"DREAMING" WOMEN:

A STUDY OF IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN BETTY SMITH'S NOVELS

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by

Kadavakollu Tejaswani

Department of English
School of Humanities
University of Hyderabad
June, 2009

Department of English
School of Humanities
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad 500046

Date: June, 2009

This is to certify that I, Kadavakollu Tejaswani, have carried out the research embodied in the present dissertation for the full period prescribed under Ph. D. ordinances of University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this dissertation was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.

Head of the Department:

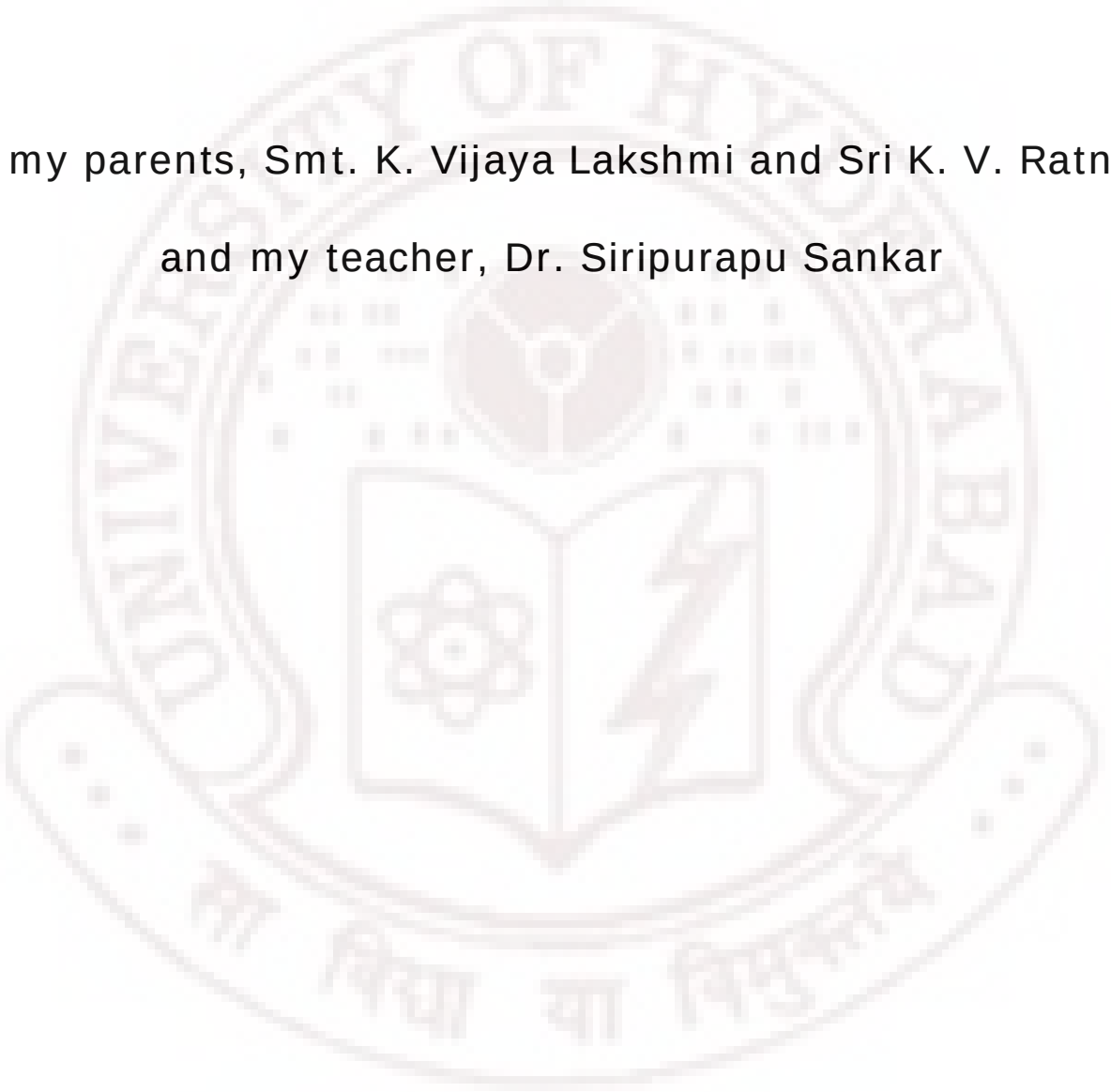
Signature of the Candidate

Name: Kadavakollu Tejaswani

Enrolment No.: 05HEPH01

Dean of the School:

Signature of the Supervisor



For my parents, Smt. K. Vijaya Lakshmi and Sri K. V. Ratnam

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Betty Smith was born in 1896 to a poor German immigrant family in Brooklyn. After her marriage to George H. E. Smith, a law student in the University of Michigan, in 1919, she moved to Michigan. Though she could not finish high school, she took classes in journalism, literature, writing and drama at the University of Michigan. Smith was mostly self-taught and used her everyday experiences creatively to author more than 70 plays. She won the Avery Hopkins Award for her work in drama and used the prize money to pay for a three-year course in playwriting at the Yale Drama School. After a few years of writing for newspapers, Smith moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She started her writing career as a playwright and also coauthored many plays along with Chase Webb, George Abbott, Koch Frederick H., and Robert Finch whom she married in 1957. She also wrote many short stories[1] and articles along with the plays around the year 1920. Of significant note is the fact that Smith authored and co-authored nearly 70 plays and to study Smith as a playwright would have led me into an altogether different area of research. The lack of availability of all the plays and short stories also prevented my study in this direction. In spite of all her writing in the areas of drama, short story, poetry and articles ranging on various themes, Smith is eternally known in the literary circles for her novel, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn published in 1943. Her other novels are Tomorrow Will Be Better (1947), Maggie – Now (1958) and Joy in the Morning (1963).

[1] Some of the more well-known short stories are “Death of a Singing Waiter,” “Rob Green and the Buzzards,” “While the King Played Tennis,” “Passion Wise and Love Foolish,” “Glamorous Love Stories,” “I Told the Other Woman,” “I Married Another Man's Woman,” “I Call her Margy,” “Insuss in Brooklyn,” “Love Came at Christmas,” “Wives-in-Law,” and “Backward Turn Backward.”

My dissertation deals with the working class immigrant women's experiences in Betty Smith's novels. The first chapter deals with the role of movements that led to the awareness in women regarding their position in American society, the role of literature in this awareness, and Betty Smith's portrayal of working class immigrant women's problems in the context of the writers of her period. This chapter contains three sections. Section I deals with the movements in America, which led to women's emancipation, and the role of literature in exposing women's status in society. By recalling the history of America, which amassed its wealth through the hard work of working class immigrants, I would like to establish the significance of the voice of a working class immigrant woman writer. Section II introduces the author, Betty Smith, her growth as a playwright and her exclusion from American mainstream literature. It also deals with the portrayal of gender, class, and race in her novels. Section III briefly surveys women's problems in America as depicted in the novels of select writers. By studying the immigrant experiences in Betty Smith's novels, I hope to place the voice of Betty Smith in the American literary canon. Hopefully, this due recognition may also influence mainstream American literature. In my dissertation, I would mainly like to stress the manner in which Betty Smith moulds her women characters. Smith's women characters accept that their ignorance is responsible for the troubles in their life and they work hard to improve their lives. Women in Smith's novels do not blame men in their lives for the hardships they face. We see that Smith's notion is also echoed by Betty Friedan. Friedan writes the following in The Feminine Mystique: "[i]t seemed to me that men weren't really the enemy—they were fellow victims" (386). Friedan goes on to say that a woman's real enemy is degradation of the self, which also is Betty Smith's opinion as evidenced in her novels.

Section I

America, it is said, is a nation made up of immigrants. This has been true of her right from the day she was supposed to have been discovered in 1492. The eminent historian, Vann Woodward asserts that "immigrants were American history" (100) whose population in the 15th century mostly included "undesirables; the unemployed and the convicts, and tens of thousands of both kinds" (27). Apart from the undesirable and adventurous people who came in batches throughout the 15th century, the first batch of immigrants with a "true" purpose came in the year 1620 from England in the "Mayflower." These immigrants were Puritans who came with the intention of creating a better world than England. These Puritans, also called Pilgrim Fathers, were separatists exiled from England for defying the authority of the national Church and following the New Testament. Though they separated from the Church, they were loyal to the King of England. Puritans felt that England was becoming increasingly ungodly and felt that it was not a country they would like to live in. They wanted to create a new land, which was more compatible with their religious beliefs. They made a covenant with God that they would build a new nation which is pious and devout. They landed in America on 25th December, and survived a harsh winter. Eventually they built homes, grew crops with the help of few Native Indians, and established their government. The Pilgrim Fathers drafted a covenant on November 11, 1620 and this is acknowledged as the first sacred document in the tradition of the constitution. This covenant is actually the first draft calling all the men present in the name of God and Christian faith to meet, draft and enact laws for the benefit of the colony. The basic idea behind creating the covenant is to form a government for the benefit of the people and the progress of society, which then is to function as the foundation for the future governing bodies in America. They set up the Massachusetts Bay Company and developed a port at Boston. Puritans survived their

hardships and depended mainly on farming, fishing, shipbuilding and trading for their livelihood. Some of them worked as tailors, carpenters, or labourers. Though the Puritan leaders, drafted the "Mayflower Compact" acknowledging the king of England as their sovereign, they pledged allegiance to the leaders they chose and the laws they would create. To preserve their ideals, the Church was kept away from the government. In 1630, a second ship, "Arbella," set sail from England under the leadership of John Winthrop. John Winthrop in his lecture, "A Model of Christian Charity" clearly states that the immigrants' purpose is to improve their lives and do more service to God in a country governed by people who are the followers of the Church. "Arbella" was famous for leading the entire British population that inhabited New England between 1630 and 1640. In this decade, known as the Great Migration period, thousands of English families immigrated to Massachusetts.

As the immigrant population grew, they displaced Native Americans from their land. The Native Americans not only lost their land but also forests which were their source of food. It is sadly ironical that the Native Indians, who were the original inhabitants of America before the immigrants arrived, were not considered citizens of America till 1924 (Manasco). According to historical data, the first Native Americans arrived from northeastern Siberia into Alaska via the Bering Sound. Sandia, Clovis and Folsom are the oldest documented Indian cultures in North America. Native Americans survived on hunting and farming. They had their own laws and culture. They followed their own religion and were very wise and peace-loving people. In fact, it was a Native American, Squanto, who helped the Pilgrim Fathers battle the harsh winter and helped them plant crops like maize.

Native Americans were worshippers of nature and were not materialistic. But the immigrants who occupied America viewed the place and the Native Americans as resources in their pursuit of materialistic gains. This conflict in the viewpoints resulted in hatred, suspicion and revenge between Native Americans and immigrants. Native Americans were treated as brutal savages by the immigrants who had settled by now as Americans in the new land. Some of the Native Americans retaliated violently against the Americans. The vainglorious American history also includes the gruesome massacre of Native American warriors, women and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1890. Americans tried to "civilize" Native Americans either by converting them into Christianity or by assimilating them, and most of those Native Americans who resisted these two methods were killed in wars.

At present, Native Americans have a special understanding with the American government. Though the population is low, Native Americans still exist in America. There are 561 tribal governments which are federally recognized by the American government. The tribal territories are ruled by their own elected governments with limitations. Due to the immense paperwork involved, some tribes still have difficulty in gaining recognition from the federal government. The participation of Native Americans in World War I helped them a great deal in getting American citizenship. Native Americans were given the voting right in 1924. Apart from the inconsiderate displacement of Native Americans, America witnessed three major movements—abolition movement, temperance movement and suffragette movement, which culminated in the movement for equal rights for women. In the next part I discuss the movements briefly.

The geographical location of America is such that the northern part has the scope to develop industries whereas the southern part has large agricultural fields which require huge manpower. The southern part required people who are physically strong and who can be easily manipulated to work in the farms. For this purpose the southerners enslaved the Africans. The North of America required hardworking people who are willing to work for low pay for various unskilled and skilled jobs and newly entered immigrants suited the role. Though the pay was hardly enough, immigrants were willing to work because they believed in the American Dream. The South of America abused Africans and in the North of America immigrants were neglected by the government. The northern part of America flourished with industries, banks, and railroads. So, naturally, it depended on manpower and the immigrants dominated the labour force. As getting work was highly competitive, there was intense hatred among the immigrants, and also between the immigrants and the Americans as well. Industrialization spread stories of instant riches and hard work justly rewarded. The American Dream's fame became a panacea for diverse people belonging to different continents and millions thronged American shores in search of fulfilment of the dream.

Those who were affected to the maximum extent by industrialization were working class white women and immigrant women who had to fend for themselves as child labourers until they got married or ended up as ageing spinsters. But again marriage was not a lifelong security as it could end up in divorce, desertion, or widowhood, ultimately leaving the women to fend for themselves and their children. Evidently, women belonging to middle class and lower class, irrespective of race, had to face a lot of tribulations going through the daily grind of living. For majority of working class women, even basic necessities like finding work, finding a place to

live in, making ends meet, running a family, and trying to bring up their children with dignity were elusive.

For black people, life was brutal. Though transatlantic slavery was outlawed in 1808, domestic slavery continued for several years in America. The first blacks were brought to Jamestown, Virginia, as slaves in 1619. Black women faced sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies and separation from family, and laboured through sickness and tribulations. Sold like cattle, their life was nothing but complying with the masters' atrocious demands. Working class women irrespective of race faced a lot of problems inside and outside the house.

Women's role in society is designed according to certain specifications and women are strictly expected to adhere to this role. Barbara Welter opines in the essay, "The Cult of True Womanhood," "[I]t was in this context that a new role of domesticity was created and promoted as a distinctively feminized complement to the masculinized role of economic provider. In the form of the 'cult of true womanhood,' this role prescribed piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity as the appropriate norms of respectable middle-class feminity" (qtd. in Buechler13).

Buechler argues that ironically this role contributed to the rise of awareness in women regarding their status in society. Women who were removed from their productive role in the family had to be satisfied with the only role that they were allotted, that of piety and purity. In particular, women belonging to the upper classes who had a lot of free time on their hands were encouraged to take up charity work and educating the masses. They were allowed to form meetings in the Church and educate the poor and illiterate. In the course of these meetings as the

women were allowed to uplift the poor, realisation dawned on them regarding their limitations. Women understood that the limitations in their life were caused by lack of education.

Education for women was a long and hard way away from the first school, Boston Latin School, which was built in 1635. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, men who wanted to pursue higher education had to go to England to study. But with the establishment of Universities like Harvard (1636), Yale (1701), Columbia (1704), The College of William and Mary (1726), Princeton (1747), and College of Philadelphia (1749) by scholars, rich and philanthropic patrons, and government, education system diversified into various branches like theology, science, language, logic, grammar, mathematics, and medical sciences. But women could not attend colleges till 1833. Women educators like Catharine Esther Beecher, Emma Willard, Mary Lyon, Jane Addams, Susan Anthony, Mrs. Carl Schurz, and Mary McLeod established higher-level educational institutions for women. Oberlin College (1833) was the first coeducational college. Vassar College (1861) was the first women's college and the first graduate school for women was Bryn Mawr College (1880).

For the blacks, the early education they received was from kind owners and the missionaries with the intent to convert them to Christianity. Education of blacks received a boost with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. In the South, there were separate schools for blacks, and in the North though the schools were not separated, segregation existed. In 1954, Supreme Court ruled out segregation in public schools as unconstitutional. Black women like Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) who fought for abolition and women's rights, Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897), whose work Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is still read by literature students,

not only worked for abolition before Civil War but also brought into light sexual harassment and abuse endured by slave women. Frances W. Harper (1825-1911), a poet whose anthologies of poems include Forest Leaves (1845), Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects (1854), Sketches of Southern Life (1872) and Light beyond the Darkness (1890), and Harriet E. Wilson (1825-1900) with her famous novel, Our Nig (1859) worked for labour reform and children's education. Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964) stressed the need for educating black women. Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931), journalist and editor, worked on racial issues and anti-lynching through the clubs she established for these social causes, Ida B. Wells' Club and Chicago Women's Club. Alice Moore Dunbar Nelson (1875-1935) poet, journalist and social activist worked for African Americans' and Women's rights. William Wells Brown (1816-1884) with his autobiography Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself (1847) worked for the abolition movement. Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) whose literary works include Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845), My Bondage and My Freedom (1855), and Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (1881, revised 1892) worked for the rights of blacks. Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) who is famous for his literary work, Up from Slavery (1901), worked for awareness and progress of his fellow blacks. W. E B. Du Bois (1868-1963) whose works include The Philadelphia Negro (1899), The Souls of Black Folk (1903), The Negro (1915), and Then and Now (1939) and Langston Hughes (1902-1967), poet, columnist, dramatist, and social activist whose poetry anthologies include "The Weary Blues" (1926) and "Fine Clothes to the Jew" (1927) are forever remembered for their contribution towards education, equal rights, and upliftment of their fellow blacks.

Women belonging to the upper class and confined to luxurious homes also faced problems, namely of ennui. Upper class women had to battle with boredom and a sense of unworthiness. Betty Friedan's viewpoint regarding women's position in the twentieth century holds good for upper class women of the previous centuries and the present century as well:

> The problem lay buried, unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban housewife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night, she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question: "Is this all?" (15)

This role-play required some women to forego their talents or skills, and stay at home. Most of the women were not happy with this caring and compassionate role that was set for them. These women felt that it completely obliterated the spheres in which they could excel as any normal human being. Whichever class they belonged to, it is a fact that women did face problems of various sorts that made them lose their self-worth whether at workplace or at home. Women could only meet at Church which was highly approved by society. Helping the poor and the sick was the outcome of these meetings. Gradually, women extended their contacts and became more organized in trying to identify and solve the problems that plagued society. This development helped them to organize meetings, analyse the problems, and trace solutions. Ironically, these meetings, which were sanctioned by the Church and society, led women to think

about their positions and status. They began analysing their lives and tried to sort out their problems. The first problem they decided to brave against was alcoholism, which was and is the cause of the breakdown of many families the world over.

Thus, during 1800–1890, the first major problem women sought to confront was temperance, wherein women sought for moderation or complete abstinence of liquor. The earliest temperance organization was founded in Saratoga, New York in 1808. Led by illustrious leaders like Carry A. Nation, Frances Elizabeth Willard, Susan B. Anthony, Henry Browne Blackwell, Alice Stone Blackwell, Samuel C. Blackwell, Antoinette Brown, the Church also took a major part in this movement and was the cause of 6,000 local societies in several states of America by the year 1833. Although seen as a direct challenge, men endured this movement because the movement's success paved the way for domestic harmony. It should also be noted that progressive men welcomed this movement and took active part in it. The two major associations that worked for temperance were Women's Christian Temperance Union and Anti-Saloon League. After an extended battle, a Constitutional Amendment was made in 1917 for the cause of temperance. Through the 18th Amendment, prohibition became a law in January 1920.

The second problem women tackled was slavery. It is interesting to note that the first President, George Washington owned slaves and so did five other Presidents, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Andrew Jackson, James Polk and Zachary Taylor. Antislavery began in the colonial days and The American Colonization Society which was founded in 1817 led protests against slavery during the early eighteenth century. Women's role in movements against alcohol was accepted by the Church and society because people were aware that alcoholism in a person

would lead to irreparable moral and financial damage of a family unit. For women, to get equal importance as their men counterparts in planning and execution of campaigns and strategies in these movements was a hard fought struggle and it was rarely successful. Moreover, when women started to fight against slavery, they realised their own abject existence and at this point they understood their limitations and embarked on the fight for their rights.

Most of the leaders of the Anti-Slavery movement came from New England and the movement first passed on to the liberal Northern States and then to the conservative Southern States where it received severe backlash. Led by leaders like David Walker (1785-1830), James Mott (1788-1868), James G. Birney (1792-1857), Lucretia Mott (1793-1880), Nat Turner (1800-1831), James Watkins (1801-1858), Theodore Weld (1803-1895), Maria Stewart (1803-1879), William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879), Robert Purvis (1810-1898), Wendell Phillips (1811-1884), Henry Highland Garnet (1815-1881), Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), Harriet Tubman (1822-1913) and Mary Church Terrel (1863-1954), the movement's ideologies became accepted and widespread. The Southerners did not agree with the movement and in fact aggressively threatened the supporters. At this point the events took an inevitable turn with infighting between the supporters and opposers of the Anti-Slavery movement. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of America issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Slavery was finally abolished in 1863 through the 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution after a bitterly fought Civil War.

The third important issue was suffrage. As women actively took part in these two movements a clear perception of their miserable state of affairs became apparent to them.

America is indeed indebted to the labour force, of which women constitute a considerable part, which helped America develop to its present state. In this 21st century, as we begin to question the various social evils that plagued the previous centuries, the most unremitting, unresolved social evil that comes to mind is the treatment meted out to women. While white men fought for equal rights for black men and white men, and for voting rights for black men, they chose to leave out women belonging to both the races calling it the "negroes' hour." Buechler explains that women realised the discrimination against them when "they were not allowed to join the society or to sign its founding document" (17). Spurned by this discriminatory attitude, women founded their own Anti-Slavery societies such as the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. In 1837, eighty-one delegates from twelve states met in New York to form the National Female Anti-Slavery Society. Apart from William Lloyd Garrison no other prominent Anti-Slavery leader was willing to accept women as equals in their movement which led many women to join the Garrisonian Anti-Slavery movement. Women then began to include the issue of women's rights in the Anti-Slavery movement. Coming from diverse backgrounds, feminist leaders like Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony went on to tackle women's issues as well. For more than two decades women's issues like voting for women, and equal wages and rights were debated alongside the Anti-Slavery issue. Eventually, in 1848, The Seneca Falls convention addressed the raging problems and drafted a Declaration of Sentiments and Principles launching the women's rights movement.

It is notable that during the Civil War, women's groups lobbied for the abolitionist cause putting aside women's issues. Even after the proposal of the 13th Amendment in 1863, Buechler argues that black men and women along with white women could still feel the lack of basic civil

liberties enjoyed by white male citizens which made many women (my emphasis) confront the voting issue for black men and women, and white women.

Despite the valiant efforts of women leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the 14th Amendment was passed on June 13, 1866, referring the right to vote as a male right bringing up the gender divide in the American constitution. Even after the women's movements increased their agitation, the 15th Amendment was passed on February 25, 1869, stating unambiguously that voting was a male right. In 1872 when Susan B. Anthony and some other women attempted to vote using the 14th Amendment, they were arrested for illegal voting. This accelerated the agitation with many progressive and liberated men supporting women on the voting issue. On January 10, 1878, the "Anthony Amendment" was introduced in the Congress to extend voting rights for women as well. In 1890, American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) led by Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell and Julia Ward Howe and National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Carrie Chapman Catt played an important role in bringing in college-educated women and women's organizations into the movement. Yet, this organization encouraged racism against black women by barring black women from joining their organization. Black women, in response, formed their own organization, National Association of Coloured Women (NACW) to fight for the cause of suffrage under the leadership of Mary Church Terrell in 1896. Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer were some of the black women who were very dedicated to causes concerning black women.

In 1913 an important turn took place in the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Alice Paul formed the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage within the association and in 1914 split from the parent association, and merged to form the National Women's Party in 1916. After great efforts by women belonging to these two associations and the support of progressive men, United States Senate approved the Anthony Amendment on June 4, 1919. August 26, 1920, was the day when the Anthony Amendment became a law. After a relentless fight for 72 years women succeeded in accomplishing the right to vote. Black men were given the right to vote in 1870 and women[2] belonging to all races were given the right to vote in 1920. Black women had to fight a long fight to come this far in American history.

At the critical juncture where women were fighting for suffrage between 1893 and 1920, America was facing adversities in the form of the Depression and the Great War as well. Depression lay siege of America for more than half a century wherein economic spheres like banks, railroad constructions, and industries failed and millions of workers were left unemployed. In the early 20th century revolutionary reforms were made in medical, law, and teaching spheres, and businessmen and farmers formed associations to address their grievances. Progressive citizens welcomed these changes as the foundation for American progress. Many affluent and educated women joined organizations to agitate for social reforms.

In October, 1929, the stock market crashed in America and caused loss of confidence in the economic stability. The collapse was complete by 1933 and left economic critics too confused to analyse the causes for the Great Depression. Unemployment went up to 80% in

[2] Marie Ruoff Byrum was the first white woman to vote after the 19th Amendment on August 31, 1920. Juanita Jewel Shanks Craft was the first black woman to vote in 1944 from Dallas County.

some states with men, women and children joining public relief system for food. Peoples' confidence in themselves and hope for the future were completely shattered. People were standing in lines that stretched to blocks to get bread from the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Searching garbage cans for food by the poor was an extremely common sight. Hundreds died of malnutrition and starvation. People left their states and hometowns in futile search of jobs and food. This was the time when America was grappling with uncertainty, disillusionment and skepticism. At this point, Women's Liberation Movements made a painstaking progress to the position where they were ready to interrogate their identity, starting with agitations for prohibition, Anti-Slavery campaign and the right to vote. Although women have achieved the right to vote, they remain a long, long way away from the right to lead lives as individuals, to be precise, to lead life like a man. At this point of time, writers and social activists through their writings and meetings tried to awaken the consciousness of their countrymen.

Many American and first-generation American writers of the twentieth century exposed the hardships of the working class immigrants. The contribution of literature to a country is twofold as it not only brings to light the antisocial practices of that period and tries to bring about a change in the mind-set of people, but it also is a record for the future generations to use it to understand and develop societal conditions.

Authors like Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945), Anzia Yezierska (1880s-1970), Edna Ferber (1885-1965), Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973), Betty Smith (1896-1972), John Steinbeck (1902-1968), James T. Farrell (1904-1979), Richard Wright (1908-1960), and Ann Petry (1908-1997), were mirroring their times through their narratives. Petry, Steinbeck, Wright, and Dreiser tackled the

issues without deviating from reality. Writers like Smith, Ferber, Yezierska connected poverty with lack of education and tried to evolve solutions. Problems faced by the working class were uncovered. The grim life in immigrant neighbourhood was exposed. Literature was mirroring the difficult times. Literary greats like Harriet Baecher Stowe who wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin as far back as 1852 and Ellen Glasgow who wrote about the problems faced by the southern poor white in The Descendant (1897) were their predecessors. Theodore Dreiser's novel, Sister Carrie (1900 and was withdrawn for 12 years), reflected the travails of a young woman who succumbs to the temptations of modern urban life. Frank Norris's The Octopus (1901) and Upton Sinclair's The Jungle (1906) were about the struggle between the haves and havenots. No literary student can overlook the socially relevant literary contribution of Sherwood Anderson's Poor White (1920), Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms (1929), To Have and Have Not (1937), and For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940), John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath (1939), John Dos Passos's U. S. A trilogy (1930-37) and Richard Wright's Native Son (1940). Women writers and feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1840-1935), Emma Goldman (1869-1940), Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), Margaret Sanger (1879-1966), Anzia Yezierska (1880s-1970), Isak Denizen (1885-1952), Edna Ferber (1885-1965), Anais Nin (1903-1977), Betty Friedan (1920-2006), and Hisaye Yamamoto (b. 1920) adorned the literary field and have contributed to society through their literature. At this critical juncture, it is remarkable to see from the above list that immigrant working class women writers also contributed to literature. Betty Smith belongs to this category.

Section II

It is, no doubt, a daunting task to work on an author who is not recognized by either mainstream writers or critics. Nevertheless, I strongly feel that her works are relevant even in this age due to three reasons. First, her background has not deterred the writer in trying to achieve her dream; second, the topics she worked on are relevant even today not only in America but throughout the world; third, I strongly feel that she was sidelined from the mainstream literary canon on grounds that to me are not substantial. Probably, the mainstream literary critics and readers considered Smith's work unrealistic and fantastic and maybe that was the reason Smith's work was sidelined and was not considered mainstream literature.

Smith's first novel, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, published in 1943, sold 3 million copies in the first three weeks of publication and had over 37 reprints and was translated into more than twelve languages. Writing plays came effortlessly to Smith, and the plays worked as a resource in her becoming a novelist in the later years. Before writing the novel, Tree, Smith worked on the very theme in play form. She wrote a three-act play called "Becomes a Woman." Smith also wrote a play called "Francie Nolan" in 1930, which became the basis for the central character of Tree. In 1945, Twentieth Century Fox produced a movie based on Tree, which made the director, Elia Kazan very famous. In 1951, George Abbott directed a musical play based on this novel. In 1974, two years after Smith's demise, a TV-movie was also produced based on Tree. Her works included men and women like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Abraham Lincoln, and Narcissa Whitman who worked for social causes and made a difference in others' lives; and significant issues like abortion, religion, immigration, the American Dream, most of which the

society was looking at from a new angle. She also dealt with issues that would mould the next generation American citizens like formal education, disparities in the bringing up of male and female children and sex education.

Her writings at first glance look autobiographical because of the characterization and narration of plot and incidents. We cannot conclude that they are completely autobiographical for Smith says, "A story was something you made up out of something that might have happened. Only you didn't tell it like it was; you told it like you thought it should have been" (Tree 198). Smith was twice blessed in that she had the wealth of understanding her self and others too, and also the ingenuity to use it creatively in her writings. Her characters are a reflection of herself and the persons she came in contact with every day. If we grant what Smith acknowledges that there is a "dividing line between truth and fiction" (Tree 199), then it helps us not to deem all her writings as essentially autobiographical.

As Smith herself was a second-generation immigrant, it was not an impossible task for her to narrate a contemporary story mirroring all the immigrant problems. In her novels, Smith dealt with issues that besieged the society of that time period. Through her novels, Smith brought out the beauty and spirit out of mundane characters in spite of their poverty, drunkenness, and the sordidness of the society they lived in. It can be said that "when the picture was finished, you didn't see the dirt or the meanness; you saw the glory of innocence and poignancy" (Tree 165). Her novels were always ending on a note of hope, "[s]omething like a fairy tale" (Joy 48). She declined to be categorized as a socially relevant writer, in spite of

writing about issues which are found to be relevant even in the present. Probably, this is a reaction to the manner her work was sidelined from the mainstream.

