

CHAPTER 3

THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GONE WITH THE WIND

In any novelistic design it is the theme, story, plot, characterization and setting which contribute to its excellence. In the critical analysis of Gone with the Wind, these elements of the novel have to be taken for fuller treatment. But the fact that this novel is one of the most successful novels of the world, adds one more element of interest to its study. This element is its immense popularity. In a critical study of Gone with the Wind this aspect cannot be neglected. Hence, in this chapter, the novel is looked at from two standpoints. One is the critical analysis of the work along the conventional line of its plot, theme, story, characterization and setting ; and the other is the study of the work as a novel belonging to the category of popular literature.

In a panoramic novel like Gone with the Wind many ideas underlying the surface story can be found. Several myths, archetypal patterns can be traced in the novel. Mithcell herself was of the opinion that 'survival' was the theme of her novel. In reply to a question by Harold Latham, she had stated that her novel was about the quality of 'gumption' or practical sense to survive found in the people of the South. But related to this theme of survival many ideas can be found, out of which the novel grows. The main idea in the novel seems to be about the phenomenon of

change - change taking place in the life of a person and life of a nation; change in the material and mental conditions of the characters; and also the change in the ideas of love and passion. Change seems to be the very germ, the soul of Mitchell's novel because all the important incidents in the novel seem to bring about or point out change of some kind or the other, and the novel proceeds with this feeling of change. The Civil War is the one incident in the history of America that brought about a great change in the life of the nation. The novel tells a story about this change and the shape it gave to the nation and the life of its people. Some of the characters in the novel change with the changing situation, they survive; however, a few of them not being able face the changing situation find it very difficult to survive.

Scarlett, the central character of the novel, grows up in this process of change. Everything that belongs to her is destroyed by the war. When she returns to Tara after the fall of Atlanta she finds that her house and plantation have been plundered by the Yankees. They have taken along with them everything that was valuable - horses, cattle, gold, food. They have burnt the cotton. Scarlett's mother is died and this has affected adversely her father's mind. Her father Gerald is no longer a strong person. There is none to look after Scarlett and her family as every able bodied person is in the army fighting the War. At this juncture, the first change takes place in Scarlett. She has lost her husband and become the mother of a child

but hasn't lost her girlhood. She loses it after her return to Tara -

She was seeing things with new eyes for, somewhere along the long road to Tara, she had left her girlhood behind her. She was no longer plastic clay, yielding imprint to each new experience. The clay had hardened, some time in this indeterminate day which lasted a thousand years. To-night was the last time she would ever be ministered to as a child. She was woman now and youth was gone.¹

Scarlett takes charge of all the affairs at Tara. She gives the servants clear instructions about what they are to do. She realises that everything is not lost, Tara is still with her. She decides to face the situation with courage. The change in situation is so swift that Scarlett hasn't had time to take a pause -

She did not stop to think that Ellen's ordered world gone and a brutal world has taken its place, a world wherein every standard, every value had changed. She only saw, or thought she saw, that her mother had been wrong, and she changed swiftly to meet this new world for which she was not prepared.²

Scarlett manages to save Tara only because she has changed swiftly. She kills a Yankee soldier, faces the situation cleverly when Yankees come to Tara again. To save Tara from Scallawags like Slattery and Hilton, she needs money badly, and she decides to acquire it at any price. She is not scared of public opinion or any other force in the world now because she has hardened her heart against all that bound her to the old days and the old Scarlett. In her efforts

to save Tara she changes and this brings her not only prosperity, material fulfilment but also a sense of freedom.

While Scarlett is thus ready to change herself, the people around her are not prepared to meet this change. They do not approve of change in Scarlett and they themselves are not ready to change even a bit from the old ways of life. This is because they do not fully realise the changed state of affairs. Scarlett understands their position and comprehends their dilemma-

They haven't an idea of what is really happening to me or to themselves or to South. They still think, in spite of everything, that nothing really dreadful can happen to any of them because they are who they are, O'Haras, Wilkeses, Hamiltons. Even the darkies feel that way. Oh, they're all fools! They'll never realize! They'll go right on thinking and living as they always have, and nothing will change them.

