

CHAPTER – IV

THE LITTLE GIRLS

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The Little Girls, is one of the mature novels of Elizabeth Bowen written at the age of sixty, and published in 1964. It is dedicated to Ursula Vernon. It is one of Bowen's quality texts dealing about memory, childhood and the power of fortuitous association.

Bowen's **The Little Girls** is the story of three women around sixty-Dinah, Clare, and Sheila who are reunited in the novel. The novel is consisted of three parts. The first part narrates their reunion, the second part relates^{to} their school life, and the third part is about events after their reunion.

The initial scene of the novel begins with Dinah and her partner, Frank, burying objects in the cave. Dinah is the protagonist of the novel who is an exceptionally attractive woman in her fifties. She is prone to be enthusiastic and much more recently been in an interesting task of burying objects in the cave for future posterity Mrs. Coral is her friend, staying at the other side of the village in a Stone Villa. She is past forty and takes foreign students as her guests. The cave appears to her as a small museum. Dinah is of^{the} opinion that if they vanish in future they will be considered belonging to a race, but she wants them to be thought as personalities. To reconstruct history, one must have expressive objects indicating people. Mrs Coral's chance question – who's going to seal it up? - sends Dinah into a vague state.

Francis is Maltese orphan, helping to maintain Dinah's house, 'Applegate', built of stone. Mrs. Coral's question and the sight of an uneven swing upsets Dinah. She finds that she is repeating her childhood experiences. She is obsessed with a desire to find out her long-lost two school-mates whom she last saw in 1914. Due to war they had been separated from each another with great anxiety. Dinah sends out nearly £100 worth of newspaper advertisements until two women respond. Her old friends feel that their comfortable and settled life will be disturbed when they are summoned by the voice of the past. Clare is the most uncomfortable with Dinah though Dinah is quite at ease with her.

Sheila and Clare meet each other in the tea-room of Knightsbridge department store. Both of them are astonished to see each other for they are old women now. Sheila is now Mrs. Arthworth. Her husband owns Beaker and Arthworth at Southstone. He is an estate agent too. Clare, too, is married, but keeps on her first name, Miss Burkin Jones. She is a business-woman and owns 'Mopsie Pye' gift-shops in London, in Southstone and at many other places. They discuss about their family life and the past days. Both Sheila and Clare are of opinion that Dinah has spent a lot of money on advertisement. Clare doesn't like Dinah advertising for her whim, and Sheila thinks that she is paining her. They are eagerly interested in knowing why Dinah has called them and what's she up to. To Clare it is an attack of seizure. They want to take legal

action against her. Clare being a business minded woman feels that such kind of advertisement has affected her business.

Then all the three friends decide to meet at the Crossroad of the Hillman. Clare turns up, but Sheikie does not come. Clare is not interested in coming. So she looks sore. She feels that Dinah's constant meetings has made her life a hell. Both Dinah and Clare wait for Sheikie's arrival. Meanwhile they discuss of Sheikie. Dinah reveals that Sheikie has answered all her letters. But Clare is surprised at Sheikie's response because Sheikie shows disinterest in Dinah. Clare wants Dinah to know that Sheikie is not interested to come. which hurts Dinah for Sheikie plays a double game. As Sheikie doesn't turn up, Dinah and Clare go back to 'Aplegate'. On reaching 'Aplegate' Clare notices the croaked swing in Dinah's garden. She also remembers the croaked swing which is in her school garden. As she observes the croaked swing, she feels that it is difficult but good to master the Croaked swing, Sheikie, though not interested to come has already reached 'Applegate' in time. All the three discuss about their past and present life. Dinah's main purpose in searching her school friends is to know from them what they have to do about the coffer which they hid in their childhood days. Now, lately she has been hiding things in the cave and tries to preserve past activity. Dinah takes her friends to the cave and they are surprised at her collection of things.

Part-II of the novel deals with the flashback their past days of 1914. It takes place largely at St. Agatha during the summer when Dinah and her friends are eleven and studying in class IV. The three girls Dinah, Clare and Sheila are also called as Dicey, Mumbo and Sheikie.^{respectively} St. Agatha School is out of town on a plateau. Most of the girls are day-boarded. Miss Ardingfay is the founder and Headmistress of the school. The school is considered to be best for it organised games, looping, swimming, prep and many other activities. In the school lawn there is uneven swing. Miss Ardingfay is a good administrator and keeps vigilan. watch on students. She appears to the students like the imperial votaress when she moves about the school. When the three girls are in IV class, their class is decorated with clock board of lists, which inspirates them. Miss Kinmate ~~teaches~~ teaches English. Once Clare readsa poem, but the teacher accuse her for ruining a beautiful poem. Sheila has read the poem with wonderful moderation. Sheila, as a child is clever, knows dancing and often goes to rinks. She comes from a respectable family with upper links.