Smith portrayed women as weak, as strong, as cunning and scheming, as compassionate and understanding, as spirited, as hopeful, as companions, as humans with all their frailties and assets. We see women in all the shades of virtues and follies: as wives, lovers, prostitutes, friends who cheat and friends who help, caring mothers and sisters, and scheming mothers-in-law. To me, Smith was compassionate and understanding about women in the manner of one of her characters, Mary Rommely about whom Smith says, "[Y]et she understood how it was with people who sinned. Inflexibly rigid in her own moral conduct, she condoned weaknesses in others. She revered God and loved Jesus, but she understood why people often turned away from these Two" (Tree 62). Smith's characterization and plot reveal that "[s]he knew of all pitiful human weaknesses and of many cruel strengths" (Tree 62).

With great dexterity, Smith had incorporated all the significant issues of the society of her time in her writings. In her novels, each with their unique plot and characterization, Smith managed to deal with the burning issues of the time. Smith through her various writings tried not only to highlight the problems but also find a solution. In Tree we not only see the growth of a girl into a young woman but also the growing intellectual awareness in immigrant women as generations change. Her narratives also present a picture of the growing awareness in America. Thus her novels are not only about a woman's journey but the journey of America as well.

Women's liberation, as I understand, should work towards a goal of freeing humanity of all kinds of beliefs, constraints, and coercion regarding women. Viewing women as human beings is what I think women's liberation is all about. Women's liberation is all about accepting women as they would like to mould themselves—as professionals or as homemakers, respecting their decisions and tolerating their miscalculations as one would a man. A liberated woman need not be an ambitious career-oriented woman. A liberated woman ought to be free of prejudices, viewing each and every option objectively with a new perspective, accepting the one with which she can identify her self. Sanger aptly remarks the following in her essay, "Birth Control":

> Her [A woman's] mission is not to enhance the masculine spirit, but to express the feminine; hers is not to preserve a man-made world, but to create a human world by the infusion of the feminine element into all of its activities. . . .
>
> Her eyes must be less upon what is and more clearly upon what should be. She must listen only with a frankly questioning attitude to the dogmatized opinions of man-made society. When she chooses her new, free course of action, it must be in the light of her own opinion—of her own intuition. . . . . Only thus can she remake the world. (Lynn 31)

In Smith's novels most women who lack insight, in spite of the sufferings they endure, are abjectly cruel to other women who go through similar sufferings. Smith laments that common sufferings like childbirth, poverty, lack of appreciation and recognition by husband and children for their efforts as a homemaker, do not seem to unite women. Similarly, immigrants, though they suffer due to isolation, ignorance of language and government policies, do not help

other immigrants. The apathy among women upsets Smith very much so as to develop a feeling of loathing for such women. Probably, Smith emphasized this issue to bring about a change in the attitude of these women. Carol Siri Johnson reveals in her dissertation[3] that Smith expressed her dislike for demanding women in her life in a letter to her publisher, Elizabeth Lawrence:

> But coming from a matriarchal family … my father died when I was ten … and having all aunts and few uncles and mostly all female cousins … one of which or whom sued me and having two daughters who sometimes make demands on me that a son wouldn't, I just get the feeling I don't like women [. . .].

Smith felt that her aunts and cousins were not very sympathetic to her and even her daughters were sometimes too demanding. She felt that though they were women, they did not understand her as a woman.

Smith narrates an incident in Tree, where Francie watches with horror an unwed mother, Joanna being stoned. From the dialogue between the mother and neighbourhood women Francie understands that these women hate Joanna because they know that there was love between Joanna and the father of the child. For these working class women love is a luxury which they can not afford and seeing a young unwed girl looking after her child happily enraged them further. Francie was shocked because no woman came to help Joanna except a man passing by. Smith hated the "devious ways," "disloyalty," and "cruelty" (237) among women. She found it difficult to accept their weaknesses; yet she could understand them as seen in the portrayal of her characters. She was concerned regarding their growth as human beings.

[3] This dissertation is available online without page numbers.

After studying Smith's novels, I feel that the society as a whole, and also the family play a vital role in the accomplishments of a woman. Parents ought to bring up their children accepting that there are only physical differences in the two genders. Women are very much like their men counterparts, feel like them, and would like to be treated like them. Men laid down rules for women for their sole benefit. According to the rules laid out by men, men were always the winners. But women have had to slog to be noticed. They have had to prove that they are a cut above the rest of their sex. Life for women has been to fight among themselves to be noticed by men generating bitterness among women.

Women, throughout the centuries have been taken for granted. They were unobtrusive children, harassed wives, sacrificing mothers, seducing lovers, old, disgruntled maids, and cheap labour. Life was no different for a woman than a slave—the slave of parents, the slave of the husband, the slave of children, and the slave of circumstances without any thought of standing for her rights or of retaliation. A woman was not supposed to entertain any thoughts of her self; she was always supposed to be sacrificing, hardworking, accommodating, and uncomplaining in nature.

In the past, women took great pride in cooking and serving because that was the only means they knew to get their share of appreciation from men. But in the present day, women are aware of their rights, abilities, and their options; so naturally they know how to gain appreciation through other channels. Increasingly women are opting for careers because they get appreciated for their ability, as also gain financial freedom to lead their lives according to their will.

With all these notions in mind, the society as well as the family ought to educate their children in a befitting manner. Men who were the oppressors in the past ought to take the initiative to bring back balance and semblance in society. Through the centuries, as the women were savagely subjugated, it was difficult for them to dream or make plans to realise their dreams. It is the ethical duty of men in the family to inform and instruct their family members—wives, daughters, mothers, fathers, sons and brothers included—to uplift the women in the household so that society and family benefit from emancipated and happy women.

Smith, through the development of women characters in her novels, seems to suggest ideas of how women should plan to improve their lives. Smith, by creating characters like Ben in Tree, Denny in Maggie-Now, and Carl in Joy in the Morning, indicates that families benefit by the manner in which men plan for their family's future and treat their wives and children with due love, care and respect.

****

In this part, we will see how Smith grew as a playwright. As in many other working class neighbourhoods, theatre was patronized by the Brooklyn working class. The theatres with their gaudy decorations resembled palaces and fed on the dreams of the working class. Smith saved money by babysitting, and doing other odd jobs in the neighbourhood just to watch at least a play every week. The first play she watched was *The Bishop's Carriage.* She watched Sara Bernhardt performing on her farewell tour. Smith's biographer, Valerie Raliegh Yow writes,

"[A]ll those Saturday afternoons Lizzie spent in Brooklyn and New York theatres not only stimulated her imagination but also heightened her awareness of dialogue that snapped and of direction that compelled attention" (Yow 33).

Smith expressed her fears and passion for writing in an essay thus:

> The cruelest thing about this desire to write is the hopeless hope that it engenders. Deep down in my heart, I know that I shall never get anywhere with this writing business. But who can tell? Sometime, tomorrow even, someone may find something marvelous in the things that I write. (Yow 55)

Smith attended playwriting classes at the University of Michigan. At this point her plays were on adultery, incest, and women's liberation. Yow discloses that Smith's first husband, George Smith had an affair and that Smith was still troubled by sexual harassment probably by her stepfather. As Smith had the tendency to write about the issues that bothered her, the years 1926–31 were characterised by plays around these themes. By this time she had written many plays and the play, *Francie Nolan*, won the Hopwood Major Drama Award. In 1931, she was invited by George Baker, a distinguished playwriting teacher, to study with him in Yale University on a two-year fellowship. Yow tells us that this is the place where Smith learned the technicalities of play production like directing, acting, designing and building sets, painting scenery, designing and sewing costumes, working with the crew, designing lighting and running lights. She had some good friends like Elia Kazan, who later on directed a movie based on her

novel Tree, and Van Heflin. She met Robert Finch in 1933 with whom she co-authored many plays, who was also her companion for many years and who she finally married in 1956.

Through the thought processes of her characters in her novels, Smith lets us know how she developed into a playwright and a novelist:

> She wrote her own act to that—what would happen *if*. She wrote it out in conversations and found it a remarkably easy way of writing. In a story you had to explain why people were the way they were but when you wrote in conversation you didn't have to do that because the things the people said explained what they were. Francie had no trouble selling herself on dialogue. Once more she changed her mind about what profession she'd follow. She decided she wouldn't be an *actress* after all. She'd be a writer of plays.
>
> (Tree 220)

Smith writes about Annie in Joy in the Morning,:

> She took to the medium heart, soul, and mind. Dialogue came easy to her. In the play form her short, often unfinished sentences were an asset rather than a drawback. She had an instinct for characterization and a sure feeling about building up to a crisis and making it flow easily into a climax. (128)

This can also be said about Smith who churned out 70-odd plays, which were either published or produced. And maybe when she knew that she had more material than necessary for a play she would do it the way Annie did in Joy:

> She knew the material would not adapt itself to the play form. She had formed the habit of starting all her writing in the play form. She felt she got better characterization if she started out in dialogue; kept the best of it in the story, discarded the rest or put it into exposition and description. She began to write it as a short story. (184)

At the time of the Depression, when most of the people were out of work, Roosevelt set up WPA to provide jobs. Roosevelt's friend, Harry Hopkins, persuaded him to set up special projects to employ people in the arts. Federal Theatre Project was started with this object in mind, and Hallie Flanagan, a theatre professor at Vassar college, was appointed as the head. Smith got a job as a critic in the Play Bureau of the Federal Theatre Project and later, became an artist as well. On a tour to North Carolina University, Smith met Frederick Koch and Paul Green and secured jobs for both herself and Bob Finch. Yow says that Smith who witnessed the development of Green's play, *The Lost Colony* claimed that she was so inspired by it that it freed her from constricted technical writing. Green's *The Lost Colony* had the prestige of being declared as a part of the cultural heritage of the United States.

In Chapel Hill, Smith also worked on rewriting and critiquing plays for a nominal sum. At this time she met two amateur playwrights, Jack Woodford and Jay Sigmund. Woodford was

a writer of cheap love stories and wrote a few plays as well. He publicised one of the plays Smith co-authored with him as his own and this made Smith so angry that she terminated their collaboration. Yow also divulges that the play *Three Comments on a Martyr* carried Smith's name alone even though the theme was Sigmund's. In Smith-Sigmund collaboration, Sigmund supplied the themes based on spirituality and psychology and Smith worked on them to create the plays. This partnership worked till Sigmund died when he shot himself accidentally on a hunting trip. Later, when she wrote a scene in Tree, where Francie is told to use her classmate's material and work on it, Francie refuses to do so which makes us surmise that Smith repented her act. Smith also co-authored many plays with Bob Finch around this time. In one of his letters to Smith, Bob Finch also accuses her of claiming the plays they coauthored as her own. His bitterness with this action is seen when he claims that he would have still been writing if not for this mean streak of Smith.

Yow reveals Smith's strength and weakness in playwriting thus:

> Betty was a master of dialogue and the one-act play form, and she felt satisfaction in writing one-act plays. But she may have continued to write these plays mainly because she loved writing with Bob. Under pressure, she sometimes wrote too many plays, too fast; although the technique was flawless, she was not always emotionally invested. She had a realistic estimation of her strengths and weaknesses as a playwright, though. She admitted that although she was highly proficient in the genre, she was not always able to come up with a good plot and setting. She said, "I wait for someone to tell me what to do. But I do work

> thoroughly and put everything I have into whatever I do." When she wrote with a collaborator, she would take up the collaborator's interesting story line and rewrite it so that the result was a good play. She was serious about teaching playwriting, confident about her ability to critique a play and willing to help others write plays. (107)

Smith also consistently worked with students on their plays, analysing them, teaching them how to make a play effective, reading plays, writing critiques, and attending student productions. In 1937, she wrote a play, *So Gracious is the Time*, based on abortion. It was well-received in a one-act play contest and a judge commented that this play reminded him of the power and fidelity one sees in Gorki and Chekhov's works. This comment boosted Smith's morale who felt alienated by her fellow writers and University employees. Yow feels that Smith as a divorcee and mother of two girls, without a degree, and without a University position, must have felt very vulnerable.

Going through Smith's letters, Yow also surmises that Smith could have been pregnant at this time and had to abort due to reasons such as Bob's unwillingness to marry her, grownup daughters, and her advanced age. Smith's life was surrounded by insecurities from her childhood, trying to receive her mother's love, empathising with her irresponsible father, leaving her studies to work, living with her mother and incestuous stepfather, worrying about every single day when she was newly married to George Smith, later, when George prospered, dealing with his adultery, which traumatised her leaving her very insecure, divorcing and bringing up her two daughters as a single mother, finding work to survive, having a fragile relationship with Bob

Finch, having severe headaches, and having problems with her growing daughters. After Tree was published by Harper Publishers, she was, to a certain extent, freed of monetary problems and insecure feelings regarding her status as a writer as compared to other American writers of that time.

Compared to other educated persons with University positions and secure jobs with University degrees, who Smith calls her American contemporaries, she always felt isolated. She felt she would never be able to match their self-confidence. Smith felt this isolation when she was with her first husband, George Smith's friends as well. Her last novel, Joy in the Morning reverberated with Annie's feelings of isolation. Smith was only voicing her fears in this novel. Yow tells us that Smith was not in touch with mainstream writers such as Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty, but met Bernice Kelly Harris in various conferences. One reason Smith could not bond with her fellow women writers could be her mistrust of women in general, and the other reason could be her low self-confidence due to her working class background and other insecurities in life. Probably Smith's mistrust of women grew from her insecurities.

Yow believes that Smith's playwriting career has influenced Smith's writing style. I do agree with Yow that actually her expertise in writing dialogues in plays may have limited her writing style in that the narrative form was not that effective. I would deal with this in subsequent chapters. Yow goes on to talk about Smith's fascination for characterization based on the choice of words in the dialogue, pronunciation, mannerisms which reveal a person without much explanation. Smith had the power of total recall of people, incidents, and spoken words like her mother, Catherine. Smith used dialogue and action expertly to advance the dramatic

plots but had a problem when she had to narrate an incident using complex sentences. So she stuck to using short sentences and inside her heart believed that like Hemingway she could get away with it. Yow says of Smith's prose writing style:

> She wanted the prose to be simple, clear, direct and conversational. She did not want to have obvious technique or ostentatious language in the novel lest it distract the reader's attention from story and feelings. She herself felt too deeply about the novel's subject matter to write in a way that her style would call attention to itself. (137)

Yow says that "[l]ike other American writers of immigrant families such as Anzia Yezierska, Henry Roth, Mario Puzo, Henry Miller, O. E. Rolvaag, and Julia Alvarez, Betty Smith felt a fiercely insistent need to examine her immigrant forebears' confrontation with American culture and the psychological trauma within families as they tried to adjust and survive" (139). Smith admitted that she was deeply influenced by James T. Farrell and was aware of writers such as Edna Ferber and Theodore Dreiser.

In spite of the similarities of age and country, Betty Smith, John Steinbeck, and James T. Farrell ended up belonging to different streams of the literary canon because of their geographical locations. Smith belonged to the industrialised Brooklyn area where work was available. Steinbeck belonged to the agriculture-based Southern area which was hit by natural calamities. Farrell belonged to Chicago where people were hungry for power, money, and sex. Smith's life was surrounded by working women who seized the opportunities present at the time of the World War. Steinbeck watched people who were displaced from the land they thought

was their own, and rushed for work to unknown lands. Farrell grew up in a neighbourhood where young boys wanted to grow up into tough guys who would do anything for money, power, and sex. In Farrell's neighbourhood the life expectancy of a young, promising boy was below thirty years. If he was not killed by gangsters, he was killed by alcoholism. Farrell's Studs Lonigan is an example of the young men in his neighbourhood.

Johnny Nolan of a Tree, though not as tough as Lonigan, is an example which Smith gives of young failures in life. Nolan, like Lonigan, dies of alcoholism and pneumonia. The problems or life they lived were different. Where Smith's characters knew the cause of poverty and how to overcome them, Steinbeck's characters had to deal with unknown forces and natural calamities. Farrell's main characters are young, uneducated men who pretend to be tough. They are not bound by any rules of family or society. They are only interested in drinking and fighting and being known as tough guys among the gangsters in the neighbourhood they live. Steinbeck's characters are illiterate, hardworking farmers, and Smith's are illiterate, hardworking immigrants who had a chance to work in the industrialised Brooklyn area. Steinbeck and Farrell were just mirroring life from their viewpoint in their narratives whereas Smith picked up real situations and gave her own endings.

Carol Siri Johnson reveals that Smith agrees that she was influenced by Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson and Thomas Wolfe. Smith also admired writers like Steinbeck, Farrel and Henry Roth. According to Johnson, Smith's style was consciously developed and aimed at readers belonging to the working class. Johnson also says that her style and her subject kept her out of mainstream literature.

Johnson also states that Smith's Tree was published because of the time period she wrote in. She claims that because there were few men at home in America at the time of War, the writers, readers and publishers as well were women and this actually helped in getting Tree published. She also says that the literature produced in 1940s was excluded from the canon as there were not many men writers.

Johnson states that Smith's literary contribution was negated by New Criticism, to whose rules Smith's novels did not conform. But Johnson also asserts that in the context of Smith's life and her times Smith's literature takes a definite direction. She also recollects the words of Tom McCormack who along with Thomas Evan of Harper Perennial accepted editing the novel and who later on claimed that "[o]nly a pro of the first order can weave stuff together like that." This comment makes us understand the complexity of Smith's novels. When we read Smith's novels, we understand that each and every incident she writes about is relevant and she dexterously interweaves these with plots that are interesting, poignant and sometimes humorous as well.

However, Johnson also claims that since "no one social group holds the key to life," the writings of all the writers belonging to various economic, ethnic, and gender groups are valuable. Hence, I feel that acknowledging Smith's voice is important in literature as well as in American history.

Smith regrettably finds herself isolated not only from the mainstream but also from women's writing and socially-relevant American writing, in spite of the fact that most of her work concentrated on working class women's issues and her characters were based on working class Americans. Apart from Tree, critics have sidelined her other three novels.

Critics like Diana Trilling, Rosemary Dawson, G. E. Miles, Orville Prescott, and Virgilia Peterson, have treated Smith's literary work as bildungsroman and sentimental. Today, as we are aware of the debates on questions of the "literary," on the construction of identities etc., we are ready to acknowledge alternate voices, and are in a position to judge Smith's work in the context of her times, her life, her ideas, and as related to the particular section it is directed to. Smith, coming from a poor, immigrant family, dealt firsthand with most of the problems the poor, immigrants faced in America. The immigrants were denied work, denied a proper place to live in, denied the dignity of life which is the basic right of any human being, denied basic health and education facilities, and to top it all, they had to face a hostile environment consisting of mainstream Americans, other immigrants, and the government. The only thing they could look up to for succour was religion, which did not help them much. Religion never did change despite the huge change in the times and in the needs of the common people. It did little to help the immigrants, to educate them, to protect their rights, and to allow them to lead a better life.

Most immigrant men were burdened by feelings of isolation and hostility at work places and would vent their frustrations on women at home. Women, in turn, vented their frustrations on children and other women they met in their lives. Women were surrounded with problems like making ends meet, bringing up children, forging relations with in-laws and the neighbourhood, and facing irate husbands at home. Life, for them, was a continuous struggle. They were not aware of the basic facilities the government offered nor was the Church helpful in this regard.

Life lacked basic amenities and dignity. The only thing they clung on to was, hope. Hope for themselves, and when they came to terms with the hopeless life, they eagerly turned this hope towards their children, and hoped that at least the children would lead a better life than the parents. For this section of people, who believed in the American Dream, and who dreamed that someday they would be able to realise it, "hope" was the only thing that allowed them to live. Smith could possibly be trying to create and correct the situations around her according to her thoughts.

All this is evident in the themes of her four novels. Smith's Tree is the story of three generations of women who gradually see a change in life and transform their personal dreams into hopes for their children. This is a recurring trait in Smith's novels. It brings to the notice of the readers immigrant women's awareness of governmental reforms as years go by and the struggle to lead a better life than the previous generation. A brief discussion of the themes in the four novels is given below.

In Tree, Francie's mother, Katie looks at her children lugging a Christmas tree up the stairs and wonders when her children would realise the viciousness of poverty that they were steeped in and try to come out of it. By the time they climb the stairs and reach their home, Katie figures out a way to come out of the squalor they live in. The following paragraph can be thought of as a base for the story of Tree:

> An answer came to Katie. It was so simple that a flash of astonishment that felt like pain shot through her head. Education! That was it! It was education that

> made the difference! Education would pull them out of the grime and dirt. Proof? Miss Jackson was educated, the McGarrity wasn't. Ah! That's what Mary Rommely, her mother, had been telling her all those years. Only her mother did not have the one clear word: education! (207)

Smith's views on education are clear from the above narration. She felt that formal college education is extremely valuable in life. She explains that Katie was not interested in street-smart intelligence that earned riches. Katie wanted her children to be like the teacher, Miss Jackson, who though poor was different from Mrs. McGarrity. Katie felt that formal education leads to an attitude of unassuming self-assurance as was evidenced by Miss Jackson's behaviour.

Smith's second novel, Tomorrow Will Be Better is about lovelorn mothers' selfish hold on their children, a man's confusion with his sexual identity, a young woman's dream for a better life, a marriage gone wrong, and a young woman's courage to come out of this marriage and live on her own. Smith ends this novel too on hope. This is a novel about immigrants' realisation that the American Dream is not for them but who still hope that it might work for their children.

Smith's Maggie-Now is entirely different from her previous novels. Here the central character, Maggie-Now, as opposed to the strong women in her earlier novels, simply floats with circumstances. She is a passive giver who only revels in providing. Maggie-Now is perhaps based on Smith's married life with her third husband, Robert Finch who she considered the love

of her life. Smith created the character, Maggie, a giver, probably in memory of that love. Maggie is revealed to us in the writer's words in the following manner:

> Sometimes her mother let her take lunch to school. Usually it was two bologna sandwiches. She always traded them for the three slices of dry bread a wispy girl brought for lunch, insisting that she hated meat and liked plain bread better. It wasn't that she was sorry for the girl or overly generous; she just liked to give things.
>
> "She is a giver," sighed Sister Veronica to Sister Mary Joseph.
>
> "She'll have a busy life, then," said Sister Mary Joseph dryly. "There are ten takers for one giver." (57)

Smith's Joy in the Morning is a celebration of the early years of marriage. As against her other novels, where she highlights the drudgery of poor housewives, Smith, in Joy, brings out the beauty of the early years of marriage: the dreams, the aspirations, the hopes, the beliefs, the joy, and the love a young newly-married couple shares. Joy is about how a marriage should be. It is a novel in which we see the couple grow individually, as well as together, still in love with each other, and with hopes for a better life in future. This novel is about suffering in the present for a better tomorrow. The protagonist, Annie tries to convince her husband, Carl about the beauty of the life they share even though they are poor, "But it's not the tenement kind of poor. That's

being poor for *nothing*. But we're poor for *something*. You'll get a law degree out of it, and I'm getting so much out of it right now by being allowed to go to my class" (116).

Poverty is unable to subdue the exuberance of Annie who takes pleasure in enjoying the present moment without fear for the future. She is a woman who hopes that "something wonderful will turn up" (Joy 116) in the future and does not mind enduring poverty in the present as long as she has this hope to give her strength.

In all the four novels Smith shows her craft of storytelling by interweaving social issues with autobiographical details around the central theme. She is different from some of her contemporary writers who were writing about poverty in that she not only tries to find out the root cause of the problem but offers solutions as well. While writers like Pearl S. Buck and Ann Petry dealt only with poverty and its repercussions, writers like Ferber, Yezierska, and Smith dealt with women's concerns, poverty and its repercussions and ways to overcome the problems.

All the four novels of Smith taken as a whole portray the steady growth of a woman. Smith resented the fact that some of the critics had sidelined her work as just bildungsroman. In essence, though her novels can be considered bildungsroman, Smith deals with major concerns related to immigrants, working class, women and society. As the themes in all the four novels are very similar, I have chosen to concentrate on individual novels in my chapters rather than focus on different themes in each chapter.

Section III

In this section I would like to deal with the problems women faced in the early twentieth century as reflected in the novels of Smith and select authors. When we look at the kind of progress women achieved, it is ironical that the so-called progress only brought in more problems. I have consciously picked up authors both men and women; authors who were in America against their wishes and authors who chose to be in America; and also authors who were feminists belonging to the 19th as well as the 20th century. The point I want to get across is that problems of women were beyond any particular period, race and class. Also the reason for picking up male authors is to stress the point that men were also aware of these gender differences and problems women faced irrespective of class and race and mirrored them in their novels.

Most working class young women start their life with dreams for a better life than that of their mothers. At the age they are able to take a decision regarding their life, they have only two options—either work for a better life or marry with a hope for the best. Either way they end up defeated because in the first case society can not offer them a life they dream for in spite of their willingness to work hard. Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945), Anzia Yezierska (1880s-1970), Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973), Richard Wright (1908-1960) and Ann Petry (1908-1997) have mirrored the society of their times in their writings. Though these writers chose women from different race and class backgrounds, they have established that irrespective of differences, women had to face numerous problems despite the gradual changes they had in their lifestyles. If rich women were troubled by boredom and a sense of emptiness, poor working women found it difficult to

make ends meet. The men whom they believed in eventually turned out to be undependable. Working class women had to face economic problems which led to abuse, indignity, emotional and physical illnesses ending in untimely death, despondency, and boredom. When these women took up work to supplement their incomes, the troubles did not vanish; instead, further problems cropped up. The men in their lives found devious ways to oppress their newfound economic freedom.

In Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie (1900) we see George Hurston trying to latch on to Carrie Meebers whom he cheats into running away with him. In Pearl S. Buck's The Mother (1934), the hardworking mother finds her husband absconding, leaving her with three children and an old mother-in-law to care for. Though Richard Wright in Native Son (1940), deals with Bigger Thomas, the son of the miserable racial circumstances in America, he also interestingly though briefly deals with the problems of African American working class young women. Though the story is about racism which has created Bigger and generations of men like Bigger, Wright also, to a lesser extent, deals with a young woman's problems based on race and class. Bigger's girl, Bessie who works hard and leads a simple life is a picture of abuse at the hands of this underprivileged juvenile. Bigger gives her the money he robs from Mary's body to spend. Later on, he reveals to her Mary's murder and involves Bessie as an accomplice in a white woman's murder case. Eventually, Bessie herself ends up murdered by Bigger. Life of a poor working woman can be seen through Bessie's words:

> "Bigger, please! Don't do this to me! *Please!* All I do is work, work like a dog! From morning till night. I ain't got no happiness. I ain't never had none. I ain't

> got nothing and you do this to me. After how good I been to you. Now you just spoil my whole life. I've done everything for you I know how and you do this to me. *Please* Bigger. . . ." She turned her head away and stared at the floor. "Lord, don't let this happen to me! I ain't done nothing for this to come to me! I just work! I ain't had no happiness, no nothing. I just work! I'm black and I work and don't bother nobody. . . ." (169-170)

Native Son is a novel where the problems of white and black women are shrewdly juxtaposed. Denied of dignity in life and death, Bessie, a black woman stands as a complete contrast to Mary. Mary, in spite of her riches and enviable position as a rich heiress in society, has problems. Brought up by dutiful, philanthropic Christian parents, Mary ends up as a wild woman who takes up drinking and behaves in a wild and reckless manner. Bessie's death serves only as a tool to fasten evidence on Bigger, but as a murder victim, Bessie loses because of her race.

Reading selected novels from Theodore Dreiser to Smith, it is apparent that though industrialization helped in creating employment for women, it could not provide stability or dignity in a woman's life. Despite all her riches, Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of Kate Chopin's The Awakening (1899) is still a "poor" woman. A rich man's wife and the mother of two children, Edna to her great consternation finds herself in love with a younger person. As she tries to understand and come to terms with herself, she drowns in the whirlpool of emotions. Unable to justify herself or her family, Edna drifts away from her family and the person she

loves. The awakening of her self-realisation leaves her so emotionally deprived that she ends up killing herself.

On the other extreme of the social ladder is Carrie Meebers, Dreiser's protagonist of Sister Carrie (1900). Starting as a working girl and earning $4 per week, and progressing to a stage actress who earned more than she could ever imagine, Carrie makes a remarkable progress financially. But earning money does not give Carrie the emotional satisfaction she craved for. The two men in her life, Charles Drouet and George Hurstwood, who for a period of time, provided for her to some extent, fail to give her emotional stability and dignity she sought.

Yezierska's Sarah in Bread Givers (1925) could find solace only in her roots. Achieving her life's ambition for which she willingly sacrificed her family, does not bring contentment in Sarah's life. She has had to go back to her Jewish upbringing to find means to satiate her restlessness. Giving a thought to her neighbourhood and the father she hated brings a semblance of hope back into her life. Her success alone does not give her happiness; she ends up looking after her father, and also develops an awareness of the neighbourhood.

In The Mother (1934) by Pearl S. Buck, we see the protagonist suffering throughout her life without any respite. The protagonist is a victim of poverty and circumstances beyond her control. Deserted by her husband, she strives to uphold her dignity in the village by sending herself money in the name of her husband. She succumbs to a taxman and becomes pregnant. She attempts to abort her child using wild methods and almost kills herself. She resigns stoically to life and brings back her blind daughter's body from her marital home, presumably killed by

her in-laws. She helplessly watches her second son executed as he is involved with subversive groups who work against the government. Pearl S. Buck shows that many women like her fall victim to poverty and illiteracy.

In Ann Petry's The Street (1946), Lutie Johnson in spite of her hard work could not achieve her ambition of living in a dignified manner and keeping her son off the street. Lutie Johnson worked in the home of a white family, away from her husband and son to try to provide a decent living for the family, only to find out that her husband cheated on her. And she is blamed by her husband for his infidelity. His reasoning is simple; if the wife is away for such a long period of time, how is he going to satisfy his sexual urge? Lutie also faces racial discrimination in the white home, where some of the guests who visit the home warn the lady of the house that Lutie is too beautiful and may entice her husband.

Lutie had to find work in a world where most of the whites think that the blacks are after them and a majority of the blacks think that the white people lust after them. Lutie faces sexual harassment from both black and white men. A black himself, Boots Smith tries to lead her on by promising a singing career. A white man, Mr. Junto, who owns the apartment in which Lutie lives, also covets Lutie. Eventually, Lutie kills Boots Smith when he tries to rape her and runs away leaving her young son in a juvenile home.

Looking at the broad spectrum of Smith's contemporary writers we can understand that women faced problems irrespective of class and race. Financial independence is only a transient independence for women, and it is only a beginning. It should be used as a tool to better oneself

as a person and to do away with prejudices. Analysing the novels written by authors belonging to different races, class and gender about women belonging to different sections of society in different time periods, proves that financial independence did not bring about a dramatic change in a woman's life. On the contrary, we can say that it brought in more responsibilities and also frustration when women realised that their meagre earnings were not sufficient to provide for the family. Even in the present, a bias exists against women, where women are paid lesser than their male counterparts for a similar job done.