They won't change. May be they can't change. I'm the only one who's changed - and I wouldn't have changed if I could have helped it.³

The Southern society cannot change but it cannot remain the same after the defeat of the Confederacy either. The five years of war have crushed the Southerners and made them helpless citizens of conquered provinces. They see their state being trampled upon by the enemy, and their former slaves turned against them. The Southerners are disfranchised, their women are humiliated. They are defeated but yet stand determinedly erect. They do not change their manner of living but yet some change has taken place in them. Mitchell describes this change-

They looked the same but they were different. What was it ? Was it only that they were five years older ? No, it was something more than the passing of time. Something had gone out of them, out of their world. Five years ago, a feeling of security had wrapped them all around so gently they were not even aware of it. In its shelter they had flowered. Now it was gone and with it had gone the old thrill, the old sense of something delightful and exciting just around the corner, the old glamour of their way of living. 4+

The Reconstruction brings poverty to the Southerners and they struggle against it. Mrs. Merriwether starts baking pies and selling it to the Yankee soldiers. Mrs. Elsing turns her home into a boarding house. Hugh Elsing peddles firewood. Though it is very hard and painful for them to cope up with the changed times, they do it stoically. They fight back the menace of freed Negroes by forming the Ku Klux Klan. They succeed in driving the Republican governor out and bringing the Democratic party to power in the South. They survive because they are, what Grandma Fontaine in the novel calls, 'buckwheat people'. They bow to the inevitable like the ripe buckwheat bends in the storm. When the wind has passed the buckwheat springs up straight and strong, similarly, the Southerners spring up after the Reconstruction is over.

Different reasons bring about a change in different characters of the novel. If survival is the reason for the change in Scarlett and the Southerners, love for daughter is the reason for the change that takes place in the

personality of Rhett. Before Bonnie's birth Rhett is a person hated most by the Southerners. He flouts all the conventions of the Southern society, disregards all norms and patterns of proper behaviour. He shamelessly makes profit from the wreckage of Southern civilization. A profiteer and Scallawag, Rhett mixes with Yankees and Carpetbaggers, and is involved in illegal business. But the birth of his daughter Bonnie changes it all. Rhett has seen that Scarlett's son and daughter are not being received in Atlanta's respectable homes. He doesn't wish the same to happen with Bonnie. He wants his daughter to be a respectable person in future and realizes that it is possible only if he himself becomes respectable. So he starts his journey to respectability mending his own ways. He donates money to the church and Atlanta Ladies Society; changes his behaviour completely. Rhett works for the Democratic party in the election campaign dissociating totally from his former friends- the Republicans and Yankees. Slowly Rhett changes to a person loved by the Southerners.

Through the theme of change Mitchell undermines the popular idea of unchanging love in her novel. All the three characters involved in the love theme of the novel undergo a change of feeling at the end. Scarlett's love for Ashley changes to love for Rhett. After Melanie's death Scarlett discovers that Ashley always loved Melanie and nobody else. Moreover, she realizes that she does not love Ashley, though

she tries to oppose this idea in her head-

Useless to try to combat the idea, useless to say to herself : 'But I do love him. I've loved him for years. Love can't change to apathy in a minute'. But it could change and it had changed.¹⁵

Ashley too realises that he has always loved Melanie and he had only a desire for Scarlett's body. Scarlett finds that she is in love with Rhett, at the same time Rhett decides to tell her that his love for her has died. Scarlett tells him about Melanie's last words. Before dying, Melanie has advised Scarlett to be good to Rhett because he loves her. Rhett agrees to this-

'Well she was right, as far as she knew. But, Scarlett, did it ever occur to you that even the most deathless love could wear out?'
She looked at him speechless, her mouth a round O.
'Mine wore out', he went on, 'against Ashley Wilkes and your insane obstinacy that makes you hold on like a bulldog to anything you think you want.... Mine wore out'.
'But love can't wear out!'
'Yours for Ashley did'.¹⁶

Scarlett tries to stop Rhett but it's of no avail because Rhett is tired of it all. Bonnie's death has destroyed his world and the best way for him is, he thinks, to go away. This death of the feeling of deathless love is one unusual idea that Mitchell has introduced in her novel. It is unusual because the authors of romantic stories have always been in conformity with the immortality of love; the love stories do not put forth the idea that love is not

everlasting, it can change.