Dicey stays with her widowed mother at 'Feverel Cottage' who loves pieces of collection, especially China.^{objects} Clare comes to meet Dinah and sees Mrs. Piggott, Dinah's mother ^{is} deeply interested in reading the novel without taking any notice of Clare's presence. Clare does not disturb her, she observes the things in the sitting room, and becomes

mystic of this world of possessions for they move from place to place with few things as Clare's father works in army. Mrs. Piggott then looks at Clare, and warns ^{her} and her friends for blowing Gelignite box last week in Sheila's shed room. Mrs. Burkin Jones has sent a word of this incident to Mrs. Piggott. So Mrs. Piggott wants such incident to be avoided. Major Burkin Jones often visits Mrs. Piggott for they love each other, but they do not disrupt their families despite having an affair. The two friends Clare and Dicey are caught up in this world of adult emotions, but their friendship is intact.

Sheikie is most active of all her friends. She takes part in all activities. Only it is Dicey who swims faster than Sheikie. The School is not often visited by relatives, but it happens one day when the girls go to play, Elfreda's aunt meets Dicey on the ground. She wears a peculiar hat^{or} straw-omitting bad smell. She praises the school for giving girls the freedom they need. She wants to know whether Romans had landed there. This raises the curiosity ^{of} Dicey. She always feels that people leave things or bury them as Romans used to do. The aunt is very practical in her attitude, and she doesn't agree^{with} Dicey. She is of the opinion that as time goes on things bury themselves.

Dicey has a cousin who looks after them, and often gives support in odd times of their life. The girls have already developed an anxiety to collect various things like pistol, old chicken bones, but they fail to get

rich jewels. They want to hide these things and bury them. All three girls go to Southstone market and buy a dog's chain from Fagg's gold fish shop. In the shop, the three friends noticed that the windows of the shop reflect the old High Street which appears to them a picturesque sight. They decide to buy a coffer but Sheikie does not like any one of them. Instead she prefers a coffer from her house.

The Beakers stay in '9 Ravenswood Garden'. Sheila has two married sisters. Her bedroom is richly decorated, and is supposed to be most beautiful in Southstone town. Sheila keeps her room clean and tidy. All the girls select the coffer and decide to place it without others' notice. This shows that the things are not representative of a race but they are personal. Dicey and Sheikie transfer the coffer in an empty greenhouse. This is kept secret from Clare for she lives away in a Regiment Camp in 'Virginia Lodge'. She has two brothers, of whom one dies of meningitis and other comes to live with them in holidays. Mrs. Burkin Jones has planted many types of flowers, and she likes especially nasturtiums but Clare hates these flowers. Clare wants to place in coffer a paper in unknown language. So she does not help her mother to water the plants. She loves solitude which gives her an opportunity to muse. Mrs. Burkin Jones is conscientious and judges Clare's friends judiciously.

All three friends gather in St. Agatha's thickets with electric torches. They dig a pit and place the things with a written paper. Clare has written on it in blood. This is done when Southstone people go to watch a celebrity. They put sparkle from acting box, tiara coil, clotted trowch and vertebrae of larger mammal. They wonder who's going to seal it up. They think they can seal with red wax, and put a print of thumbs. A picnic party is arranged by Olive Pocock at Wanchurch, twelve miles away from Southstone. There everyone is invited. Everyone has his own plans for summer. Dicey and Mrs. Piggott want to go to Cumberland, Sheikie to Herne Bay and Clare has no plans yet. The children enjoy the party. Major Jones is forced to talk to his lady love Mrs. Piggott, Dicey feels excluded and runs to Clare to bid her farewell but Clare goes off with her father triumphantly without noticing her. The picnic ends on July 23, 1914 and then the war breaks and the girls are separated from one another.

