civilization. She is an emerged personality. She wants security and protection of the town as it is getting encroached and ruined. She loves the town and longs to get it reformed in all aspects. She sees her future bright in the prosperity of the town.

The problems and challenges before her cannot be carried on alone since she is as bold as a man figure in patriarchy. She is not supported in all ways even by her husband since the male mentality does not permit him to cooperate with her and remain at the back as an assistant. Hence her efforts seem to have got shattered because she is willing to do something in the male dominated society wherein she does not have a good milieu for doing her level best. As a matter of fact there is something that even stops her from doing so. This is why she fails in her efforts.

Women in male-dominated society are taken as if they are commodities and sources of entertainment and men can use them as they desire. They underestimate women’s mental qualities and attempt their level best to subdue new ideas. They do not want to be led by women since they think it is much absurd and the matter of shame. Rather they simply take women and see them from the perspective of sensuality. Women are trained in such a way that they ever want their life partners to remain interested in them. Therefore they often take care of their health and beauty much. In the regard the narrator highlights Carol’s feminine qualities: “She (Carol) hoped Dr. Kennicott would never lose his ability to make love to charming women,

and she had a pair of gold stockings” (49). Carol is confident enough that Dr. Kennicott is a lady killer and this is why he will always love charming women. She thinks in this way simply she possesses feminine qualities granted to her by patriarchy. She cannot go beyond the trainings and cultural practices. Though she appears and sounds much revolutionary and rational somewhere, she still perceives the surroundings as she has been made to. In fact it is not her fault. Rather the entire patriarchal empire is responsible for this. Her failure is also the consequence or byproduct of the similar factors. Men and women are classified in such a way that men always look superior and more responsible in the biased eyes of society. Men exploit women in many ways at different places because of their sex distinction. It is true that women are female and they have discreet biological limbs from men’s. In several aspects women are far more capable than men but men never attempt to comprehend the reality. In the name of conventional practices and predicaments they dominate women to a severe extent. The narrator reveals the very circumstance in the extract below:

The men and women divided, as they had been tending to do all evening. Carol was deserted by the men, left to a group of matrons who steadily pattered of children, sickness, and cooks-their own shop-talk. She was piqued (irritated). She remembered visions of herself as a smart married woman in a drawing-room, fencing with clever men. Her dejection was relieved by speculation as to what the men were discussing in the corner between the piano and the phonograph. Did they rise from these housewifely personalities to a larger world of abstractions and affairs? (51)

Carol's visions are supremely magnificent and outstanding in the sense she has ever thought of bettering the society she is currently living in. She has ever been patient and gradually has made efforts to do her level best. The society she is in is much prejudiced and male-centric. Men have always plotted against her and her visions which are radical. This customary community cannot tolerate the sight of the path she has paved and this is what the reason is for her failure. She thus loses hopes and eventually realizes that men are responsible for her defeat. Hence she is much critical and speculative. She can winnow between rice and pieces of stone. She sees through the male mentality which is preoccupied with the predicament that women are inferior and incapable of launching drastic changes in the society. With this knowledge she feels irritated and distressed. Carol even vitalizes the town and says:

It's a dear loyal town (and isn't loyalty the finest thing in the world!) but it's a rough diamond, and we need you for the polishing, and we're ever so humble-She stopped for breath and finished her compliment with a smile. If I could help you in any way-Would I be committing the unpardonable sin if I whispered that I think Gopher Prairie is a tiny bit ugly? (67)

Hence Carol is much critical and is inclined towards reforming by getting things exposed and problems revealed before all the concerned people and she expects that people will consent on her plans and objective regarding the town. For doing so she informs people that the town is a bit ugly therefore it needs cleansing and polishing since it is like a diamond that has plunged into dirt and rubbish. In the metaphorical sense she expresses her attitudes towards town and further wants to see it in innovative pattern. After all, she advocates on her own behalf and presents things in very logical ways.