There are many myths which could be traced in the course of the novel. Prominent among them are the rival myths of Home as Heaven and Home as Hell; and Woman as Redeemer and Woman as Destroyer. After Charles Hamilton's death Tara becomes hell for Scarlett and she goes to Atlanta but this feeling does not last long and we see her visiting Tara from time to time. The idea of identifying home with heaven is more stronger in Scarlett's mind. Everytime she faces a crisis, she turns homeward for warmth and strength. For her, Tara is both a haven and heaven on the earth and she is determined in protecting it from every misfortune. Scarlett can be seen as a Redeemer in this respect. After the death of her parents, after the defeat of Confederacy, she struggles alone to save Tara. She also protects her two sisters Careen and Suellen, her slaves Mammie, Pork, Dilcey and Prissy; her relatives Melanie, Ashley and Will Benteen. On the other hand Scarlett destroys the life of Frank Kennedy. She marries him by deception, destroys the bonds of love between Suellen and Frank. Endangering her honour in Shantytown, she makes the Ku Klux Klan to take revenge for the attack on her Frank gets killed taking part in the Klan's raid on Shantytown. She frustrates Ashley's chances of freedom by preventing him from going to the North for resuming an independent life. She employs him in her saw mill only with the selfish motive of keeping Ashley close to her. Rhett, who helps Scarlett in every difficult situation, also suffers from

her. His dream of love life with Scarlett never comes true because of Scarlett's own behaviour and he faces disillusionment in the end. Thus, Scarlett proves out to be both the Redeemer and the Destroyer.

Even before Mitchell started writing Gone with the Wind, she was popular among her friends as a good storyteller. Gone with the Wind has an interesting story to tell and the author tells it effectively. It's narrative mode rouses the reader's curiosity and evokes a desire to know what happens next. Mitchell unfolds her story stage by stage, each stage contributing its own effect, which however, partly fades out as the succeeding stage is revealed. Mitchell's novel implies a contest. This contest is between its protagonist and society, between the protagonist and the Forces of fate. The story of Gone with the Wind is responsible for the primary interest of the reader in the novel. The novel is divided in two volumes, five parts and fiftythree chapters. The first part is the stage of preliminary description. It introduces the central character of the novel-Scarlett. Most of the other important characters like Melanie Hamilton, Ashley Wilkes, Rhett Butler, Ellen and Gerald O'Hara, and Mammy are also introduced in the first part. The life on the plantation in the ante bellum South is described. Tara and the other surrounding plantations with families like Tarletons, Fontains, the life of comfort they lead is portrayed elaborately in the opening chapters. The story of how

Gerald O'Hara built his plantation and married Ellen Robillard, appears in these chapters. Scarlett is in love with Ashley while every young man in the county is infatuated by her charm. She learns of Ashley's engagement with Melanie and she is shocked. Her efforts to make Ashley marry her fail. In desperation and anger she marries Charles Hamilton who is soon killed in the war.

Scarlett's health is still affected by Ashley's marriage, and at the end of the first part she leaves for Atlanta with her newborn son.

The second part develops the theme of the novel, disclosing a few more aspects of the story's pattern. It opens with Scarlett's arrival at Atlanta and gives the picture of Atlanta city and its society which has women like Mrs. Merriwether, Mrs. Elsing and Mrs. Whiting. Life in Atlanta is still not affected by war. All the Atlantans are contributing in their own way for the Southern Cause but Scarlett does not care a bit for it. She is concerned only with the pursuits of her own pleasures and comforts. Though a widow, she takes part in dancing and attends parties, giving least attention to the opinion of society around her. The novel now focusses on Rhett and his activities. He is busy in making money by running blockades. His activities, his relations with Belle Watling are strongly disliked by respectable citizens, but Rhett too doesn't care about them. Finally Atlanta's society casts him out. After the initial victories the confederacy suffers setbacks and

heavy losses. The news of war casualties involving heavy toll of human life keep on flowing in. Among the dead are many young men whom Scarlett knew. Ashley is declared as missing. However, using all his influence with Yankees, Rhett becomes successful in obtaining the information that Ashley has been taken a prisoner of war.

The third part of the novel gives an unexpected turn to the action and indicates its future. General Johnston begins retreat giving way to the Yankees. The Yankees enter Georgia seize Atlanta finally capturing it. The fall of Atlanta comes as a shock. It gives a new turn to the events of the story. Scarlett is forced to leave Atlanta because of the War trauma. She has to take with her Melanie, who has just given birth to a son. Rhett helps them to get out of Atlanta. At the last moment Rhett decides to join the Confederate army. Rhett's decision to join the Confederate army is an act that is not expected of a person like him. Scarlett arrives at Tara to find that her mother is dead, her father has lost his mind and her plantation is ruined by the Yankees. These events make Scarlett a different person. She starts managing all the affairs at Tara. Many difficulties come in her way but Scarlett keeps on struggling against them all. Melanie, who is frail and weak, stands by Scarlett in every calamity. She even approves of the murder of a Yankee soldier by Scarlett. With the news of the defeat of Confederacy and Ashley's return to Tara, the third part and first volume of the novel ends.