My study made me realise that the main problem a woman faces is the preconceived notion of the society and family regarding a woman's role. Society has some set rules and notions regarding how a woman should fare in life. A slight deviation from this path and the society immediately gears up to make the woman feel guilty, and also goes to great lengths to punish the individual. It is ironical to see the society which silently watches a crime committed in its midst taking up the role of a guardian of morals where a woman's role is concerned. Society does not play a role in bringing the culprit to book. Society does not right a wrong. Society does not try to stop a crime from being committed. Society, in spite of the changing times, does not try to broaden its views. Society does not try to reach the oppressed and downtrodden, but society lays down the rules as to how a woman should conduct herself.

From Dreiser to Smith, if we see the kind of role society plays, it is clearly evident that society does not help uplift a woman. Society only comes into the picture to point at a woman who has taken a step towards liberation. Society is nowhere to be seen when a woman is in

need. Society only finds pleasure in finding fault with women who have deviated from the conventional role to fulfill her needs.

The irony further lies in the fact that the injustice was greater in a land like America which immigrants considered a safe haven, a land of equal opportunities, and a land where people believed that dreams could be realised with hard work.

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Chapter 2

Worlds Were Not Unattainable

In this chapter, I attempt to look into the dreams, the aspirations, the spirit to overcome hurdles, and the strength of perseverance in working class immigrant women as depicted in A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. This novel is about working class, immigrant women trying to chase the mirage of dreams in the land of dreams.

The issues mainly affecting the women in Tree are class and race. In Tree the voice we acknowledge is the voice of a working class woman who is ready to take up hard work and challenge her destiny rather than grieve over her circumstances. Tree is autobiographical, is a bildungsroman and is sentimental; in addition, we also see the shift from ignorance to knowledge in the immigrant women and the shift in the viewpoint of the author regarding America. In the beginning of the novel we see the author partly blaming the Church and the government for the problems the immigrants face. By the end of the novel and the passing of years, there is a change in the mindset of immigrant women as they become more educated and more aware than their previous generations. They know how to solve their problems and work towards achieving their dreams.

Published in 1943, the novel conveys the dreams of three generations of poor, hardworking immigrant women, and Smith's solution to achieve those dreams. Smith's daughter, Nancy Pfeiffer informs us that "[s]ome of the material of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* first appeared in play form. The forerunner of "Tree" is an early three-act play called *Becomes a*

Woman. The character of Francie was developed in a play called *Francie Nolan*. Chapter 33 of "Tree" first appeared in a one-act play dated 1940 called *Fun After Supper*" (Tree 7).

The novel is about the growing up of a young girl, Francie Nolan. It is about the dreams of the young girl for a bright future, a girl who had to give up her education at the age of fourteen to support her family. Tree is also about the dreams of a poor immigrant woman, Mary Rommely who dreams of a better life for her daughters through education and saving. It is about the dreams of love, marriage, companionship and family of a young woman, Katie Rommely. It is about the dreams of the three sisters, Sissy, Katie, and Evy for a better life for their children. It is about the strength and hope of poor immigrants in spite of poverty. It conveys the love of a daughter for her father, drunk though he is.

Tree has made Betty Smith popular and rich beyond her dreams. The title of the novel is clearly symbolic of the story of a poor eleven-year-old girl who dreams of making it big in an insensitive world. Despite poverty which has the power to destroy the soul and make a person insecure, the spirit in her allows Francie to dream big and work towards achieving her goal. Francie is not only a dreamer but also has a creative mind that finds beauty in mundane things in life. She finds the tree so beautiful with "[i]ts umbrellas curled over, around and under her third floor fire escape" that simply sitting on the fire escape makes her "imagine that she was living in a tree" (6). Poverty is unable to diminish her ability to perceive and create beauty out of ordinary things in life: "It grew in boarded-up lots and out of neglected rubbish heaps and it was the only tree that grew out of cement. It grew lushly, but only in the tenements districts" (6).

This tree called the “Tree of Heaven” is also symbolic of the spirit of immigrants who believe in the American Dream and strive hard to achieve it. With regard to the seed of this tree, Smith could be referring to the numerous immigrants who deluged America in the hope of making it big. Boarded-up lots, rubbish heaps, and cement are nothing but an indication of the obstacles that these immigrants had to face in life. Despite such problems, immigrants continued to turn up in hordes which in turn gave rise to tenements. In Brooklyn tenements, life found its way in spite of poverty.

A tree or a plant has been used symbolically in novels, short stories and even autobiographies as well cutting across cultural and geographical boundaries by authors. Though each tree or plant, represents a slightly different idea. In Smith’s novel, we see the tree representing the growth of free spirit despite hardships due to poverty. In the Telugu short story, “Bonsai Life” by Abburi Chaya Devi, we get the idea that the tree which grows up in the open land is not only independent and can withstand dust storms, rain, sun, or a squall but can also provide shelter to people. In this short story, a woman who is not educated much, comes to visit her sister who is well educated and working in a city. She is unhappy with her dependence on her husband for everything. She finds her sister’s life as a working woman more fulfilling. She is dismayed to see her sister raising bonsai plants in her apartment’s balcony. She voices that bonsai plants are delicate like a housewife and cannot withstand any hardships, leave alone provide shelter to anyone, whereas a tree which grows out in the open is strong and sturdy and can provide shelter to people.

"Look how tall that turayi has grown. Out in the open, see how freely it has grown. However powerful the sandstorm, it hasn't bowed a little bit. Moreover, it has provided shelter to so many people, and is protecting them. Imagine how many would find respite from the hot sun under the shade!"

"What's so surprising about that?" I asked.

"Not that it is surprising, Ammalu. Look at the bonsai you have tended to lovingly! It looks proper and sweet, like a housewife. But see how delicate it is. You have to tend it very carefully. It can't even withstand a small dust storm or squall. When it is dependent on someone, how can it provide shelter to anyone? Isn't it because of the difference in the way one brings up a boy and a girl, that a woman's life is like that of a bonsai?"(118)

Kamala Das, in her autobiography, My Story, uses the plant as a metaphor for the uprising of the feminist movement against a patriarchal society. Kamala Das vents out her frustration regarding the indifference meted out to her in her childhood by her parents. She emphasizes that parents play a vital role in bringing up their children, establishing their personalities, and thereby building up a healthy society, which unfortunately she was deprived of:

They took us for granted and considered us mere puppets, moving our limbs according to the tugs they gave us. They did not stop for a moment to think that

> we had personalities that were developing independently, like sturdy shoots of the banyan growing out of crevices in the walls of ancient fortresses. (74)

It is impossible to miss out the consequences the last line alludes to. She warns of young and revolutionary personalities breaking out of the crevices of ancient traditions and customs. It conveys the idea that youngsters are capable of building new ideas which could shake the ancient patriarchal society. Even though this could be just a beginning like a small plant, like the plant these new ideas have the strength to topple the building/patriarchal society which has become redundant. Fresh ideas, albeit in their initial stages, have the capacity to change an entire outmoded system which has become unsupportive and restrictive and inhibits growth.

In a different vein, Australian writers, Rosalie Medcraft and Valda Gee, who are part aboriginal, in their autobiography, The Sausage Tree, give a lot of importance to the Laurel tree which grew in their garden. The fact that the autobiography was titled The Sausage Tree is an admission of the importance of the tree in their lives. In their life the sausage tree stands as witness to their happy and innocent childhood. It was witness to children's games like playing shop, hide and seek, and numerous other games. It was an important part of their childhood: "Many years later when Dad rebuilt the fence he trimmed back the sausage tree as it was in his way. The tree didn't take too kindly to this treatment and in due course it withered and died" (ix).

When the tree died after being trimmed by their father, the authors admit to taking the loss so much to heart that they felt that a part of their childhood was missing. As the writing of

the autobiography is an attempt to bring back their childhood, they have probably given the title The Sausage Tree to their autobiography with the belief that it would bring back their missing childhood in their memories. The trimming of the sausage tree here also symbolizes the oppression of the Australian aboriginals by the white people. Exploited by the white people, the tradition and culture of the aboriginals is almost on the brink of extinction.

The use of a tree symbolically also reflects the life the author has led and the author's priorities in life. For Smith, achieving her dreams despite poverty was her life's ambition. Smith herself had to leave school and start working in a factory at the age of fourteen. Her experiences in life are reflected in her novels. Kamala Das, born in a traditional, orthodox Nair family, feels suffocated and stifled in a loveless family. She rebelled against the set rules of society and this rebellion is reflected in her autobiography. As for Abburi Chaya Devi's "Bonsai Life," it reflects the strength education has bestowed on the author. Her purpose in life seems to be to enrich a girl child through education. Also she seems to advocate that an educated and working woman can provide shelter in good and hard times like a tree which provides shelter to people in rain and shine. Her priority in life is to educate a girl child so that the child can withstand life's adversities and become a strength to provide shelter for others as well. For Rosalie Medcraft and Valda Gee, the tree symbolizes their culture and ethnicity, their family, their roots and memories, and trimming it is symbolic of the danger of its extinction by white people's unwanted intrusion. A tree thus is a powerful symbol used by different authors to indicate the growth of one great idea of strength despite setbacks, which is capable of giving shelter.

Reading the texts belonging to authors from different countries and diverse backgrounds, we see that women face problems irrespective of race and class. Betty Smith belonged to the American working class, Rosalie Medcraft and Valda Gee are part aboriginal Australians, and Kamala Das and Abburi Chaya Devi are from upper class Indian families. Their texts prove that women from different class and race backgrounds have been beleaguered with problems and have been in a position to identify the cause of their problems.

Tree was published at the time of the Second World War, when America was energetically trying to project a positive image of a land of abundance to the world—a picture perfect image of a country where hard work alone works wonders, where nothing could go wrong for those who dare to dream and work hard towards realising it. But the real story was otherwise and Smith did not hesitate to portray it.

The immigrants' experiences in Smith's novels are anything but wonderful. Their first step on the American shore is greeted by thieves who steal their entire belongings. They are tagged "greenhorns" and ridiculed by the Americans as well as immigrants who had settled in America just before them. Though willing to work hard, getting work that would keep their body and soul together is next to impossible. Getting a job that pays them well and renting a decent place to live in are their persistent worries and they live in eternal fear that they would lose their jobs and have to vacate their rooms. They dare not look for a better job for fear that the supervisors in the alien country would harm their prospects and this fear pursues them throughout their lives. The government is indifferent to their problems and completely ignores them. The immigrants are unaware of the benefits provided by the government regarding

education, poverty, and health. The immigrant women feel isolated and continuously strive to show to the American world that they belong to America in the way they dress and behave.

Isolation is also addressed in Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie where Carrie, a white girl, longs to belong to that part of America which according to her is fashionable. She yearns for new dresses so that she is acknowledged by her peer group which is the working class young women. All this craving for dresses is nothing but a pathetic effort to fit into the world Carrie sees and wishes to belong to. It is a silent cry to be accepted by her equals and to this end she sacrifices her values and beliefs. Margy in Tomorrow Will Be Better and Annie in Joy in the Morning also express a similar feeling, trying to belong to that section of America in which they exist. The lives of Carrie in Sister Carrie, Margy in Tomorrow, Annie in Joy and Lutie in The Street are evidence of the fact that working class women suffered in America irrespective of their race. In the process of being identified as Americans, immigrant women are willing to lose their individual identities. In spite of this heavy loss they are willing to pay, they are not viewed by their American counterparts as having the status of American-born citizens.

Burdened by their men who ill-treat them, the poor immigrant women run the family, bring up the children away from the vices poverty ensnares them into, and put on a facade of a normal family. These women have to face problems from the men in their lives, from the outsiders, from their children, and have to be emotionally strong enough to be able to deal with these problems without losing their sanity.

Communication is another vital problem for immigrants in the new world. Smith brings out in the open the problems immigrants face in learning the English language, trying to converse in it, and overcoming their mother tongue influence in pronouncing words clearly. Historians like Alejandro Portes in Immigrant America accept that the main hurdle for the immigrants is learning the language and being able to converse clearly so that others can easily understand them without ridiculing their accent:

> Learning to live simultaneously in two social worlds is a requisite of "successful" immigrant adaptation. In a world so different from one's native land, much has to be learned initially to cope—especially, the new language. With few exceptions, newcomers unable to speak English in the Anglo-American world face enormous obstacles. Learning English is a basic step to enable them to participate in the life of the larger community, get an education, find a job, obtain access to health care or social services, and apply for citizenship. Language has often been cited as the principal initial barrier confronting recent immigrants, from the least educated peasants to the most educated professionals. To be sure, the process of language learning—played out, particularly for the children of the new immigrants, in the institutional context of the public schools—is a complex story of mutual adaptation, of the accommodation of two or more ethnolinguistic groups in particular structural contexts. (181)

Smith also relates how Francie in Tree is made fun of by her friends because of her accent. In Tomorrow and Joy too, the protagonists, in spite of being born in America, face

problems because of their accent. We can understand how difficult it is for an immigrant to master the language so as to communicate with others. The language Smith uses in her novels is very simple and spoken and understood by immigrants. Smith's writing in some ways reminds us of Edna Ferber's writing. Smith mentions reading Ferber's novel So Big (1924) in Tomorrow Will Be Better (1947). Evy driving a milk wagon and being the first woman driver to drive in a milk route reminds us of Selina DeJong in So Big where Selina is the first woman to drive a cart of vegetables into the town market. Selina, a widow of just one week, takes her cart load of vegetables to the market for the first time and lies down in the hay with her young son next to her, waiting for the market to start and for a new dawn in her life. Ferber compares her with Mary lying down in the hay with her newborn son, Jesus in her arms:

> She did sleep miraculously. The September stars twinkled brightly down on them. As she lay there, the child in her arms, asleep, peace came to the haggard face, relaxed the tired limbs. Much like another woman who had lain in the straw with her child in her arms almost two thousand years before. (182)

Smith's language also sometimes resembles Ferber's. Smith also draws parallels from the Bible when she talks about Joanna, an unwed mother and the treatment meted out to her by her neighbours: "'Bitch! You bitch!' screamed the stringy one hysterically. Then acting on an instinct which was strong even in Christ's day, she picked a stone out of the gutter and threw it at Joanna" (233).

Interestingly English historian, Elizabeth Roberts throws light on the social condition of unwed mothers in this period in A Woman's Place. Through the interviews of many women Roberts establishes the fact that the few women who were pregnant before marriage had to make drastic choices like killing themselves, or giving the child away for adoption after birth, or in the rarest of cases being brought up by the mother. These deplorable conditions are not limited to England but are universal, and they not only apply to that period of time but in some places even to the present as well. Mrs. Dobson (married in 1930) narrates to Roberts an incident told to her by her mother:

> In them days the bride and bridegroom used to walk to church to get married. Now, if the woman was pregnant, I think that was really cruel, she might not have been the willing party. It isn't always the girl's fault you know! But this here woman she worked in the same mill as my mother and this here weaver asked my mother if she was going to watch the wedding. She said that she couldn't as she had her washing to do. Anyhow, when my mother went to work on the Monday they told her what the wedding was like. They stoned the woman because she was pregnant. That was at Emmanuel Church. That was nasty-minded women!
>
> (76-79)

This narration not only lets us know how intolerant people are of human faults, but also that there are a few women even at that time who consider such moral policing nasty.

Smith's idea regarding life is also similar to Ferber's. In Edna Ferber's So Big, Simon Peake, a gambler, tells his daughter, Selina DeJong the significance of living:

> Living. All mixed up. The more kinds of people you see, and the more things you do, and the more things that happen to you the richer you are. Even if they're not pleasant things. That's living. Remember, no matter what happens, good or bad, it's just so much"—he used the gambler's term, unconsciously—"just so much velvet." (10)

Like Ferber, Smith also conveys the idea that for some people life means living every moment and employs the term "so much velvet" when talking about it. In life, anything apart from tribulations is "so much velvet." When Katie in Tree complains to Sissy regarding Johnny's drinking binges, Sissy tells her that she has to put up with his drinking because she loved him and married him. Sissy advises her that sex is important for a marriage to survive and if there are other good aspects in marriage they too are advantageous: "What other things? Well, maybe there are," conceded Sissy. "If there are other good things too, that's so much velvet"(102). Smith believes that good sex is important for a happy marriage and takes up this issue in her other novels as well.

Simon Peake's views on life in So Big are also reiterated by Francie in Tree. Francie on knowing that War has been declared tries to immortalize the time in her memory. Like Ferber's Simon Peake she wishes to live each and every moment in her life:

> "Dear God," she prayed, "let me be *something* every minute of every hour of my life. Let me be gay; let me be sad. Let me be cold; let me be warm. Let me be hungry. . . .have too much to eat. Let me be ragged or well dressed. Let me be sincere—be deceitful. Let me be truthful; let me be a liar. Let me be honourable and let me sin. Only let me be *something* every blessed minute. And when I sleep, let me dream all the time so that not one little piece of living is ever lost." (421)

Francie hopes for being something every minute in life whereas Katie would rather die than live in certain circumstances. Francie's passion for life is against Katie's views of life who though poor and in an alien country, left without any hope for the future, and recently widowed, refuses to stoop down to take charity from the Catholic Charities as suggested by her sister Evy, "'When the time comes,' said Katie quietly, 'that we have to take charity baskets, I'll plug up the doors and windows and wait until the children are sound asleep and then turn on every gas jet in the house'" (303). Charity is so demeaning to Katie that she would rather kill her children and herself than accept it. Though she is physically helpless and her children are too young to work, Katie is willing to work and allow her children to work than accept charity.

Katie like her mother, Mary Rommely, and her daughter, Francie Nolan believes that education is the redeemer of their lives. Mary Rommely advises her daughter, Katie Nolan that the reading of the two greatest books in the world, The Bible and <u>The Complete Works of Shakespeare</u> to Katie's daughter, Francie "will make a different world for her" (83):

> The secret lies in the reading and the writing. You are able to read. Every day you must read one page from some good book to your child. Every day this must be until the child learns to read. Then *she* must read every day, I know this is the secret. (83)

Mary Rommely who is uneducated and worked as a domestic help previously passes on the knowledge she has received from her workplace to her daughter. Through her observation she understands that education brings a change in one's life. Mary Rommely believes that the Protestant Bible is more beautiful than the Catholic Bible as she heard a few parts of the Protestant Bible read to her by a very good Protestant friend. Though a devout Catholic, she advocates that the Protestant Bible is far more exquisite than the Catholic Bible to her daughter, Katie and tells her to read it to her children.

Katie eventually understands what her mother told her at the time Francie was born. Earning wealth like McGarrity is not a priority for her. Katie wants her children to develop sophistication that comes only with education. Education, she believes, would widen their prospects in life. Katie comprehends that education and better work choices would allow them to combat poverty.

This seems to be a common feeling which prevailed in the majority of working class people whether in America or England. In her introduction to A Woman's Place, Elizabeth Roberts after interviewing a number of women deduces that "many women indicated their awareness of the limited horizons and opportunities of their lives, but were just as likely to

associate their menfolk with this lack of choice. They tended to blame the poverty which governed where they lived, the length and nature of their education, and very often the kind of jobs available to them" (2). Roberts finally tells us that "[i]n other words, women who were conscious of their exploitation interpreted it in terms of class conflict" (2). We can perceive that what Roberts says of England is applicable to America as well. Similar kind of atrocities being perpetrated on women in England and America makes one wonder where the Pilgrim Fathers' notion of creating a better world than England stands.

Francie has her own views on education. At the tender age of fourteen she has to leave school to work to provide for her family. She tries to figure out her life while she is working in a factory. She reflects that covering wires with green tissue paper to create stems for artificial flowers throughout her life would be her future. Even if she is lucky enough to marry she would marry a guy who is also a factory worker and they would lead lives like their parents. She imagines that after the birth of children monotony would set in and the couple would end up in bitter fights like the numerous couples she has seen in her life. "These people are caught," she thought. "And why? Because" (remembering her grandmother's repeated convictions), "they haven't got enough education" (365).

Apart from Francie, Katie is the most important and complex character created with qualities that make her seem so human, so brave, and so real. In her youth, Katie loves Johnny Nolan enough to steal him away from her best friend, Hildy O'Dair, but poverty makes a mockery of Katie's love and leaves her indifferent to her husband's death. Katie, a woman who

her daughter judges as being partial to her brother and not always clever, is loved by her children and sisters, and admired by Thomas McShane who proposes to her after Johnny's death.

The men in the novel, the Nolans, are physically weak and dispirited. When the going gets tough they simply turn to bars and get drunk. Smith describes them as, "THE ROMMELYS RAN TO WOMEN OF STRONG PERSONALITIES. The Nolans ran to weak and talented men" (70).

An interesting aspect Smith writes about is the reluctance of the male characters to be committed to the family. Frankie in Tomorrow, Claude in Maggie-Now and Carl Brown in Joy are reluctant to have children citing poverty as reason. But their wives are eager to have children. Johnny in Tree gets so scared when Katie delivers their children that he ends up in a drinking binge. When he comes to know that he is going to be a father for the third time he feels restless the whole night and stays awake. Pregnancy of his wife makes Johnny realise his inadequacy as a husband and father and unfortunately he is not strong enough to change the way in which he leads his life. For Johnny, his wife's pregnancy is a reminder of his failure to support the family. Surprisingly, Frankie and Carl, after knowing that their wives are pregnant, look forward to their role of a father.

Smith's protagonists, Katie in Tree, Margy in Tomorrow, Maggie in Maggie-Now, and Annie in Joy, crave to become mothers when they are still not in a position to support themselves as they are young and unable to plan for their future. These women are not well educated and, as they are not working, they end up only thinking of family life. When they perceive their

husbands' loss of interest in them they try to hold on to their children, thinking that the birth of children would make their men more responsible and caring towards their family. Unfortunately, in most working class families, men vanish after getting married and having children. Their families are only aware of their absence but never their presence. Probably the reason is that these men are too young and not educated enough to shoulder responsibilities.

In Tree, men in the lives of Katie, Evy, and their mother Mary Rommely are conspicuous by their absence. They are never present when the family needs them. Katie's husband, Johnny Nolan, gets married when he is just twenty. He finds to his horror that he is the father of a child and there is another child on the way by the time he is eligible to vote: "His life was finished before it had a chance to begin. He was doomed and no one knew it better than Johnny Nolan" (96). Smith conveys the idea that the immigrants knew that having children before settling in life is detrimental to their progress in life, but they were helpless to plan due to their religious beliefs and lack of education.

Katie marries Johnny for his good looks, singing and dancing capabilities. But she realises her responsibilities immediately after marriage and works toward accomplishing them. Johnny even though a year older than Katie can not accept the change and starts sliding down. He is unable to keep a job and unable to realise his responsibilities as the head of the family. He spends what little he earns on drinking. When life becomes tough, he ends up drinking more and runs away from his duties and his family. He loves his wife and children but paradoxically can not shoulder his responsibilities as the head of the family. He is immature and weak. Katie and Johnny are different in character but still loved each other as: "Katie had a fierce desire for

survival which made her a fighter. Johnny had a hankering after immortality which made him a useless dreamer. And that was the great difference between these two who loved each other so well" (97). Katie has dreams which are practical and feasible and she has the inner strength to work towards achieving her dreams. Dreams are useless if there is no burning desire to actually accomplish them.

In Tree, Smith brilliantly tackles most of the issues that plagued poor immigrant women. The treatment meted out to the immigrants by the Church and the government is dealt with impartial candour. It is sad that some of the immigrants themselves after settling in America treat the new immigrants in as despicable manner as the Americans do. The newcomers are treated with open hostility. Portes voices:

> [T]hroughout the history of American immigration, a consistent thread has been the fear that the "alien element" would somehow undermine the institutions of the country and lead it down the path of disintegration and decay. Much heated rhetoric and much money has been spent combating these alleged evils; playing on these fears has also proven lucrative for a host of nativist associations and individuals. (95)

Portes goes on to argue that in some places like Mexico, the Americans feared that someday these immigrants would try to create their motherland in America and this feeling led them to be aggressive towards the newly arriving immigrants. Although the idea itself is ridiculous, Portes says many Americans felt that this was the truth that they would find

themselves in, in the near future. This feeling came to the fore when they interacted with the immigrants. The Americans would view them with suspicion and hatred and the immigrants viewed these "ideas and individuals" with "passive endurance" and terror.

It is ironic to note the Americans' feelings towards immigrants as they themselves displaced the natives and occupied their land. Or probably they are scared they would receive a similar treatment from the new arrivals. Portes reasons that "immigrants often lack sufficient knowledge of the new language and culture to realise what is happening and explain themselves effectively. For the most part, the first foreign-born generation lacked 'voice.' It is on this enforced passivity that the nativist fears of many and the active hostility and lucrative demagoguery of a few have flourished" (95-96). Portes opines that the immigrants' problems stemmed from the fact that they were unable to communicate and dispel the fears of the Americans. Their passivity led Americans to attribute their own selfish reasons and extreme fears to the immigrants' behaviour.

When we try to look at the differences in attitude between the immigrants who arrived first in America, it is significant to note that the first immigrants claimed the land as their own and at the same time were/are unable to tolerate the arrival of later immigrants. Later immigrants were/are overwhelmed by the hostility and were/are always trying to find ways to blend into American society. Immigrants who came later were ready to forego their culture and identity so as to blend with the Americans. Austrian (now Slovenia) immigrant writer, Louis Adamic, in What's Your Name? (1942) explores the problems immigrants with foreign names face in the American society. Adamic recounts the stories of men and women who had to

change their names so as to avoid being ragged in schools and to avoid the distrust their foreign names invite. Adamic narrates accounts of immigrants from Austria and other European countries who had to change their names just to get a job and a better life for themselves and their families. He also vividly brings in the rift this change in name causes between the old and new generation immigrants. The first generation immigrants are reluctant to let go their names, to which they cling on to in the hope of holding on to their identity which they associate with their names. The later generation tries to get rid of their names, which they feel are the cause for isolation and ridicule, so as to create an American identity for themselves.

It is also interesting to note that some immigrants who had changed their names previously desired to change back to their earlier names in their later years. Probably one's age and security that comes along with residing in America for many years have a role to play in this reversal. Also as years passed by, Adamic says, Americans began accepting immigrants' foreign names and some of the later generation felt less threatened about using their original names. As has been noted earlier, the treatment meted out to newcomers by the immigrants who had settled just a few years before them is shockingly cruel. Nevertheless as has been explained in Smith's novels and Adamic's narratives there is marked development seen along with changing times.

Trying to trace the path of the loss of innocence ending with the birth of knowledge in Francie Nolan, I realised how, as generations change, awareness grows in immigrant women who still hold on to their unaccomplished dreams and wish that at least their daughters would realise them. As generations pass, there is a substantial growth of awareness and knowledge in poor immigrant women regarding their rights.

When the truth dawns on Katie that she made a mistake by getting married and becoming a mother at a very young age without any security for the future, Katie's mother, Mary Rommely rekindles the hope in the American dream. She consoles Katie that education would make a difference in the lives of Katie's children:

> There is here, what is not in the old country. In spite of hard unfamiliar things, there is here—hope. In the old country, a man can be no more than his father, providing he works hard. If his father was a carpenter, he may be a carpenter. He may not be a teacher or a priest. He may rise—but only to his father's state. In the old country, a man is given to the past. Here he belongs to the future. In this land, he may be what he will, if he has the good heart and the way of working honestly at the right things. (82)

Mary voices anguish over leaving her land, missing familiar things, and losing her friends. But still she does not lose hope for the future. She accepts that she could not achieve what she hoped for but she is happy that her family is together and attributes her failed life to her own shortcomings such as lack of awareness and education. Smith indirectly holds the government responsible for the wayward life Katie's sister, Sissy leads. Smith seems to say that the government failed to educate the immigrants regarding their rights for education and health.

Smith's novels give that picture of America which America tried to hide. Her novels portrayed that section of America which America would have rather kept under the wraps. At a

time when America was trying to portray an image of abundance, fulfilled dreams, and success achieved, Smith brought into focus a part of neglected America, nevertheless a significant part. Significant because America is after all a nation built by immigrants and this is about the government's and Americans' apathy towards the immigrants.

Most immigrant working class women mainly face problems at home because the men in their families carry their workplace problems home and burden their family members. Immigrant working class men face the ire of their co-workers in a highly competitive world. They constantly worry that they may lose their jobs and they end up being unable to feed the family. Being uneducated, most of them find living, both outside and inside the home, unbearable. Family burdens at a very young age make many men lose their nerve and they end up drinking like Johnny Nolan. Neither the Church nor the government takes responsibility for the welfare of the immigrants.

A handsome, young man like Johnny Nolan's life is wasted because he is not prudent enough to cope with the problems he faced. Though willing to work, Johnny is too scared to approach anyone for employment and the little he earns he spends on drinking to forget his responsibilities. He is so scared of life and to live that he celebrates his twenty-first birthday drinking when Katie is carrying their second child. Having children even before he reaches the age to vote, i.e., take an intelligent decision, ruins his and his family's prospects. He dies of pneumonia and alcoholism, away from his family, in a pavement ditch. He reminds us of the wasted life of Boyce Deighton in Paule Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones, which is also set in Brooklyn. Beautiful and useless to his family like Nolan, Deighton manages to instill hatred in

his wife and love in his ten-year-old daughter, Selina. Selina loves her father fiercely and hates her mother, Silla, for the way Silla treats her husband. Though Deighton is also a good-for-nothing person like Nolan, Selina, like Francie, keeps his memory intact.

Multiple concerns are raised by Smith throughout the narrative regarding the plight of poor immigrants in search of work. Smith voices her ire against the apathy of the government and Church towards the immigrants. Tree is a reflection of Smith's concern for problems immigrant women face seeking help from higher authorities, seeking basic health and education facilities, and trying to get a job and a hygienic place to live in. Apart from these problems, Smith also pays attention to adolescents' feelings regarding sex, the role of society and home to provide appropriate guidance to adolescents, marital problems, and disputes between a couple and interference of parents of the young couple which only leads towards breaking up the young couple. The themes recur in her other novels as well and will be discussed in the other chapters.

