

Chapter-III

Slesinger and the Feminine Mind

As Slesinger's concerns are mainly feminine, she has studied different aspects of feminine psychology closely. In her exploration of the different stages in the developmental process of the female psyche, we conveniently find two groups of stories. The first group deals with the feminine mind in its pre-marital context, while the second group explores the feminine psyche in the institutional context of marriage.

The stories 'The Answer On The Magnolia Tree', 'Relax Is All' and 'The Times So Unsettled' belong to the first group, while 'Mother to Dinner', 'After the Party', 'On Being Told That Her Second Husband Has Taken His First Lover' and 'Missis Flinders' belong to the second one.

I

'The Answer On The Magnolia Tree', a short novella is a description of an all-women world with its typical problems and atmosphere. Slesinger, with a keen observation of human behaviour, gives a detailed picture of a typical day at a boarding school of girls a dormitory. Except the

teachers, almost all the inmates of the school belong to more or less the same age-group.

Slesinger had the chance of observing the adolescent girls, their behaviour, attitudes, thinking process when she worked as a private school teacher for one year. This experience happens to be the main source of her short novella and her screenplay *Girls' School*, (Columbia, 1938) also ~~was~~ based on this novella.

The most striking remarkability of the novella is its episodic pattern in which a longe number of women characters are depicted. But the focus attention is on the live portrayals of adolescent girls, with concentration on the minute details of their psychological process.

Another significant point of the story is the interaction of these women characters on different levels of relationship - the girl-woman relationship, the married-unmarried relationship the rich-poor relationship and finally the teacher-student relationship in the institutional context of the boarding-school.

The day, on which the story begins, is not a normal one, because of the punishment to Linda - a student. She is an outcast and not allowed to attend the classes or the other activities of the 'Magnolia Hall' - the dormitory. The punishment is given to her for staying out all night with a young man on a golf-court.

In Linda, Slesinger has drawn the picture of a romantic adolescent girl. Though Linda is afraid in her heart of the consequences of what her parents would say, she is very much romantic about them. "...it would be COLLOSAL to be kicked out of school for love."¹ The gradual change in her state of mind is precisely pointed out. As time passes by the intensity of her fear and guilt decreases and a sense of pride takes its place, which reflects in her answer to the imaginary question of the Duchess, her father and the student council - 'Why did she act like this?' The strong justification for the act she gives is - "Because I am in love."

In contrast to Linda, is Sudie's character, who in fact envies Linda for her daring to live on a golf-court for a full night. But she, herself, has no daring even to kiss Malcolm at the dance and is therefore, found accusing

herself and has been dreaming all the time about kissing Malcolm that night. The different layers of these innocent girls' minds are presented in various instances. In another episode Sudie and another girl Jean go to the village to get advertisements for the year book of the school. Sudie is rather frightened and scared to get separated from Jean. Their boarding is an exclusive world only of women, therefore, the experience of facing a man is totally new for Sudie. Here, the teenager's totally new experience of getting excited with the physical touch of 'a man' is recorded in a picturesque way. When Sudie sits near Mr. Prossor, the pressing of his knee on her own is quite a dream to her - "...whatever it was, could go on like this forever."² The experience she is having reveals the early sexual awakening in an adolescent girl.

Natalie differs from Linda and other girls because of her humble background. Being the editor of the year book and also chairman of practically everything, she is looked upon by her classmates as a management girl with a mixed feelings of hate and awe. In the right of the chairman, she rather complains about Linda's affair. But being herself one of the girls, her thoughts wander from one end to the

other in confusion-Was it a right thing to tell on Linda's affair? On the one hand there is a sense of duty, for she is a scholarship girl and has so many responsibilities, but on the other hand, she feels herself odd person in the group of rich, getting a sort of inferiority complex.

Natalie is shown never to come out of the complex, and each act, each decision seems to be loaded with the same thought. While the other girls are playing, she thinks "only the rich girls, who wore linen sun-back suits could spring,"³ whereas she can remain good only at committees, at passing exams, at winning scholarships. Slesinger effectively records the workings of the subconscious of her characters. In her subconscious, Natalie dreams about playing tennis and winning a cup. Coming from a poor family she is always aware of the fact that she has joined a school, which her parent can hardly afford.

Another world, which Slesinger describes is that of the teachers. Like in any other dormitory, the teachers stay along with the students in the hostel. The world of these spinsters is depicted with all its dreams and fantasies, stresses and strains. A variety of these teachers is

presented - "...the funny teachers, neither young nor old, neither girls nor women, neither women nor ladies,"⁴ who time and again crave for the youth that has gone forever.