In the second volume, a picture of the South going through Reconstruction is presented. The Reconstruction begins in the opening of the fourth part and with it enter the villains of novel - Wilkerson and Hilton who try to take possession of Tara by imposing high taxes. Scarlett succeeds in saving Tara from them though the price she has to pay for it is very high. She has to deceive Frank Kennedy, her sister's beau, into marrying her. With Frank's money she pays taxes on Tara, and starts lumber business to earn more money. Ku Klux Klan is formed in Atlanta to meet the menace of freed Negroes. When Scarlett is attacked in Shantytown the klan decides to take revenge and raids Shantytown. In this encounter Frank is killed. Rhett saves the other members of the gang from Yankee officers. In this task Belle Watling also helps by giving false evidence. Gerald O'Hara dies at Tara. The fourth part of the novel presents the fundamental issue of the novel in a climactic form. Events reach a state of climax with Scarlett getting married to Rhett at the end of this part.

The last part of the novel completes its action, elucidates the idea and expresses the final significance of the story. Scarlett's life with Rhett is spent in luxury and fun. She builds a new grand house in Atlanta. She spends her time in the company of Scallawags and Carpetbaggers who are extremely hated by the Southerners. Scarlett is almost cast out of the society in which she has no respectable friend except Melanie. While Scarlett has

drifted away from the society, Rhett finds it necessary to assimilate in it for the sake of his daughter's future. Working hard for it, he gains respectability in the society, but with Bonnie's death it loses meaning for him. He also realises that his love for Scarlett has worn out. At the same time the incident of Melanie's death brings Scarlett the knowledge that she actually loves Rhett and not Ashley. But the time has run out now as Rhett finally decides to leave Scarlett.

The framework which holds together the five parts is strong. The action is manipulated in such a way that it succeeds in achieving its purpose of stimulating curiosity. The plot of Gone with the Wind presents characters, action and atmosphere as an organic whole. Almost all the critics of the book have praised Mitchell's skill in the construction of the novel. The Civil War begins and ends in the first volume; Reconstruction period starts with the beginning of second volume and when the novel ends, the end of Reconstruction is in sight. Both these periods are given equal scope and attention. The five parts represent different stages of the story, each part is balanced, making the story's progress systematic. For a massive novel like Gone with the Wind which introduces more than fifty characters and numerous incidents, there always exists the danger of making the story haphazard, unwieldy and disorganized. The unified structural pattern of this novel hardly gives any room for this to happen. All the

events are woven together so as to give an organic unity to the novel. The plot of Gone with the Wind gives form to the story, individuality to its characters and singularity to its presentation.

Mitchell bestows special attention on portrayal of her characters. She takes care to see that the characters she presents are neither mere automatons wanting in the life force, nor the mere mouthpieces projecting her theories, views and opinions, but authentic creatures of flesh and blood having individuality of their own. The characters in Gone with the Wind are real, credible, convincing and true to life as the novelist intends them to be.

The novel opens with the introductory statement about its central character Scarlett - "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm"⁷. This is a slightly startling statement about the heroine whose beauty is described in the next few lines -

But it was an arresting face, pointed of chin, square of jaw. Her eyes were pale green without a touch of hazel, starred with bristly black lashes and slightly tilted at the ends. Above them, her thick black brows slanted upward, cutting a startling oblique line in her magnolia white skin....⁸

A description of Scarlett's symmetrical figure follows this. Undoubtedly, Scarlett is beautiful and she is well aware of it. Her looks are her main assets. She uses her beauty to keep men hanging around her. She is so vain that she cannot endure men being attracted by anyone but

herself. Her heart is set on Ashley whom she loses. Vanity is a strong trait in her character. At Ashley's engagement, when she is refused to be married by Ashley, she overhears Honey Wilkes's acid remarks about her and decides at once to punish her. For this sole reason she uses her charms on Honey's beau Charles Hamilton and marries him. Selfishness is another aspect of her character. She can go to any extent for her own personal gains. She marries Frank Kennedy and Rhett Butler not because she has any love for them, but purely out of self interest.