The chief problem the immigrants have in the land of dreams is a feeling of isolation. This feeling leads to a state of insecurity and depression that will not allow people to function to their best capacity. It is apparent that persons who are not able to give their best cannot add anything of value either towards their personal development or to the society they live in. It is a feeling that every immigrant faces in all walks of life and also at every point in time. Alejandro Portes in Immigrant America voices how immigrants in America were always made to be aware of their foreign roots. He says that immigrants in America have never felt that they belonged to America because of the vast differences in language, culture, and ethnicity. Even when they try their best to belong to America they are more often than not forced to bear in mind their

ethnicity. He insists that immigrants are forced to remember that they are only living in America but they are definitely not a part of America.

To balance this feeling some of the immigrants develop hostility towards everything and everybody in life like Thomas Rommely, Francie's grandfather, and some develop a feeling of fear for everything that requires the help of the government like Mary Rommely. New generation individuals like Francie develop a feeling of belonging to the country by adapting themselves to the customs and fashions of that time. This feeling is strong even in children like Francie and her brother Neeley. A bored and troubled Francie follows her brother, Neeley who goes out to play with his friends, in spite of his admonishment. When Neeley's friends object to Francie trailing them, Francie replies that America is a "free country" (18). Neeley and his friends do not take any notice of her after this.

Other children not taking notice of Francie after she mentions that America is a "free country" is very significant. It reveals that even children are aware of the promises America has made to its citizens. America is, even when seen through children's eyes, a "free country." The term a "free country" itself opens up a plethora of dreams and endless possibilities. It is like a magic key that opens myriads of possibilities to the struggling immigrants. A "free country" allows people to pursue their dreams as long as they do not harm others. A "free country" is beyond class, race, and gender segregation and most importantly it instills confidence and self-worth in people.

Portes contends that "[t]he immigrant's world has always been a difficult one, torn between old loyalties and the new royalties" (96). The feelings of immigrants who leave their home country to pursue their dreams in the land of America are well explored in Smith's novel, Tree. America's proclamation of a land of abundance reached far and wide even to the illiterate peasants and it has such a profound impact that they leave their belongings, land, relatives and friends just to realise their dreams. In reality, they sacrifice their past, and their identity to achieve a better life for themselves and their children and to create a new identity for themselves.

Lack of awareness also causes a sort of fear regarding anything which requires the presence of authorities in immigrant women like Katie and Mary Rommely. Mary's savings of ten years amount to fifty dollars and she approaches another immigrant who settles in the country well before her to buy a piece of land. She ends up being swindled out of her money. She again attributes her loss to lack of education, "Ai. People like us, known as greenhorns from the old country, were often robbed by men such as he because we could not read" (87).

In spite of the heavy loss she incurs, Mary avoids going to the higher authorities to complain about the swindle. She would rather sacrifice another ten years of her life cutting expenses and saving than approach a policeman. Where Mary shies away from approaching any official person regarding her troubles, the little education that Katie has does not give her the courage to accompany her children even to a hospital to get vaccination. Her fear of approaching a hospital is so great that she would rather send her two young children unattended to get a vaccination than go with them and reassure them. Fear of authority silences Katie's motherly instincts. The experience at the hands of the doctor who comments about the dirt on

their hands leaves Francie seething with shame and rage. The callous behaviour of the nurse who also has risen from a similar working class background renders Francie speechless.

Smith's greatest asset lies in understanding people and their behaviour. Nowhere in Tree, do we find her denouncing a character; instead she tries to analyse the reasons for that particular person's behaviour. Smith understands the nurse's stand when Francie goes for a vaccination:

> A person who pulls himself up from a low environment via the bootstrap route has two choices. Having risen above his environment, he can forget it; or, he can rise above it and never forget it and keep compassion and understanding in his heart for those he has left behind him in the cruel upclimb. The nurse had chosen the forgetting way. Yet, as she stood there, she knew that years later she would be haunted by the sorrow in the face of that starveling child and that she would wish bitterly that she had said a comforting word then and done something towards the saving of her immortal soul. She had the knowledge that she was small but she lacked the courage to be otherwise. (147)

Tree reveals how America fails to attend to the essential needs of the immigrants. Smith's novels expose how this failure led to the lack of education in children which thereby led these children to grow up without any knowledge to make proper decisions in life. These wrong decisions made the immigrants' lives miserable beyond imagination and made them lead lives in complete squalor and robbed them of dignity and self-confidence.

In Tree, we see how lack of education led Sissy, the elder daughter of Mary Rommely to lead a life of wrong choices that gave her a reputation as a loose woman. By the time, Sissy's mother, Mary Rommely is aware that government provides free education to poor children, Sissy is eight years old and Mary thinks that she is too old to go to school. Putting her physical and emotional heath at risk, Sissy delivers ten stillborn children at home as she is unaware of the health facilities provided by the government.

Sissy, though uneducated due to her parents' ignorance, learns a lot by the time she becomes a mother. In fact, Sissy is the first person in the Rommely family to go to a hospital for childbirth. It took thirty seven years for the Rommely family to learn about insurance for education. Ironically, it is discovered by the uneducated Sissy who insures for her children's education. Till then the poor only insured for death to cover funeral expenses.

The Church, which plays a major role in the lives of Catholics, is very rigid in its stand on issues like abortion, sex, and divorce. If the Church helped them plan in matters like marriage, education, and career, life would have been pleasant for these people. The Church does not stress education, so the children grow up without any goal regarding their lives. As they grow up into adolescents, the children can not help being curious about sex. The reasons are various; early exposure to sex due to lack of privacy in poor families, lack of sex education, gossip among children regarding sex, age, and no education. Poverty is a cause of children's early exposure to sex and wrong notions of sex.

Richard Wright's Native Son is a very good example on how poverty debases people. Wright writes about the pathetic living conditions of the black people. Most of the African-Americans were uneducated and below the poverty line in the early twentieth century. Racism and segregation dominated America at that time and these people were not allowed to stay near white American citizens. They had to live in one-room tenements where they did not have any privacy at all. Wright narrates an incident where when the protagonist, Bigger tries to run from the police, he watches a couple having sex in their one-room house with the children sitting right next to them. Bigger has grown up in this kind of environment where nothing intimate is left for a couple. This reminds him of his childhood where he too witnessed similar incidents. Exposure to these kind of incidents and living among poor people for whom inevitably nothing is valued or honoured make many children grow up into hardcore criminals without any feelings. Poverty has the might to lull people out of their decency and dignity.

Here I would like to mention the difference in the voice of a man and a woman in detailing the repercussions of poverty. Smith, being a woman probably could not come out with the deprivation of poverty in a more open manner. But Yow says that Smith at one time hoped that Brooklyn should be bombed by Hitler's bombs. Yow goes on to say that the wicked life in Brooklyn tenements could be the reason for Smith's notion. In 1931, Virginia Woolf presented a paper to The Women's Service League, "Professions for Women" in which she states that as a woman writer she had to wage a war against a phantom in the house, which she refers to as "Angel in the House." This "Angel in the House," Woolf says, subdues her voice against voicing out her true feelings. It is imperative to note that this "Angel in the House" could be behind the subdued voice of Smith in narrating life in Brooklyn tenements.

Smith's manner of suppressing autobiographical facts reveals that the "Angel in the House" was behind her when she was writing. After many years she gathered the courage to comment that Brooklyn ought to be bombed because of the viciousness generated by poverty in its tenements. It proves Woolf's contention that women writers work under pressure of preconceived expectations of the society. In the same paper, Woolf[4] also bemoans that no one really knows what a woman really is: "[. . .] what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know. I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill."

Before Woolf, this fact has also been asserted by Florence Guy Seabury who states in her essay, "Stereotypes" written in 1930: "Nobody knows what women are really like because our minds are so filled with stereotype of Woman" (47). Both Seabury and Woolf opine that through the centuries the woman was moulded as per the expectations of man rather than her evolving as an individual. And because of this reason, they say that nobody really knows what women are. Woolf finally says that women can not be categorised unless and until they enter every field and express their expertise in every way.

The discrepancy in narrating arises not only due to the authors' gender but also due to differences in race and class of Smith and Wright as well. Wright being an African American male found it easier to voice the evils of poverty as there were not only men and women writers but prominent African Americans belonging to both genders who questioned America's racial disparity and the revolting treatment of African Americans. Smith, a woman, a second-

[4] Page reference is not available since the essay "Professions for Women" was taken from the internet.

generation immigrant belonging to the working class who had no role model to look up to could have found it difficult to voice her concerns regarding the problems brought on by poverty. In the period Smith was writing, there were few working class immigrant women writers who put down their problems in narratives. Though Smith could not complete her education, she became a playwright and a writer due to sheer grit and determination. As she did not have much exposure to educated society, she could not have known about any working class women authors. In her narratives, she was writing about the experiences she has heard, seen or endured.

In the immigrant neighbourhood, due to circumstances on the street and inside the home, some children very quickly grasp what sex is about and are keen to explore it. As the Church and society would never approve of premarital sex, these youngsters, who could hardly be called adults, choose to get married. Marriage is not a solution, but a beginning of another problem. Church again turns a blind eye towards the problems the young couple faces. Following contraceptive methods to plan for a family is a sin, but having numerous children without a proper job or a hygienic place to live in is allowed. The Church never tries to force anyone to educate their children nor plan for a career. Due to religious beliefs, especially Catholic married couples do not have the freedom to plan for a family. Not having a proper education, they can not take proper decisions regarding their life, their career, and children.

Negligence in imparting knowledge regarding their rights to the working class is partly to be blamed for women like Sissy ending up with questionable reputations and having stillborn children. This negligence is the reason for young men like Johnny turning into drunkards and being unable to assume their responsibilities. This is the reason for women like Mary Rommely

being swindled out of their years of savings. This is also the reason for women like Katie giving birth to children in spite of poverty, ill health, and advanced age.

A woman is regarded as an asset or an object who is not supposed to have rights over her body. A woman, physically delicate compared with her male counterpart, is made to slog like a slave but when it comes to her body she never has control over it. It is sacrilegious and out of the question for a woman to hope to decide whether to have children or not though she is the person who carries the child in her womb, nurtures the child, and looks after the growth of that child. It is taken for granted that a woman *has* to face the consequences of sex. She cannot decide whether to have children or not, inside or outside of marriage. This is especially true in the case of middle class and working class uneducated women who have to depend on society for their daily lives to run smooth. Though these concerns may be voiced by various feminists, Smith makes it a point to analyse the problems and offer solutions.

Katie and Joanna are examples Smith has taken to illustrate this point. Katie, who is pregnant at the time of Johnny's death, is too weak to work and look after herself and her children. She finds it next to impossible to run the family with the troubles they are going through with no help in sight. Smith writes about the agony a woman undergoes to have a child when she very well knows that she cannot afford to feed the child. Unfortunately, for these poor, immigrant women, lack of education spells doom and the Church is clearly apathetic towards their problems:

> Katie sat alone at the kitchen table far into the night. "I need two months. . . .just two months," she thought. "Dear God, give me two months. It's such a little time. By that time, my baby will be born and I'll be well again. By that time, the children will be graduated from public school. When I'm boss of my own mind and my own body, I don't need to ask You for anything. But now my body is boss over me and I've got to ask You for help. Just two months. . . .two months."
>
> (304)

Katie knows her troubles are intensified by the fact that she is pregnant. She is not in any position to work, yet, being the breadwinner of the family, she has to care for her two children, herself and the child to be born. She is bitterly resigned to the fact that she has no right over her body, more so being a Catholic woman, and cannot take decisions about, if and when to have children. Katie, being a Catholic, shies away from thinking of abortion or contraceptives. The Bajans or migrants from Barbados in Paule Marshall's Brown Girl Brownstones, have a different view regarding the same problem. When Virgie Farnum walks in, her friend, Silla exclaims in disgust on seeing Virgie's pregnant state:

> "No doubt. You like you gon bring the child before the night out. But look at you," she said with tender disapproval. "You's a disgrace to come tumbling big so soon after the last one."
>
> "C'dear, what I must do? It's the Lord will."

> "What Lord will?" Silla sucked her teeth in disgust. "Woman, you might go hide yourself. These ain ancient days. This ain home that you got to be always breeding like a sow. Go to some doctor and get something 'cause these Bajan men will wear you out making children and the blasted children ain nothing but a keepback. You don see the white people having no lot." (29)

This dialogue reveals that some black women are aware of their problems and unlike Catholic immigrant women, are willing to control the problem. Silla also understands that the white people are not expanding their families. It also reveals how women are helpless and how they try to surrender their lives in the name of fate/God's will.

But when Katie in Tree is pregnant and wonders why she ever married Johnny, Sissy clarifies that Katie married Johnny because she was young but religious and as religion forbids premarital sex she had no option but to marry Johnny.

Joanna is the woman who dared to take the other option. Joanna has a child outside wedlock. Joanna falls in love and becomes pregnant, but she does not have a father or brothers to force the man to marry her. Instead the man has a mother and three sisters who advise him not to marry her: "Don't be a fool, they told him. She's no good. Her whole family's no good. Besides, how do you know you're the one? If she had you she had others. Oh, women are tricky. We know. We are women" (236). In Smith's novels, women suffer being born women but it does not stop them from hurting other women in spite of the knowledge of their suffering as most of the times there is no bonding among women. She, probably, was arguing that women

ought to unite so as to prevent problems in their lives. As we analyse Smith's novels, we understand that women who give more importance to men in their lives than to themselves are the reason for the lack of bonding in women.

Joanna's incident seems to suggest that more than a man, a woman causes more harm to a woman. In Smith's narratives, women face most problems not because of the lover/husband but due to the despicable treatment meted out to them by the mother/sister(s) of the man in their life. When a man is egged on by his mother or sisters in thinking that he is not doing injustice to the woman he loves by abandoning her and labelling her an immoral woman, he really believes that he is not doing anything wrong.

Joanna has to face problems not only from the boy's side but from the women in society as well. When she takes her baby out in a pram, the women in the neighbourhood are enraged that Joanna could bring up the child as perfectly and lovingly as a wedded wife. They can not accept the fact that love existed between Joanna and her boyfriend and love still exists between Joanna and her child:

> Many of these good women had children which they brought up by scream and cuff. Many of them hated the husbands who lay by their sides at night. There was no longer high joy for them in the act of love. They endured the love-making rigidly, praying all the while that another child would not result. This bitter submissiveness made the man ugly and brutal. To most of them the love act had become a brutality on both sides the sooner over with, the better. They resented

this girl because they felt this had not been so with her and the father of her child. (232)

"Praying all the while that another child would not result"—that sums up my argument against the Church. These women know that they are not in any position to bring up children, but they are not educated enough to tackle the restrictions the Church has imposed on them. These restrictions not only ruin their personal lives but also putrefy the society.

Some working class people who are obsessed with religion follow all the rules religiously in spite of knowing the pitfalls. Yet, wherever possible, they find loopholes to circumvent and enjoy. This section of religiously-inclined people do not find objections related to matters such as drunkenness, shirking work and responsibilities, inability to create a fit society for the children to grow up in, and helping others who are in need. They cheat the Church they believe in, their parents and themselves as well. People are weak and to their greatest disappointment the Church not only turns a blind eye to their problems but also makes no attempt to mend the rules according to the times and needs.

Through Francie, Smith has professed hatred for certain kind of women, which, I feel, is nothing but an intense loathing for this kind of a scheming quality in women. Most working class women in that period lacked compassion and awareness. These women were themselves deep in problems and could not offer empathy towards other women who were suffering. Francie's hatred is so firm, that she vows that "[a]s long as I live, I will never trust any woman again, except maybe Mama and sometimes Aunt Evy and Aunt Sissy" (238). We may surmise

that lack of education leads to these scheming qualities in women and to prioritize men above everything in life. To latch on to a man, be it a husband, a brother or a son, and lead a subservient life is the priority in these women's lives and to this end they scheme. Smith is surprised how women lack the bonding quality despite the troubles they face in this "man-world:"

> Most women had one thing in common: they had great pain when they gave birth to their children. This should make a bond that held them all together; it should make them love and protect each other against the man-world. But it was not so. It seemed like their great birth pains shrank their hearts and their souls. They stuck together for only one thing: to trample on some other woman. . . whether it was by throwing stones or by mean gossip. It was the only kind of loyalty they seemed to have. (237)

In fact, Smith is appalled by the lack of bonding among immigrants, among suffering school children, among poor people, who go on to sneer at the newcomers or those who have been going through trouble. While dragging scrap to sell, Francie and Neeley meet other poor children. These children also sell scrap, but when they see Francie and Neeley dragging the scrap they call them "rag pickers" (8) and insult them. Francie knows that the tormentors are also rag pickers and she also knows that her brother would insult other kids while coming back but she still feels ashamed of herself. It was the same among school children, some of whom were extremely brutal towards the new kids. The feeling of ridicule for the newcomers is so

enormous that it spread over all categories of people in America—immigrants, workers, neighbours, women, and children.

Francie, as she grows up from the age of eleven to the age of fourteen, begins to see the world in its true colours. Though only fourteen she has to pretend that she is sixteen so as to be allowed to work. At the age of eleven she perceives most of the common things in her surroundings as beautiful and common people wonderful. Even a pair of brass scales in a tea shop shines like burnished gold to Francie's hungry eyes. She looks at the scales in perfect awe, waiting for them to balance. It makes her feel that "nothing wrong could happen in a world where things balanced so stilly" (137). To her "[g]rowing up also spoiled a lot of things" (217). Within two years, she finds all the notions she nurtured in her heart silly. The Chinaman with his shop where he does the laundry is another great wonder. The organ grinder who goes with a monkey, the driver who drives a horse-ridden carriage are some of the exemplary candidates whom she looks up to for inspiration for a career. The plays she watches and the actors who enact the main roles are among the people she is enamored by. Some of her eccentric and rich neighbours and their lifestyles are also a cause of envy for her. Francie herself is surprised by the change in her viewpoints:

> Francie, who *knew* Mama was always right, found out that she was wrong once in a while. She discovered that some of the things she loved so much in her father were considered very comical to other people. The scales at the tea store did not shine so brightly any more and she found the bins were chipped and shabby looking. (217)

She is at a stage where she does not hesitate to lie to eat a pumpkin pie in her class, and tells a lie that her name is Mary to obtain a new doll. Later she confesses to the teacher that she lied to eat the pumpkin pie and she also finds out that she is actually named Mary after her grandmother. The fact that her name is actually Mary makes her feel better regarding her lie. Maybe by this fact she feels that she has not lied. Still this episode makes her grow out of love for dolls and other childish fancies.

Smith mentions that "[i]t was her first and last doll" (215). Ironically, lying for that doll also is the reason for Francie growing up. She is at an age where she is skeptical about the endings in the plays she sees. She is not convinced by the way "things just happened at the nick of the moment" (218). But paradoxically that is exactly what happens in Smith's novels. Her novels end with something happening at the right moment to help the protagonists. Francie, who is also a great theatre fan, becomes bitter with the plays' endings. She begins to wonder what would happen if things do not end on a hopeful note. What if the hero does not come in time to save the heroine? She contemplates that it would be better for the heroine to marry the villain than wait for the absent hero to come and deliver her from her troubles. As for the heroine's life which was supposed to depend upon the hero's timely arrival, she wryly surmises that "[i]t takes a lot of doing to die (220)." Watching the plays end in an unsatisfactory, unrealistic way, Francie would think how to create her own plays:

> She wrote her own third act to that play—what would happen *if*. She wrote it out in conversations and found it a remarkably easy way of writing. In a story you

> had to explain why people were the way they were but when you wrote in conversation you didn't have to do that because the things the people said explained what they were. Francie had no trouble selling herself on dialogue.
>
> (220)

This could also be the reason why Smith could excel in playwriting. Another incident in Francie's life which makes her understand the harsh realities of life is when Katie used to devise games to overcome poverty. When they are short of money and food, Katie used to tell them adventurous stories, that they are explorers at North Pole caught in a blizzard and waiting for rescue troops to come. She would distribute the food equally among them and would pretend that they are waiting for the rescue troops to arrive. But growing up and understanding things spoiled the fun for Francie. She understands that there is no "*reason*" (218) or nothing big is ever going to come out of their being hungry. Katie replies that she has "found the catch in it" (218).

When Francie is sixteen she finds herself a boyfriend, her first love, Lee Rhynor. She goes out with him to restaurants and dances. The misleading youth, as it does with everyone, makes Francie think that she has found her true love. Smith compares Francie with Katie at that age: "She had the same thought Katie had seventeen years ago dancing with Johnny—that she'd willingly accept any sacrifice or hardship if she could only have this man near her for always. And like Katie, Francie gave no thought to the children who might have to help her work out the hardship and sacrifice" (456). This incident helps us understand how, generations after generations, thoughtless adolescents fall in love and get married.

Over time, for poor immigrant couples, poverty relegates the act of love to something necessary, just a bodily function without any emotion between the partners. Married couples avoid sex because women fear conception. The necessity of love and fear of conception leads to hatred between the partners. The hatred is so much that even Joanna, an unwed mother is aware of the relationship between poor couples. She shouts at the woman who insults her, "I bet your husband spits on you—afterwards. I bet that's just what he does" (233). Smith explores the degradation of marital love among poor immigrants and comes up with the cause as being nothing but poverty. Smith explains that poverty and lack of education not only disgrace people but they also make them mean.

As discussed previously, Smith offers education as the means of coming up in life, and a complete chapter in the novel, chapter 19 is devoted to the deplorable conditions of the public schools and the demoralizing behaviour of the teachers. Smith candidly feels that "[b]rutalizing is the only adjective for the public schools of that district around 1908 and '09" (153). Smith relates how the children of the poor are differentiated and treated miserably by the teachers, whereas the children of prosperous parents are treated with deference. Smith writes about how Francie "learned of the class system of a great Democracy" (152).

Unfortunately, this behaviour is imitated by the children themselves in such a way that children of prosperous parents "duplicated the teacher's torments" on their poor classmates: "[I]t would seem as if all the unwanted children would stick together and be one against the things that were against them. But not so. They hated each other as much as the teacher hated them.

They aped teacher's snarling manner when they spoke to each other" (152). Teachers are tyrants who "taught because no one wanted to marry them. Married women were not allowed to teach in those days, hence most of the teachers were women made neurotic by starved love instincts" (153). Smith's notions regarding unmarried women strengthen the fact that she believes a happy marriage is essential for women along with a satisfying career. Smith also opines that "[t]he cruelest teachers were those who had come from homes similar to those of the poor children. It seemed that in their bitterness towards those unfortunate little ones, they were somehow exorcizing their own fearful background" (153).

Smith also brings to light the rumours that did the rounds in those days, of which she says, "[t]he ugliest thing about these stories was that they were all sordidly true" (153). The illicit affairs between the teachers and the janitors leaving the children to fend for themselves in the classroom, corporal punishment meted out to the unfortunate poor children of the class who come to the school unkempt and disheveled due to their poverty and for whom it was impossible to bribe the teachers with expensive gifts, teachers ignoring these children even when they are in dire need to attend nature's calls, bullies tormenting the children by not allowing them to use the bathrooms in the interval time, and teachers favouring and grading their favourites with better grades and encouraging them—all these issues are brought into the open and the American public school system is condemned by the author.

Smith also admits that there were a few good teachers who were caring and "who suffered with the children and tried to help them. But these women did not last long as teachers. Either they married quickly and left the profession, or they were hounded out of their jobs by

fellow teachers" (153). Smith puts the blame on the government that set the rule that married women cannot work as teachers. Some of the teachers who had to depend on their jobs for survival had no other choice than to contain their emotions which led them to have illicit affairs and/or persecute the children of other poor women.

Here it is interesting to look at how Smith's contemporary writer, Ann Petry depicts the views of a public school teacher in The Street. The teacher hates the poor, restless and unkempt black children and wishes for a class of rich, white children who will adore her and who can be taught. The rank smell of their unwashed bodies and clothes overwhelm her even out of the classroom. She finds the smell of Harlem in the classroom. She knows that the children are aware of her hatred and hated her with, if not equal, more vehemence:

> She regarded teaching them anything as a hopeless task, so she devoted most of the day to maintaining order and devising ingenious ways of keeping them occupied. . . .
>
> And now, as she watched the continual motion of the young bodies behind the battered old desks in front of her, she thought, They're like animals—sullen-tempered one moment, full of noisy laughter the next. Even at eight and nine they knew the foulest words, the most disgusting language. Working in this school was like being in a jungle. It was filled with the smell of the jungle, she thought: tainted food, rank, unwashed bodies. The small tight braids on the little girls'

> heads were probably an African custom. The bright red ribbons revealed their love for gaudy colors.
>
> Young as they were, it was quite obvious that they hated her. They showed it in a closed, sullen look that came over their faces at the slightest provocation. It was a look that never failed to infuriate her at the same time that it frightened her.
>
> (328-333)

Though Petry narrates the teacher's viewpoint, it only strengthens Smith's impression that the public school system in the early twentieth century in America was at its worst. Smith's Francie represents immigrant working class children and their everyday problems. Francie is just one of the numerous children who find it impossible to please the teacher with their cleanliness and riches. The parents of these children are involved in a battle to survive in this world and have no time to look after the kids. Even hygiene is sacrificed for the mothers are too tired, physically and emotionally. The teachers find it difficult to believe that a parent is not even in a position to keep the child clean. The teachers hate these children and shower all their love on the children who are well off and who can afford to come in pretty dresses and sometimes give presents to them.

Petry's teacher is a symbol of the hatred working class black children faced in public schools. Though the teacher knows the poverty and the pathetic living conditions of the working class black people, she is unable to tolerate the fetid smell of poverty in her classroom. She dreams about a day when she can teach smartly dressed white children. She hates the children

and is also afraid of them. These feelings are reciprocated by the children as well. Petry and Smith, though from different racial backgrounds, deal with characters from similar class background and depict the condition of the American public schools through their narratives.

Smith also tackles the issue of sex education in this novel. Again she holds lack of education responsible for treating sex as something dirty and condemnable by the uneducated lot. Smith talks about the society and its double standards regarding the topic:

> There was a great hush-hush about sex in that neighborhood. When children asked questions, the parents didn't know how to answer them for the reason that these people did not know the correct words to use. Each married couple had its own secret words for things which were worshipped in bed in the quiet of night. But there were few mothers brave enough to bring these words out into the daylight and present them to the child. When the children grew up, they in turn invented words which they couldn't tell *their* children. (249)

Smith also implies that this kind of behaviour has a vicious effect where children are led to believe that sex is dirty, and that not only sex but the whole process of pregnancy and childbirth is an issue to be kept under wraps. Even children perceive pregnancy as a shameful issue. This theme is further examined in the chapters related to the novels, Tomorrow Will Be Better and Joy in the Morning.

Another problem Francie faces is in her own home where she feels neglected and uncared for. In Tree, Smith brings to light the partiality that is shown towards the male child in a family which can seriously affect the psyche and self-worth of a girl child. Since her infancy, Francie observes that her mother, Katie likes her brother Neeley more than her.

Small incidents which show disparity never escape Francie's notice. Though she knows that this feeling is wrong and the child does not deserve this she is unable to control herself. She promises to herself that "[h]e was the one that she had to see through. Francie and Johnny would get by somehow, but she would take no chances with the boy. She'd see to it that he more than got by" (96).

Katie understands that her daughter, Francie, has strength of will and has the power to achieve anything she sets her mind on. She knows that Francie is interested in education and she would complete it at any cost, whereas Neeley is a boy who like his father is weak in spirit and immature in some matters. Knowing this, Katie decides that Neeley needs a push to get educated whereas Francie can definitely manage on her own. This is the reason she favours Neeley over Francie when deciding who should go back to school.

In a way Katie is justified because given the circumstances she can afford to send only one child to school though the problems in her life are brought on by the wrong decision to get married when both Johnny and Katie are still in their teens and are not in a position to even support themselves. Eventually, without proper planning for a family they become parents of two children before both of them reach twenty years. Once again this can be attributed to lack of

education and of awareness among poor immigrants. In this way the role of Church and the government is behind every drastic step the poor have to take just to live with a hope for a better tomorrow. Though Katie knows that it is wrong to discriminate among children she feels she is helpless about her feelings. She compares her handsome son to her physically weak daughter and feels contempt for her. She understands that she is going to love her son more than her daughter and tells herself that she should never let the children perceive the difference.

For one Christmas, Francie makes a hatpin holder for her mother and Neeley buys a packet of striped candy cane for each of them. The reaction of Katie on receiving Neeley's present is again an instance which shows her discrimination: "Mama went into ecstasies. She said it was the prettiest present she had ever had. She kissed Neeley three times. Francie tried very hard not to be jealous because Mama made more fuss over Neeley's present than hers" (211).

When Francie and Neeley get confirmed they have to take middle names according to their religion. Sissy asks the children what names they took for their middle names. Much to Francie's disappointment, Katie as usual shows her preference for her son over her daughter by praising her son's choice of the middle name. There are many incidents like this in the novel which bring out the way a girl child is discriminated against.

Francie asks her mother whether she likes her or not and if she thinks she is as good-looking as her brother, Neeley. Her mother hesitates to answer and finally answers in a roundabout way that she has pretty hands and nice hair. Her mother's reluctance to lie in a way

strengthens Francie's beliefs that her mother loves Neeley more than her, that Francie herself is not as beautiful as Neeley, and her mother does not lie even in difficult situations.

There comes a point in their life when things become a little better financially so that Katie need not depend on both her children working to run the family. Now they have to decide who should be going to school. At this time Francie also gets a hike in her salary but she hides the fact from her mother thinking that that would make Katie send Neeley to school and Francie to work. After a heated argument everybody agrees that it is better to send Neeley to school. When Katie pleads with Francie to understand that it is for their own good, Francie refuses to believe and says:

> No, I can't see. I can only see that you favour Neeley more than me. You fix everything for him and tell me that I can find a way myself. Some day I'll fool you, Mama. I'll do what I think is right for me and it might not be right in your way. (386)

When it comes to her son, Katie shows a wonderful understanding and planning. When her children are heaving a Christmas tree up the stairs, she tries to understand her children. She knows her daughter is clever and will go beyond high school. She knows Francie is a learner and will definitely achieve success in life. Katie wonders whether Francie already understands that she loves her more than her brother. She knows that Francie is getting away from her and wonders how she will treat her when she achieves success in life. Neeley, she thinks, like most other mothers, will never leave her and that is the reason she loves him more.