Armstrong is Graham's "wife" and Graham is Armstrong's "wife". Everything is shared between both of them, yet there is underlying strain in their relations.

Engle, another teacher, rooms alone, who talks to herself for company. "Little Miss Chambie", age 26, is the youngest of all the teachers.

The atmosphere in the school is rather unnatural, but the teachers are accustomed to this "female shell of a dormitory". Slesinger skillfully points out inner feelings and strenuous interaction among these teachers. When Chambie gets ready for her date, Engle - age 36 - rather hates her. Chambie is also "reluctant to go to town and face the unpredictable world of men". Staying only in a feminine world is, to some extent, quite unnatural and hence facing a normal world - where men live - makes them rather reluctant.

Miss Engle, a woman of 36, has normal feminine feelings. "A husband; a house; a kitchen; self respect..."⁵ they seem to hover in her mind time and again, but confined in an abnormal surroundings talking about such things would be a taboo. It's fifteen years since she met Prof. Mellish. Suddenly she craves for her youth and sweetness. In Miss Engle a typical mentality of a spinster is observed, when she engages herself in imagining with various men in various houses.

Miss Engle dreams about her married life, whereas Miss Laurel is a teacher, who has intense longing..... "someday this school will house the children of the poor - all children alike."⁶ She is portrayed as the only teacher having a boy-friend outside and she is shown to be impressed by his socialistic thoughts. In the class, she gives a speech about an incident - "And whose fault is it - the most people in the world, the great majority must live in such misery and squalor?"⁷ She feels "emotionally exhausted" and "great and important" for teaching the rich students such things.

Slesinger delineates the issue of the role of a woman in a lecture arranged in the dormitory - "How to

be charming?" The charm lady's speech is expressive enough to reveal the ironic truth about the expectations from a woman in the sophisticated class - "Remember a party.... is a move, a step in the great social game... never argue, don't disagree....especially with men.... Don't have too definite opinions on any subject, for too much thinking makes ~~line~~ in the face....leave it to men to do the thinking, the worrying, the money-making, it is woman's first duty 'to be charming'."⁸ The role of a woman is sometimes defined by women themselves like this. Whereas the men's world refuses to accept her equally, the woman also helps herself to remain in her established role. These weaknesses of women are exposed in the character of a charm-lady.

In the portrayal of the Duchess, we meet a typical head of any such institution. She is rather anxious about Linda's case, for if they dropped her, there would be trouble because 'Linda's mother is an alumna of Magnolia Hall and her father is a fraternity brother of one of the trustees.' A problem before management of these institutions is shown in her awareness. While talking to Linda, she makes Linda aware of her age -

"....everything is important now, Linda, at your age. You are....at the cross roads !"⁹ But Linda, not attentive to the Duchess' talk, is holding her attention on the blossomed Magnolia tree. The Duchess remarks - "you are not going to find the answer on the Magnolia tree."¹⁰

'The Answer on the Magnolia tree' indicates the sudden reveries that each member of the dormitory enters into. The blossoming of Magnolia flowers reflect the youthful emotions of these girls. Looking at young faces, the teachers think of their youth, with a sad feeling, some with envy - "Still there was some hope, there's some time" - dreaming for the revival of their youth. The teenagers are on the crossroads, eager to enter into a new world. They experience the delicate, thrilling youthful emotions. Though they are lost in their recollections or in their sudden dreams, they have to come out of that world, for they would not get realistic answer on the Magnolia tree.

With all the finesse of an astute psychologist Slesinger has depicted microscopic picture of the feminine mind in her characters. The minute details both on the plane of psychological realism and formal realism add a degree of authenticity to the story.

Thus, the story operates basically on three inter-related thematic levels. In the characters of teachers, Slesinger shows the nostalgia for last youth and the concomittant feelings of sadness and emptiness. In the adolescent girls, she portrays the dreams and fantasies of the teenage heroines, fascinated ambivalently by the early intimations of sexuality and subjected to the institutional code of conduct. Finally, in the character of the charm lady, we have an ironic comment on the roles into which these girls are expected to cast themselves when they enter the world of adult society.

The Magnolia tree stands in the story as a central symbol of the delicate, brittle world of adolescent dreams cut off from the outside world of reality. In this novella, Slesinger has captured the subtle aspects of the feminine selfhood both in psychological and social terms.

If 'the Answer on The Magnolia Tree' deals with the early awakenings of sexuality and the accompanying world of dreams and fantasies 'Relax is All' describes a spinster's belated but sudden, dramatic and joyous encounter with sexual experience.