The third part is related to the lives of old women in the present. Clare is a self-made woman running a 'Mopsie Pye' shop. She is busy in her work, and Dinah comes to meet her whereas Clare doesn't take much interest in Dinah's visit. Clare is perfectly a practical woman realising that it is not able to keep friendship going even when one is old. So she feels that without Dinah's touch she is perfectly going on well for fifty years. Clare is of the opinion that one cannot meet each other often

and warns Dinah not to rock the boat. Dinah comments on Sheikie's life for there are many mysteries about her, who leaves dancing, and has no children married Trevor, Dinah's remarks hurt Clare. Both of them agree to meet at Grand in Southstone. After reaching Sutland Gate Dinah writes a letter to Clare to send butter knife which fascinates her.

Dinah feels compelled to complete the unfinished business of the past. She instigates the digging up of the coffer and all three women join at Grand in Southstone with axes in their hand. But it turns out to be empty, reflecting that it is impossible to reconstruct the past as it is. Dinah is affected mentally whereas Clare and Sheila are not. After Dinah's departure, Clare and Sheila go for a walk. Sheila begins to recollect her past days. In London she fails to make a career in dancing. Sheila's deep sorrow is that she couldn't marry Aubrey who has been killed. Sheikie has double sorrow for Aubrey is lost forever and ^{the} career of dancing comes to an end. At last she marries Trevor at the age of thirty and looks after her step-children. She is surrounded by tender memories of past. Sheikie feels that Dinah has got everything in life but she fails to value it. Sheila doesn't like Dinah who comes to Ravenswood Garden with a wild animal in captivity. As they return from the walk Trevor goes with Sheila and Clare returns home in a mini car.

Dinah returns to Applegate and is happy to see the butter knife sent by Clare. She is worried of Dahlias for it has been caught by frost. Dinah does not like the idea of mason sealing up the cave. Clare comes to buy the masks of Dinah's neighbour, Clare helps out ~~the~~ poor woman. Francis and Clare feel that Dinah has a shock. Dinah and Clare go to Frank's house but in his absence Dinah reveals about her mother's death at Cumberland. Dinah is shocked and turns to Clare for comfort but Clare is not responsive, Dinah reminds her too much of Mrs. Piggott whom Clare has loved with child's intensity. To this, Clare has no answer. Dinah further tells of her father's death who dies under the train ~~because of~~ short of money. She always feels that widows run in their family. Dinah accuses Clare of not having affection which hurts Clare, she calls Dinah an enchantress's child, and doesn't believe her. ~~but~~ Dinah is shocked by her accusation and still feels Clare loves her. Clare deserts leaving ~~it~~ alone.

Dinah is sick and is in bed. Sheila comes to nurse her. Her children and grand children come to see her. The sons ~~show~~ their silence and doesn't believe in Frank's accusation of Clare. They are not serious of their mother. Dinah is a widow like her mother but the two boys had various cousins for moral support. The grandchildren of Dinah sit comfortably cutting pictures of magazines and are safe in their own world. They are not affected by Dinah's ill-health. Moreover friendship

triumphs at the end. Sheila finds some comfort from the renewed friendship. She also tells the story of her lost love to Clare and admits to Dinah's son that she has deposited in the coffer her sixth toe, Congenital anomaly which has shamed her in girlhood, which is kept secret from her friends. Clare and Dinah take long time to sort out their misunderstandings. Clare realises that Dinah merely wants to be consoled for the losses of her childhood, rather than to take Mrs. Piggott's place as an unconscious temptress. At the end, Clare remembers the picnic scene of 1914 when she fails to bid her distrusted friend farewell. She finally says goodbye to Dinah for now, and then. Dinah wakes as if from a bad dream. And the novel ends on an affirmative note and also on the redemptive recognition of loss and the hope for some restitution in the future.

This novel has certain autobiographical shades. The novel is the story of three women of around sixty years age who are called Dinah, Clare and Sheila reunited in the novel. The novel is also the story of three little girls who spend their school-life together in St. Agatha school. In this novel Bowen returns to her own life of Ireland and London in particular. The Southstone area setting of this novel reflects Bowen's childhood experiences. Bowen's suppressed feelings of childhood are lent expression into characters of **The Little Girls**, specifically in the character of Dinah. One incident of her childhood