Katie is actually turning out to be like the mothers Smith campaigned against. As Katie and Johnny have grown apart, she pins her hope on her son and showers him with love and expects him to be with her always. Smith based Katie's character on her mother, Catherine. Due to her powerful memory, Smith could neither erase the incidents of her childhood nor her mother's discriminatory treatment. By creating Katie's character, probably, she was able to understand her difficult relationship with her mother and to a certain extent get rid of her overwhelming past. Smith's contemporary, Alice S. Rossi clearly defines in her essay "Profile," how children should be reared without partiality towards any particular sex:

> She will be reared, as her brother will be reared, with a combination of loving warmth, firm discipline, household responsibility and encouragement of independence and self-reliance. She will not be pampered and indulged, subtly taught to achieve her ends through coquetry and tears, as so many girls are taught today. She will view domestic skills as useful tools to acquire, some of which, like fine cooking or needlework, having their own intrinsic pleasures but most of which are necessary repetitive work best gotten done as quickly and efficiently as possible. She will be able to handle minor mechanical breakdown in the home as well as her brother can, and he will be able to tend a child, press, sew, and cook with the same easy skills and comfortable feeling his sister has.
>
> During their school years, both sister and brother will increasingly assume responsibility for their own decisions, freely experiment with numerous possible

> fields of study, gradually narrowing to a choice that best suits their interests and ability rather than what is considered appropriate or prestigeful work for men and women. (122)

Rossi states that children should be brought up without taking their gender into consideration. They should be taught all the skills which are necessary in a person's life irrespective of gender. Noted feminist, Caroline Bird argues in her essay, "The Case for Equality," that "it is wrong to deny individuals born female the right to inconvenience their families to pursue art, science, power, prestige, money, or even self-expression, in the way that men in pursuit of these goals inconvenience their families as a matter of course" (Lynn 129).

Smith, through her writings strove to fight against problems the immigrants faced in public schools, workplaces, and their neighbourhood, and male and female discrimination at home. Smith not only put her point across to the immigrants that a better life can be achieved through education, but also made immigrants' voice heard in America and throughout the world. Smith, through her first novel, in every sense, showed that "worlds were not unattainable."

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Chapter 3

Reaching Out

Published four years after her first novel which was a huge success, Tomorrow Will Be Better is a message to work towards a better tomorrow when things go wrong. In some respects it seems to be a sequel to Tree. Margy, the main protagonist, seems a grown-up version of Francie. Smith's first three novels reflect the problems a woman encounters at different ages and the last novel is a narration of how a well-planned life can be full of joy. Tomorrow details a young girl's strength of spirit in reaching out for a better life.

In Smith's novels, women belonging to the working class always seem to strive to make their lives better. Moreso immigrants, who leave their identity in the old world to have a better tomorrow seem determined to achieve a better life. Tomorrow is about the importance of marriage in a working class individual's life. It analyses the problems that play havoc in a working class married couple's life.

This chapter consists of two sections. Section I deals with the feelings of immigrants in a new country and section II deals with mother-child relationship and a young girl's courage to come out of a loveless marriage.

Section I

Margy is eighteen, a working woman, and, according to the author, "not a one to stand" (19). This phrase accurately describes the attitude of the protagonist who is always trying to

make things better for herself. Initially, she tries to get a job so as to be independent. Then she tries to get married so that she can leave her loveless, suffocating home. But to her dismay she finds her husband unresponsive to her love. When she becomes pregnant she expects that she and her husband, Frankie will be able to bond better with their child. Unfortunately, the child is stillborn, and when she realises that their incompatibility in marriage is a permanent issue, she opts out of the marriage so that she can reach out for a better life. Margy is a person who does not tolerate the problems that stifle her and tries to reach out for a better tomorrow.

For a young girl belonging to the working class, there are few options for leading a better life. Either she has to work hard believing in the American Dream or get married with the hope that her husband would realise that dream. A young girl sets up a home with her husband with the conviction that she would be able to set up a better home than her parents. After marriage, the responsibilities wear down most young men from working class immigrant background to the extent that they are unable to perform their duties as the head of the family, for they are also very young and the only reason they get married is to escape the drudgery of an oppressive home environment. The couple very soon realises the travails of running a home.

It is next to impossible for these youngsters to come up in life because they have to work from the time they enter their teens. They lack education to plan and deal with life. Employment and housing are two important factors they have to think of first as these are the basic issues to set up a home and also very hard to achieve. Once they gain employment they are forever on the edge worrying whether they would lose their jobs if they were to ask for a hike as jobs are few and job aspirants are many. They get entangled in the web of family life and hardly

have time or inclination to work towards improving their standard of life. As religion forbids them to plan for a family, the girls end up as mothers in no time and get pulled into the whirlpool of unplanned family life. And the young girls who dream of a better tomorrow usually end up like their mothers still hoping for a better tomorrow for their children.

Like Smith's first novel, Tomorrow also starts on a Saturday, Saturday night to be precise. Her third novel, Maggie-Now begins on a Saturday in retrospect. Her last novel, Joy in the Morning, starts on a Saturday evening. Saturdays are the beginning of weekends; with two days of leisure at hand, the working class youth can hardly afford to go to any place to enjoy themselves. Throughout the week they work hard and when the weekend comes they discover that their poverty does not allow them to enjoy it either. A weekend is just a reminder for poor people of their loneliness and poverty. And this feeling drives them to take up the first opportunity that comes their way to escape from their houses in which they feel trapped. It is too late by the time these youngsters realise that the problem is not the house or inmates but poverty and lack of education which lead to an unplanned life and a workplace where there is no progress in their job prospects.

Tomorrow tells us of the loneliness a young girl feels in a home where there is no peace or joy. In her teens, working, without friends, and nowhere to go, a girl is tempted to take the first opportunity that comes her way which she thinks will make her life better. This is a story of a working girl and how she is led to make inevitable choices like her mother who has also made similar kinds of errors in the past.

Smith's Tomorrow is a testimony of immigrant alienation, not always due to her immigrant status, but also due to her class and gender. Margy and her friends feel alienated at home and outside in social circles due to their poverty. After getting married, more than her husband's love, Margy is at the receiving end of her mother's ire and her mother-in-law and sisters-in law's hatred. Margy feels alienated in her home, her mother's home, and her in-laws' home. The only place she could enjoy a little is her workplace which is the place where she ultimately plans to go back to.

In this novel the alienation discussed is from a woman's perspective and also from an immigrant's perspective. Authors from diverse backgrounds have dealt with alienation in their novels in different ways. In Dreiser's Sister Carrie (1957), Carrie feels alienated because of her class, but as she is a white woman she does not face any racial problems. Here we see a man's perspective of a woman's feeling of alienation due to class. Carrie feels alienated from society as she is poor and lives with a man outside of wedlock. Once she starts earning money as a theatre artist she discovers that the world is at her feet. Carrie's alienation is only due to class and once she conquers that, she, to an extent, feels peaceful. At least, she is financially independent and she can now look forward to a better life. Whereas Lutie Johnson in Petry's The Street feels alienated in every sense—due to class, race, and gender. Here we see the woman's perspective of a woman's alienation due to class and race. Poverty makes it difficult to rent a place to live in and her beauty is also a cause which works against her job prospects. At the same time, her poverty makes her easy bait for people who desire her.

Though Carrie, Margy and Lutie belong to different races, they feel alienated, a feeling that connects these three young women. These young protagonists call to question America's tall claims as the "land of equal opportunities."

Smith's descriptive powers are also at her best where we find some tender and realistic descriptions of a working class woman's life. Smith has been able to capture through Margy as a four-year-old girl, the problems girls face even at such a tender age. The story revolves around a working class immigrant family, the hostility that Margy's father faces at his workplace, the feeling of isolation of the mother, and the spirit of the daughter to transcend the adversities.

Ultimately, Smith tells us that the government and Church fail to come to the rescue of the working class immigrants leaving them to go through a vicious circle of similar mistakes. She portrays America which is callous to immigrant men in the workplace and society, which leads the men to ill-treat their family members, which causes resentment and hostility to grow among the family members and which leads them to make hasty departures from home. A family is nourished by love between the parents and love for the children. Even when there is no physical violence present, the men simply vanish from home and go to places like pubs and bars where they can drink and forget their workplace sorrows. A wife resents this behaviour and feels lonely in a home where the husband either abuses her or neglects her. An unhappy woman can not possibly do much for her family. Ultimately she has to relieve herself of this loneliness; otherwise it will eat into her. Though this situation is present in most poor families it is moreso for immigrant poor families, as they are twice alienated due to class and race. Tomorrow is a woman's perspective of alienation of a woman due to her class and race. But for poor, uneducated people it is difficult to understand their situation, leave alone try to come out of it.

For immigrants the alienation at the workplace normally leads to unhappy households where the children try to run away from home at the earliest possible chance by marrying the first person they come across. Rarely do they plan for their education or their future. Their life is defeated even before they get a chance to dream.

Alienation of men at workplace indirectly affects women where they cannot lead a happy married life. A woman expects her hopes to be fulfilled by her husband. A disgruntled man can do little to make his wife happy and an unhappy woman cannot create a happy household for the children. Ultimately society ends up with people who are unhappy and who cannot contribute to the society's wellbeing.

The 18-year-old protagonist, Margy Shannon tries her best to get out of the poverty-ridden life and make it better. In Tomorrow, Margy takes a strong stand against poverty, her parents and her gay husband. Smith with her power of understanding tries to reason out why the characters turn out the way they are. She gives a clear analysis of what goes behind a character. This novel treats the sensitive issue of the feelings of poor immigrants in an unsympathetic foreign land in a truthful way.

The second chapter of the novel is devoted completely to recounting the feeling of isolation of the immigrants in a foreign land. When Margy as a child is lost and ends up on a new block she tries to join a group of girls who are playing. But the girls do not allow her to play with them and try to intimidate her with their callous behavior. Young Margy figures it all out in her little head—"that the little girls had not wanted her on their block. She decided she'd

do the same thing if any strange girl ever came to play on *her* block. And I must chase all the strange girls that come to play on my block" (12).

Some immigrants who settled in America, unfortunately, showed a similar kind of intolerant feeling towards the new immigrants. These immigrants would trouble the newcomers just as they were troubled when they were new to America. Immigrants arrive with lots of hope that the free country would give them opportunities to rise up in life, opportunities they lacked in their motherland. They hope that in the new country anything is possible with hard work. But Henny, Margy's father, realises that matters like renting a new flat or trying for a new job are next to impossible in the new country. According to Henny, "the two most heartbreaking chores of life were looking for a new flat and for a new job" (37).

America, which they believed to be a haven for freedom and equal opportunities, was drastically callous to these immigrants who were hardworking, sincere, and optimistic. Lack of education made them miss out on the benefit programs the government provides for these immigrants, and the government was too apathetic to make them realise their rights regarding basic education and health amenities. The immigrants felt "shoved" by the Americans and in turn "shoved" among themselves. They felt that the "odds were against" (37) their finding a better job.

Henny feels miserable when the motorman of the trolley he commutes in refuses to stop the trolley for him at Henny's stop as he is the only person to get down at that stop. Henny tells him that people who belong to the working class should be more understanding towards each

other. Margy feels similarly hurt when she is cheated by a peddler who sells flowers. She goes to meet her mother and on the way stops to buy some flowers for her mother. She bargains with the peddler and after buying the flowers discovers that most of the flowers are withered. Unintentionally, she blurts out her thoughts: "People like us," she said, "shouldn't do things like this to each other" (184). Margy feels very let down by the peddler's behaviour probably because she identifies him as her social equal, a working class immigrant perhaps.

The longing to belong and the forlorn feeling of isolation of an immigrant is reflected in the everyday life of the protagonist and her family members. Even the streets seem to be cold and unwelcome to these hapless immigrants. Smith gives a stark description of the street:

> They stood at the curb while Flo looked down the street that nobody liked. It was a one-block street, dead-ending at the twelve-foot-high iron gates of a grim, gray, charity hospital. The gates made a long narrow cage of the street. There was a feeling that if you turned into that street, the opening would close behind you and the locked gates ahead would hold you prisoner in that city block forever.
>
> The street made Flo uneasy. Yet it fascinated her, too. (8)

And as for Margy, she simply whimpers with fright at the mere sight of the dead-end street.

Margy's happiness when she attends a dance and contemplates "how nice it was to have a place to come to; where you were welcome; where you fitted in" (10) reveals her feelings of

being isolated. When Margy and Frankie overhear the socialite, Miss Grayce, who hosts these dances, and her friends making fun of their accent, she understands how the upper-class people perceive the working class people:

> Occasionally there is a moment in a person's life when he takes a great stride forward in wisdom, humility or disillusionment. For a split second he comes into a kind of all there is to know. He is loaned the gift the poet yearned for—seeing himself as others see him.
>
> Margy, listening to the gentlemen, saw her kind of people as others saw them. She'd given little thought to any world outside her own. She had been born in a certain environment—had taken it for granted. Her kind of people were different from each other in small things but alike in the fundamentals. Some were kinder than others; some meaner. A lot were poorer than most; a few better off than their fellows. Some were ambitious and a lot didn't care about anything except living from day to day. She knew some who seemed happy and she knew too many who complained all the time. But all were confined in the same rigid frame that boxed in her life. The only difference among the people she knew was that some squirmed more than others in the box. (116)

Margy tries to understand the mentality of Miss Grayce who is willing to give much of her time to the poor only to laugh at them. Margy wonders if Miss Grayce is mean. Margy terms Miss Grayce a "pleaser," (117) because she likes to please the poor, and also her rich

friends by making fun of these poor people. Unfortunately, this is the time at which these two youngsters, Margy and Frankie, who are at their optimistic low, try to cheer up one another and mistake their feelings for each other as love.

Smith's sharp observation of life ends up in such sincere descriptions that you are bound to visualise the scene. Though the description is about poverty at its worst, she manages a coup by arresting the readers' attention with her narration of the lives of common people and their lifestyles. This is similar to the manner in which Steinbeck in his Cannery Row writes about poor people and their simple lifestyles in which they manage to interweave some fun. Cannery Row revolves around characters like Doc, Mack and the boys, Dora Flood, and Lee Chong, the grocery shop owner and reminds us of Smith's narratives on familiar characters like the salon owner, China man who runs the laundry, grocery shop owners and the manner in which they lead their lives. Steinbeck's characters in Cannery Row are relaxed and settled in life whereas Smith's characters are in quest of a better life. Smith's description regarding women who lose their dreams to the drudgery of poverty is an example of a text which is honest and brings out the conquest of poverty without making fun of poor people and yet having a trace of dark humour in it:

> They wore black—bunchy dress and sagging coat; a slightly mashed, too youthful hat, probably a daughter's discard, set straight on their heads. They sat spread out and breathing heavily, looking like pumpkins squatting on the ground in late fall ready to squash apart if a wintry wind went among them.

> Yet each had been a tremulous young girl once, full of dreams and natural vanities. But they had had to fight poverty and they were licked from the start. The lost fight had taken full payment from them. (86)

Like many young girls before her, Margy makes a vow that she will "never get like that." Margy's "whole philosophy, her golden hope—that she had all of life before her" makes her endure poverty. Margy reflects that though her stay at her parents' home is not comfortable, she has something to hope for. She could look ahead in life, and imagine that she would get married to a decent guy and could lead a better life. Once she is married she feels that she has "one less thing to dream about" (186). Smith shows it is important for some people who have nothing but dreams in their life to look forward to the realisation of their dreams as without hope life is difficult to survive for these people.

The American Dream, despite its promise, was out of reach of the average common person. Smith's characters who are drawn from life, bemoan that the American Dream is nothing but a mirage. Margy's father, Henny frequently vents his anguish, and feels "stuck" in life, as he could not rise up in life like some others:

> I had the ideas all boys has. I was dope enough to think I stood a chance a being president of the United States. They fooled us in school. They learned us that every American boy stood a chance a being president. I believed that like I use' to believe in Sanny Claus. Well, I got over that when I got in long pants.

> Then I got this here idea that I could be a cop or a fireman or the guy what drives a railroad train. A free country. Anything could happen. Well, ideas was free anyways. It turned out I didn't have no chance to be nothing. (32)

The next generation was more than eager to seek employment. Henny's daughter, Margy, "at seventeen, with two years of high school behind her, felt ready to lick the world" (36). With the optimism of the youth, "who are sure they can make their own proud destiny in spite of the tritely spoken wisdom of the older people who have had their chance at licking life and have come out of the unequal fight with bloody and bowed souls," (36) Margy marches ahead to give America an opportunity to prove its claims.

After being turned down by a few prospective employers, Margy ends up with a job with Mr. Prentiss who is kind and gentle and starts dreaming the dreams of youth. Like in the romantic literature of her times, Margy dreams of marrying her boss, Mr. Prentiss, but is sensible enough to realise that these kinds of things happened only in stories. Even on the eve of her marriage, Margy dreams of marrying Mr. Prentiss. Mr. Prentiss also is depicted as having a soft corner for Margy, but holds back because of class norms and his mother's views regarding his marriage.

On the eve of his daughter's marriage, Henny dreams that his son-in-law would make it big, unlike him. Henny feels that "[t]he Great American Dream had betrayed" him. He presumes that "[t]he American Dream had faded away into the mists of legends." But he reasons it could work for Frankie. And he takes up the example of Abraham Lincoln: "Yes, the Great

American Dream had betrayed Henny. Sometimes he wondered whether it had ever existed in the first place. But it must have existed sometime in America. There were records—there was history to prove it" (147). So, Henny dreams for his son-in-law and also for his daughter, and believes that "Frankie would make good and his daughter would have a comfortable life. He had to believe in something, otherwise he would have found the going hard" (148).

Immigrant men generally start from the scratch and America has been partial in some cases to men who work hard and have the initiative to brave against the odds. These few who manage to realise their dreams are treated as prototypes by the future generations. But the average men, belonging to a particular class where education, intelligence, and riches are almost nil, have to struggle hard to break even. They are "shoved" by people who are a little better than them and in turn "shoved" among themselves. Imbeciles that they are, they willingly bring home all the frustration which is boiling inside their hearts to heap it on their partners who in turn take it out on the children.

The motive for the immigrants who have already settled in America to harass the newcomers could be the same reason as black people harassing black people. K. Sumana reasons thus in The Novels of Toni Morrison: A Study in Race, Gender, and Class: "The reason for the tendency of black people to harass other black people is, perhaps, self-hatred induced by white hegemony. White standards corrupted the minds of black people in such a way that black people have developed self-hatred" (56).

This reason could be attributed to the immigrants as well. It could be that the immigrants who felt unwanted when they landed in America resented the newcomers because they idolized the Americans and their views. What feelings they received from the Americans were passed on to the newcomers. The feeling of isolation in the immigrants and their ordeals in trying to belong to America are reflected in the everyday life of the protagonist and her family members.

In Tomorrow men are portrayed as weak, spineless, drunkards who in spite of marrying according to their own wishes do not have the courage or ambition to go further in life. It seems like their courage leaves them at the altar of the wedding, and their ignorance and illiteracy make them end up as poor family planners. Instead of going forward in life along with family planning for a better life, they give up very easily and wind up as drunkards and abusers.

After marriage, Margy rarely gets to sleep with her husband, Frankie as Frankie still has problems with understanding his orientation or lack of orientation towards sex with her. He hates any sex talk, or even walking out with his wife when she is pregnant because he is scared of the comments the guys on the street would make. Though he is shocked initially when Margy tells him that she is pregnant, he is ready to look after their child. He is happy with Margy's pregnancy because "[i]t was an ideal arrangement for him: affection without sex. They lived like two loving and understanding friends" (234). Margy craves for children because she understands there is no bond between them and unwittingly speaks out something which she herself never knew was on her mind. She tells Frankie that they need children because they have nothing between them. Unfortunately, Margy gives birth to a stillborn baby. Margy, decides to

leave her husband and plan her life after understanding that with Frankie's sexual preference she will never lead a normal sexual life and he will never be able to give her emotional support.

Other writers of the 19th and 20th centuries like Kate Chopin, Theodore Dreiser and Ann Petry were asserting the fact that MEN were few and scarce to find and denounced men because of their failings. Men, who women can look up to, who are exemplary, responsible, caring, supportive, steadfast, dependable, and with a vision for the future well-being of the family and thereby the society were and are a rare breed. Edna Ferber and Betty Smith through their writings make a case that instead of waiting for such men, women can do better by being independent.

I opine that a woman needs to understand that she is a human being first, a person who has a right to grow as an individual before taking the part of a daughter, a sister or a mother. Women need bonding with their sex where they can let down their inhibitions and be themselves. But societal restrictions are such that it is impossible for most women to bond unless it is in the setting of religion, education, or family. Bonding with peers was a problem faced by many women regardless of class because there is no common platform where women can meet without living up to societal expectations. Rich and middle-class women who had nothing much to do apart from socialising with their peers, had to endure "the comfortable concentration camp" of the suburban home whose plight Betty Friedan emphasises in The Feminine Mystique. For poor, uneducated women like Flo homes are not even comfortable to relax like those of their upper class sisters.

Fortunately, as generations change women also change their perceptions regarding their children. Margy is scared that if a son is born she also might emotionally depend on him like Mrs. Malone who depends on her son, Frankie, as both of them are denied love by their respective husbands. Margy understands that a woman who is not loved by her husband emotionally manipulates her children. She prays for a girl, but unfortunately she gives birth to a stillborn baby. When she does not get the emotional support she needs from Frankie, she decides it is time to start life afresh. The next section deals with mother-child relationship and Margy's spirit in breaking out of her oppressive marriage.

Section II

Tomorrow, as it unfolds as a marital story of a young working class girl, is mainly a barb against mothers who try to manage their children's life for them. Margy, Frankie, and Prentiss suffer at the hands of their mothers, mothers who love them and try to save them from marriage and their spouses. The behaviour of these mothers can be attributed to the fact that they are generally uneducated, ignored by their husbands, abused by poverty, and do not have a life apart from running a home on stringent budgets.

Like most of the women before her, Margy's mother, Flo has dreams and ideas about her life. When she is young she dreams and pictures herself and her daughter as "dressed to kill" (102). Like most women before her she is sure "she had all of life before her" (100). Flo recollects her life when she is not married and when she had "big ideas" (17). She wonders why she ended up in a cold-water flat in spite of her ideas and assertions to her mother that she

wouldn't marry unless somebody provided a better home than her father. Flo's mother retaliates that she too had similar ideas when she was young and feels sad because her daughter is ashamed of her. In spite of their dreams, Flo and Henny could never achieve anything better in their lives. Henny ends up working in the same place as a shop worker because he is too scared to look for a new job. Flo scrapes her husband's weekly earnings to provide decent meals for the family, pay rent, and insurance. Poverty does not allow working class women to go out and amuse themselves; every penny is counted and kept track of. Cooped up in a rented flat for years together, always fearing the present, with no hope for the future, such women end up hysteric and end up fighting at the slightest provocation. Flo complains about her husband's way of leaving her in the house to go out and bond with his peer group: "And after a woman works hard all day," countered Flo, "she don't want to be cooped up night, neither. At least you see other people in the shop all day. I don't see nobody. All day I look at the four walls . . . " (99).

On the travails of a housewife, I would like to quote Charlotte Perkins Gilman even though she is known for her stand against immigrants as seen in her famous short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper" as the point in discussion is about the feelings of a housewife. These feelings can be attributed to most working class housewives irrespective of race. Gilman in her essay, "The Lady of the House" claims that a woman is denied the bonding that men enjoy outside their home. She states that a husband separates the woman from the world and denies her the companionship and development she requires to progress in life. This denial affects her growth as a person, affects their home and in turn affects the society as well: "The man needs the wife and has her—needs the world and has it. The woman needs the husband—and has him;

needs the world—and there is the husband instead. He stands between her and the world, with the best of intentions, doubtless; but a poor substitute for full human life" (Lynn 21).

For working class housewives, home is not a place where they can sit back and relax after a day's hard work. Home has become a place of recollection of their futile dreams and hopeless future. Even if the men stayed at home the impact of poverty is such that they would only end up in fights. And the women do not even know any place to go and enjoy within their means. Very soon years accumulate and it becomes too late for them to enjoy anything as a family. And a day arrives when they realise that they could have been happy with what they had but by that time it is too late as the parents become old and the children start living on their own.

Smith's Tomorrow is also a barb against Catholicism, which disallows family planning measures. The poor folk know that having children when they themselves are trying to find a foothold will set them back in life. Yet, they dare not go against religion. Religion for these poor Catholic women gave nothing to live for. Instead religion made them devise their own strategies to combat the growing family members. These poor women would forego sex so as not to end up with more mouths to feed. It is appalling to find how religion degrades married women to resort to nagging and quarrelling with their husbands, and creating a disharmonious home which is definitely not suitable for the growth of a happy child. Life was unbearably miserable for these poor women who had to fight down their love and act spiteful and nagging.

Nagging and fighting is a sort of contraceptive these women have devised to avoid being burdened with unwanted children. Smith shows her expertise in understanding human nature in

the text quoted below. With one stroke, Flo, who is described as a nag, turns out to be a very caring and tender woman who is a victim of poverty:

> She knew she had it in her woman's power to give him hope and dreams again. All she'd have to say was: Never mind, Henny. I love you. We still have each other. And all this *is* temporary. Everything will be better someday. Wait and see.
>
> She could say that. That's all he wanted to hear. He'd be happy all of a sudden. He'd put his arms around her. . . . .
>
> In a panic, she murdered her tender thoughts. She fought down the impulse to show him affection. She knew what any demonstrativeness would lead to. Another terrifying nine months—new stitches—another mouth to feed. (34)

Flo would rather bear the hostility than have another child, which she cannot afford to feed.

Illiterate, working class women who had dreams for themselves when they were young but could do no better than fall into the drudgery of poor housewives, have not many options before them other than terrorising their girl child to be away from boys and not get married in a hurry. In case it is a son who falls in love and wants to get married the minute he starts earning these women cannot show any other feeling apart from spite towards the girl he loves.

It is beyond these mothers to understand that lack of a healthy home environment has driven their children out to set up their own home. And even the married couple fails to understand the reason behind their intention to get married and very soon end up squabbling and ignoring each other like their parents who ignore each other. This is how they end up–from young, dreaming girls to old scheming women. Society and religion take an active part in transforming a woman from a sweet, young girl with dreams, who showers affection and love on a young man to a spiteful mother spitting venom and ready to curse her daughter or son for the sin of thinking of getting married and setting their own home. No doubt the intention of these mothers is the well-being of their children, but definitely they can not offer anything better for their children.

When she realises that her daughter is going to get married, Flo begins to feel sorry for the hard times she gave her daughter. She feels sorry for the dolls she did not buy when Margy was just a child; she feels sorry for the clothes she did not allow Margy to buy when Margy was working; she feels sorry for the food she cooked for her family. Now she innovates appetising meals within her means, and tries her best to keep the home clean and welcome for Margy and also her friend, Reenie.

Flo does not get on well with Margy's mother-in-law, Mrs. Malone and feels insulted when they comment on Margy. She nurtures a grudge towards Mrs. Malone and her daughters. It is sickening to see how women demean the lover/wife of their son/brother. These women are scared that they will lose the power over their son/brother once another woman enters his life. Instead of living their own life, these women tend to give importance to their son/brother and

control his life. Once they know that they are engaged, the women shower the son/brother with renewed love and indicate his importance and duties towards the family. Even after the marriage is over, Flo is unable to get rid of the bitterness she nurtures in her heart because of Margy's marriage and taunts her when she comes home, which only helps to widen the rift between them. Most working class mothers treat the marriage of their children as a refusal to acknowledge the love and gratitude towards their parents. Flo comes out as a mother with mixed feelings for her daughter; as long as Margy is with them she tries to control her in every manner and refuses her even basic essentials like a winter coat or a proper meal citing their poverty as an excuse. Once Margy decides to get married, Flo tries to be nice to her daughter and her friends as well, though she hates Margy for deciding to marry. At the same time, Flo hates Margy's in-laws for their offensive comments on Margy.

Frankie loses out to his mother even before his life could begin. Mrs. Malone in trying to gain love and sympathy from her son teaches him that even if he looked at a girl it would cause her misery. Smith wrongly attributes Frankie's homosexuality to the cheap talk regarding sex and pregnancy Frankie had to endure on the streets, and the teachings of his mother. Smith's idea could be the result of her limited education and limited circle of educated people which could have affected her ideas relating to gays. Unlike Flo, Frankie's mother provides him a room for himself and good food. Mrs. Malone does not mind her son having a good time as long as he does not fall in love. Going out on a Saturday night, Frankie Malone could only arouse jealousy in his mother. Strange though it seems, the truth is that Mrs. Malone does not mind her son having affairs, but she shudders at the thought that he might love one of them and marry her. She never bothers where her two girls go on Saturday nights, but feels threatened when Frankie

stays out late. She wishes her daughters to be happy with a man, but at the same time she can not tolerate her son making another woman happy. Women like Mrs. Malone who are neglected by their husbands give more importance to sons in their lives than to themselves, and they wish that they are bound solely to them. When this does not happen, they nurture hatred towards the woman in their sons' lives.

Mrs. Malone's worries regarding her son reminds us of D. H. Lawrence's Mrs. Morel in Sons and Lovers. Though there is a difference in the almost obsessive love between Mrs. Morel and Paul and the possessive love between Mrs. Malone and Frankie, there are also many similarities in the feelings of Mrs. Morel and Mrs. Malone. When Paul comes home late after seeing Miriam off to her house, he sees his mother waiting for him:

> Always when he went with Miriam, and it grew rather late, he knew his mother was fretting and getting angry about him–why, he could not understand. As he went into the house, flinging down his cap, his mother looked up at the clock. She had been sitting thinking, because a chill to her eyes prevented her reading. She could feel Paul being drawn away by this girl. And she did not care for Miriam. "She is one of those who will want to suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left," she said to herself; "and he is just such a gaby as to let himself be absorbed. She will never let him become a man; she never will." So, while he was away with Miriam, Mrs. Morel grew more and more worked up.
>
> (159)

Mrs. Morel, a dominating mother, like the mother characters of Smith has a failed marriage in the sense she does not have any emotional support from her husband. So she clings on to her sons for emotional support. She cannot tolerate her sons having dates and like Mrs. Malone does not mind her daughters going on dates. Paul could see through her and questions her regarding her discrimination. He asks his mother why she does not mind with whom his sister goes out with. Lawrence gives us a man's viewpoint where in spite of his mother's unsolicited interference Paul is able to sympathize with his mother rather than with Miriam. The bond shared by Paul and his mother is more fixated in nature. Smith gives us a woman's perspective in the same situation and empathizes with Margy.

This problem arises because society has fashioned women to give more importance to men in their lives. A man is expected to pursue success, a career, a dream, a hobby, but when it comes to a woman, society expects a woman to rein in her aspirations and tune in to the wishes of men in her life, father, husband or son. A woman who gives importance to her aspirations is viewed as an aberration by most men and most women as well.