Miss Blake, a woman who works in a New York office with a psychologist, has come to a camp for holidays where she is getting training in riding. The event in the story takes place on the day when Ethel Blake and other members, guided by Bud, the cowboy go to visit a place supposed to be containing a mysterious cave. Blake is riding Comanche - a male horse - but the horse despises her because he knows that she, a city-dweller can not ride him confidently. The arising of human sentiments of competition, ego, sexual drive are intensified by ascribing them to horses.

As a New Yorker Blake has a hectic life and cannot relax in the office. Bud, while teaching her to ride insists on 'relaxing' - 'Relax is all'. But she wants to ride fast so as to forget the work, the strains of her city life and get Bud's approbation for riding.

The horse, she feels, is a symbol of something to conquer. Her repressed sexual feelings get their outlet in her feelings for the horse. She has fallen in love with Comanche, but he does not reciprocate. She has Comanche in her dreams - 'rather human'. When they reach the place, Bud passes on the canteen to her : it smells of Chiquita's -

Bud's mare horse - sweat and has the "salty taste of Bud's healthy spittle". She drinks it even though there is a sharp disguisting smell, because it gives the warmth of another person to her. The frequent references of smell and touch and expressions of horses indicate different aspects of the sexual theme.

While other members decide to search for the entrance of the cave, Ethel offers to stay with Jimmie a little boy, because "she had a way with children".¹¹ Being a spinster, she has no chance to express these feminine instincts but these are exhibited at such moments. When the group comes back, fascinated, Bud finds that he has lost his brand new snake hat band. No one is ready to go again in the cave with him. But Ethel suddenly agrees to help him for, "here was a twenty-nine year old child who....would never be happy again if he didn't find it"¹² Usually afraid of high places, Ethel is not afraid now "something seemed to be driving her."¹³ This element of irrationality in her is justly revealed. Infact, the band is a trifling matter, but now finding this becomes a matter of challenge - of life and death to her. When she finds it suddenly, she turns the flashlight intentionally so that Bud can not see it.

"Suddenly and perhaps for the first time in her life, Ethel Blake grew coy....she let a man's eye rest on a thing, she held in her hand....she became female and powerful, she felt....that she must even for the only time in her life look cute."¹⁴ Bud, as if teased by a female, becomes aggressive and holds her tightly "like hugging the flanks of a horse." When they come out, Chiquita looks at Ethel with "a jealous eye" as if Ethel has snatched away her lover, Bud. In fact the repressed, impulsive instincts of Ethel herself, are expressed through personified feelings of horses. The symbolism helps to unfold the layers of the fluctuating feelings of the protagonist with all its subtleties.

After going through the dramatic, sudden but ecstatic sexual experience Blake is filled with "strength and pride". Now the situation changes, she manages and masters Comanche. When at one point they both ride "side by side like lovers", Ethel feels "this is the finest moment in her thirty five years of life." The sexual intercourse, which she has experienced for the first time in her life, has brought a 'relaxation' for her.

The dormant sexual feelings of a well educated woman of 35, who works in the field of psychology are minutely analysed in the story. It depicts the sudden experience of sex bringing a realisation to a spinster of her female potential, whose world has so far consisted of books and lectures only.

Slesinger describes in the story how a spinster from the puritan east comes to wild west, and discovers the epiphany of sexual experience and through it comes to terms with the masculine self.

The thematic pattern in Slesinger is a fine combination of her awareness of the times and the problems of feminine sensibility. 'The Times So Unsettled' is a representative example of this. Like other women writers of the thirties, one of her main concerns is the interaction between gender and history. In her fiction Slesinger develops the theme of man-woman relationship, encompassing the experiences on different levels.

In this story Tess Slesinger draws the desparate loneliness caused by the first world war and its after effects shattering the lives of youths - like Heinrich and Mariedel,

a working class couple, who cling to one another out of terrific loneliness. But the main issue dealt in the story is the relationship between marriage and love - whether marriage gives assurance of love. Traditionally the fulfilment of love is supposed to be in the happy married life of lovers and it is assumed that the real intensity and pleasure of love is brought about after marriage. But the kind of love presented in the story, does not square with this idea. On the contrary, the situation concludes that the contentment of love is not in marriage because "marriage does not ensure love." The story also throws light on the transitory human relationship in the modern civilization.