There is another side to Scarlett's personality. She too has some good qualities. She is not feeble as is the Southern lady. She has tremendous strength and determination in herself. These qualities help Scarlett survive the tumult of Civil War and Reconstruction. She has no feeling of nationalism but she hates the Yankees because they have destroyed her home and plantation. She does every possible thing to protect her home and her family. Time and again the forces of fate beat Scarlett only to see her emerging stronger than ever before. She is callous, unscrupulous in her business deals. Because of this she is rejected by her own society. Her behaviour makes Rhett leave her in the end but still the sympathy of the reader is with Scarlett. It is so because her character is a human character with the shortcomings of human being. This perhaps is one of the reasons why Scarlett appeals to all the readers.

Though the main focus of the novel is on Scarlett,

this does not do any injustice to other important characters like Rhett Butler, Melanie and Ashley Wilkes. Rhett is introduced at the barbecue scene on Ashley's engagement. Though he comes from a respectable family, he is not received in the home of respectable people. The reason is that he has refused to marry a girl in his past. The reader is told that Rhett had no close relation with this girl whose claim for marriage was that he had taken her out once. Expelled from the society, Rhett starts making money through illegal means. He is handsome, very intelligent and possesses a fine sense of humour. It is only Rhett who is able to see through Scarlett's mind and understand her. They both are alike in their selfishness and disregard for the conventions set by the society. Both are attracted to each other but Scarlett is unable to understand her feelings towards Rhett. Rhett sees the war from a sceptical point of view. In this respect, he is like Ashley. Both know the uselessness of this war but both fight for the South. Rhett is a speculator, a friend of the Yankees, but he actually loves the South. That he has a tender heart is shown by his love for the children and his helping the Atlanta ladies. Full of self-assurance, wit and courage, Rhett becomes the tragic figure of the novel in the end because of his final disillusionment with Scarlett and death of his daughter Bonnie.

Ashley Wilkes represents those Southerners, who after the Civil War tore their world apart, could never

live life in reality. Ashley is an intellectual whose life before the war is spent in comfort and luxury. After the war he sees the fall of his society and is not strong enough to start life anew. He is a weak person who can live only with support from others. He thinks that he loves Scarlett but doesn't marry her because Scarlett is not an intellectual like himself. He is a gentleman and cannot have sexual relations with Scarlett though he has a passion for her. Ashley cannot change to face the changed times so he has no place in the New South. His realisation of his weakness makes his life more painful. Ashley is a symbol of the old South whose fall with the passing time is inevitable.

Melanie is the ideal lady of the novel. Every virtue of the ideal woman can be found in her. Good natured, honest, helping, innocent Melanie can only see the positive side of the people. Therefore she stands by Scarlett in Scarlett's good as well as bad deeds. Nobody can be rude to Melanie even when she maintains relations with social outcasts like Rhett and Scarlett. Belle Watling helps the Klansmen only because she wants to save Melanie's husband. The only woman high in Rhett's esteem is Melanie. Her character is as important as is the central character. In the novel the death of no other character is as touching as the death of Melanie. In the creation of such an ideal character the novelist has to save it from the danger of its appearing unreal. Mitchell has made the character of Melanie ideal at the same time convincing.

Gerald and Ellen O'Hara are the characters who help in building the central character's personality. Gerald's Irish blood gives Scarlett a strength to get through hard times. Gerald, like most of the Americans of his time, has built his world in America through his presence of mind and hard work. His wife Ellen is the mainspring of the O'Hara family. Though Ellen is an ideal wife for Gerald and gives him no reason to complain, she cannot forget her real love. She dies with the name of her cousin Phillippe Robillard on her lips. This trait is passed on from the mother to daughter. Scarlett imagines of Ashley everytime she is being loved by Rhett. Ellen can hide the reality of her love throughout her life because of her ladylike quality. This quality is not present in Scarlett so Scarlett cannot hide her love for Ashley. Ellen's life is closely connected with Gerald's life and her death heralds the death of Gerald.