Smith gives us a moving account of a young man trying to understand his homosexual orientation in Tomorrow. Though Frankie finds it difficult to love his wife, persists in doing his duties as a husband. Frankie is considerate towards Margy, and he tries to explain to her that a child so immediately after their marriage would set them back financially. When in spite of his precautions he finds his wife pregnant he accepts his role and looks after her well within his means. Frankie is confused regarding his sexual orientation and is unable to make love to his

wife. Poverty, lack of proper education, and the surroundings he grew up in make him an imbecile and a confused person.

When Frankie tells his mother to treat his wife in a better way because she is carrying, and could be scared that she might die, Mrs. Malone seems incredulous. She demands to know who gave him that silly notion of "women being scared and suffering and maybe dying just because they have a baby" (217). When Frankie replies that it was she who taught him that, she is so shocked that Mr. Malone breaks in to reinforce the truth. Mr. Malone, gently but decisively, speaks out against his wife:

> "Yes, you did, Nora," he said. "You told him. He was a boy of sixteen at the time and just beginning to turn around and look at the girls on the street. And you was carrying Doreen at the time and you told him how scared you was—how you was going to suffer giving birth and how you might die. I told you at the time not to trouble the boy and you said he's got to learn about life sometime. And then you told him that he mustn't do nothing to cause you grief and you got around to it that every time he looked at a girl, he caused you grief. Oh, you learned him well, Nora, thinking it was for your own benefit. You didn't know you was learning him for some other woman's benefit, too." (217-218)

In Lawrence's Sons and Lovers, Paul though he loves Miriam, deceives himself due to his mother's dislike for the girl and is ready to sacrifice his love for the sake of his mother. Lawrence writes about a son's perspective in this regard:

> A good many of the nicest men he knew were like himself, bound in by their own virginity, which they could not break out of. They were so sensitive to their women that they would go without them for ever rather than do them a hurt, an injustice. Being the sons of mothers whose husbands had blundered rather brutally through their feminine sanctities, they were themselves too diffident and shy. They could easier deny themselves than incur any reproach from a woman; for a woman was like their mother, and they were full of the sense of their mother. They preferred themselves to suffer the misery of celibacy, rather than risk the other person. (272)

Like Mrs. Morel, Mrs. Malone also, through excess love for her son, aids in his failure as a man. In Tomorrow, we perceive a wife's (Margy's) voice, whereas in Sons And Lovers we perceive a son's anguish. Mrs. Malone tries to explain to her husband the reasons for her behaviour. When she tells him that Frankie was "the best one of all the children" (218) she got, we get to know how a lovelorn woman in the process of getting love from her son ends up in damaging his future with his wife. It is obvious that Mrs. Morel like Mrs. Malone, who was once a young girl and dreamed about life, did not get anything out of life. Poverty makes them abdicate love in the quest of livelihood. Illiterate, with nothing better to do than looking at the four walls of the house, Mrs. Malone showers all her love and pent-up emotions on her only son. Mr. Malone tries to make her perceive how the family ended up bitter:

> "Yes, he's the best one we got," he said. "He was made out of the love a pretty girl and decent man had for each other a long time ago. He was carried under a

> happy heart. He was hoped for and he came into the world . . . wanted." He sighed. "The others came unwanted because we couldn't help ourselves and because there was slip-ups and accidents. But he's the one was wanted."
>
> (217-18)

It is pathetic to see women who do not get love from their husbands cling on to their children only to ruin the children's lives.

Smith shows us how the troubles working class immigrant men face in the hostile world end up as a burden on their women. Uneducated, scarred by the problems in life, scared of the new country, unable to earn enough to run a family, these men bring their problems home. When the home resonates with quarrels between the husband and wife, the men walk out to bond with other men probably in a bar or a salon over drinks. And the wife turns her attention towards the children–if they are young she tries to control them; if they are earning she tries to plan their lives; and if they want to marry she tries her best to stop them. In other words she tries to wring out affection and appreciation from her children which she failed to get from her husband.

Mr. Prentiss is another son who feels suffocated by maternal love in this novel. Brought up by a widow, a woman who is not the recipient of her husband's love, and who has nothing much to do other than blackmailing her son emotionally, Mr. Prentiss, nearing forty, remains unmarried, for the sake of his mother. He falls in love with a young, beautiful girl in his office, but relinquishes his love because his mother does not approve of the girl. Mrs. Prentiss hates the girl, Mary, so much that she describes her as impudent, and declares the colour of her hair as false as well. She imparts her wisdom to her son who tries to convince her that the colour of

Mary's hair is original, thus: "Ah, we women may fool you men, but we never fool each other" (62).

Mrs. Prentiss tells her son stories about the difficulties she encountered bringing him up in such a way that he is forced to think of not hurting her even in the slightest manner and to this end he sacrifices his happiness, his love and his marriage. A selfish woman, she would rather have an unhappy son than pursue other appropriate interests in life. Mrs. Prentiss forces him to think that keeping her happy is his primary duty. Prentiss remains a bachelor till his mother's death.

Smith relates in her novels that mothers manipulate both boys and girls. On this issue mothers show no partiality. But unfortunately girls get more than their unwanted share because they are never appreciated right from the beginning of their birth. At the outset girls rarely get affection from the mother or any family member, and to top that the mothers start emotional blackmail once they start earning, to stop them getting married to the first guy they meet. Once she gets married, she has to bow to the demands of marital life. It is very difficult for the society to accept a woman as a person with her own interests and plans in life. Whether she conforms or not to the role that society designed for her, a woman is bound to have troubles.

Wives in a non-functional marriage generally turn towards their sons to get emotional support and to shower them with their "giving-all-for-love" (119) nature. Once the sons decide to get married, the mothers hate them and their fiancées with equal vigour. Any rift between the couple is intensified by the interference of the parents on both sides. Many women have an

inherent nature of “woman-need to save someone from hurt” (119). Smith seems to imply that some young girls who marry for love are actually marrying out of pity for the boy which they misunderstand as love. On the contrary, many men, after the initial honeymoon is over, turn away from this suffocating love to bond with their peers. For a working class man, this would be with other men of the same class in a pub. A man enjoys being with his peers for the sole reason there are no expectations from him and he can let his hair down and be his self. He need not be a dutiful son, a responsible father, or a caring husband.

But a woman is left with an insecure future, a loveless marriage, loneliness, and children to feed, as the suffocating four walls of her world. When these women turn to their men for emotional and financial support men do nothing but turn away, forcing them to find their own means to survive. But these same men again do a volte-face and accuse the women of neglecting their duties, which makes any sane person question the authority under which these duties are attributed only to women.

All the three characters Margy, Frankie, and Prentiss suffer because of their mothers. Margy takes the first opportunity to break away from home because of her mother who tries to control her every step. Frankie’s gay orientation is in part attributed to his mother’s lecture on the difficulties of pregnancy and it affects him so much that he feels he is committing a sin just by looking at girls. When there is a slight problem in the marital life of Margy and Frankie, instead of helping them out, the mothers try to increase the rift. Prentiss though in his late thirties is unable to get married to a girl he loves because of his mother’s unfair hatred towards her. He has to wait till his mother’s death to think of getting married, but by that time Mary gets

married. Smith, at the end of the novel, hints that Margy might again work in Mr. Prentiss's office and probably marry him after getting a divorce from Frankie. Even if the marriage does not take place, being financially independent could bring a new change in Margy's life.

Apart from Smith, Ferber and Yezierska also stressed that education and employment would bring about a progressive change in women's lives. Around the time period Smith published her novels, women writers were voicing women's perspectives and getting their due recognition. Education for women has not changed since the 18th century when Mary Wollstonecraft stated that the education that society was offering to a woman based on her gender is humiliating and degrading to a human being: "In short, the whole tenour of female education (the education of society) tends to render the best disposed romantic and inconstant; and the remainder vain and mean" (Poston 75).

Wollstonecraft also argues in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, that horizons of opportunities for a woman be widened through educating her like a man. Wollstonecraft argues that appropriate education leads to women freeing their shackles from "tyrants and sensualists" who "keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing" (24). She further elaborates that the sensualist is worse than a tyrant because they deceive women into believing that women had power over these men. Education, she states, will help women to look at their status in society in an appropriate manner.

The implication that religion can wreak havoc in any illiterate family, which is not well fortified against poverty makes one ponder why religion, in these modern times, still holds on to

old beliefs that are best done away with. The days when one would think "the more the merrier" are gone. The present beliefs are such that if a person is unable to bring up a child, that person has no moral right to give birth to a child. If a parent or a lover is unable to offer his child or partner something better in life he definitely does not have any right to make their life more miserable than before.

Smith imprints on the readers' mind the significance of education and financial freedom it leads to. She also makes a point that only with awareness comes the knowledge to respect the rights of a woman's body. When these two factors fall in place, naturally, we will have a happy couple and a family who in turn can make a better tomorrow.

The ending in Tomorrow as we have seen in Tree is full of hope. Margy realises that her marriage will never work and she will never be able to get love from her homosexual husband. She decides to go back to working, with the hope that Mr. Prentiss may offer her something better now that his mother has passed away. She begins to write a letter to Mr. Prentiss for a job opening and finds the pen point rusted. She washes it and admires the washed pen point, which "looked shiny and new" (274). With the hope of starting a new life she starts to write on a new piece of paper.

The strength of Smith's narratives lies in the aspirations and dreams of poor, young women who dare to take responsibility for their lives. They struggle to come out of the feeling of isolation and poverty by devising their own methods. They understand that the main reason for oppression of any sort is poverty and illiteracy. Education, employment, and clear planning

for the future are the tools, they think, that are needed to tackle the future. Out of insecure homes, and neighbourhood, these young women dream to seek love and identity through their own efforts. Tomorrow will definitely be better for those who dream and make an effort to reach out.

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Chapter 4

Chinook

Maggie-Now is the third novel Smith wrote and it was published in the year 1958. Apart from hostility the immigrants suffer and the growth of a girl into a middle-aged woman, Smith, in Maggie-Now, takes up the trauma of children born to unwed mothers. She also deals, to a certain extent, with the problems elderly working class immigrants face after retiring from their jobs. This chapter is an analysis of how Maggie-Now responds to circumstances to overcome the problems in her life. It asserts the triumph of Maggie's spirit over Pat and Claude's denial of her needs. It deals with immigrants' feelings of isolation and alienation, the trauma of an orphaned child, and the loneliness of working class immigrant women and elderly people. This novel is different from the two previous novels in the sense that this novel does not have mothers-in-law to harass the newly married couple. The protagonist is also not a young girl like Francie in a Tree or Margy in Tomorrow who are looking for work to become financially independent. Maggie is in a better position compared with the previous protagonists as she owns a home and rents a part of it. Creating such a character also reflects Smith's economic status. In the year 1958 she was well off, owned a home and also another cottage in Nags Head which was her retreat from the problems in her life.

Autobiographical elements help us understand Smith's writing better because from these autobiographical facts we realise that Smith's circumstances in life play a major role behind her narratives. Noted feminist author, Virginia Woolf, in her essay, "A Room of One's Own," opines that: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (6). Smith, at the time of writing Maggie-Now had money and her own home and was in a position to

write what she wanted. Probably this independence results in the distinct ending of this novel. In Maggie-Now, hope comes in the form of Maggie's future plans for her self. This, I think, could be attributed to her financial status due to her publications and royalties and her own home which validates Woolf's theory that women writers' texts exude confidence when they are financially secure. As we look at the four novels of Smith, in the first three novels she talks about failed marriages, and in her last novel, she gives a solution for a happy married life despite poverty.

Maggie is somewhat similar to Tomorrow as the central characters in these novels, Maggie and Margy respectively think that marriage would help them have a better life. Both Margy and Maggie desperately want to become mothers; Margy "to give it [the child] love" and "to prove that there are more than dreams in a person's life" (Tomorrow 250) and Maggie because of her "*need so much to be needed*" (Maggie-Now 251). Both fail to become mothers and have to choose different methods to fulfill their needs.

Marriage, promising to bring in a better life, has become a false alarm in Maggie's life. It is like Chinook, the name given for the sudden, deceptive breeze which people mistake for the arrival of spring. Actually spring is still a few days away, but the wind is deceptive enough to make people think that life has arrived. I feel that this name is apt for this chapter on Maggie-Now because Maggie, the protagonist also thinks her marriage will change her life but she has to accommodate changes to fit into the life marriage leads her into. At the start of the spring season, Claude leaves Maggie and goes in search of his identity without informing her about his

intentions. Probably the wind promises him the revelation he craves for and not informing his wife regarding his plans is his way of taking revenge on his situation in society:

> He opened the window and leaned out. She leaned next to him and the south wind lifted a tendril of hair and she put her cheek next to his.
>
> "It's a Chinook wind," he whispered as though he didn't want her to hear. (258)

The "Chinook" wind brings the smell of spring and overpowers Claude's sense of responsibility. The overpowering impact of smell on the senses in also dealt by Kate Chopin in her short story, "Lilacs." A smell or fragrance is a powerful memory which triggers desperate measures in persons to relive the past. In "Lilacs[5]", Chopin writes about an actress, Adrienne Farival, who with the whiff of blooming lilacs leaves everything in her life in chaos and goes back in search of her childhood home, a convent:

> Well, that is how it was with me, Sister Agathe, when the scent of lilacs at once changed the whole current of my thoughts and my despondency. The boulevard, its noises, its passing throng, vanished from before my senses as completely as if they had been sprinted away. I was standing here with my feet sunk in the green sward as they are now. I could see the sunlight glancing from that old white stone wall, could hear the notes of birds, just as we hear them now, and the humming of insects in the air. And through all I could see and could smell the lilac blossoms, nodding invitingly to me from their thick-leaved branches. It seems to me they are richer than ever this year, Sister Agathe. And do you know, I became like an

[5] Page reference is not available since the story "Lilacs" was taken from the internet.

> enragee; nothing could have kept me back. I do not remember now where I was going; but I turned and retraced my steps homeward in a perfect fever of agitation: "Sophie! My little trunk—quick—the black one! A mere handful of clothes! I am going away. Don't ask me any questions. I shall be back in a fortnight." And every year since then it is the same. At the very first whiff of a lilac blossom, I am gone! There is no holding me back.

In the short story, "Lilacs," the smell of lilacs is so overpowering that Adrienne, an actress, leaves her musical programs in chaos and tries to relive her childhood spent in a convent. The conversation between Sister Agathe and the gardener of the convent reveals that Adrienne is a very impulsive person. Vaguely, we are given to understand that Adrienne is an orphan brought up in the convent from which she probably ran away to settle in Paris. At the time the story takes place, she is leading a life which she would rather hush up than reveal to the sisters for she tells them that she is a widow. Though Adrienne achieves material success by becoming an actress she longs to go back to the convent whenever the lilacs bring back her childhood memories. We can say by this that Adrienne is not content with her material success and at the same time she is not able to relinquish her life as an actress. She leaves her home in Paris without a care for her programmes and producers and leaves for the convent, which the smell of lilacs remind her of. Claude in Maggie-Now also presents this mixed-type of a personality. Although he has a loving and caring wife, he finds it difficult to settle into a normal life. At the scent of the Chinook he desperately launches onto the search of his biological parents with renewed vigour. Memories rekindled by smells make them act impulsively without a thought for the people who are dependent on them.

Smith's protagonists are distinct compared to the women characters most of her contemporaries wrote about in that they identify their problems and tackle them, a chief trait in which she forms an exclusive circle along with writers like Edna Ferber and Anzia Yezierska. At the end of the novels we see that Smith's protagonists have the satisfaction of acting on their problems instead of crying hoarse over them or blaming other people or the circumstances.

When dealing with immigrant women's problems, it is not possible to ignore the problems faced by women in general though belonging to different race and class. From a broader perspective, immigrant women's problems are also a part of women's issues. In the 20th century, there were major women writers like Kate Chopin, Edna Ferber, Ann Petry, and Pearl S. Buck who wrote about the problems women faced. Kate Chopin, the author of almost a hundred short stories and two novels was pushed into literary oblivion because she highlighted the inner feelings of women for these were felt to be too scandalous by men and also women. Her writings were actually appreciated in the 1970's with the resurgence of feminism. Edna Ferber's protagonists belong to middle and upper class and due to circumstances are left alone to fend for themselves. Ferber's women take the hardships in their stride and build a new life on their own. Petry's The Street is about a young, lone Black mother's struggle to earn enough to live a decent life in a society which was against her race, class and gender. Buck's The Mother is the story of a victim of poverty and Buck covers all the stages from childhood to old age of an unnamed peasant woman in her novel. Not naming the protagonist could be an indication that this woman is a representative of all the women who are struggling in similar conditions. Chopin, Buck and Petry seem to attribute the problems of their protagonists to the society and men in the lives of

the protagonists. On the other hand, the protagonists of Ferber and Smith analyse their predicament and build their lives without blaming anyone.

Eminent feminist writers like Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), Margaret Sanger (1879-1966), Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) and Betty Friedan (1920-2006), revealed the problems faced by women in a prosperous and progressive country like America. Again, these women were not immigrants though some of them belonged to the working class. But it is necessary to talk about these writers and feminists as they have worked for the liberation of women during the later part of the 19th century and the 20th century. The issues these writers focused on were limited to one aspect at a time. For instance, Anna Julia Cooper, one of the most important African American scholars in American history, and a dedicated teacher, encouraged her students to receive scholarships to prestigious institutions. Cooper's work proved the notorious notion that African Americans were intellectual inferiors to the white Americans false and infuriated the white Americans so much that she was fired from the position of principal of Washington High School, Washington. Unfazed, Cooper continued her efforts to inspire the students, working as a teacher in the same school. She was famous for her work A Voice from the South. Charlotte Gilman, a rare woman who maintained friendly relationship with her husband's second wife, had unprecedented progressive views. Gilman considered herself a humanist, not a feminist, and worked towards a universal code for men and women. She argued that women should be financially independent and household chores should be professionalised if not shared equally by men. Her works include The Home, Human Work, Women and Economics, and The Man-Made World.

Margaret Sanger, a woman far ahead of her times, worked as a birth control activist and worked for women's rights over their bodies and the choice of abortion. In 1916, Sanger was the first woman to open a family planning and birth control clinic in America, but very soon her clinic was raided and she was put in jail for a short period of time. Later on she published many articles on birth control and also launched a monthly periodical on birth control. Sanger's widely published books are What Every Girl Should Know and What Every Mother Should Know. Gwendolyn Brooks's versatile verses are about options or rather lack of options in the lives of working class African American women. Her poems are about everyday people who struggle to live day after day. Her poems are distinguished by two traits—one, there is no lamenting of victimization of her characters, and two, there is no assurance that their lives will be better either through hard work and planning or through divine luck. Betty Friedan, on the other hand, focuses on the problems faced by upper and upper middle class women homemakers. Friedan's The Feminine Mystique is regarded as an inspiration for many women in America. Friedan is regarded as the leader of the contemporary feminist movement. Friedan identified and brought into focus some of the unrevealed feelings in women like the desire for appreciation, fulfillment, being thought of as useful and for following their dreams without guilt.

Fortunately, authors can write about a wider spectrum and discuss multiple issues in their novels and that is what Smith has done through her novels. She has chosen autobiographical elements, issues that bothered her in life, and people who troubled her as her subjects, and relentlessly worked on them to reveal the positive and negative effects these kinds of persons can cause in others and on society as a whole.

Throughout American mainstream literary history, the only major voice heard is that of the white American male belonging to the middle/upper class. People belonging to different sections of the society had to face different problems based on race, gender, and class. Even though the problems of these sections were represented in literature, in many cases they were not experienced firsthand by the authors. So, in all likelihood, the experiences or the true history of these people has seldom been reflected in the narratives. A person who undergoes the problems firsthand can give the history of problems faced by that particular section of people more accurately. Maggie-Now is a novel about alienation and isolation suffered by the immigrants. Especially their effect on immigrant women is significantly discussed in this novel. The next section deals with immigrant problems and the sense of isolation. The section also deals extensively with Pat and Claude's experiences which in the long run affect Maggie's life negatively.

****

The first time Maggie's father, Patrick steps on the American soil he is received in a manner which most other immigrants who came and who still come to America with dreams that they can make it big can easily identify with:

> The cop across the street was moving away. Patsy was afraid he'd lose him so he made an attempt at crossing the street. Bedlam! Whistles blew, bells tinkled, gongs clanged, drivers cursed, horses reared and a man fell off a high-wheeled bicycle. People yelled at Patsy:

> "Get out-a the gutter, yer Goddamned greenhorn!" This was Patsy's first greeting in the new world.
>
> "Wipe-a behin' the ears, doity mick," yelled an Italian fish peddler. This was the first instruction Patsy received.
>
> And, "Go back where you come from, why doncha," from one of Horatio Alger's newsboys, was the first piece of disinterested advice Patsy received in America.
>
> Patsy scuttled back to the sidewalk, thinking: *I'll get to know the language in time, for 'tis almost like English.* (17)

The above quote gives us an insight into how immigrants who settled in America treated the new immigrants. The men who taunted Pat were an Italian fish peddler and other unidentified immigrants whom the author groups as "Horatio Alger's newsboys." Horatio Alger, an author in the early nineteenth century published more than a hundred novels based on the American Dream. His protagonists are young men who succeed in life through hard work on the streets as vendors, boot polishers, and newspaper boys. In Alger's novels success does not mean riches but having a stable and secure place in society. We see in them some rich gentleman impressed with the protagonist's hard work or honesty taking him under his care. Even in the nineteenth century, we can see this trend in Charles Dickens' novels such as Oliver Twist, David

Copperfield, and The Great Expectations where the protagonists Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, and Phillip respectively undergo similar changes in their life circumstances. When a male author in America uses this kind of development in a novel for a male protagonist it is termed the American Dream whereas when a woman author uses it for a female protagonist, her fiction is termed "sentimental and emotional," not only by men but women critics as well. It seems that the discrimination between men and women is carried on to authors as well.

Coming back to the deplorable treatment the new immigrants face at the hands of settled immigrants, it seems to be carried out as a sort of tradition by the immigrants, almost as a way of life. Moriarity, an immigrant, who has endured a similar kind of trick when he first came to America, also finds it a matter of ridicule till his daughter, Mary reminds him of his misadventure:

> "Are you standing there and telling me you was taken in by that old thrick?" He laughed. "Ya-ha-ha! Ya-ha-ha!"
>
> The booming laugh scared The Missus. She threw up her hands in fright and scuttled from the room.
>
> "Ya-ha-ha!" laughed Mike. "Wait'll I tell the boys down at headquarters."

> "Now, Papa, don't laugh," said Mary Moriarity. "Remember the same thing happened to you when you came over. Only the man said he was your uncle's cousin. And he got your trunk. *And* all your money, too." (21)

Smith further explains that the treatment the uneducated immigrants endure at the hands of their tormentors is shockingly carried out by them again on the newcomers. They do not seem to learn anything from their suffering. Smith tells us this kind of dealing with suffering is seen in immature children, and uneducated and ignorant women as well when she narrates the manner in which Francie is treated in the school, and Joanna is treated by other women in Tree.

Smith's creation of Pat, Maggie's father taking the centre stage and asserting to live to bury all his family members could be doing justice through literature to her father or to the character, Johnny Nolan in Tree. The character, Johnny Nolan, has a limited role in Tree, and like Smith's father, dies an untimely death of pneumonia.

Even after remaining in America for years, Pat does not socialize much and does not have any friends either in the workplace, or in the neighbourhood. It is notable that apart from the younger generation, none of Smith's characters make friends either at the workplace or the neighbourhood. The older generation immigrants depend mostly on their relatives and are vary of their neighbours and workmates. The new generation youngsters like Francie in Tree, Margy and Frankie in Tomorrow, Maggie, Denny and Tessie in Maggie-Now, and Annie and Carl in Joy try to make friends and also try to make every effort to imitate their American counterparts

in the way they dress and talk, so as to acquire a sense of belonging and a feeling of security in America. So we see a change in the behaviour of immigrants as generations change.

Previously, the immigrants lacked language skills, and, skeptical of the Americans, were keen on keeping the family together and maintaining relations only with their countrymen. Their only goals seemed to be earning money and keeping the family together. As generations are changing they are becoming more aware and are friendlier and yearning to be a part of America. The new generation is more outgoing, more educated, and more considerate towards the newcomers. A sense of isolation is rapidly giving way to a sense of belonging. The first generation immigrants were not aware of their rights. The men's major concerns were to find a job and rent a place to live in. Women's major concerns were to run the home and keep the family together. Men hardly had friends at workplace and women were hardly friendly with their neighbours. Both men and women depended on their own relatives who helped them to come to America. The second generation men and women were more outgoing, knew their rights, were educated to a certain extent, and reached out for better prospects. They had friends at workplace and in the neighbourhood. Many youngsters competed with their American counterparts and tried to reach out for a better life.

The awareness brought about by change in generations brought a change in the women as well. In the past, a woman's job was to cook for the family and keep the family together. As the times are changing women are also getting educated, are working, and are aware of their identity. They are also able to contribute to the family's welfare, bring up the children in more hygienic and loving conditions, and also look after themselves in a better manner.

Immigrant women who landed in America lacked education and the knowledge of the English language. They had to completely depend on their men folk who were hardly better than them in language skills. It was difficult for them to cultivate friends in the neighbourhood other than their few relatives or friends through whom they immigrated in the first place. They lacked self-confidence to go out as the place was entirely new and they had to face hostility from the Americans and immigrants as well. They did not have any knowledge about the amenities the American government had provided for them. The only place they could enter fearlessly was the Church.

A working class immigrant woman's domain is her home where she can confidently move about and take decisions, provided the man of the house is able to afford a stable amount towards rent and food every week. Her world revolves round cooking, washing, keeping the house clean, looking after children, feeding them, sending them to school, seeing that they keep out of trouble, nursing the ill, and creating a pleasant atmosphere by the time the children and husband come back home. With the meager amount of money she has in her hands and the little strength she has in her body due to her gender, somewhere a woman is bound to fail in accomplishing all these tasks perfectly. Generally this failure affects children's education, and the peaceful atmosphere at home.

Women, especially mothers, are expected to do their work without complaining. Society defines women as persons who should do all the above-mentioned tasks without any problem at all. When a woman complains of the lack of money or time or sympathy from her family which

ultimately affects her efficiency she is considered a nag. For a woman, as a mother and a housewife, it is a no-win situation. She, definitely, can neither keep up to the societal and family expectations of her role, given the means, nor can she complain and get away.

Immigrant working class women are strongly bound to their families because the family is the only identity they have in a new country. So they work hard to keep up the family spirit alive. Their social outings are only going to Church every week. They rarely have time for themselves, cannot afford simple things like a new dress or some time out with friends, or an affordable place to go with their husbands or family. Life is always slog, slog, slog. And by the time they reach their primetime they realise that their life's ambitions can never be accomplished, their husbands are going to retire, the children are getting married and leaving, and they have no place to live when the husband retires from his job. In fact the insecure future looms very much near, without a job, without a home, without any support from the children, and with ill health and old age as companions.

Smith brings out the insecurities working class immigrant women face in her novels. In Maggie-Now, Pat is a coward who runs away from marrying his lover, Margaret Rose. Pat never lives up to the role of a loving and caring husband to his wife, Mary nor is he a responsible father to his children. In contrast, his daughter, Maggie, who is named after Margaret Rose, takes up the role of a homemaker to her father's house at a very young age, brings up her infant brother, Denny, remains a faithful and loving companion to her husband, Claude, and also looks after her adopted children with love and care. The two characters, Pat and Maggie symbolise average men and women characters who fall under societal norms. In her novels, Smith portrays that in

most average working class families, where men break up while shouldering their responsibilities, women silently bear more than their share with dignity. The experience of Pat and Claude further the problems of Maggie. The sufferings Pat and Claude received only make them insensitive to Maggie and her feelings. These two men in Maggie's life seem to think that as life was not fair to them they too need not be fair to anybody. Maggie's sufferings are more because as a woman she faces more crisis at home and outside as a nonentity and as an alien/immigrant.

Pat is not a source of comfort to any woman in his family, but actually is the cause of insecurities in the women in his family as he brings more troubles in the family with his behaviour. Pat feels his job as a road sweeper is below his dignity, but he is not able to rise above the job due to lack of education and his own inclination. He is a person who believes in depending on others rather than paving his own way. He believes his mother and runs away from marrying Margaret Rose, his lover. He agrees to marry Mary, Moriarity's daughter because he knows no other way to rise up in life. He takes the job Moriarity manages through his influence. He feels embarrassed to tell his wife that he loves her despite the fact he knows that she would love to hear those words from him but tells her finally when he knows that she is dying after delivering their son:

> No, he had never told her that he loved her and now he *knew* he did love her. He felt he should say the world "love" now. It was a simple word, easily said, but he couldn't say it. In some obscure way, he felt it would make him a stranger to her.

[. . .]

When he knows for sure that she is going to die he whispers that he loves her and feels so disturbed that he bumps into a screen while leaving his wife. (91-92)

Pat does not feel sorry for his daughter, Maggie who at sixteen has to take up the role of a mother to her infant brother and a homemaker to him. Instead he feels that this responsibility will keep her out of dubious company and she will not end up marrying the first fellow that would come along. Pat's notions are revealed in a dialogue with a relative who takes up Maggie's case with him:

"Me mother was tied down with two children when she was Maggie-Now's age and it didn't harm her. The girl is strong and healthy."

"The responsibility . . . "

"It will keep her out of trouble. She'll know the work of a home and a baby. She won't be so anxious to marry the first clown what comes along."

"She's not going to have much fun."

"And is that any of your business?" (94)

The discrimination shown towards a girl child is very obvious in the above dialogue. It is really appalling to see Pat comparing his daughter to his mother rather than to girls of her age in that period. He could not even think of comparing his daughter to himself when he was sixteen. At an age when he expects Maggie to run the house and look after her infant brother and be responsible, he himself was roaming around, enjoying with friends and living off his mother. He feels that it is in the best interest of a female child to be responsible and look after her father's home rather than think of her enjoyment. Even today, this discrimination between the roles expected of male and female children is present in households throughout the world, regardless of race and class. Pat's experiences as a working class immigrant do not allow Maggie to have a happy childhood at home. In fact, she bears the complete burden of Pat's experiences.