Mariedel, the Austrian girl, is in love with Heinrich, an ardent socialist, who wants to bring about revolutionary change in Vienna. Though Mariedel is ready to get married, she knows that Heinrich has reservations because as he says in his broken English "the times so unsettled are."¹⁵

We meet in her a woman who has totally merged her identity in her man. She is a kind of woman that Simon De Beauvoir describes -

"It was to find herself, to save herself, that she lost herself in him in the first place, and the fact is that little by little she does lose herself in him totally for the whole of reality is in the Other."¹⁶

Mariedel submits totally to the will of her man. If Heinrich goes to America, ofcourse she would go with him, but if he stays behind in Vienna and spends the rest of his life fighting and underfed, she would stay with him anyway. Richard and Mahli, the American couple, who visit Vienna for a short time, have been particular friends of Heinrich and Mariedel. They always ask them - "you are in love...why don't you get married?" But Mariedel knows very well that to Heinrich, Vienna is everything and their future is totally contingent upon the future of Vienna - for Heinrich says - "If Vienna is dead, then Mariedel and I are dead too, Vienna is our city. We will live with it or die with it."¹⁷ In Heinrich's argument "marriage does not ensure love",¹⁸ it seems Slesinger has raised the basic issues concerning the marriage institution.

Heinrich wants to implement his ideology at any cost and expects a revolutionary change. Even when socialists take over Vienna and start doing all the things he had wanted

them to do, this is not quite upto his satisfaction. Though he loves peace, he knows that change "can not be done through peace, we must have more blood-shed" and when in reality the dream of socialists is destroyed by blood shed, in the course of "unsettled times" Heinrich is shot dead. Slesinger depicts these unsettled times which do not allow the lovers to bloom their love.

But in Mariedel's feelings of love she has portrayed the everlasting, immortal nature of love. Mariedel feels that "there had been something in their hearts which not even Heinrich's death could end."¹⁹ She decides to meet Richard and Mahli, perhaps to see her lost love sublimated and fulfilled in the happy married life of Richard and Mohli. But here also she meets futility. When she comes to America Richard goes on repeating -"this is a real reunion."²⁰ Upto this time Mariedel does not know that Richard and Mahli are leading a separated life. When this truth is brought home to her it comes as a terrible shock.

She had lost her young brother when he was shot dead on the Italian front twenty years ago. Later she lost her lover, Heinrich. She had expected to find a ray of hope in the life of Richard and Mohli. But now even that last hope

is destroyed, leaving her totally desolate and she recollects Heirich's words - "marriage does not ensure love."

Tess Slesinger seems pioneering in dealing the basic concept of marriage and the problems concerning it.

All these stories prove Slesinger a consummate short story writer. In 'the Answer on...' her method is episodic. She switches from one character or small group of characters to another, carrying the narrative or chiefly through the consciousness of one character at a time. The structure of the story is well-suited for the theme of the story. The episodic pattern matches with the fluctuations in the minds of the delicate, romantic adolescent girls and gives the touch of verisimilitude. On the other extreme the dormant, sexual feelings of a spinster are exposed with all its subtleties through animal imagery in 'Relax is All'. The symbolism is applied with a superb mastery which makes the theme crystalclear and emphatic. 'The Times so Unsettled', depicts a young girl's mentality trapped in the tragic period. In order to impart distinctness to her characters Slesinger creates suitable situations and in reacting to these situations her character acquires extraordinary vividness and individuality.

II

The stories in this group exclusively deal with problems of women in their married life. While exploring the ambiguities of married women Tess Slesinger shows what Mary Fergusson calls "a particular acuity."

In traditional approach marriage was considered as the destiny offered to women by society. Without marriage, it was assumed that a woman's life remains incomplete. A woman could not be thought of without her partner. It was expected that she must make all adjustments with her husband and for the certainty and settled marital life, she had to fulfil her husband's expectations and mould her likings, views according to her man because she existed only for her man's sake.

The woman was always taken for granted, which resulted into one-sided adjustments. The problems, the tensions, the strains of the woman were not at all paid attention to. Throughout her married life, she carried a sense of dependence. Merging of her identity with the man's life was regarded the real contentment of her life. As their role was confined to

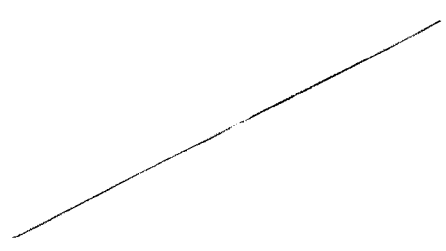
be wives and mothers, they had no individual dignity. But with a man, however, the case was different. He was regarded socially an independent and complete individual. A woman came to feel odd, if she was not connected to a man. She looked to a man to complete her life, to give her an identity and a purpose.