appears where Bowen instigated a burial ritual at her school called Harpenden Hall soon after her mother's death. She buried a biscuit tin containing some cryptic warning. Bowen was not allowed to attend her mother's funeral ceremony as children are forbidden to see the corpse for they believe it will wake up later on in the grave. This suppression of not watching the funeral ceremony is found in this novel too. **The Little Girls** bury the coffer with objects believing that it contains still. The novel further deals with the details of purchasing things for burial and making plans excluded when her mother dies. This suggests that the episode of burying coffer compensate for that exclusion and allow her an opportunity to explore her early anxieties about death. The picnic scene celebrates at the end of summer term which happens to be not a time of temporary leave taking for the war broke out and **The Little Girls** are separated from one another. This also reflects that the goodbye of **The Little Girls** are unexpectedly permanent just as Mrs. Bowen's death has been for her daughter. Dinah, the protagonist of the novel, has much in common with Ursula Vernon, a neighbour at Bowen's Court, who appears to be extremely and agelessly beautiful to Bowen. Lady Ursula's childhood has been disrupted like that of Bowen. Bowen is close to her and has spent happy days loitering around with her and so she dedicates **The Little Girls** to her. Bowen and her mother live a solitary life at Kent when her father is hospitalised. Even Dinah and her mother, Mrs. Piggott, also live a secluded life at Southstone.

This novel is the outcome of a profound sense of alienation, an estrangement which can be traced to the losses of her early childhood. As Bowen grows older, Bowen's sense of isolation increases and the effect of age upon her writing makes her later novels more complex. The heart of **The Little Girls** lies in the style of dialogues that are innovative and experimental. In this context Anne M. Watt Brown remarks:

‘Eva Trout and **The Little Girls** represent a new direction in Bowen's fiction. They can rightly be seen as the development of a late style rather than as a symptom of malaise. In fact, we can read these final novels as part of Bowen's search of identity, a pursuit one scarcely would expect from a novelist writing in her early sixties.¹

The novel is the confusing stream of references that characterises conversation between people who know one another. The Jamesian influence is also expressed in the structure of the novel. It is a novel certainly bracketed as a feminine, evocative and atmospheric. It is a hard-headed comic novel. Apparently the novel offers a calm, external perspective on behaviour, but this novel has deep moral seriousness and even offers a most suitable meditation on history. This novel sounds a sombre book of Bowen and the most high-spirited novel of all. In this particular novel Bowen attempts to do something more ambitious than to concentrate on youth. The central theme of the novel is the exhibition of power of childhood and the continuing presence of some shaping force

which is never lost. It is an indirect revelation of personal feelings towards the childhood.

Bowen's **The Little Girls** is a female-dominated novel with characters like Dinah, Clare, Sheikie, Mrs. Coral, Miss Ardingfay, Mrs. Piggott, Miss Kinmate, Mrs. Burkin Jones, Elfreda and Mrs. Arthworth. The male characters of this novel are Frank Wilkins, Francis, Major Burkin Jones, William Roland, Cousin Roland and Trevor. Among all female characters it is Dinah who is the protagonist in the novel. She is sixty years old attractive woman living in Southstone. She is a widow, and she has ^u_n childhood friends Clare and Sheikie. Clare is married and is a business-woman running 'Mopsie Pye' gift shops successfully whereas Sheila is married to her childhood friend Trevor who is a house-agent. Mrs. Coral is Dinah's good friend and keeps foreign students as paying guests. Miss Ardingfay is the headmistress and good administrator of St. Agatha school. Miss Brace and Miss Kinmate are teachers in this school. Mrs. Piggott, the mother of Dinah is a widow. Mrs. Burkin Jones is the mother of Clare and Mrs. Arthworth is the mother of Sheila. Elfreda is a friend of Dinah, Clare and Sheila.

Bowen and her mother lead a secluded life at Kent when her father is hospitalised. This is reflected through the character of Mrs. Piggott and Dinah. They also lead an isolated life. All three friends

Dinah, Clare and Sheila, ~~and~~ belong to the middle class society. Dinah is prone to enthusiasm and has her own world. It is Clare and Sheikie who are affected by times and have suffered a lot in their life. Bowen has concentrated on Dinah who struggles to unite her school-day friends. Bowen has tried to reflect the lives of three friends, but it is Dinah who plays a major role and is cause for many incidents in the past and present life of three friends. Dinah Delaroix tries to struggle against the sense of loss in an unconventional way of life review in which Bowen participated by proxy. Bowen herself experiences a cathartic effect from completing the novel. Bowen tries her best to reflect her view of past life when she is sixty in the character of Dinah. So she gives a major role to Dinah. The sub-ordinate characters are Clare, Shela, Mrs. Piggott, Mrs. Burkin Jones, Mrs. Coraland Mrs. Arthworth. Miss Ardingfay, Miss Kinmate and Miss Brace have just minor roles in the novel.