Coming to the effect of Claude's experiences on Maggie, we can say that as Maggie's childhood is lost to Pat her prime is lost to Claude's callous behaviour. Pat feels his home is better than any home that any man could offer his daughter. He tries his best to stop Maggie's wedding with Claude; when he fails he tries to irritate Claude with his presence and unnecessary remarks. Eventually, he gets used to the idea that his daughter is definitely going to marry Claude. Claude manipulates Pat into talking more about himself. Finally Pat is exasperated talking to Claude and confides in his friend Mick Mack that Claude's questions regarding Pat's childhood actually disconcerted him:

> You know, it got so I couldn't sit and talk with him no more. He gave me the willies. He asked them questions—about me mother and did I remember me father what died before I was born and did I know where all me brothers was. He

> eats off-a people was the way I figered it out. He keeps chewing away at me life till he's got it all for hisself, but he don't give me nothing of his life; like where he was born and where his relations is now. (249)

The questions that Claude asks Pat are just a reflection of his anguish regarding his orphan state. Claude, an orphan, tries to live his childhood in others' childhood tales. This shows us the kind of lonely life an orphan leads and his craving for a normal life. An orphan craves for routine things like the presence of parents, their love, and a life with them like any normal child. Smith's narrative questions as to who ought to be blamed for the problems an innocent orphan child faces in this callous world. The manner in which Claude makes people reveal their childhood to him makes them feel that he is richer by their narration and they are somehow deprived of a part of their life.

Even his girlfriend, Maggie is taken aback by the constant manner in which Claude asks her to relate her childhood to him. A working class second generation immigrant girl, Maggie, who has lost her mother when she is sixteen, and who has hardly any relatives or friends, finds it incredible that someone is interested in her life. This incident reflects the extent of loss an orphan suffers so as to find the life of a poor, friendless girl interesting just because she is born to wedded parents and the family has lived together:

> He wanted to know everything about her life; especially her childhood—her mother, brother, father and grandfather. He prodded her with questions and drew her out and she spoke freely as if dictating an honest autobiography. As she had

> everything else, she had taken her childhood for granted. But as she noted his delighted and interested reactions, her childhood seemed very wonderful all of a sudden. (130)

By the end of their talk Claude feels enriched because he lived her story and he treated her parents and grandparents as his own. Smith suggests that living with parents, which every child takes for granted in life, is missing in an orphan's life. On his part, Claude, to an extent, when he is with Maggie, brings out the beauty in the very routine life led by Maggie. It is very much true that we do not realise our blessings until we see someone suffering more than us. Claude makes Maggie realise that the life she has led is "all part of the wonder of a girl growing up into a woman" (132). Claude re-lives in her narratives, reacting to every incident in her life:

> "[. . .] It was all part of the wonder of a girl growing up into a woman."
>
> He told her how moved he had been at her stories and how amused, too. He spoke ecstatically about the wonder of her childhood.
>
> *What's so wonderful, she thought. Wasn't he ever a child?*
>
> After a while, she saw it a little through his eyes and she was strangely disturbed. It was as though he had lived her childhood but on a more wonderful plane than she had. She felt, vaguely, that she had given away her childhood that night. She had given it to him or he had taken it from her, and made it into something wonderful. In a way, her life was his now. (132)

Maggie understands that life has been unfair to Claude. She realises that Claude has lived her childhood but enjoyed it more than her who actually lived it. She feels that she has gifted her childhood to someone who has made it more wonderful just by listening to it. After the narration of her childhood she feels that Claude also owns her childhood as much as her and her life is his from then onwards.

However, Claude refuses to reveal his childhood to Maggie. He also shows his commitment towards a relationship with her:

> His face cleared and he smiled. "Oh, someday, when we're old and sitting by the fire and it's snowing outside, I'll tell you everything."
>
> "I will wait," she said shyly.
>
> He looked at her strangely. After a while he said: "In the meantime, I'll take your childhood for my own and your Brooklyn and all your friends, too, your brother, your father, your Aunt Lottie . . . (146)

Claude Bassett is not simply a character but a symbol of the havoc created by irresponsible couples in society. Brought up in an orphan home, Bassett is besieged by the urge to find his biological parents. He shapes his personality to brave the taunts he receives from his classmates and to search ceaselessly for his biological parents.

Ever hungry for a home and relatives Claude tries to live his childhood in Maggie's narration of her childhood. Claude relentlessly goes to different states in search of information regarding his parents. Smith's concern for children born outside wedlock is revealed in the portrayal of Claude's character. Claude's character is a question to society as to why a person should go through so much of suffering for no fault of his. Forever restless, the anguish Claude suffers to discover his parents, not only causes problems to his self but also to his wife, Maggie. The only saving grace of this pathetic situation for Maggie is the family's ability to provide for itself and their not having children. Ultimately, Smith's novels reveal that working class immigrant men's experiences have a powerful impact on their women's lives.

Maggie-Now is about "the wonder of a girl growing up into a woman" (132), a celebration of a girl, Maggie, growing up into a woman. As a sequel to her first two novels where Smith discusses unmarried mothers, this novel presents the anguish of an abandoned child. An abandoned child, Claude's personality is shaped by the problems he faces while growing up. Eventually, this personality also affects his family negatively when he marries.

Smith was almost sixty years old when she wrote Maggie-Now. As people age, they tend to go back to their roots, their childhood memories, and places where they feel emotionally secure. Although a woman is a rebel as a child, in many cases, as she ages she takes solace in the faith she is brought up on. Smith's cutting remarks regarding the role of the Catholic Church in working class peoples' lives has dramatically changed as she has aged since the time she first wrote Tree. In Maggie-Now, the Church comes to Maggie's rescue and gives her comfort in the absence of her husband, Claude. For Maggie, being a Catholic is something inherent in her.

When their life is surmounted by problems Maggie finds solace in her faith whereas Claude, an orphan, unable to empathize with any religion, is traumatised and disturbed. The fact that the role of faith in religion in a troubled person's life is immense and this faith gives the person strength to surmount any obstacle is brought out clearly in Maggie-Now.

Smith finds it impossible to resist from exclaiming her admiration for pioneer women like Narcissa Whitman who along with personalities like Abraham Lincoln and Harriet Beecher Stowe were her role models. When Claude meets Maggie for the first time, he is taken by her simplicity of dress and the lack of any make-up on her face, unlike many of her peers. He finds her simple and wholesome. When he compliments her on these issues, Maggie is unable to grasp that her simplicity has won his admiration and belittles her own dress sense:

> "Who's modest? I just happen to know that my dress is not in style. That's all."
>
> "It is always in style. A girl in a Portugal village wore one like it a hundred years ago. Tonight in London, a duchess is wearing one like yours. Only of white satin.
>
> "And those shining braids wound around your head: So Ruth wore her hair, perhaps, when she stood in the alien corn. . . . And Narcissa Whitman. . . "
>
> "Who?"

> "They opened up the Oregon Trail—she and her husband, Marcus. The Oregon Trail . . . " He waited, his head turned as though straining to hear something from far away. (124)

Where Claude is deeply moved just by recollecting the names of Narcissa Whitman and Marcus Whitman, Maggie finds it difficult to follow him. As she is not educated she fails to follow the thought process of Claude. Claude not only finds her simple but he also finds her as unique as the pioneer women of America. Her simplicity and honesty appeal to him and make him compare her with path-breaking women who were simple like her.

This novel is significant in that the young couple, Maggie and Claude, take their lives into their hands and make their own decisions. It is interesting to see how a couple fares without mothers in this novel. Smith's previous novels portrayed mothers as persons interfering with their children's lives. In spite of the hurdles they face because of Claude's obsession to find his roots and his frequent absence from their home, the little time they spend together is filled with love. One more factor to contribute to their happiness is the house Maggie inherits from her mother. They need not pay rent and the rent they receive from the upper portion which they rent out helps Maggie in times of Claude's absence.

Maggie is a second-generation immigrant, whose father has a steady job, and on her mother's side, her grandfather is a politician and her mother had worked as a teacher before her marriage. So apart from the bitterness regarding the treatment Pat received when he first arrived, Maggie does not seem to have much problems financially or racially. Her problems are religious

and marital as her grandfather has partly realised his American Dream. Starting as a novice in the new country he has gone on to become a politician. Comparatively, the second generation immigrants seem to be more focused than their compatriots belonging to the same economic background in America.

According to Smith's novels, women in an immigrant neighbourhood are not very curious about their neighbours; they generally help when there is a wedding, childbirth, or death in a family. Apart from these instances, the acquaintance seems to be very little among them; probably financial burdens make them behave less socially except in an emergency when humanity rises above petty considerations. At work place, the immigrant men tend to be less conspicuous, and dare not ask for a hike or look for another job for fear of losing the present job. Smith brings not only immigrant problems but also the societal conditions of that time to the fore. This novel brings out the ongoing debate in America regarding abortion at that period of time.

To abort or not seems to be a huge issue not for only pregnant women but also for most men and women who are not concerned in any way with the woman who carries the child in her womb. More than the result one should explore the cause of any action. If the causes for abortion are taken care of in a society then many problems related to these abortions would be solved. Abortion is not a way out of a problem as it could also cause irreparable damage to a woman's health and psyche. Men and women should be educated regarding safe sex which could eradicate sexually transmitted diseases, and control unwanted pregnancies. The Church and State should involve themselves in these matters giving importance to changing times.

Margaret Sanger opines that men and women both suffer due to the birth of unwanted children, but she rightly points out that women suffer more than men not only because they have to go through the ordeal of childbirth but because a woman sees the suffering of her children on a day-to-day basis. Sanger says in her essay "Birth Control":

> While it is true that he suffers many evils as the consequence of this situation, she suffers vastly more. While it is true that he should be awakened to the cause of these evils, we know that they could come home to her with crushing force every day. It is she who has the long burden of carrying, bearing and rearing the unwanted children. It is she who must watch beside the beds of pain where lie the babies who suffer because they have come into overcrowded homes. It is her heart that the sight of the deformed, the subnormal, the undernourished, the overworked child smites first and oftenest and hardest. It is *her* love life that dies first in the fear of undesired pregnancy. It is her opportunity for self expression that perished first and most hopelessly because of it. (Lynn 50-51)

The fear of unwanted pregnancy leads a woman to suppress her feelings of love towards her partner. Necessity makes her develop some methods to avoid pregnancy, and the only one guaranteed method a working class woman can think of is nagging her husband as soon as he comes home. She is ready to sacrifice the peace of her home and her human need for love for the sake of avoiding unwanted children.

There were also many cases where women took up crude methods to abort themselves, putting their lives at risk. A mother's anguish for her aborted children is candidly told in verse by Gwendolyn Brooks in her poem, "the mother":

> [. . .]
> I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized
> Your luck
> And your lives from your unfinished reach,
> If I stole your births and your names,
> Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches,
> and your death,
> If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,
> Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.
> Though why should I whine,
> Whine that the crime was other than mine?--
> Since anyhow you are dead.
> [. . .]
> Believe me, I loved you all.
> Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you
> All. (Gates and McKay 1579)

This poem reveals a mother's yearning to clear herself of the guilt of killing her children and to profess her love even though she knew her children for a very short period of time. This

poem also tells us that even though many years pass since the time of abortion the grief on the death of her unborn children and pangs of guilt for the act she has committed remain with a mother forever. It is a no-win situation for a woman who ends up with unwanted pregnancy– going ahead with the pregnancy might end up with the family and the newborn child suffering financially and emotionally, or aborting it might leave her emotionally and physically scarred for life.

In Maggie-Now, when Mary, at the age of forty, unexpectedly becomes pregnant after the doctor advising her not to, she is too dumbstruck to react. The doctor she goes to, Dr. Scalani, becomes upset as he is unable to decide whether to abort her or not as abortion was still illegal in America at that period:

> The doctor sat at his desk, tilted the chair back and put his fingers together. He gazed at his framed diploma hanging on the wall. He remembered a professor he had had in med school. He wished he could talk to him about an abortion in connection with his patient. He knew what his prof would say and what he, Doctor Scalani would say.
>
> He'd say: *Diagnosis clearly indicates that a therapeutic abortion is in order in the case of Mary Moore. How do I proceed?*
>
> *Two or more physicians must be in agreement with you after examination that the pregnancy should be terminated.*

Would it be safe?

Under proper conditions, yes

I could do it on my own.

Illegal, Scalani. Suppose you did abort and she died? Manslaughter.

But if I had acted in the best interest and post mortem indicated that death was inevitable, abortion or no abortion?

You may not go to jail, but you'd never be allowed to practice again. (83)

He knows that Mary would die in childbirth, but at the same time he is not sure if aborting would save her life. Eventually at the time of childbirth, giving precedence to religion, Dr. Scalani saves the child and loses the mother. He has to sacrifice his care for one patient for the greater good of many other patients as he would be banned from practising if the patient died while or after abortion.

Fortunately, later generation women like Maggie and Denny's wife, Tessie have better plans for their future married lives. Tessie and Denny, though very young, show their maturity

while planning for their future. This is an indication that the present generation is learning from the mistakes of its previous generations:

A two-year courtship started with their first date. They made plans.

"We'll be different," they told each other. "I won't be like some women," said Tessie, "and get sloppy as soon as I have you for good. No matter how much housework there is—how many children there are—my hair will be curled and my nails manicured when you come home from work and I'll treat you like you was company."

"And I," said Dennis, "will be just as polite to you as though you were a girl I'd just met and was anxious to make a little time with."

"And," said Tessie, "we'll have dates, pretending we're not married but just going steady. And we'll get dressed up and go out on Saturday night to a show or a dance or a nice dinner someplace like we do now."

"And I will respect your mother," he said.

"And I will keep on loving your sister the way I do now and I will be nice to your father."

"Yes," they agreed. "We'll be different." (305)

The above dialogue is an indication of the changing attitude of young couples. Young people became more aware of the problems a couple usually faces in marital life and the causes for them. In Maggie-Now, Denny and Tessie are making plans for a happy married life and trying to find solutions for the usual problems even before they are married. This dialogue shows us that respect and love for each other is important for a happy married life. Yes, a good marriage is important for a person and for the society.

****

Though the following section seems to be a little out of the way of immigrant women's problems, I would like to include it here as I feel that this is a matter of significant importance in the novel as well as society. The issues Smith took up in her novels make us question American culture as a whole.

For youngsters like Margie and Frankie in Tomorrow, and Maggie and her contemporaries in Maggie-Now, to go to a place just to sit and talk with their friends and enjoy their youth are next to impossible in a working class community. They devise their own meeting places and dancing balls under the guidance of youngsters from a higher class or Church authorities. The loneliness the youngsters feel is so pathetic that they feel ashamed even to confess it.

When Claude first comes to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, he starts a school of salesmanship. Some young girls, women and men turn up for the classes. It is interesting to note that no young boy attends these classes as most of the youngsters are either working, or if they are not working, they are simply whiling away their time. The ages of the women who attend Claude's classes range between eighteen and forty whereas the men are middle-aged. The way they dress to attract men is an indication of their loneliness. Maggie also decides to attend the class for three reasons—to make twenty dollars a week as advertised by Claude, to get to know people of her age, and to get to know Claude better. As soon as she sees the women who attend the class it makes her wonder: *"Why, it's like a party, or a dance*, decided Maggie-Now, *the way everybody's so dressed up. They didn't come here to learn anything*, she thought derisively. *They came to get a man! Listen to me*, she chided herself. *As if I didn't come here for the same thing!"* (115).

To her surprise she finds that all the women who attend the class are in a similar situation. She finds them dressed and made up in such an artificial way that it makes her feel ashamed of her simple home-made dress and style. The two things she becomes aware of are, one, that there are lonelier women than her, and, the other that she lacks a lot of material things like good dresses and accessories to make herself look attractive like most of her peers. And to her great surprise Claude is floored by her wholesome beauty in her simple and old-fashioned attire.

Unfortunately, America declared War at this time and Claude decides to enlist in the War and that is the end of the classes on salesmanship. But the taste of companionship among the

women makes such an impact on those who are present that they find it difficult to let go of it. One of the girls suggests that they start an organisation or club where they can meet and talk. The loneliness that engulfs them comes out at this time:

> "I mean," she said, "couldn't we just keep on meeting here nights and just sit around and talk; read books, say, and talk about them? I mean, it would be worth a quarter a night to me," she said defiantly, "just to have someplace to go to."
>
> There was a hush. The other women looked away from this girl, ashamed that one of them would display her loneliness so nakedly. (128)

Smith seems to convey that women are lonely and unmarried because they do not have good looks, or wealth, or job. To compensate for their loneliness, they yearn for good companionship, a person to talk to who can understand them, and a place to meet such people.

Loneliness not only stalks women but elderly people like Lottie, the widow of Timothy Shawn, and Pat's friend, Mick Mack too. Mick Mack and Pat were friends when they attended night school after landing in America. Pat meets Mick Mack again in a bar after many years. Mick Mack, a widower, is disabled in a work injury and receives a meagre amount as compensation. With children married and settled, Mick Mack lives in a home managed by a widow, O'Craley. Smith says, "[i]n his own words, they had no room for the old man (153)." Mick Mack longs for company so much that he is willing to pay for the company of Pat:

> "Ah, no. 'Tis her cooking has won me heart. Do you come and eat Easter Day dinner with me, Pathrick. Only thirty-five cents for outsiders."
>
> "No," said Pat. "Home I eat for nothing. And eat good, too."
>
> "I'll treat," said Mick Mack. "Friendship, to me, is more than money."
>
> "I'll eat with you then," said Pat. "Not that I want to, but because I'm sorry for a miserable little man, the likes of you, having to pay to have someone eat with him." (153)

The above dialogue reveals the loneliness of Mick Mack and the craftiness of Pat. Though he has more than enough troubles and very little money, Mick Mack does not mind spending for Pat just to be with him for one day.

Housing is the foremost important problem the working class face. Living in tenements and going through the gruel of everyday life, it is difficult for them to afford a house to live in. Life passes by so quickly that they find themselves unable to work for a living or retire to a contended life in their old age. In America, children become independent by the age of eighteen and go out to live on their own. They start a life of their own and it is rare that they get the time or means to help their elderly parents. Though immigrant working class people come from a different cultural backgound, their youngsters aim to ape the Americans and hence the immigrant parents in their old age are unprepared for this sudden desertion.

Smith's novels, Tomorrow and Maggie-Now make one wonder about the future of a number of people like Margie's parents and the culture of living in hallways when they become old without anyone to care for them, and in a home which is not their own. The problems are more challenging when the person is an immigrant woman who can speak little English, with no education and no job. It makes one shudder just to think of their future. It makes one wonder about old age and the future of people who work and are able to earn just enough to live in the present.

Smith's characters like Johnny Nolan who dies of alcoholism, aged immigrants like Margie's parents, unmarried mothers like Joanna, unwanted and deserted orphans like Claude, and children troubled in school like Francie are questions to society and government about who should own the responsibility for the ill-treatment of these people and the urgent need to rectify the situation.

The writing of Maggie-Now was accidental as claimed by Johnson. Smith met with an accident in 1952 and her right fingers were affected. This accident also affected Smith in such a way that she was left with dread to think of writing anything. Smith started typing as a therapy to help her fingers function again. She ended up writing dialogue which she used as material for Maggie-Now. The fact that the publishers were excited that the central character is a "giver" rather than a "taker" is an indication of the way people perceived women in that age.

Johnson's dissertation helped me understand Maggie-Now better though her approach is different from mine. Johnson also mentions that Smith's literary life reflects the changing equations in the American literary marketplace. She claims that the relationship shifted from direct author-editor to author-agent-editor. Literary agents had become more influential in this period. Smith relied mostly on her literary agent, Helen Strauss and also benefited by this agent-author relationship.

Johnson states in her dissertation: "[T]hroughout the novel the men are free: it is only the women who were trapped in desiccated lives of numbing routine. Although she is centered in the title, Maggie is a marginal character in the book, a shadow in her own house: her life is a cycle of separation, pain and unrewarded labour." This is one way of looking at Maggie or for that matter any of Smith's protagonists. I feel that Smith's protagonists are women who under the given circumstances always strive for a better life. Maybe we cannot claim the end result as a success, but at least these women tried to come out of the oppressive problems without putting the blame on others. Maggie is definitely not a marginal character as Johnson argues but a central character who tried to create some stability in her life. As Johnson claims, all the men in Maggie's life, her father, her husband and her brother, lead better, happy lives. But Maggie never lamented or regretted not having a life like the male characters; she never compared her life with theirs and felt sorry; instead she tried in her own way to come out of her dismal life. It is a fact we have to accept that men have the best of everything irrespective of their education, earnings and age. The novel seems to suggest that it is of no use to cry over their comforts and their providence; given the circumstances one should strive to better oneself at any given point of time in life without blaming others for their ill luck.

Johnson claims that Maggie-Now is a strange, hollow book, unaware of its own intentions. But one should also give credit to publishers and critics like John Beecroft of the Literary Guild who thought that Maggie-Now could be as popular as Tree. Maggie's character conformed to the ideas of most men and also women in America who were outraged and taken aback by the feminist movements in America at that time.

Johnson also mentions that Orville Prescott of The New York Times supports Smith's novels because they cover a particular section of peoples' lives in a highly readable tone. According to Prescott, the novels are replete with credible details about immigrant lives in America and Smith's treatment of her subject is such that we never get a feeling of reading a socially relevant work for most other novels about urban slums are too depressing to read. This feeling regarding Smith's works arises due to the way in which she brings out the beauty of ordinary people and ordinary things in life and ending the novel on a hopeful note.

Johnson claims in her dissertation, "Maggie-Now is all of these things: it is enjoyable, it is misguided, it is realistic, it is false, but it is a novel that makes sense in the context of Smith's difficult life." My opinion is that Maggie-Now is a complex novel which not only deals with the growth of a woman but also immigrant problems, unwanted pregnancies, abandoned children, relationships, the author's belief in Church and loneliness in women and elderly people. The incidents and themes are intricately woven together and show the craftsmanship of a master writer.

Yow also mentions that Randall Jarrell, a southern poet and Consultant in Poetry for the Library of Congress, while addressing the National Book Awards ceremony in New York in 1958, censured popular culture and Smith's Maggie-Now, which he claimed belonged to popular culture, as an example of poor taste in literature. Jarrell in his invective said that "in a really bad society Marcel Proust would not have written *Swann's Way* but rather a biography of Elvis Presley" (Yow 295). His question to the audience, according to Yow, was "[W]hy is Brooklyn so much richer and bigger, so much more literate and educated . . . so much less productive culturally than was Florence?" (Yow 296). The next day, Smith reacted to this diatribe by recalling a childhood incident where she saw a "large, garish Kewpie doll at some amusement park, and hearing a lady breathe out 'Oh, isn't that beautiful!' Miss Smith said that it was then that she first learned the meaning of the truism that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder." And to strengthen her argument, Smith asks the audience: "Has anybody read 'Swann's Way' since yesterday?" (Yow 296) inviting laughter from them.

On a different plane, Maggie-Now reflects Smith's love for her father in the creation of the character, Patrick Dennis Moore and his longevity, and for her third husband, Robert Finch with whom she coauthored many plays and on whom the creation of the character, Claude, is loosely based. Smith's novels are also a reflection of her personal experiences and feelings.

Smith's novels are inspired by the life she led and the problems she faced more than the conditions or the problems the country faced at large. All her four novels relate the problems she faced in life—growing up at home and workplace, her marital life and the problems she faced with her husbands and mothers-in law, her ambiguous relationship with her mother, her love for

her father, her hatred for meanness in women, and her thoughts or solutions regarding emancipation of women. Her novels though published at different times when America was projecting significant historical changes, sometimes seem to reflect her age and her life rather than the times. At the time of the publication of Maggie-Now, women's agitations for their rights were on the rise in America whereas Smith was around sixty years old and had mellowed down. So her later novels Maggie-Now and Joy in the Morning bring out the joy of companionship while at the same time she talks about the problems immigrant women faced in general. Smith's protagonists are women who have come from a similar background—second-generation, immigrant working class women who brave all odds to come up in life.

As we have seen so far, a major part of America is made up of working class immigrants who lead similar lives, but few try to better their lives. Earning money is a secondary issue but to have a better life in terms of quality compared to what they are leading due to the circumstances plays an important role for these working class women. As they are hardworking women they are sure that earning money to meet daily expenses in not a problem. Trying to elevate themselves to the standards they set in life, and being acknowledged as citizens of America and being accepted by their peers as fellow Americans, are their goals. As immigrant working class women contribute a major part of American population and as Smith's novels are a reference for them to lead a better life, her portrayal of these women is significant in the history of America.

The manner in which she ends Maggie-Now indicates the subject of her next novel. She ends it by revealing the plans of the new generation couples. Denny and Tessie make plans to

live happily; they comprehend the source of problems of a new couple and work towards tackling it. Denny and Tessie's plans for a happy married life could have been the base for Smith's next novel, Joy in the Morning, where we see the couple, Carl and Annie making plans for a happy married life.

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Chapter 5

Something Wonderful

Smith's fourth novel, Joy in the Morning, is a confirmation that there exists "something wonderful," (116) a feeling of love and understanding between the couple in the initial period of married life in spite of their poverty. This chapter is a study of aspects like love, hope, and future plans that go into making marriage "something wonderful" in a young working class girl's life. This chapter has two sections. The first one deals with the isolation of a working class immigrant young woman, the pains she takes to merge into contemporary American culture, and the plans the young couple makes to realise their dreams. The second section deals with Annie's playwriting career, which is but a way of creating her identity. This section validates Smith's conviction that a vocation is important for a woman through Annie's playwriting career. Love for each other and hope for a better tomorrow make them transcend the problems they face with ease. In the three previous novels, Smith's young protagonists marry with the hope that marriage will provide them with a better life but are disappointed. But in Joy, Smith tells her readers that poverty is not a stumbling block to succeed in life or to have a successful marriage. Though poor, Annie never loses hope that something wonderful will occur and bail them out of their troubles. Joy in the Morning is the celebration of marital bliss. Apart from the bliss and problems of married life, Smith also delves into the world of a young wife which consists of day-to-day planning as well as long-term planning for the future, battling feelings of loneliness, trying to comprehend her identity, and making efforts to belong to the neighbourhood.

Though published in the year 1963, Smith had the idea of writing this story as far back as 1948 as revealed to a reporter. Smith's aim in writing this novel was to prove that poverty is not a stumbling block to progress in life. Yow reveals in her biography of Smith:

> At the time, her aim for this novel was to "show that being poor really means nothing because it is a temporary thing. And the couple will have hopes for great things ahead." The protagonists she imagined were George and herself. In 1948, she was talking to a reporter about the novel she wanted to write when she made a revealing mistake. She began by telling him that she intended to write about a girl who marries a medical student and works hard while her husband goes to school. "She raises a family and tries to make life comfortable in cramped quarters and on little money. But life is hopeful." Suddenly she switched from present tense to past, from fiction to memory: "The two together made it a handful of pretty wonderful years." So, twelve years earlier, she had begun to view the first years of her marriage to George with tenderness, but she was not yet ready to examine the details of her life then. (312)

It is significant to note that she mentions her happy years of marital life as only a handful. Joy is the last novel that Betty Smith wrote. The characterization and plot of this novel are proof that it is a continuation of her previous, well-known novel, Tree. In Joy, the protagonist, Annie McGairy is an eighteen-year-old girl who leaves school when she is 14 due to financial problems and takes up work to help her widowed mother who remarries. Dan, the stepfather, is depicted as being sexually abusive to Annie. Carl Brown, a young law student, is Annie's husband who

aspires to become a successful lawyer in a midwestern city and eventually dreams of becoming the governor of this state. His future plans are well thought of and he reminds us of Ben, the boyfriend of Francie Nolan, the protagonist of Tree.

I

At the time of the World Wars a hitherto unknown set of young girls made their presence felt. These girls were the direct product of the World Wars. When men in the immigrant families were enlisted in the War, or injured or killed in the War or out of it, the children in the family had to take up the burden of the family along with their mothers. Girl children were taken out of school, their ages increased in certificates, and they were fo,rced to work so as to run the family. These girls, who were too young to be considered women, lost interest in school by the time they got a break to go back to school as they were unable to identify with the school girls. They knew life far too much to behave as normal girls of their age. At the same time, as earning members of the family, they felt independent and became confident enough to think that they would be able to live a life unlike their mothers. In the case of dysfunctional homes mirrored in novels like Maggie–A Girl of the Streets (1893) by Stephen Crane, Studs Lonigan (1935) by James Farrell, Bread Givers (1925) by Anzia Yezierska, and Smith's novels, young adolescents were more than eager to run away from home. The options for the young men were to become drunkards and irresponsible idlers, or to get into marriage and break down under the pressure, or to join gangs. For the young women, the options were to join the flesh trade or to get married and change, much to their dislike, into mean and nagging housewives like their mothers. A few were clever enough to understand that education is their only rescue to come out of this rut.

Young working girls lose the innocence that exists in girls of their age and cross the boundary of girlhood and reach a position where they are unable to correlate with the contemporaries of their age. Also it is impossible for them to behave as grownups according to the ages on their false certificates. These young girls become confused and end up marrying the first person who sympathises with them to escape from their homes and jobs, and to their horror realise that married life is no better than working in a factory. All their dreams and plans are shattered because of unforeseen problems that play havoc in their lives. They find it difficult to accept that they are after all in the same rut they associate their mothers with, the rut out of which they tried to escape in the first place. They want to identify themselves with the young American women of that age who are probably still in high school or college and they feel isolated when they can not match up to their standards in confidence or style. Obviously, young American girls' lives were entirely different from the lives of young first or second generation immigrant girls. For immigrant girls poverty decides their destiny in spite of the dreams and plans they have in life.

Poverty and lack of education are the causes for the lack of growth prospects for working class immigrants. They are also the cause for immigrant women's lack of self confidence when they interact with others in general. The living conditions of working class immigrants were so pathetic that even as children they were unwanted and hated by other immigrant children and were never included in any social events. Annie in Joy is reminded of these instances when she sees a watchman with a stick on the campus: "As a child, she'd been chased off the grass in the

park; chased off the school grounds after school hours; chased off a street not in her own district by the kids who lived on that street" (42).

Annie, after her marriage to Carl, spends most of her time reading books borrowed from the University library. The first time she gets ready to visit the library she prepares "the way a girl prepares for a party" albeit "aware that no matter how she arranged her long hair, she'd look out of place among the bob-haired coeds" (41). Annie longs to dress like the coed girls just to fit into the image of a young and confident college girl. Her list of "things to buy" also includes "Get hair bobbed (Ask Carl first)." It is remarkable to note the next line in the novel: "She thought it over and crossed out ask-Carl-first" (41).