But in the early decades of the century, with the new advancement in every field, the centre of the woman's activity was no longer confined to home only, as the new horizons became open to her. As her role achieved wider dimensions, the orbits of her personality widened too, thereby resulting in the awakening of her own self. She began to observe different aspects of her day to day experiences from an entirely fresh perspective and started thinking of her own identity. She realised that she too had her own views, approaches and likings. There was a new awareness of her ability, intellect and skill which was neglected earlier. Though she had the same qualities and abilities, that man had formerly she was regarded inferior and subordinate, but the talent which was kept dormant before, now started shining. She started thinking of her emancipation. The woman found that she had her own unique personality and it was not necessary to remain a slave to man.

The foregoing discussion provides a general backdrop to the stories analyzed below. In these stories Slesinger has depicted the problems of the married women by showing them in different complex situations such as -

- 1) Psychology of a newly married woman and her wavering between two different roles : daughter and wife.
- 2) The contradictory selves coming together; the incompatibility resulting in separation and the meaningless life of a woman without her man.
- 3) The uncertainty in a woman's life even after her second marriage in a male dominated society.
- 4) Mental suffering of woman caused by the suppression of her maternal instincts.

'Mother to Dinner' published in March 1930 in the Menorah Journal is an illustration of Slesinger's psychological insights, because it reveals the conflict between "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics.



Katherine Benjamin, heroine of the story 'Mother to Dinner' is caught in a strange eccentric dilemma - the dilemma of two loves : her love for mother and her love for her husband. She is tossed by contrasting forces from both sides : excessive affinity of mother and logic of her husband. The story explores her trapped position between husband's demands for her entire devotion and her mother's need for emotional support.

Katherine has invited her parents for dinner. But she is quite doubtful whether Gerald, her husband and her mother would be congenial to each other. Her past recollections came as a horde and they become a major hinderance in the formation of her new marital relationship. Even after eleven months of her marriage, due to the excessive attachment with her mother, she fails to establish satisfactory marital relation and can not find solace. Her domestic and social habits are those of her mother, patterns of female culture, passed down from one generation to the next, "little rituals" which bring with them past memories and "indeed she suffers from matrophobia."²¹

Slesinger has the insight to enter into minds of her characters and to analyse the working of their psyche.

Katherine intensely feels like phoning Gerald but hurriedly drops the idea because to Gerald, "thinking about every small thing, attaching significances to every moment, wishing to communicate every small thought was besides being sentimental, "an imbecilic waste of time".²² Earlier she used to tell everything to her mother and her mother had also taken keen interest in listening even about her shopping expedition, but to Gerald what she has to say is irrelevant. Therefore, the genuine question=before her is - "Between two people who live together, why should anything be irrelevant?"²³

Thus Katherine is shuttled between these two poles.. As she fails to come out of the intimate world of her mother, Gerald's world remains strange to her. "She was aware of a wish to sink Gerald into the bottom of her mind."²⁴ But immediately her subconscious mind returns to her mother and at the some time Gerald's memories forbid her to recall the past because he describes Katherine's flights "a worthless luxury." Throughout the whole story we can observe a state of a newly married woman, forced into complexities and contrasting thoughts. "She hated herself for thinking of her mother", but suddenly she feels "against her mother....she had committed a crime."²⁵ It is this ambivalence of relationship which Slesinger explores in a masterly fashion.

The mother-daughter relation is quite an odd one. Though Katherine realises this, she can not manage to adjust with the situation. She has understanding but not strong enough to overcome the situation. Gerald, infact, indirectly helps to intensify her strain. He does not help to Katherine to come out of the past reminiscenes, but goes on ridiculing her habits, her parents. Instead of trying to be close to her, even after a period of one year after their marriage, he remains "strange" to her, who knows nothing of her twenty years of life but the last two. Being a matter of fact man he maintains business like behaviour in their married life also. If Katherine wants to have a dialogue with him on the telephone she can guess what he would say.- "What do you want?" Gerald's dry behaviour, his indifference to her emotions accerbate Katherine's vexed mentality. Slesinger explores here the fact that the bond between a husband and a wife is not fixed on material wants of each other, but there should be total sharing, total understanding.

Outside the "sodden" air rises to a storm and inwardly Katherine's mind is torn between the conflicting feelings of identification with mother and husband and divided feelings about each of them individually. The storm image is the key image of the story. The storm haunts Katherine upto the end.