Mitchell has made all her Negro characters lovable. Mammy, Pork, Dilcey, Prissy and Big Sam are all slaves of the O'Hara family but nowhere in the family do we find any cruel treatment given to them. The O'Haras treat the Negroes as the members of their own family. Mammy is the most important of the Negro characters. She performs the role of Scarlett's surrogate mother. After Ellen's death Mammy goes to Atlanta with Scarlett because she wants to keep an eye on her and take precaution that Scarlett behaves as a lady should. Dilcey feeds her own milk to

Melanie's child. Pork hunts for food when Tara is in ruins. Big Sam fights for the South, he saves Scarlett in Shantytown. All of them act with the feeling that they belong to the O'Hara family and Tara. That is why Big Sam returns to Tara after the War; Pork, Dilcey and Prissy do not leave Tara; Mammy finally goes to Tara after Bonnie's death. Miss Pittypat's servant Uncle Peter is hurt by the remarks of the Yankee housewives because he has never been called a nigger by any white person until then. The negro-white relationship is seen purely from Southern point of view but nevertheless, the characters of Negroes have been made lively.

The minor characters of Gone with the Wind are as real and consistent as are the major ones. They are clearly significant of certain interesting elements of human nature. The Tarleton, Fontaine and Wilkes families represent the plantation people and Merriwether, Elsing and Meade families represent the Atlanta society. The characters from these families help the reader in grasping the nature of these two sections who together constitute the society of the South. The firmness and strength of Southern ladies is seen in women like Grandma Fontaine, Mrs. Merriwether and Mrs. Tarleton. Frank Kennedy, Dr. Meade and Archie stand for Southern manhood and chivalry. Tom Slattery and Hilton are the characters with a villainous streak. Belle Watling, the mistress of a brothel, shows through her actions that she too has a good side to her character. Every minor character in the novel has some role or the other to perform.

Mitchell adopts both the direct and indirect method of delineation in the presentation of her characters. Some traits of the characters are shown directly to the reader while some characteristics are conveyed indirectly through the necessary inferences from the narrative itself.

The setting in Gone with the Wind has an indisputable value of its own. Though setting is never used as an end in itself, it is yet an important factor in Mitchell's art. The scene of action shifts frequently between only two places - Tara and Atlanta, the rural South and urban South. Mitchell pictures both these places with equal vividness. South as the setting is the very matrix in which the characters are fixed. It serves as the medium which sustains, envelops, nourishes and controls the characters of Gone with the Wind, and determines their manner of being. In the very first chapter the reader is made acquainted with the rural South-

It was a savagely red land, blood-coloured after rains, brick-dust in droughts, the best cotton land in the world. It was a pleasant land of white houses, peaceful ploughed fields and sluggish yellow rivers, but a land of contrasts, of brightest sun-glare and densest shade. The plantation clearings and miles of cotton fields smiled up to a warm sun, placid, complacent. At their edges rose the virgin forests, dark and cool even in the hottest noons, mysterious, a little sinister, the sighing pines seeming to wait with an age-old patience, to threaten with soft sighs : 'Be careful! Be careful! We had you once. We can take you back again.'

When the scene shifts from this exotic land to Atlanta,

a town which has recently become a city, it is described with equal vividness. Atlanta has grown because of its railroads. It is a railroad junction connecting the South with other parts of the nation. In the wartime it has become an important centre of activity and a precious target for the enemy. In the war Sherman burns Atlanta and the people build it again. But it changes drastically after the war. Mitchell uses the picture of Atlanta after war to convey the effect of the aftermath of war--

The town was roaring - wide open like a frontier village, making no effort to cover its vices and sins. Saloons blossomed overnight, two and sometimes three in a block, and after nightfall the streets were full of drunken men, black and white, reeling from wall to kerb and back again. Thugs, pickpockets and prostitutes lurked in the unlit alleys and shadowy streets. Gambling houses ran full blast and hardly a night passed without its shooting or cutting affray. Respectable citizens were scandalized to find that Atlanta had a large and thriving red-light district, larger and more thriving than during the war. All night long pianos jangled from behind drawn shades and rowdy songs and laughter flowed out, punctuated by occasional screams and pistol shots. The inmates of these houses were bolder than the prostitutes of the war days, and brazenly hung out of their windows and called to passers-by. And on Sunday afternoons, the handsome closed carriages of the madams of the district rolled down the main streets, filled with girls in their best finery, taking the air from behind lowered silk shades.¹⁰

This picture shows the condition of south under Reconstruction. Similarly, the contrast between the scenes of Tara before the war and Tara after the war gives an idea of the destruction done by Yankees. The exotic ante bellum South is turned in to a waste land by the Union Army. The setting of Gone with the Wind and its characters are inter--

related. Moreover, it helps in bringing out the significance of the theme of change underlying the narrative.