Similarly she says that she is no more dogmatic and conservative that she still lingers with the traditional ways of moving ahead. Rather she hopes and attempts her level best to bring changes in radical ways to keep up the sense of modernization of each and every aspect of human life. In this concern she speaks in very confidential way: "I know. So is mine. I don't care a bit for dogma. Though I do stick firmly to the belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and the leadership of Jesus" (67). She believes in practical life rather than in religious and spiritual one. She confides on the fact the material prosperity can only better and satisfy human needs and essentials. Despite all these she does not lose faith in the grandeur and magnificence of God and Jesus Christ, the holy Ghost as well. On this ground she strengthens her spirit and evokes her further plans about the reformation and its challenges of the town. Hence it gets crystal clear that she is much tolerant and patient along with this visionary and she speculates the future of the town in very much transparent manner. The narrator does seem interested in Carol's personality and her interpersonal relationship. How other members of her family and fellows behave with her is the matter of great significance and notice. It is much interesting to note that Carol's husband Kennicott has never cooperated with her in any way to promote her vision and enhance her career. In addition to all these she has ever been looked at from the subaltern perspective even in her family by female members such mother-in-law. The relationship that appears between Carol and Kennicott's mother is also not sound and commendable in the sense that she is indoctrinated with the predicament that has ever been in existence in the male-dominated society. The narrator states in the text:

Carol was extravagant, but at least she did not try to clear herself of blame by going about whimpering, "I know I'm terribly

extravagant but I don't seem to be able to help it". Kennicott had never thought of giving her allowance. His mother had never had one! As a wage-earning spinster Carol had asserted to her fellow librarians that when she was married, she was going to have an allowance and be business-like modern. But it was too much trouble to explain to Kennicott's kindly stubbornness that she was a practical housekeeper as well as a flighty playmate. (73)

Initially Carol is much hopeful and expects a lot from her marriage life. She tells her fellows that she will get allowance from her husband but that does not take place. She is not given by Kennicott and it is paradoxical that Kennicott is kindly stubborn and imposes his ideas on her in such a way that she feels dominated due to the fact she is a woman. Her expectations and dreams she has ever had get shattered in very severe ways. She becomes tattered and finds life futile. However, she accomplishes her wifely duties so obediently with the hope that she would be later successful in her target. There is gender based conflict in Carol's family and that can be clearly seen in the extract below:

Kennicott usually considered himself the master of the house.

At his desire, she went hunting, which was his symbol of happiness, and she ordered porridge for breakfast, which was his symbol of morality. But when he came home on the afternoon before the housewarming he found himself a slave, an intruder, a blunderer. Carol wailed, 'Fix the furnace so you won't have to touch it after supper. (75)

Kennicott is much proud of being male and considers him the master of the entire family. He controls the family affair and Carol asks for permission from her husband

even when she wants to go on hunting for pleasure. No doubt Kennicott controls even her minor activities. Despite the fact that Kennicott blames him of being a slave, an intruder and a blunderer, he implicitly dominates specifically Carol that on the surface does not appear but felt when his each and every concept is evaluated very keenly and critically.

Carol's conscience is so strong that she does not get distressed even if she has ever been discouraged and neglected everywhere. She considers her capable of fighting against all sorts of problems on her own. She thinks that she can reform the town and she is a great reformer. Even the narrator finds her much confident regarding this matter: "Carol was certain that she was a great reformer. She mercifully had combs, brushes, needle and thread ready. She permitted them to restore the divine decency of buttons" (80). Carol is well-organized and self-dependent in all ways in the sense that she collects required essentials such as combs, brushes, needle and thread. Indeed there are a number of situations confusing and vague before Carol and along with this she associates her plans with the opinions and attitudes of the town dwellers regarding the recreations and transformations of the village for sports. The narrator says:

In fact, the village longed for the elegance of city recreations almost as much as the cities longed for village for sports; and Gopher Prairie took as much pride in neglecting coasting as St. Paul-or New York-in going coasting. Carol did inspire a successful skating-party in mid-November.[...] Harry Haydock did figure-eights and Carol was certain that she had found the perfect life. (84)

Despite its hazardous situations, the Gopher Prairie takes pride in its elegant possession and better condition in comparison to other renowned places in the United

States of America such New York, St. Paul etc. after all, the Gopher Prairie is self-sufficient even for the purpose of sports and coasting. On this ground she finds as a perfect life there. She becomes content enough to prolong her stay there. She does not feel sorry for being there. Rather she is so delighted that she hates to leave the place and go away from it. Carol is dedicated and devoted to the Gopher Prairie and is well-prepared even to sacrifice all things she has for the sake of the place. She is not self-centered. She hardly thinks of her. Rather she is much sacrificing which can be perceived in the extract below:

Her reforms, her impulses toward beauty in raw Main Street, they did become indistinct. But she would set them going now. She would! She swore it with soft fist beating the edges of the radiator. And at the end of all her vows she had not notion as to when and where the crusade was to begin. (86-7)