Various impressions are crowding in her mind. Eventually her psychic condition becomes gusty and windy. These stormy tensions go on increasing because she fails to make a choice between her husband and her mother. At the end no alternative remains but the absurd thought of the imaginary death of either one of the two. In the first section of the story her stand is "she must protect them both",²⁶ but finally when the doorbell rings she wishes that "one of them, Gerald or her mother were dead."²⁷ As Janet Sharistianian writes :

"By inscribing this conflict in the protagonist's hidden thoughts and emotions, rather than revealing it through her speech and actions, the story points toward the difficulties of self-expression....and the special difficulties the female characters have in making any claims for themselves upon the world."²⁸

Each symbol used in the story intensely clarifies the discomforts in a newly married woman's mind. Her psychic stage is justly compared with "green peas and punching conteloupes aware of the waiting uncertainites,, the uprooting, the transplanting, involved in their calmly leaving homes to

go to live with strangers." Because of this strangeness Katherine is wavering between the two ends and tossed from one to another. Her mind, like a pendulum, remains swinging and it becomes difficult for her to strike a balance between the two.

One more aspect of the married life of a woman is revealed in the story 'After the Party'. The temperamental incompatibility of the pair ultimately results in separation and leading the wife on to a meaningless, empty kind of life.

'After the Party' is a story of Mrs. Golborne who is living such kind of restless, meaningless life of loneliness. Because of the revolutionary ideas of Henry, her husband, she has received a terrible mental shock. After this neurotic breakdown, the doctor suggests, "she should give parties, parties for people, in order that she should feel she had some contact with the world still."²⁹

In fact, she and Henry have lived together for twenty years. Though Henry was a socialist from the very beginning, his socialist concepts never become a cause of conflict between them. But after his illness, Henry came out as a totally different person. He said that he had

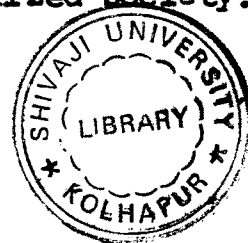
become disillusioned with the tactics of the socialists and...."the Revolutionist were the ultimate party."³⁰

Now here comes the clash between the couple. Henry wants to give up his remaining life, money, energy to the cause of Revolutionists. He has found a cause, a purpose for living. He also appeals to her to give the entire sum of her fortune to "save her soul" and tries to convince her that she should feel tired and ashamed of empty life they led. But in Mrs. Colborne's character, Slesinger has depicted a woman whose interests totally differ from those of her husband. Mrs. Colborne suggests that they would adopt a child or two for they have no children. But Henry rejects the idea and keeps before her a terrifying picture of the coming Revolution - "When the Revolution comes, there will be guns pointed at all the things you love most in this city, the great department stores, the fine churches... the skyscraper apartments....But....before the working classes dare to shoot, there are fingers pointing at you... from all parts of the world....fingers of French peasants pricked by their needless, blodless fingers of rachitic babies, trembling fingers of beggars, fingers of factory hands, miners, all of them pointed at you."³¹ This terrific

picture of the Revolution comes as a shock to her. It seemed to her that Henry was taking a quiet, mad pleasure in smashing her life before eyes.

Mrs. Colborne is not a woman of self-determination and can not achieve a sense of completeness without her man. Therefore, when Henry becomes a Revolutionist, her life becomes a void. Now she had "no real home to devote her time to."³² "The advantage man enjoys that his vocation as a human being in no way runs counter to his destiny as a male....He is not divided. Whereas it is required of a woman that in order to realize her femininity she must make herself object and prey...."³³

To find out new interest in life it is decided that Mrs. Colborne should give parties to celebrated writers. But to arrange such parties becomes an elaborate technique with dispassionate approach. The real nature of these parties is exposed in the detailed picture of a party given in celebration of Miss Sawyer's celebrated work. Slesinger has exposed in this party a satirical show of meak and shallow relations of a so called civilized society.



Nobody has taken cognizance of Miss Sawyer in the past parties, but with the success of her novel, she has achieved the honour of guest; therefore, "everybody is dying to meet her." But Miss Sawyer knows very well that this is a temporary glamour.

Through these parties, though Mrs. Colborne is trying to find consolation, looking after new interests in life, these parties remain only artificial measures. As the measures are artificial, the results are temporary, in vain. She spends her energy and money for these luxurious get togethers, but the vanity of them makes her more restless. After Miss Sawyer's party, the impressions of the past parties, the plans about the next parties gather in her mind. And suddenly she feels intensely to to somewhere in mountains, "because it is too late." She is now eager to find this ease which she fails to get in these parties.