The analysis of Gone with the Wind along the line of its theme, plot, characterization and setting does not help to expose fully the merits and significance of the work. It is so because this novel belongs to the realm of popular literature. The popular novels are not read for the virtuosity of their authors or the elegance of their structure or style. They are also not read for the precision of their language or their subtlety of thought. They are never prescribed for the classroom study of literature; majority of the critics do not regard them as literature itself. The popular novels have been differentiated from the mainstream literature into sub or para-literature by some critics.

The average reader reads a novel with the singular purpose of finding entertainment. A novel is written for its readers. A reader can find pleasure in reading novels of Thackeray and Jane Austen as well as Margaret Mitchell and Desmond Bagley. The books belonging to popular literature may not have high literary merit but surely they interest the average reader. In the Twentieth century when novel has become the most popular form of literature, popular novels suffer neglect at the hands of the critics. The literary critics demand bit too much literary excellence from these novels. On the contrary, the average readers read fiction

with no other motive than that of escaping the tedium of time. They read to escape from thoughts that tease and fancies that cheat. It is thought that they miss the true purpose of reading. Moreover, they are considered guilty of the inexcusable crime of regarding fiction as an anodyne and as an anaesthesia. The literary critic does not believe that popular reading may furnish subject matter for important and fascinating studies, so he prefers to remain aloof from the best selling books.

The fact that there is a vast gap between the quality of novels considered as high-brow literature and the popular novels considered as middle brow or low-brow literature, does not justify the cause for the neglect of popular literature. It can only mean that there are two different types of novels and so they have to be judged by different standards. Evaluating Gone with the Wind by the standards of High literature would not help in understanding its significance fully. It has to be studied as a novel belonging to the category of popular literature, as a bestseller. It would also help if it is studied in comparison with a modern bestseller like Jackie Collins's Love head.

What are the ingredients of a bestseller? It is difficult to pin point all the ingredients because there are a number of successful books with a number of subjects. But some features of a bestseller are prominently visible. A bestseller is successful because it is liked by the mass of readers. Its most important feature is that it provides an

interesting reading experience by exciting the reader. Several novels produce this excitement by emphasizing different elements like horror, murder, violence, sex relations, extraordinary adventures and sentiment. A popular novel may emphasize on any one of these separately or may have a mixture of them. The thrillers of Desmond Bagley, Frederick Forsyth, Robert Ludlum have a combination of violence, murder and extraordinary adventure in them. Agatha Christie gives importance to only murder and its investigation in most of her mysteries. The picturization of regular as well as irregular sex relations dominate Harold Robbins's books. Barbara Cartland relies on producing excitement by giving stress on sentiment in her romances.

A popular novel has to be vivid in its portrayal of scenes, action and persons. The creation of a personality like James Bond has become immensely popular because of its vivid and attractive portrayal by its author Ian Fleming. The same is the case with Agatha Christie's creation of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Frederick Forsyth's lengthy descriptions about the international illegal arms trade and the activities of mercenary armies are a major source of interest in his Dogs of War. Other elements like humour, fantasy and religious appeal also attribute a great deal in making a novel interesting and successful.

Most of the popular novelists adopt a simple

method to narrate their story. They either tell it directly or make the protagonist narrate it. This is one reason why the reader prefers to read their novels. In Absalom, Absalom! Faulkner tells the story of Thomas Sutpen employing a technique which is complicated enough to baffle an ordinary reader. The story is told to Quentin Compson by his grandfather and Rosa Coldfield, Quentin's contemplations appear intermittently in the narrative. There can be no question about the high literary merit of Absalom, Absalom!, but surely this narrative could not grip the average reader's attention. Therefore, though published in the same year, dealing with the same time in Southern history, Absalom, Absalom! sold poorly, while Mitchell's novel had a grand popular response.