Main Street to her is all in all and she loves the place in so crazy way that she cannot detach her from it. She indulges in the process of reforming the place in better form. She prefers to add beauty and bring a new charm to its form. She is so strong that she ignores all sorts of criticisms and comments made by village dwellers. Her radical vision is negatively understood. People suspect her and her plans. They are preoccupied with the sense that she will destroy and bring about complications more to this place. They are scared in such a way they doubt every step made by her. However, she does not lose patience. Rather she keeps on doing her usual duties. In the regard of her insurmountable spirit, the narrator states: "In a week she had recovered from consciousness of insecurity, of shame and whispering notoriety, but she kept her habit of avoiding people. She walked the streets with her head down" (100). It is the matter of surprise that she becomes upset and disappointed with

negative remarks often made against her and her activities. She does not raise her head up which is indeed much common. In fact her intention for doing anything in the village is much sacred but people have understood it differently. The conflict which remains between the villagers and Carol is enormous. People greet her not in the sense that they respect her but they are obliged to her husband Dr. Kennicott. They are very cunning and rude in the matter of greetings. They do not have any idea and judging power that they can know who and where they are. Furthermore, they do not have any idea about their economic state. They are indeed ignorant about their genuine plight. They mock at her since they underestimate her capability and goodwill for them:

She knew that she read mockery into greetings but she could not control her suspicion, could not rise from her psychic collapse. She alternately tagged and flinched at the superiority of the merchants. They did not know that they were prosperous and not scared of no doctor's wife. They often said, "One man's good as another-and a darn sight better. (101)

She is much conscious of her and surroundings. She suspects people's greetings and digests each and every bitter moment of her life. She does not react badly and rudely despite people's resentment and suspicion. She has never thought of any harm to people but they do not understand her feelings and emotions. Her dedication is valueless and meaningless in their eyes. She is not convinced that the village in its crude state will be healthier than the artificial town. Rather she is confused within herself whether she thinks right or wrong. Thus the narrator highlights her dilemma: "She had tried to convince herself that the village, with its fresh air, its lakes for fishing and swimming, was healthier than the artificial city" (102). When Carol fails

to bring changes in the village and make it a beautiful city, she consoles her self stating that the natural state of the village is far better than the artificial city since there is no freshness and clean environment. She regrets trying to reform the village by bringing about modern frames to the natural village. A reviewer named Matthew Krichman opines that *Main Street* is such a book. Mention Gopher Prairie, MN to anyone who has read this book, and images of quintessential small-town America will quickly come to mind. He says:

This book isn't so much about Carol or Will Kennicott, or any of the other characters who populate this narrow-minded, Puritan, one-horse town. It's about the town itself, and what it represents for broader America in the early 20th century. It's not the greatest book, but I would recommend it because of its ability to capture a sentiment that defined a significant period in our nation's history.

(32)

Hence Krichman is al right regarding the issue he has raised over here. America was in the process of getting materialized in the early 20th century and meantime it faced various challenges as well since Puritan people were much conservative that they did not like radical changes in the society they lived in. rather they enjoyed being in the customary life state. The writer through Carol has attempted to show the contemporary situation and conflict extant between reformers and conservative Puritans. The narrator makes it clear how people of the Gopher Prairie are much critical even to her gowns that she usually puts on. When they see something distinct regarding dressing up, they make many vulgar remarks. The extract below shows how her interpersonal relationship is: “In her innocence she had not known that the whole town could discuss even her garments, her body. She felt that she was being dragged

naked down *Main Street*" (105). Despite the fact people are much narrow-minded, she doesn't care. Rather she enjoys her freedom and does that she thinks good. She does not take notice of people's remarks since she is much talented and forgives them considering they are still in the domain of ignorance and superstitions. She is much sensible about the fact that they will be conscious of the gradual changes in the world and then they will get used to taking such things in the positive ways. With this hope, she lives amongst those conservative people. In this way she struggles a lot even in her family since family members are of different opinions and concepts. She is dependent on them as she is the part of it and the most significant reason that she depends on them, is her gender. She has been made to consent on their decisions and plans. She is in a baffling situation what to do and what not to do in the sense whether she implements her plans or she approves of theirs. This dilemma really brings about a kind of upheaval into her normal life. The narrator clarifies her plight that is distressing and irritating as well. The narrator speaks in this regard:

Carol forgot her misery-hunting in this solidarity of family life.