Bowen has an indifferent view towards male characters in the novel. She has treated them with less importance. They are sub-ordinate to female characters in the development of the story. The male characters like Frank Wilkins, Francis, Trovor, William, Roland, cousin Roland and Major Burkin Jones are secondary to female characters. Bowen concentrates on the lives of three women in general and male characters appear occasionally in the incidents of women's life. They

are just given a casual reference in one's life. Being a woman writer, she views in a feministic way reflecting the lives of women. In this context Anne M. Wyatt Brown remarks :

'Bowen could examine her own deeply submerged love for and disappointment in the men and the places in her life – past and present.'²

The effect of World War-I is seen in the lives of three women – Dinah, Clare and Sheila- war is seen as a symbol of separation. The three little girls meet for the last time on July 23, 1914. Olive Pocock arranges a birthday party and it is their end of summer term. They bid farewell temporarily but soon after the war breaks out and it is their permanent parting. Due to war, Dicey and Mrs. Piggott have to live in Cumberland and suffer. War has brought isolation and insecurity in their lives. In this context Dicey remarks:

'It was very bad up there where we were in those isolated places. Everywhere such awful dismay.'³

War affects deeply the life of Clare who has lost her father at Mons while fighting in the war. There is a hint that Sheila has married Mrs. Artworth's second son because the elder is killed in the war. Dinah's friends have carried through their lives the effects of the world war-I. Sheila and Clare obviously lead the common life of a tragic century. They feel immensely odd, insecure and unsocial for the war has

affected their life. War symbolises change in society, 'Applegate' Dinah's house is built on an earlier farming landscape. The world of 1914 is changing in which old emerged with or ceased by the new. St. Agatha previously is a house but now altered to a school atmosphere. As time changes, the women try to recapture the year of 1914 which represents emotional experiences in their lives. Other female and male characters in the novel are not affected by war.

This novel of Elizabeth Bowen has the feature of emotional dislocation. The major characters are shown emotionally dislocated. It is seen specifically in the character of Dinah. Dinah is sixty year old attractive woman living in 'Applegate' at Southstone. Being a widow she leads a lonely life, and is prone to enthusiasm. She is always in her own world and is less aware of the present activities in the world. She is recently engaged in burying objects in the cave. Dinah wishes to preserve their objects for future posterity. She is emotionally involved in this work forgetting its validity for future generation she lacks knowledge of the object in her own life. In this context John Coates remarks :

'The contents of the "Time Capsule" Dinah is burying will have no meaning for generations to come because the buried objects reflect preoccupations and fantasies so private and personal to the individuals who have contributed them as to have no significance to others in the present, let alone in a distant future.'⁴

Dinah's emotions are dislocated and is a fragmented personality. Dinah wishes to preserve the past but on her own terms. On the other hand, her choice of 'Applegate' means rejection of the past and she further rejects the old fan. This suggests that Dinah is a confused person and lacks self knowledge. Dinah wishes her two childhood friends to participate in her task forgetting that they have life to lead their own way. She is engaged in an essentially illicit operation which shows her imprinting of her own will on time, fact and on the characters. She fails to get the accepted response from her friends and goes in trauma.

Dinah's two friends Sheila and Clare are leading a happy life. Sheila Arthworth is a highly respectable and prosperous middle-class wife, and Clare is a business woman, which represent their contrasting careers. Sheila has failed to stay with her dying lover, for which she feels responsible and hence her feelings are suppressed. On the other hand, Sheila fails to make a career as a dancer, and she is partly the result of her dread of risk and exposure.

Clare's unhappiness in life is the result of wrong choices for which she is responsible, and of an emotional and social background. As a child, she is constantly suppressed by her mother. Moreover the reason of her unhappy married life is not revealed to her friends. Her refusal to discuss about her unhappy married life shows that she is sole responsible for its failure. Mrs. Burkin Jones always criticises and wounds her

feelings which is one of the reasons for Clare's complex emotional development. The lives of Clare and Sheila are led through the complexity of the relation between personal choice and family and social background, between individuals and the public history of their time. Hence their life is emotionally dislocated.

