

CHAPTER 4.

CONCLUSION

A study of Margaret Mitchell's personal life shows that there is a relation between life she lived and life she pictured in her novel. A reflection of the personalities that came in contact with Mitchell in her own life can be found in her novel. The similarities between Red Upshaw and Rhett Butler, Mitchell's parents and Scarlett's parents are succinctly visible. It cannot be claimed that Scarlett is completely a persona of Mitchell herself. However, there are some traits common in the character of the heroine and her creator. Scarlett's courage, boldness and disregard for the conventions of the society remind of Margaret Mitchell in her youth. Like Scarlett, Mitchell had to take care of the men in her family at an early stage of her life. Some experiences and incidents in Scarlett's life are similar to those that came in Mitchell's life. Some characters of the novel are based on real life people whose stories were told to Mitchell in her childhood. Mitchell's knowledge of the Civil War helped in making the book historically authentic. Civil War was a topic of great interest to her and she was somewhat obsessed with it. This is the reason why she studied the history of Civil War in detail and chose to write on it. The period of Civil War and Reconstruction as presented in Gone with the Wind is very much closer to reality.

Though Gone with the Wind is her only published work, Mitchell's development as a writer had started much earlier. Her schoolday efforts of writing stories and her later attempt of writing a novella show her ambition of becoming a writer. She wrote the novel because she very much wanted to tell the story to public. The writing of the novel was done in her own way which was organized. The popular myth that she was a housewife who wrote just to spend her free time is exploded. A close scrutiny of her writing period would stand a testimony to this. Mitchell took one full decade to finish off the novel partly because of the crisis she faced in her personal life and partly because she was not sure of her potentialities as an artist. The encouragement and help given by her husband was an important factor in the creation of the book.

In the year of its publication (1936) Gone with the Wind received good critical attention. Critics like John Crowe Ransom wrote reviews on it. The general feeling of the critics in this period seems to be that Mitchell was a gifted storyteller and her novel had a compelling dramatic or architectural structure. After this year there came a period in which the novel was more or less forgotten by the critics. During the period roughly ranging from 1937 to 1970, very few studies on the novel appeared. Then came a revival in the critical interest for the book. Significant studies were published by critics like Leslie Fiedler and Louis Rubin. The period after 1970 saw a number of scholars

turning to the novel for study. This study was certainly different from that made by the earlier critics. Now with the change in overall atmosphere of criticism, Gone with the Wind was looked at from fresh, new and different viewpoints. Leslie Fiedler tried to reveal archetypal patterns, mythic figures and race relations in the book. Feminist redefinitions of Gone with the Wind were attempted by critics like Anne Jones. Apart from these many other important studies like the comprehensive collection of essays by Darden Asbury Fyron have been published lately. The critical response Gone with the Wind received in the beginning, its neglect till 1970, and revival of interest after 1970 are roughly the three periods of the critical reception of the book.

The critical analysis of Gone with the Wind brings out its merits clearly. The primary interest of the novel is in its story. It has a good story which is told effectively. Each stage of the story contributes its own effect rousing the curiosity of the reader. Mitchell's skill in the construction of the plot is indisputable. The novel presents a theme about the phenomenon of change. In the action of the novel different changes take place in social and political situation as well as in the personality and emotions of the characters. This theme is connected with the theme of survival or gumption which, in Mitchell's opinion, was the theme of her novel. The rival myths of Woman as Redeemer and Woman as Destroyer, and Home as Heaven and Home as Hell can also be seen in Gone with the Wind.

The characters of the novel do not appear unreal. Every major and minor character has its own task to perform in the action of the novel. The setting has its own importance. It brings out the significance of the theme and also envelopes the characters. On the whole the novel appears as a harmonious combination of story, plot, characters and setting.

The sales figures of Gone with the Wind have created a record in publishing history. This magnificent success adds another important aspect to the study of the novel. It becomes necessary to look at Gone with the Wind as a popular novel. The study from this point of view shows that this novel has the ingredients common to a popular novel. It evokes a strong excitement in the reader which indeed becomes a reason that contributes abundantly to its grand success. It has something of interest for the reader of every age group. It can be labelled as a domestic drama or a historical romance but ultimately it belongs to the tradition of popular literature. As this kind of literature is different from serious literature it is to be evaluated along a different line. One can not try to find the subtleties of style or technique in this type of literature, but its study has become important especially in recent times. The study of a popular novel consists of searching for the presence of myths and archetypal patterns as well as the reason of its appeal to the people. The novel is also looked at from this perspective in the present study.

The comparison of Gone with the Wind with the modern bestseller like Love head by Jackie Collins clearly demonstrates common ingredients in both these novels. However, Mitchell's work stands out distinctly from the modern bestseller mainly because of the treatment of its theme. Usually, the life of a bestseller is always short lived. In this respect Gone with the Wind's survival in the minds of the readers, indicates its power. Mitchell's novel gives an unforgettable reading experience, an experience which the reader wants to go through again. The longevity of this novel has proved its status as a classic in the popular literature.