She could depend upon them; she was not battling alone.

Watching Mrs. Kennicott flit about the kitchen she was better able to translate Kennicott himself. He was matter of fact, yes, and incurably mature. He didn't really play; he let Carol play with him. But he had his mother's genius for trusting, her disdain for prying, her sure integrity. (107)

Hence, her relationship with her husband is not sound since their positions do not seem balanced. Carol's conscience is much sacred and holy. She loves him very much but the case is different when we look at the activities and interpersonal behavior of Dr. Kennecott. Whatever he has to do, he does not do. Rather he deploys Carol to do for

the sake of his pleasure and entertainment. His polluted intention is concealed in such a way that Carol cannot feel. How her husband takes her, is much noteworthy here. He does not consider her as if she is also a human being. Rather he takes her as his hobby like others. In fact it is a great slap on the face of humanity. He is the byproduct of the male dominated society where he has grown up. He has been trained in such a conservative and rigid society wherein women are considered the second class citizens. Hence Dr. Kennicott is not only responsible for his inhuman behavior but the contemporary American society as well. Hence the writer Lewis Sinclair has indirectly attacked on the American society of his time where human cognition was in the budding state. It was not so mature that all levels of human beings were looked through the same lens. To support this point the extract below would be sufficient: “Kennicott had five hobbies: medicine, land-investment, Carol, motoring, and hunting. It is not certain in what order he preferred them” (191). On the human ground women are equally prominent to men. They must not be put into different basket simply because of their gender. Dr. Kennecott deals with Carol as if she is a commodity and he can use her as he wishes. She is not free even in her conjugal life which is full of numerous promises and commitments. She is misbehaved in very severe way that a sensible person cannot bear even at the cost of her/his life.

When she realizes the entire world antagonizes her actions, she starts thinking of her selfhood and separate identity that has ever been in the name of relatives basically males like father, husband. In fact this is a sort of epiphany that she attains out of much toil. If she did not make efforts to do something innovative like changing the Gopher Prairie into a better place, she would still remain in ignorance and illusion. She is now deluded. The narrator says:

She told herself that she was the daughter of a judge, the wife of a doctor, and that she did not care to know a capering tailor. She told herself that she was not responsive to men [...] not even to Percy Bresnahan. She told herself that a woman of thirty who heeded a boy of twenty-five was ridiculous. (324)

Now she evaluates her every step and action. Similarly she makes an overview of her bygone days. And her relations with father and husband who have been in prestigious positions like judge and doctor respectively. While being child and at home of judge, she was known through him that is to say she was the daughter of her father and the wife of her husband. But it is high time she thought of her identity that does not come through anyone. The long time experience of being someone's daughter and wife awakens her from the slumbering state and whenever she seeks her lost self. She does find her marriage as an institution in which she has been dominated and imposed upon patriarchal ideas. Thus she says: "Am I really this settled thing called a 'married woman'? I feel so unmarried tonight. So free. To think that there was once a Mrs. Kennicott who let herself worry over a town called Gopher Prairie when there was a whole world outside it!" (112).

She finds her free now since she does feel unmarried. It is a radical change even in her personal life. She ever attempted to reshape the Gopher Prairie but has happened to restructure her personal life just by altering her attitudes towards marriage and husband whom she has blindly ever loved. Now she feels totally changed and free from distinct obstacles. She has wiped out all sorts of stains from her self and has made it pure and sacred.

Furthermore she expresses her ideology that she is not a theist. Rather she is an atheist and discards all sorts of superstructures such as religion, convention,