Among the male characters, Francis' life, too, is emotionally dislocated. Francis is Dinah's servant of Maltese origin. Being highly ambitious and failed to make a career, renounced joining secret service as he feels it is impossible for him to assume disguises. So he is emotionally hurt. He has lost his parents in a boating accident. The failure to make a career and loss of parents have affected him. He always feels that he is in 'Applegate' with no other alternative. His feelings show that he is unhappy to stay, but he is also unable to leave. Francis is uncertain in his attitude towards his employer. At one time he behaves very faithfully, at another moment he takes little notice of anyone. In this context John Coates remarks :

'Like Louie in the Heat of the Day, he (Francis) is one of the uprooted of modern life. Both have lost parents and home, in her case by enemy bombs, in his case equally 'gratuitously' in a "boating fatality".⁵

He is intelligent and seems well-educated to Dinah. In Frank's view he is politically confused. Dinah always feels that he needs more

intellectual life than his country gives him. This shows that he is a bit confused personality in England.

Bowen has largely concentrated on female characters by giving them major roles in **The Little Girls**. Bowen enlarges the scope of female characters and visualizes their outer and inner personality. In this novel Bowen shows through Dinah, that to recapture the past is a disturbing experience. Dinah is sixty year old woman with extraordinary beauty. Her youthful appearance shows that life has not much affected her. She is a widow living a lonely life at 'Applegate'. She has two sons named William and Roland. Being a woman, very recently she has been engaged in the task of burying objects in the cave. So that future generation will be able to reconstruct her race from those remnants. Dinah and Frank are burying some objects at the outset of the novel, which appears to be an archaeological enterprise. This suggests that Dinah has some purpose in this task. She also has her own view of history. Dinah's deliberate burying of 'time capsule' is purely personal and purposeful. In this context John Coates remarks:

'To bury evidence is necessarily to filter and select. One is choosing what one considers important about oneself or one's time and, obviously, the choice may be entirely wrong. If there is an intention to dig up the buried objects later, then the burying becomes the making of an appointment to meet oneself, raising acutely the question of self-knowledge.'⁶

When Mrs. Coral puts the question who's going to seal it up? She suddenly realises that she is repeating the past experience. She becomes obsessed with the desire to find her long-lost friends of St. Agatha's school. Dinah spends money worth £ 100 for newspaper advertisements. This shows Dinah's keen interest in her friends and her task of burial. Dinah's burying of expressive objects reveals that they are the means for times to come to comprehend personalities.

She also represents the contemporary middle class society. The impercipient cave symbolises Dinah's personality as loving, exuberant and confused.

As a child Dinah is very close to her mother. She retains the memories of her mother. Mrs. Piggott loves china which is recollected by Dinah. Mrs. Piggott dwells on the emotional value of objects and helps to maintain a sense of continuity and almost a thing of identity. Both Mrs. Piggott and Dinah are happy and feel protected in this world of possession.

Dinah fails to understand that her friends Clare and Sheila have a life of their own. She wants them to be a part of this interesting enterprise to reopen the coffer. Sheila and Clare are not so much interested to do so, but due to Dinah's constant ringing and keeping them reminded force them to participate in this task. Clare's disturbance is expressed.

'To have met again has been very nice. But we cannot keep in-ing and outing every two days. We have lives to live.'⁷

Dinah is always in her own world. She is not the product of her time as her friends Sheila and Clare are. Life affects them but not Dinah. She is always protected from the very beginning. When her father commits suicide it is cousin Roland who solaces them. Then she lives under the cover of her mother's protection. In the old age it is Frank and Francis who are to help her.

When Dinah and Clare go to Frank's cottage in his absence, Dinah feels the cottage to be safe and protected. For a long time it makes her feel safe. The feeling of safety in the cottage represents the other side of her nature, the feeling of insecurity at her own home in Applegate. When Dinah and her friends find out the coffer empty which shocks Dinah whereas her friends are very normal. This failure shocks her and she expects Clare to solace her. Even she fails to get a desired response from her. She feels completely defeated and Clare accuses Dinah for her selfish nature and makes her more deeply sad. Moreover Clare calls her as an enchantress child.