Love head is a good example of modern bestselling novel. Though not as successful as Gone with the Wind, it has similarities with Mitchell's novel. Both novels are written by American women. In both novels women are the central characters. Love head is set in the America of nineteen seventies. It tells a story of three women who accomplish revenge on their common enemy. The novel opens with the murder of Margaret Lawrence Brown at a public meeting. Margaret gets killed because she has been working through her organisation 'Free Women Now' for the cause of the prostitutes. Enzo Bassalino's mafia gang which runs the brothels, has to suffer losses because of Margaret's activities. So Enzo Bassalino orders to kill her. The killer is a Charlie Mailer who gets killed by a girl named

Lola. Lola has suffered at the hands of Charlie so she kills him and gives information about Bassalino to Margarate's sisters. Lara and Beth are Margaret's sisters, Rio Java is her dearest friend. These three women decide to destroy Enzo's three sons Frank, Nick, and Angelo by using their sex as their weapon.

Dukey K. Williams is the black singing star who is the lover of Margaret. He also wants the revenge of his lover's death. He hires a black criminal Leroy and gets Frank and Angelo killed. Enzo is killed by Mary Ann August, a girl who has become prostitute because of him. As Lara discovers that she is in love with Nick Bassalino, she saves him. Rio Java continues Margaret's work for the prostitute and is killed in the end.

There is excessive violence in Love head. The picture of mafia don, his family and activities, which became a trend after the success of Mario Puzo's Godfather, is used by Collins in her novel. There are many similarities between her sketch of mafia and the mafia in Godfather. Collins also seems to give extra emphasis on picturing sex relations. The use of sex as a weapon by its protagonists is an idea which gives Collins an ample scope to sketch erotic sceness. The combination of sex with violence like in many other bestsellers, is used here to produce emotional excitement in the reader. In some scenes of the novel sex is mixed with violence to produce a combined effect. The murder of Enzo by Mary Ann August is

one such scene where she kills him in his bed. Jackie Collins presents this scene as follows-

She reached the bed and leaned over him, her breasts dangling tantalisingly above his face. He opened his mouth and attempted to cram an obliging nipple in.

She giggled, and he felt her fiddling with his clothes. He closed his eyes and sighed as he felt the erection beginning.

His mouth was full of her when she shot him precisely and silently straight through the heart.¹¹

Mitchell's book does not have the use of sex and violence to grip the attention of the reader. Instead of them, the emotional excitement is produced by an emphasis on sentiment. This emphasis is so strong that sometimes the book stands on the verge of becoming a melodrama. The scene after the destruction of Tara where a hungry Scarlett goes to Twelve Oaks in a search of food, is a fine example of this. Scarlett finds a short row of radishes along the negro cabin and eats it without rubbing the dirt off. The coarse and peppery radish brings tears to her eyes. She vomits and lies in dirt for some time. When she gets up to go home hunger and anguish are the feelings that overcome her-

Hunger gnawed at her empty stomach again and she said aloud: 'As God is my witness, as God is my witness, the Yankees aren't going to lick me. I'm going to live through this, and when it's over I'm never going to be hungry again. No, nor any of my folks. If I have to steal or kill - as God is my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again'.¹²

Margaret Mitchell and Jackie Collins use different elements to produce emotional excitement. Love head is not a

historical romance, the elements used in Gone with the Wind are bound to be different from it. America in Collins's novel is the America of a century later than that of Mitchell's novel. The society has changed a lot. But women's place in it is still secondary. The women protagonists of both the novels are struggling women though the characters of Love head do not rise to the stature of Scarlett and Melanie.

In Gone with the Wind the motive for action is survival and success; in Love head it is the cause of the prostitutes and revenge. But the two novels differ very much in their treatment of these themes. The pace of action in Love head is so fast that it does not allow the reader to take a pause and think. It is probably the very intention of Jackie Collins that the reader should not put down the book until he finishes it. The same is the case with most other thrillers, mysteries and spy novels whom the reader often finishes in one sitting. He seldom prefers to turn to the same book again. Most of the readers of Gone with the Wind tend to read it again and again untiredly. The reason for this is the finesse with which Mitchell has treated her material. This is the reason which has made Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind a novel par excellence in the field of popular literature.

Notes:-

1. Margaret Mitchell, Gone with the Wind, (London: Pan Books and Mac millan, 1974),p.411
2. Ibid.,p.425
3. Ibid.,p.535
4. Ibid.,p.592
5. Ibid.,p.991
6. Ibid.,p.1003
7. Ibid.,p.5
8. Ibid.,p.5
9. Ibid.,p.10
10. Ibid.,p.642
11. Jackie Collins, Love head, (London: Pan Books,1984) pp.147,148
12. Margaret Mitchell, Gone with the Wind,p.419