marriage institution, system etc. Thus, she pronouns herself as the town badman. She avers: "I'm the town badman, Mrs. Kennicott: town atheist and I suppose I must be an anarchist, too. Everybody who doesn't love the bankers and the Grand Old Republican Party is an anarchist" (115). She is much patient to tolerate all sorts of stigma and blames. She does not hesitate to declare that she is a revolutionary or in other words, an anarchist. After all, she compares her with extraordinary people who do fall under the category of anarchists. She indeed tries to appease her tormented emotions. As a matter of fact her feelings and aspirations are shattered in such a way that she cannot manage to assemble them together for integrity with others. The narrator highlights her disappointing situations: "Carol had avoided exposing her plans to Vida Sherwin. She was shy of the big-sister manner; Vida would either laugh at her or snatch the idea and change it to suit herself. But there was no other hope. When Vida came in to tea Carol sketched her Utopia" (136). Carol stops doing all those she used to do previously as she has failed to attain her goal. She pessimistically behaves with others as well. Her relationship with other women, changes and she moves ahead being indifferent to others. Vida a woman character with whom Carol often shares her feelings and plans, now says: "Their husbands are the most important men in town. They are the town!" (137). She makes it clear that husbands are the most important people in the town and in one sense they are the town. On the surface this remark is humorous but at the deep level, it is much sensitive and meaningful in the sense that the husbands are males and the town is controlled by these men. Whatever decisions they make, become policies of the town. On this ground they hold the supreme power and move the town as they long. Hence even Vida becomes conscious of the fact that men have ever dominated the town. Therefore, they do not create milieu for women to implement their ideas despite the fact that their ideas are far

more reformatory than males'. However, Carol cannot control her innermost feeling for the town dwellers. Thus she further displays her courage and wants for bettering the deteriorating condition of those who are still under the line of poverty and are starving. She is so kind and philanthropist that she dares to speak in the favor of the poor even at the cost of her self and interpersonal relationship. The narrator discloses her energy and endeavor for:

Carol rose. She suggested that the Thanatopsis ought to help the poor of the town. She was ever so correct and modern. She did not, she said, want charity for them, but a chance of self-help; an employment bureau, direction in washing babies and making pleasing stews, possibly a municipal fund for home-building.

“What do you think of my plans, Mrs. Warren? she concluded.

(140)

Now Carol seeks approval from women fellows. She has failed to get helped in any way by men hither-to-now. So she expects female fellows to help her. But before this she wants to check up whether her plans are justifiable or not. She explains each and every aspect of the town system. Dr. Kennicott opines that he is different from her since he does not embody all those qualities that she does. However, he is not sure: “If that woman is on the side of the angels, then I have no choice; I must be on the side of the devil! But-isn't like me? She too wants to reform the town! She too criticizes everybody! She too thinks the men are vulgar and limited! Am I like her? This is ghastly!” (183)

He is much critical to her remarks. He exaggerates and retells all the things in very polished and prejudiced manner. He does not have any soft heart for her. He very eagerly restates in such a way that she is his enemy despite the fact that she has never

gone against his desires except the case of town reformation. She never thinks of negative of the town dwellers and even of her husband but he so bitterly criticizes her in very implicit way that others do not suspect that their relationship is problematic. After all, his domination and antagonism very apparently appears in the extract below:

She longed to see Guy Pollock, for the confirming of the brethren in the faith. But Kennicott's dominance was heavy upon her. She could not determine whether she was checked by fear of him, or inertia-by dislike of the emotional labor of the scenes which would be involved in asserting independence. She was like the revolutionist at fifty; not afraid of death, but bored by the probability of bad steaks and bad breaths and sitting up all night on windy barricades. (196)

It is the matter of great surprise that Carol does not get frightened even with any sort of challenge to her life. She challenges death. Thus at the cost of her life she wants to feel free and independent from all sorts of dominations. In one sense freedom has become a solace to her living. She is upset and bored enough with the ruthless behavior of Dr. Keniccott since he has never loved her. Rather she has ever been used as a good and a source of entertainment. Furthermore her desire for independence is seen in the excerpt below:

She wished that she were independent enough to dine with these her guests. She considered their friendliness, she sneered at social distinctions, she raged at her own taboos-and she continued to regard them as retainers and herself as a lady. She sat in the dinning-room and listened through the door to Bjornstam's

booming and Bea's giggles. She was the more absurd to herself in that, after the rite of dining alone, she could go out to the kitchen, lean against the sink, and talk to them. (200)