Finally Dinah gets a trauma. She is surrounded by her children and grandchildren. Even Sheila and Clare have showed their due affection by their presence. Sheila is nursing her. This shows that they are really good friends at times of need. Francis' accusation of Clare is

not seriously taken by Dinah's children – Roland and William. Her grandchildren are in their own world least affected by their grandmother's ill health. The presence of her grandchildren Pamela, Emma, and Coralie helps to ease out the tension dominated in the novel when Frank says that Clare's mind has switched back to times of their girlhood days. It is reinforced in Clare's mind at the sight of Dinah's grandchildren. It is an important statement for Clare which helps her to understand the depth and truth of childhood friendship. It is Clare's realisation of truth of friendship that makes her to remark looking on the sleeping Dinah.

‘We were entrusted to one another, in the days which mattered, Clare thought. Entrusted to one another by chance, not choice. Chance, and its agents time and place. Chance is better than choice.’⁸

This also means that trust between them is violated by Dinah purposefully to unite her friends for only one task- to reopen the coffer. Friendship is to be based on love and understanding. The empty coffer also symbolises that Dinah fails to understand her friends. At the end Clare realises that Dinah fears the failure of her task to preserve the past. This also means that past is irrevocable, but Dinah's way of handling and preserving the past is completely wrong. This is the perfect meaning of the novel.

On the other hand Dinah's friends Sheila and Clare are perfectly worldly women. They are the product of their times. No doubt, life has affected them, but they have fought their own battles against odds of life. When Sheila and Clare meet for the first time in Knightsbridge department and they compare notes with an eye of mutual suspicion. The scene appears to be women's council of war suggesting that they lead an artificial and tense life. Even their dress and speech appear to be artificial. Both are elaborately dressed. Sheila wears a hat composed of pink roses and Sheila wears a black turban.

Sheila Arthworth is a well settled woman at Somerset. Clare is a self made woman. She has excelled in handling her Mopsie Pye shops. She is a perfect example of a business-minded person. She is cautious of time and money. She values time and she rudely remarks on Dinah's useless use of money for advertising in search of them. The act of Dinah to get in touch with them appears to them eccentric and also seems to threaten their personality and reputation affecting their identities, too. Both of them suspect Dinah's motives.

Both Sheila and Clare are perfect representatives of middle class society in England. They are so involved in their way of life, that they live in present and not holding to past as Dinah does. The call of Dinah's voice is a knock and blow to them. They appear to be suspicious and

mock at Dinah in her absence. This shows that they are not suitable as friends. In this context John Coates remarks :

‘Clare and Sheila disconcert when judged against standards of simple friendliness and ordinary curiosity which are invoked when Anna and Thomas Snub, Major Brutt in ‘The Death of the Heart’ or Mrs. Kelway insults Stella in ‘The Heat of the Day’.’⁹

Sheila and Clare artificially symbolize that two women are frightened, conscious of the world around them, without confidence and they try to defend themselves by costly dresses and other purchases. The success of ‘Mopsisie Pye’ shop also suggests the rootlessness and restlessness of modern man.

Dinah is always lingering on past and history even at the age of sixty. She has cheated time whereas unlike her, both Sheila and Clare have not cheated time, but they are its victims too. They take pains to be a part of the society and time. The lives of Sheila and Clare have been full of causalities, disappointments and griefs both personal and public-~~threw~~ out the fifty years since they left school. Sheila is a prosperous middle class wife representing the conventional role in the society whereas Clare is a self made business-woman representing the modern emancipated woman. Clare’s refusal to talk of her marriage and her father’s death in the war shows that she has fought the battle of life and she has overcome griefs. Sheila cannot marry her lover for his untimely

death, and her marriage to Trevor becomes just a normal matter of life. Both have faced all the odds of life with great strength and obviously lead a common life of a tragic century.

In short, this is a mature novel of Elizabeth Bowen. It indicates that exact recollection of past experiences and memories is almost impossible. This particular novel has peculiar examples of war effects specifically upon the major characters like Dinah, Sheila and Clare. The novel is female dominated, and a large scope is given to female characters. Bowen has her psychological reflection through these major characters of **The Little Girls**. Besides, this novel possesses examples of emotional dislocation and it has affected inner life of female characters. Their roles and status in the novel are very significant in the entire scenario of novel. Elizabeth Bowen has skillfully maintained the sense of location, environment and regionalism. The scenes and sights of the novel have close relation to the personal life of Bowen. Thus, this novel has a close view of Bowen's late life, and her personality is indirectly reflected in this novel.

This dissertation leaves an impression of being incomplete, since it has no Introduction proper, explaining the reason for selecting these novels for analysis, and no Conclusion, to show the outcome of the study of these novels.

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