In Mrs. Calborne, Slesinger has depicted a kind of woman whose life has no meaning without the company of her man. Without him, her living becomes only existing. The woman is of an ordinary type, who can not follow the revolutionary way of her husband and fails to achieve any purpose

of living. Neither she can satisfy her husband, nor she gets contentment independently. Being too "sensitive and highly inaginative" quickly becomes a prey to nervous breakdown. In the portrayal of Mrs. Colborne, Slesinger wants to focus such angle of femine temperoment which becomes an obstacle in the emancipation of a woman. When her man leaves her, her life remains only a contiuous meaningless effort for the search of peace leading to futility. The patches of parties can not be turned into bliss bringing everlasting pleasures. In the blurred state of mind, she impulsively remembers Henry's warning about Revolutionary fingers and again in this fearful state she is terror-stricken and collapsed in her old nervous breakdown. Instead of seeking ease of mind, she gets more tormented and finds herself writhing in agony.

Slesinger concentrates in the story 'On Being Told That Her Second Husband Has Taken His First Lover' another problem in the married life of a woman. The nature of the problem is seen in the title itself. The whole story is a continuous monologue denoting a running commentary on the uncertainty in a woman's life even after the marriage and her yielding to the circumstances in a male-dominated society.

Cornelia, heroine of the story, is rather ahead of Mrs. Colborne from 'After the Party'. Yet even after the first divorce, she is not happy in her second marriage with Dill Graham. Her divorce has made her clever, wiser and calculated. Infact, the sharpness of her resistance, which was prevalent in her first married life does not remain. She has become 'clever' in a sarcastic sense, i.e. the news of her man's - Dill's - infidelity does not come as a shock to her, because it is a weaker repetition of the first one. She has suppressed her rebellious nature completely and adjusts herself with the situation - "No nausea, No sharp pain", she has "utter and absolute control"³⁴ all over nerves.

In the first relations she was straitforward and did not tolerate man dominating on her. With Jimsie, her first husband, she went on argumenting and brilliantly talking for two whole days. But in this case she has "learned a lesson". As she knows Dill's weaknesses, she can attack him and tear him to fragments like "a female lion", but she warns herself to be tactful, not to be too sensitive and tries to become "a highly selective artist... and a gently restrained actress."³⁵ In fact Cornelia, can

expose the flirtations of a man with a proof. But on the contrary she tries to convince her mind giving a cold philosophy :

"You are you, therefore if he loves the real You, he can not love anybody else... Since he really loves you, since he loves the real you, what can it possibly matter if he touches her with his hands...laugh with her....kiss her....not the real her."³⁶

Though she takes this approach, she knows that she is deceiving her own 'self'. But knowing all the reality, she has no answer to the question, "What are you going to do ?" "Slesinger focuses on the continuance of the double bind for women even with sexual revolution. A wife who did not originate adultery feels she must accept her husband's announced infidelity as his right to freedom but can not perceive her right to respond in kind as viable."³⁷

Man, being possessive has exclusive rights over his woman. He always remains upperhand with his "male pride". He dislikes anybody else in her life except himself. On the contrary, he is free to have any liberty. Dill would love

Cornelia in spite of anything, "but no gents". With a sort of 'anticipatory hatred' he says "Don't ask me why I don't know why, but it's different with a man."³⁸

Slesinger directly delineates the issues raised because of the inferior stage of a woman in patriarchal system of society. A woman is always taken for granted. Though knowing her man's infidelity his philandering, she learns to tolerate it and adjusts herself with the situation. She has to pull on life as it comes and is dragged by the circumstances. Though the husband has full liberty for adultery, she can not follow the same way. As Simon De Beauvoir says :

"Woman is not concerned to establish individual relations with a chosen mate but to carry on feminine functions in generality. She has no right to any sexual activity apart from marriage, but man...can enjoy contingent pleasure before marriage and extramaritally."³⁹

Cornelia knows that Dill is not totally hers and has involved in his first love. But by the time she has learnt to rise above such trivialities ! Being totally loyal to

him Cornelia feels that she is a whole person even in her sadness, while he stands before her, however male, "a split one". But Man, here, is a "gay deceiver" and takes freedom of infidelity, yet he is sure of the "little woman waiting at home".

Time brings change in Cornelia. She has the realisation of the superior place of man got to him only because of the convention prevailed in society. Therefore, in the course of time, her revolving nature departs her, she forgets her rights and goes around mechanically expecting the worst all the time.