She is newly emerged with radical consciousness and takes all outer disturbances as her enemies. The time she has spent in the company of these people have indeed brought about no fruition. This is why she feels that her life is futile. Now she rages at taboos. That means what she was allowed to do and not permitted to do. She discards all those taboos and longs to live an independent life on her own. Despite her attempts for reformation of the town, she fails. The genuine for her failure is that people are afraid of the dangers invited by the forth coming changes in the town. Due to lack of assent from commoners of the town, she fails. Likewise, the narrator adds: "Carol worried about their struggle, but she forgot it in the stress of sickness and fear. For that autumn she knew that a baby was coming, that at last life promised to be interesting in the peril of the great change" (234). The concern that Carol showed initially slows down since she has not been favored anywhere. With this pessimism, she decides to remain passive onwards and fully concentrates on her personal life rather than on the public one. But she does not stop fighting against the oppression of her husband Dr. Kennicott. Hence the narrator reveals the opposite action and reaction from both Carol and Kennicott: "Carol rebelled. Kennicott soothed her: "Oh, we won't see much of them. They'll have their own house" (239). Carol is much revolutionary in the sense that she is committed to keep on fighting for betterment and prosperity for the town Gopher Prairie. Her husband thinks that she is emotional and does not have rational power. Therefore he soothes her and tries to appease her revolting state. She lives an engrossed useful life, and seems as cool and simple as an apple. But secretly she is creeping among fears, longing and guilt. She hates even the

sound of the word “sex”. When she dreams of being a woman of the harem, with great white warm limbs, she awakes to shudder, defenseless in the dusk of her room. She prays to Jesus, always to the Son of God, offering him the terrible power of her adoration, addressing him as she contemplates his magnificence. Thus she mounts to patience and surcease. This hatred towards sex is due to the cruelty and oppression on her and now she is reactive to sex which is justifiable as well.

How men sexually and emotionally blackmail women is much focused in the text. The way Kennicott behaves and deals with Carol when he finds her in somewhat distressed mood demonstrates the fact he sensually dominates and fools her. The narrator highlights on the very issue:

His large hands, sensual lips, easy voice supported his self-confidence. He made her feel young and soft-as Kennicott had once made her feel. She had nothing to say when he bent his powerful head and experimented, “My dear, I’m sorry I’m going away from this town. You’d be a darling child to play with. You are pretty! Some day in Boston I’ll show you how we buy a lunch. Well, hang it, got to be starting back.” (277)

When Kennicott fails to calm down Carol’s aggressive state, he uses the card of sensuality and tries to appease just by calling her his dear and a darling child. Hence he does not think that she is mature any more. Rather she is still childish despite her physical growth. To him she has grown biologically but not mentally since she is female. To say sorry is much common on the part of men in order to win the battle of sexuality and sexual intercourse. Any how men emotionally overcome women’s anger and distress easily. But here Carol suspects this fake behavior and moves ahead accordingly. He further talks to Carol and wills to know the reason by addressing her

a child why, every woman ought to get off by herself and turn over her thoughts-about children, and God, and how bad her complexion is, and the way men don't really understand her, and how much work she finds to do in the house, and how much patience it takes to endure some things in a man's love. Kennicott's eagerness to know about women's psychology through Carol is only to indirectly convince her for acceptance of the woman's role to remain obliged to husband, god and children and not to contemplate about them. Furthermore Carol realizes that she has never been in love with Kennicott. Rather she has ever been interested in his success. On this ground she does not love him any more at the moment as well. She is fully mature in sensibility and understanding that she can read men's mind and their attitudes towards women. After all, she realizes the bitter truth of human life and consoles her with the say that her relations with Kennicott have been physical and sexual not emotional. Thus it is proven that women's identity seems to get embedded with men's due to socio-political situation of the male-dominated society.

She is encouraged to believe that she has not been abnormal in viewing Gopher Prairie as unduly tedious and sternly. She finds the same faith not only in girls escaped from domesticity but also in demure old ladies who, tragically deprived of esteemed husbands and huge old houses, yet manage to make a very comfortable thing of it by living in small flats and having time to read. Thus she gets indirect supports from women who have ever suffered in this male-dominated society but no consent from men which ultimately shatters her heart. Consequently she becomes passive loses hope for change in the Gopher Prairie.

She reverts to her resolution to change the town-awaken it, "reform" it. What if they are wolves instead of lambs? She critically judges people and says they will eat her all the sooner if she is meek to them. Fight or be eaten. It is easier to change the

town completely than to conciliate it! She cannot take their point of view; it is a negative thing; intellectual meanness, a flood of prejudices and fears. She has to make them hers. She is not a Vincent de Paul, to govern and mold a people. After all, she comes to the final conclusion that she is not responsible for them any more. And she promises to leave people of the Gopher Prairie in the constant state simply because to her the residences of Gopher Prairie are models of dignity, comfort, and culture, with lawns and gardens known far and wide; that the Gopher Prairie schools and public library, in its neat and commodious building, are celebrated throughout the state; that the Gopher Prairie mills make the best flour in the country; that surrounding farm hands are renowned, wherever men eat bread and butter, for their incomparable No. 1 Hard Wheat and Holstein-Friesian cattle. Carol's radical mission gets obstructed due to the fact that she is a woman that is the cultural flaw on the part of females in patriarchy.

IV. Conclusion

Carol thinks that Main Street is all in all and she loves the place in so passionate way that she cannot disconnect her from it. She indulges in the process of reforming the place in better form. She prefers to add prettiness and bring a new magnetism to its form. She is so sturdy that she ignores all sorts of criticisms and comments made by village dwellers. Her far-reaching vision is negatively understood. People deduce her and her plans in skeptic ways. They are preoccupied with the sense that she will destroy and bring about complications more to this place. They are scared in such a way they doubt every step made by her. However, she does not lose persistence. Rather she keeps on doing her customary duties.

In contrary to her Mr. Kennicott is not sure whether Gopher Prairie is a heaven. To Carol this place is magnificent and of great implication but her husband does not think so. She is crazy about the place but he wants to conciliate her boiling plans and desires. He opines that too much craze of something is not creditable. Hence it can be hypothesized that men do not abide the stylishness and commencement of women since they think that they will remain as assistance to the women and that is the worst on their part. The narrator reveals that Carol the freedom fighter does face difficulties and becomes disappointed in her conjugal life as well.

Carol's visions are supremely magnificent and outstanding in the sense she has ever contemplated of bettering the society she is currently living in. She has ever been tolerant and gradually has made efforts to do her level best. The public she is in are much prejudiced and male-centric. Men have always plotted against her and her visions which are drastic. This customary community cannot tolerate the sight of the path she has paved and this is what the reason is for her failure. She thus loses hopes and eventually realizes that men are responsible for her defeat. Hence she is much

critical and exploratory. She can winnow between rice and pieces of stone. She sees through the male mentality which is preoccupied with the predicament that women are inferior and incapable of launching drastic changes in the society.

Carol is much world-shattering in the sense that she is committed to keep on fighting for betterment and affluence for the town Gopher Prairie. Her husband thinks that she is emotional and does not have rational power. Therefore he soothes her and tries to pacify her revolting state. She lives an absorbed useful life, and seems as cool and simple as an apple. But secretly she is creeping among fears, longing and guilt. She hates even the sound of the word "sex". When she dreams of being a woman of the harem, with great white muggy limbs, she awakes to shudder, unprotected in the dusk of her room. She prays to Jesus, always to the Son of God, offering him the appalling power of her esteem, addressing him as she chews over his magnificence. After all she realizes the fact that people who have ever been preoccupied with the sense they should obey any sort of dictation by women despite the fact that the very dictation is much praiseworthy and tends to bring about fruition in their current life. Men in patriarchy do not prefer to get led by women since they take it as a symbol of stigma and failure of the male gender role. Consequently Carol's magnificent vision remains suspended on the path of completion and does not get an outlet. The consequence she faces is the byproduct of the community she lives in at the present.

Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- Brush, Rene. *Modern Tenets in Main Street*. Harlem: Black Publishers, 2000.
- Freedman, Jane. *Feminism*. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited, 2002.
- Gilbert, Sandra, M. and Guber, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.
- Hooks, Bell. *Ain't la Woman*. New York: Afro-American Publication, 1981.
- Krichman, Mathew. *Sentimentalism and Gender Issues*. South Africa: Subaltern Publication House, 1999.
- M.H., Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. India: Hartcourt Publishers, 2000.
- Millet, Kate. "The Literary Reflection". *Sexual Politics*. New York, 1970. 235-263.
- Penn, William. *A Glimpse on Lewis Sinclair's Main Street*. New York: Crowned Crest Publication, 2001.
- Rao, Raja. "Journal" (14 March 1826), *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1950), 9.
- Sinclair, Lewis. *Main Street*. New York: The New American Library, 1920.
- Sonia, Brown.. "Becoming Human". *Women, Gender and Human Rights* .Ed. *The New Yorker Times* , 2005.
- West, Rebecca.. "Feminist Literary Criticism". *Modern Literary Theory*. Ed. Jefferson and Robery. London: Batsford, 1988.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman". *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. New York: HBJCP, 1990.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Women and Fiction". *Feminist Critique of Language*. Ed. Deborah Cameron London: Routedledge, 1990. 33-40.