In depicting Cornelia, Slesinger has dealt with the issue due to the lack of the propriety of marriage system and belittling the status of woman in the framework of the marriage institution. Marriage, is a reciprocal bond, but here the marital relationship of deep and genuine love does not remain. Yet the woman goes on maintaining the relation, though it is shallow and superficial one.

The final chapter of Slesinger's novel The Unpossessed was originally published as a short story entitled 'Missis Flinders'. The story was rejected many times by a number of

publishers, but finally Whit Burnett and Martha Foley published it in Story. The story was "the first fiction dealing with abortion to appear in a magazine of general circulation". The fulfilment of a married woman's life is usually supposed to be in her maternity. But here in the story, Margaret Flinders undergoes an abortion to "free" her husband and herself. 'Missis Flinders' is one of her best stories forming a part of her novel about the rootless and bewildered pseudo intellectuals.

After going through an abortion self-willingly, Margaret is returning home with totally a restless mind, which still lingers in the maternity hospital. With the skillful use of stream of consciousness Slesinger reveals Margaret's despair. Because of the abortion, her maternal pleasures are trampled, her feminine instincts become dominating and naturally, she reacts against Miles' help. In her inner heart she feels to "hurt her man" who is responsible for this agony, for the emptiness - "Hurt and hurt this man....He is a man he would have made you a woman."⁴⁰ Margaret feels impulsively to hurt him for he has snatched away her womanly right. But suddenly she loses her desire to punish him :

"For he was no more man than she was woman....she must reduce him as she felt herself reduced. She must cut out from him what made him a man, as she had let be cut out from her what would have made her a woman. He was no man : he was a dried up intellectual husk : he was sterile empty and hollow as she was."⁴¹

Slesinger, acutely aware of the period, has focused on the superficial and hollow thinking process of the so called intellectuals. The situation which she presents itself becomes a cutting remark on the pretentious and selfish ambitions of the character. Miles has convinced Margaret to give up the baby for economic and intellectual freedom and without much thinking Margaret echoes his opinion - "why in a time like this....to have a baby would be suicide....good bye to our working out schemes for each other and the world....our hopes concentrate on the sordid business of keeping three people alive, one of whom would be a burden and expense for twenty years."⁴² Having such extremely individualistic approach, they don't allow 'the third one' to share their personal life, they don't want to exert themselves, adjust themselves or spend their energy and money for the third one.

Through the presentation of the situation in minute details, Slesinger shows the extremes in the working of woman's psyche in a masterly way. Missis Butter and Missis Wiggam, the hospital mates of Margaret, stand in contrast to Margaret. Both of them are happy "in making a baby for their husbands every year." Slesinger also satirically exposes such women, who have not their own identity and their total satisfaction is in producing babies for their husbands.

At the other extreme is Mrs. Flinders, who has denied even a single child. But after the abortion, she realises the hollowness of intellectual fervour - "the blood was....flowing freely and wastefully....toward what ? would it pile up some day and bear a book ?"⁴³ When they reach home she feels the barrenness acutely. "...she wanted to find something there that she knew she could not find, and surely, the house....would be suddenly empty and dead."⁴⁴

The basic theme of the story is well expressed in the symbol of the basket of fruits, which expresses the intensity of the disturbances in Margaret's mind. The fleeting emotions that pass through her consciousness are depicted vividly in the symbol. These fruits stand for the invaluable gifts of nature which man and woman can enjoy together. But with revolting aspirations which are highly

superficial, both Flinders deny it and "turn their back on life". The basket of fruits exposes the ridiculous situation of Miles. The basket which he brings for her is "a poor pathetic, inarticulate - intellectual basket, standing embarrassed."

The irony of the situation is that Miles Flinders, an intelligent, highly principled man, who, in theory, can talk about the philosophy of humanity, but in practical life he neglects even the basic needs of his wife. In placing this story at the end of her novel, Slesinger suggests that "irresolution is inevitable in both political and domestic life unless principles and politics are translated into daily behaviour."⁴⁵

On the one hand the woman has yearnings for achievement and fulfilment and on the other, she is caught by her own internal restraints and possibilities. If the springing up of womanhood is not let out properly and if the natural desires are suppressed, it leads to confrontation and mental suffering.

Tess Slesinger in all these stories has explored the fundamental problems concerning marriage such as the fidelity and identity of the partners, the relationship

between marriage and love, the strains between new and old relations, the tarnished mentality of a newly married woman, the problem of maintaining mental balance and the intricacy involved in all these issues. Slesinger's close, microscopic study from different angles proves her mastery in analysing feminine psychology.