This line characterizes Annie—although she feels low in confidence, she is determined enough to know where to draw the line in her marital relationship. She shows her streak of independence in her trials to merge with her American peers. Instances like this which define Annie's character abound in the novel. Soon after their marriage, Annie refuses to succumb to Carl's desire on the porch of their rented room. She refuses to stop babysitting for the child of a widow, Beverly Karter, although Carl warns her saying Karter is a woman of loose morals. When she herself comes to know that Karter is the mistress of a married man she leaves her job immediately. She maintains her friendship with Anthony, the florist, in spite of Carl's dislike for the gay man. The portrayal of friendship between Annie and Anthony could be a result of changing perceptions in Smith regarding gay sexuality. Also her steadfast love for Carl is shown in her strength to bear the burden of unplanned pregnancy. She refuses to let Carl know

immediately so that he need not feel anxious. At the time of her delivery she sends him away from the hospital so as to spare him the trouble of watching her in pain.

Annie, an Irish girl, has to leave school at fourteen and take up work in a factory. Though she leaves school, her love for books and reading continues. At eighteen she has read Winesburg, Ohio, Main Street and Sister Carrie. Annie feels that she understands life in spite of her youth. She feels that Sister Carrie is a novel which people both in Chicago and Brooklyn can identify themselves with. She seems to regret that for a working class young girl the problems are common, irrespective of the place. For deprived people poverty designs their life and their goals. Few people can understand the problem and plan for their future by coming out of its vise-like grip to create their own destiny. Annie and Carl belong to this category. Annie achieved this through her love for books and Carl through his mother's planning of his life who was sure that "[h]e's got sense. He's going to be a lawyer and help us get a better home life" (69). It was a woman and a mother who planned it, albeit, for selfish reasons. Carl's mother is a takeoff on Smith's first mother-in-law who interfered in the couple's life too much for Smith's comfort. Smith reasons that though Carl's mother planned for her son's future, she is no better than the dominating mothers in the earlier chapter, as she wanted to greatly benefit from Carl's success.

Annie yearns to belong to the crowd in the University Carl attends so much so that she copies the dress of the co-eds in the campus and tries to imitate their walk and hairstyle. She also tries to mingle with them when the classes are let out. One day she follows them up to the classroom and forgets herself while reading the bulletin board. She finds herself outside a

classroom where there is a discussion going on about the difference between naturalism and realism. When the teacher jokes, she laughs along with the students in the class because she very much wants to belong to the class: "She didn't think it was funny, but she wanted so badly to belong" (83). Standing outside the classroom Annie longs so much to belong that she takes notes along with the class, reads the texts assigned by the teacher and writes the assignments. In fact she is so much a part of the class that, when Carl conveys this to the Dean of his college, the Dean impressed by her, requests his colleague, who is the teacher of the class, to allow Annie to take credits without the benefit of a degree.

Annie feels isolated but does her best to mingle with the coeds. She is constantly reminded of her lack of opportunities and envies her peers. Smith's narratives make the readers comprehend the urgency to analyse the cause for the lack of opportunities for working class girls like Annie who suffer for no fault of theirs:

> Annie envied their casual ways, which came from bred-in assurance. She envied the way they dressed; plainly, but expensively. The costly sweaters, the good shoes. She felt out of place in her too obviously styled suit and foolish hat with the nose veil and her tight kid gloves. She thought of her lack of education; of her wrong use of words; of her mispronunciation of words she knew; of her grammar. She knew she didn't belong. She felt that she never would belong.
>
> (57)

Annie is relentlessly reminded of her lack of opportunities by the presence of the co-eds. It makes her feel like a lesser human being and she feels depressed. One day she joins Carl and his friends playing tennis. She is unable to participate in their talk as she feels very conscious of her "ungrammatical speech" (65). On the tennis court she watches a co-ed of her age playing tennis:

> She was more interested in the girl playing on the adjoining court. The girl was pretty and wore a short white, pleated skirt and loose white sweater. She smiled a lot at her partner and had a way of tossing her head and making her short hair bounce as she smiled. Annie wanted to be like that. She tried tossing her head, but her tightly coiled hair wouldn't budge. (65)

Annie feels miserable and her self-worth is so low at that juncture that she is unable to be her normal self and embarrasses Carl further. Carl understands that she feels left out but is unable to fathom the reason: "She wanted to tell him how inferior and out of place she had felt; the degrading agony of knowing she was stupid and didn't fit in. But she just couldn't run herself down" (65). The presence of her peers who are better than her constantly reminds her that she does not belong and makes her suffer all the more.

Ready to cross barriers, all for a sense of belonging, despite the pain it causes her, Annie goes for a haircut: "She closed her eyes and bit her lip to keep from screaming when the first hank of hair left her head and fell to the floor. It had taken all her life, so far, to grow it and now it is gone" (72). As she gets ready to face the world with her hair bobbed and in her new outfit

with renewed confidence, the first thing she comprehends is the reason behind the rude behaviour of the elderly grocery shop owner, Henry. She comes to know from her landlady that Henry's only son has been killed in the Argonne fighting and that his wife died a few years ago. She understands that he is rude to cover up his loneliness as he does not want anyone to feel sorry for him. Annie, a young woman who herself feels isolated, is able to understand the feelings of isolation people like Henry and the gay florist, Anthony feel.

Annie feels insecure whenever she sees Carl talking with people belonging to the campus, his classmates, his teachers, and his acquaintances. Feelings of loneliness well up in her and she feels low. She feels that she is inferior to the educated people and she will never be able to match up to them. This makes her feel inadequate and she analyses her feelings to understand her loneliness better. She realises that she does not have friends of her age or friends with whom she can relate. Her only friend at office was a casual acquaintance and the girls in the playwriting class are just being nice to her. She grasps that she does not "fit in with them" (145). These thoughts dishearten her and she feels "that somewhere along the way she had lost something out of her life" (145).

Annie is able to identify with people who themselves are lonely like Henry and Anthony. Anthony is a dreamer like Annie; he has a dream to write a book. But he knows that it is only a dream and not a reality. Annie's feelings are similar to those of Anthony. She dreams of making it big as a playwright but understands that it is impossible. She classifies Carl as a person who has ambition. She knows that Carl has planned well and will definitely achieve his dreams. She thinks that she will never be able to come up to the intellectual level of Carl. When Carl tells her

to reduce her reading and writing, she pleads with him to allow her to continue her reading and writing. She justifies her request by reminding him that she will never be able to fit in with his friends or acquaintances. She tells him that in his line of work he will be meeting hundreds of people but as a simple housewife she only gets to meet a few people like the shop owners where she shops or her neighbours. Her world is limited and she can never dream of achieving something out of the way. Carl responds by telling her that he is afraid that her interests will keep him out of her life. Annie's response is noteworthy: "She shook her head. 'No, Carl. Nothing will ever come of my writing. I'll never write a great book like, say, *War and Peace* And I know I never will. But I like to dream that I might. It keeps me excited.'" (193)

This could well be Smith's voice, voicing her dreams and her frustrations. The American Dream has not been realised completely for Smith because she did not get a place in mainstream American literary cannon.

Even while waiting to get registered in the hospital, Annie's thoughts turn to her feelings of loneliness:

> Carl went to register and Annie sat on a campus bench to wait for him. As she had done a year ago, she noticed with wistful envy the casual air of "belonging" of the old and new students. How she had wanted to be part of it!
>
> That's all over now, she thought. Anyway, I'll have something those coeds don't have. A baby. But then they can have babies, too, after college. They can

> have both: wonderful college years and a baby too. I can just have one of those things. (217)

Annie's feeling of isolation will never leave her throughout her life. For no fault of hers a working class girl is forever destined to go through feelings of isolation, however successful she might be in her life or in marriage. Smith's Joy seems to echo the ideology of Alice S. Rossi as voiced in the essay "Profile":

> Marriage will be a "looking outward in the same direction" for both the woman and her husband. She will marry and bear children only if she deeply desires a mate and children, and will not be judged a failure as a person if she decides against either. She will have few children if she does have them, and will view her pregnancies, childbirth and early months of motherhood as one among many equally important highlights in her life, experienced intensely and with joy but not as the exclusive basis for a sense of self-fulfillment and purpose in life.
>
> (Lynn 124)

Along with a satisfying career the most important factor people seek is a successful marriage. Generally people embrace marriage with the idea that their partner is the ideal partner who understands their needs and wants, and would act accordingly. Very rarely do we see persons who have an idea regarding their contribution towards a successful marriage. Irrespective of gender, people generally hope to get an understanding and accommodating partner but rarely do they contemplate on what they would be willing to do to make the partner

happy and make the marriage work. Many marriages break down because the expectations are high and the efforts nil.

A successful marriage is that union of body and soul which results in the growth of the individuals as well as the couple, leading to the betterment of the family and thus the society as a whole. Very few people can claim to have truly successful marriages. Some people opt for divorce when the compatible factor is missing; most people compromise, some for the sake of their children, or society, and some for the sake of financial considerations. Some put up with the sham of a happy married couple without even realising that it is a pretense. Some people are not even aware that the marriage is long dead and rotting. Some think that that is the way marriages function and put up with the problems. Most of the couples are unhappy because neither do they acknowledge that there is a problem nor do they work towards solving it.

Marriage is a necessity for many of us. To have a companion and security of a home is an emotional need that should be addressed by us at an appropriate time in our life. To have a successful marriage, every person should understand the concept of marriage, the reason they want to get into marriage, their expectations from their partners and the efforts they would like to put in to make the marriage successful. When these issues are well thought of and care is taken to be considerate, loving, and respectful to one's partner, then many problems that crop up in marital life can be surmounted easily. As people age, they rarely look back on their career or their material gains with pleasure. After a certain age, it becomes more of a necessity than a choice to have a companion to share our joys and sorrows.

Joy brings out all the joys, sorrows, and fears in the first year of a couple's married life. This novel portrays the dreams of Smith through Annie, not only as a young married woman who is in love and wants her husband to progress in life but also her dream as an individual in bringing out her writing potential. This novel also questions Smith's critics and readers who criticised her style of writing. She earnestly questions why her writing style is denounced when Ernest Hemingway is praised for a similar writing style. Joy is the life of a woman who defies poverty and dreams of success of her husband and family, and also strives to achieve her personal dreams.

Annie wants to get married to Carl immediately to escape from her home and her lecherous stepfather. When she tells her mother that she wants to get married, her mother tries to dissuade her from getting married:

> "Listen, Annie. You think you want to marry Carl. But you're too young to know your own mind. Carl's not for you. Someday the right man will come along and you'll be glad you waited."
>
> "I can't wait, Mama. I *got* to get married."
>
> "You got to? Did you say you *got* to?"
>
> "It's not what you think, Mama."
>
> "Tell me what I think. Tell me."
>
> "You're hurting my arm, Mama."
>
> "I said, tell me!"
>
> "It's better that you don't know."

"When was your last period?"

"Don't say ugly things, Mama."

"Don't you tell me what to say, you . . . you tramp!"

"Mama, if you say that again . . "

"Tramp!"

"You went too far, Mama." (6)

The above conversation reveals the tension between the mother and daughter and the anxiety of the daughter to go away from home. In spite of the insults hurled at her by her mother, Annie finds it impossible to reveal the real problem to her. The talk goes on where Annie tells her mother that she dislikes the way her stepfather kisses her goodnight. Annie's mother supports him saying that he does this with her other two sons as well. She fails to grasp the idea that a child's body is private and not to be violated, and in this case Annie is not a young boy but an eighteen-year-old young girl. The impact of the abuse is so forceful that Annie after getting married is still reminded of him. She gets scared when the judge who got them married requests her to allow him to kiss her as per tradition; she takes shelter in Carl's arms imploring him to stop the judge as he reminds her of her stepfather. Annie gets married on a Saturday, and on Sunday morning when Carl tries to wake her up with a kiss, all her nightmares regarding her stepfather become active again. In fact it is her stepfather's unwanted attentions that drove Annie out of the house and into an early marriage.

After getting married in court, Annie and Carl go to a restaurant to have a simple wedding lunch. They enjoy the food as they rarely get to eat to their heart's content. Annie

states that she is glad that they are not rich because if she were rich she would be used to good things and would never be able to enjoy the food she is eating. Carl comprehends that Annie enjoys life and asks her not to change her views and thinking:

> "I'm sure glad I'm not rich," she said, "because I'd be used to things like that and I'd never have that, you know: 'First fine glorious rapture'?"
>
> "You sure like to live, don't you, Annie?"
>
> "You talk funny. *Everybody* likes to live."
>
> "Do me a favour?"
>
> "Sure."
>
> "Don't ever change. Stay the way you are."
>
> "Oh, I *couldn't* give you a guarantee on that. No."
>
> "Why not, Annie?"
>
> "Well, the world is full of people."
>
> "No kidding!"
>
> "And people are persons."
>
> "You mean individuals."
>
> "All right. Individual persons. Persons change. A person gets old and old makes him different. So he changes whether he wants to or not." (17)

The above dialogue also reveals Smith's views that as persons age their views change. This can be applied to Smith as well. As she aged she started increasingly looking back to her happy, youthful days of her married life and first pregnancy. Smith had a way of embellishing

incidents “not as it had been, but the way it might have been” (48). But, Joy is again not entirely joyful, it has its moments of sadness, insecurities, poverty and uncertainties. Nevertheless, as Annie says, she is happy she is able to value simple things that come her way because she is not rich and life is also richer because of its uncertainties.

II

This section deals with the growth of Annie into a playwright. Smith uses her experiences to build up the character, Annie. She gives us an idea of how she became a playwright in this novel. Smith, like Annie, audited classes in the University of Michigan where George Smith, her first husband was a law student. Like Annie, she became pregnant in her first year of marriage. Carl and Annie had their share of disagreements but Annie’s dreams give them strength to put up with these problems. Even in the initial days of their marriage Annie’s method of dealing with their problems is to dream that the situation could be better and to write it down. Annie is inspired by the one-act plays she has read and thinks of writing plays herself:

> A few nights later, inspired by the one-act plays she had read, she decided to write a play. First, she planned, I must get a good name so I know what I’m writing about. She concentrated on a title but none came up. The thing to do, she decided, is to write the play first and then, whatever it’s about, I will give it that name. Now what’ll I write about? How about Carl and me? Not the way we are, but if we were different people living in a different way. First I’ll give us different names. After some thought, she decided on Linda and Lance. Now

> where will I lay it? This room? I'll figure that out later. I'll write down the conversations first and put the other stuff in after. She began writing a play. (45)

Carl gets disturbed when she thinks aloud and he shouts at her. Annie shouts back and leaves the house. Carl picks up the paper Annie is writing on and smiles to himself, though he thinks that the dialogue is "stilted" (48). Still he feels that "there was something about her writing. She had written of the other evening—not as it had been, but the way it might have been. Something like a fairy tale" (48).

According to Carl, Annie has a penchant for "creating." When the broken pram she makes Carl buy in the rubbish store is replaced by a brand-new pram, she is terribly dissatisfied because she has no scope of "creating" something out of the rubbish. In her drama class, Annie is also berated by her professor for the sordidness in her play. This reminds us of the incident in Tree where Francie is berated by her English teacher for her story depicting "poverty and ugliness."

Carl works as a night watchman in a nearby factory at the time Annie is pregnant. In Tree, Johnny Nolan works as a night watchman in a school when Katie is pregnant. On these lines, Smith could be trying to recreate something out of her previous novels as well. It could also be possible that she is trying to better the problematic situations in her previous novels.

Smith tells us about her hopes through Annie when Carl presents her with a beautiful book containing all of Annie's works, like plays, and thoughts. Annie is very happy and feels as

though her book has been published and the thought that Carl believes in her is also a major part of her happiness. She tells him of her dreams of succeeding as a writer:

> I'll never be a writer, really. But I love to write all the same. I did get encouragement from this Hemingway. I read *In Our Time* while I ate lunch and supper at the dime store. You know he writes in short sentences? He must have the same trouble I have with sentences. And he writes in conversations because, like me, that's easier. I figure if he can get way with it, so can I. (113)

This conversation is very important in the literary career of Smith as it also conveys the dreams and justification of Smith regarding her writing. By this time she knew of her limitations in writing and the views of the critics regarding her works. She thus questions her critics regarding her dismissal as a mainstream writer. As a writer, Smith had an impediment where she could not write complex, lengthy sentences. But she did not allow it to hinder her urge to create literary works. Instead she worked on short sentences and conversation to get by. This is one of the main reasons she could produce so many plays. In Joy, Annie, Smith's alter ego, wonders if she, in spite of her inability to create lengthy sentences, would ever occupy a place in mainstream literature like Hemingway. Hemingway's writing style, which was praised by many and denounced by few critics and readers, is simple and plain. He uses short sentences and avoids adjectives and adverbs as much as possible. His description of incidents and places are brief and he advances his plot with dialogue similar to Smith.

When Annie goes to buy saddle shoes to complete her outfit to fit into the campus picture, there is an interesting paragraph where Smith talks not only about isolation, but also about her love for plays and her poor spelling as well:

> The shoe clerk was small, slight, and a little on the dainty side. Dapper is the word for him, thought Annie. His black hair was pomaded and he had a wisp of a mustache. His shirt cuffs extended a couple of inches outside his coat sleeves and his cuff links were dramatic, literally so; one being the Mask of Comedy and the other the Mask of Tragedy. But his shoes were unshined and run down at the heels.
>
> That's the way it is, thought Annie. Man that sells shoes can't bother with his own shoes—like a writer can't bother with spelling. Like me. (72)

Smith could be revealing her love for drama in the description of the cuff links as "Mask of Comedy" and "Mask of Tragedy" which symbolize the theatre. This is seen on the cover design of her compilation of plays, 25 Non-Royalty One-Act Plays for All-Girl Casts (published in 1942) and 20 Prize-Winning Non-Royalty One-Act Plays (published in 1943). Also in this paragraph she accepts the problem she has with spelling. The problem she has with spelling could be due to two reasons—one is her lack of college education and the other, probably due to some undiagnosed neurological problem which manifested as severe headaches since her early teens.

In Joy, Smith based the satellite town, Lopin on Carrboro, a town adjacent to Chapel Hill. The characters of Lopin are based on the working class people she encountered in this town. Yow discloses the following:

> In earlier novels, Betty Smith had shown her fascination with the transitory relationships of individuals in modern urban society. In *Joy in the Morning*, she again created working class characters in a town whose description is striking in its convincing details. Betty based Lopin, named after the Kitilope Indian tribe, on Carrboro, the working class town adjacent to Chapel Hill. By creating this town, she could again offer portraits of the people who had always interested her—individuals from ethnically-mixed urban working class neighborhoods.
>
> (326)

Smith covers a lot of ground on marital compatibility, poverty, bonding and hatred among women, isolation, a feeling of belonging to a particular group, the psychological aspects of immigration, sex education, family planning, and treatment of gays in society. If one reads between the lines, we come to know how she evolved as a playwright, about her style of writing, and her love for the written word. She brings out the beauty in everyday life despite the poverty and hardships people face.

All the same, in Joy something wonderful did exist in Annie and Carl's lives, i. e. their dreams. In spite of difficult circumstances they never let go of their dreams. This novel, I contend, proves two ideas: first, a couple who are in love and who pursue success together can

succeed in life despite poverty, and second, women get true satisfaction by following their dreams and achieving fulfillment.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion: That's the Way It Should Have Been

Chapter 6 examines the role of Smith's background in her writing career and reasons for her exclusion from the literary cannon. I had to depend heavily on Valerie Raleigh Yow's biography, Betty Smith: Life of the author of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* as this is the only work available on Smith apart from a dissertation done by Carol Siri Johnson.

After reading her biography, one comes to the conclusion that Betty Smith's life influenced her writing. Using the biographical details revealed by Yow, I connected them with the incidents in the novel. Since her childhood, Smith had a confused relationship with her mother, Catherine. Catherine had two children younger to Smith, a boy, William and a girl, Regina. Smith, called Lizzie, had no friends to play with in her childhood and so she made up her own games. Her favourite pastime was talking with the smooth flagstones of the sidewalk. Since there was no one to talk to, Smith talked to herself, inventing her own reasons for everything and every incident. Once in a way, this sidewalk came alive when a horse and carriage chanced that way. Her fascination for horses started at this point. This could be the idea behind Smith's representation of a horse and the way her characters behaved towards it.

Horse can also be seen as a symbol of desire. Fascination for a horse could mean dreaming for a happy life. Let us consider the men who hated a horse–Pat and Willie. Both of them were not satisfied with their wives and treated their marriage as an obligation. On the other hand, the women, Francie, Margy, and Maggie show a healthy interest in sex and love. Smith portrays the image of a horse which fascinated young girls, was tended with loving care by

young women, and loathed by men. This image could be a representation of family life, work sphere and desire as well. In Maggie-Now, Maggie tends an imaginary horse, Drummer in her school. Sometimes she rides the horse, and sometimes she plays the horse herself. This could be a prediction of the future of Maggie which is yet to be. Later, we see that Maggie sometimes enjoys life like a horse ride and sometimes she endures a hard life like a horse. Maggie is forced by circumstances to look after her father and brother at a tender age. At a young age, she has had to play the role of a mature and responsible woman.

Horse can also be treated as an image of longing or the ideal a woman nurtures. In the context of Maggie-Now, we can say it is the representation of family life. In Smith's novels, immigrant women give importance to family life and young girls dream of having their own happy family. In her novels, young girls actually aspire to do better than their mothers when it comes to married life.

Another image which recurs is of a bird. Willie in Tree and Claude in Maggie-Now prefer to be born as birds in their next life. Claude persuades Maggie to take him along with her to see her mother's grave. There he tries to reason with her regarding the idea of rebirth in religion. He informs her that he would rather be born a bird if at all there is rebirth, a "great gray and white sea gull" (158) because he would like to be free like a bird. After their marriage he also brings Maggie a sea gull made of alabaster from the last journey he took in search of his identity. He makes Pat promise him that Pat will cremate him after his death and throw his ashes in the wind where birds fly, and this Pat does dutifully.

Yow narrates that Smith once wrote to her editor at Harper Publishers:

> "If Hitler's bombers should ever get over and if any portion of this great city has to be wiped out, it would be a blessing if it were that section. Evil seems to be part of the very materials that the sidewalks are made out of and the wood and brick of the house." Perhaps she was remembering the traumatic incident, or perhaps the family tensions, poverty, crowded tenements, clashes between ethnic groups, and deaths of young people. (45)

Cremation could be a relief from all the painful physical encounters Smith actually faced and she probably is applying the same standards to the characters in her novels who suffer permanent psychological scars like Willie Flitman in Tree and Claude in Maggie-Now. By these incidents we can see how past incidents make an impression on Smith so that these images keep recurring in her novels.

Coming back to the relationship with her mother, young Smith sought the attention of her mother by asking her inane questions which irritated the overworked Catherine to the point of hating her daughter. Yow writes about a typical conflict between the mother and daughter that is mentioned in Smith's partially completed autobiography:

> "Mama, why don't a bug cry when you step on him?"
>
> "None of your business," she said.
>
> That wasn't the right answer. But I just had to know. So I invented an answer.

> "He don't cry because he don't want people to call him a cry baby."
>
> "Now how do you know that?"
>
> "Because he told me, Mamma. Yes, he did!"
>
> "That's a lie and you know it. Why must you always lie?" (Yow 8)

The word "lies" reminded Smith of the bugs that "dirty girls had in their hair." She hated her mother because she never answered her without being derisive of her imagination, terming them "lies" outright.

Smith also recalls an incident when her mother was talking about the hard time she had when she delivered Smith. Smith was just four, but she was highly imaginative. She believed that she "somehow crawled inside her mother and refused to come out" (Yow 9). Catherine at that time tried to make amends by telling Smith that she was found in a cabbage. When Smith got hold of a cabbage at home she pried it open to see if there were any children inside. Smith wondered whether her mother was a liar and, at the same time, was also troubled by the fact that Catherine said that William was brought by angels. Her curiosity regarding how her parents met and married and the stories Johnny created regarding their meeting only angered the practical Catherine more, to the point she hated both the father and daughter intensely.

Smith felt ashamed by the problems poverty made them undergo. She had to live in a flat where hot water was not supplied. Catherine boiled hot water and bathed her three children in the washtub in the kitchen. First the younger child, then William and last Smith went into the water which obviously was cold and dirty. Yow also tells us that Catherine made Smith stand in

the washtub because she thought that Smith would die of drowning as the midwife who delivered Smith robbed her caul. Smith felt humiliated standing naked in the tub. Her ordeals were not yet over. Catherine anointed Smith's hair with Kirkman's yellow soap and kerosene to keep bugs away from her hair. She also tied a clove of garlic around Smith's neck to protect her health. The smell from Smith was so overpowering that her sister refused to sleep next to her on Saturdays. Smith remembers these incidents with shame and bitterness.

The incident in Tree where Francie and Neeley go for a vaccination was experienced by Smith in reality. When Catherine took her children for vaccination, the nurse mocked the children and their tattered clothes. Her comments were so derisive that Catherine stated that she would report the nurse's derogatory remarks in the Tammany Hall. Smith was so proud of her mother that on their return visit she expected that they would go to Tammany Hall. Her mother's reply "*What* Tammany Hall?" had taken her by shock. Yow reveals the impact of the nurse's remarks and Catherine's retraction on Smith's mind as follows: "Betty Smith never forgot the nurse's cruelty to the poor children. After recounting this memory, she remarked, 'I grew up not quite trusting women.'" (14)

Another incident which reveals the troubled relation among Catherine, Johnny, and Smith, which Yow terms as the "triangle in the family" is regarding the marriage of Johnny with Catherine. At the time Johnny and Catherine met, both of them were accompanied by their respective friends. Once they met, they fell in love and got married. Listening to this story young Smith wanted to know what happened to their friends. Johnny replied that both of them

got married to each other and had two kids named Johnny and Catherine. Catherine exploded on hearing this story and accused Johnny of teaching Smith to lie:

> "No wonder she (meaning me) lies so much. She takes after you."
>
> "But all I said. . . "
>
> "What you said never happened. And you know it."
>
> "Maybe it didn't happen that way. But that's the way it should have been."

> Johnny's answer suddenly made Lizzie understand what *she* was doing: "Those words became my life saver. When I told my mother some wild story about myself and my mother would say 'That's a lie!' I whispered to myself, 'That's the way it should have been.'" (Yow 18)

After this incident, Smith started paying more attention to her method of making up stories. Yow mentions that Smith wrote in her autobiography that when she was not happy with a situation she would write down what she understood of the situation and what she wanted it to be. To understand the situation better, she made up her own story out of these two. Yow says, "Now she could think of herself not as a liar, but as a person who could sometimes tell things the way they should have been—but were not—and who knew the difference" (18).

Catherine can not be blamed completely for her treatment of her daughter. Catherine's behaviour stemmed from poverty, irresponsibility of her husband, uncertainty of jobs, burden of children when the couple was not even in a position to look after themselves, and lack of

education. The onus indirectly lies on the Church and the government. Smith's life and her novels prove that if men shoulder the responsibilities as heads of the family and take good care of the wives and children, their homes would be better and the children would have a better chance to succeed in life. A wife loved by her husband will function as a sensible mother. Flo, Mrs. Maloney, and Mrs. Prentiss in Tomorrow would have been better mothers if they had been treated in a better way by their husbands. Though Smith empathised with and loved her father, and hated her mother, it should be understood that Catherine's behaviour is the direct consequence of Johnny's irresponsible ways.

At that point of time, as Yow describes, Catherine's world like any other working class woman's was as follows:

> Like many working class mothers in New York at the turn of the century, Catherine Wehner lived in narrow, dark rooms, four stories above the street. She climbed the stairs with heavy sacks in one arm, a baby in the other, and two small children alongside. When she entered the flat, she had to figure out how she could put together a meal from a few paltry items and then stretch it to feed five people. She had to know how to barter with neighbors, where to buy day-old bread, how to bargain with street vendors for overripe vegetables, how to find cheap meat and milk that were neither rotten nor contaminated. She had to figure out how she could pay the rent when Johnny was out of a job. Catherine must have wondered how the family would survive if her husband and her oldest child escaped into fantasy. (24)

This text reminds us of Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" which is a very good example of working class mothers' suffering. In this short story, which has won critical acclaim, Olsen recollects the early motherhood of a working class woman deserted by her husband:

> I was nineteen. It was the pre-relief, pre-WPA world of the depression. I would start running as soon as I got off the streetcar, running up the stairs, the place smelling sour, and awake or asleep to startle awake, when she saw me she would break into a clogged weeping that could not be comforted, a weeping I can hear yet. (3)

This is the story of a young mother, deserted by her husband, working to run her family. The child, Emily would try to stop her mother from leaving for work citing different reasons: "Momma, you look sick. Momma, I feel sick. Momma, the teachers aren't there today, they're sick. Momma, we can't go, there was a fire there last night. Momma, it's a holiday today, no school, they told me" (4). But the mother had to work to eke out a living. The working class mother and her children, in turn, paid a heavy price of losing their togetherness at the time it was most essential, so as to earn a livelihood. Though the mother feels the loss of their companionship, she is stoic that the child will survive the harsh life.

Smith, like the child, Emily, lost her childhood and could not spend quality time with her mother due to poverty. Smith was a very precocious child and her mother's behaviour made the problems worse for her. She believed that her mother loved her brother more than her. In spite

of this, Smith loved her mother. It is a fact that it is to seek love from her mother that made her ask so many questions and irritate her. In her autobiography[6], Smith says as quoted in Smith's biography, "I know now why I gave you such a hard time, asking you so many questions and inventing such foolish answers. It was because I wanted you to talk to me. I know now why I told you so many lies, Mother. I wanted you to notice me. And I didn't mind it too much when you scolded me. I would rather have had you scold me, Mother, than ignore me" (Yow 25). Later on when she could analyse the problems of working class housewives as in Tomorrow, she would have understood her mother's stand as well. She would have realised that her mother's behaviour was due to poverty, insecurity, and lack of emotional bonding from her father. I feel that apart from the Church and government, Smith's father's irresponsibility was also accountable for Catherine's callousness. While Smith picked up "imagination" from her father, Smith also picked up resilience from her mother. Yow says, "Betty Smith acquired from her mother and grandfather the toughness that immigrants and their children required to survive in America's slums" (25).

Brooklyn was not a place of tender memories alone for Smith. In Joy, Annie says about Sister Carrie that the story could have happened in Brooklyn as well as Chicago (3). Brooklyn's slums were no less dreadful than Chicago's streets. Yow also recounts that Smith was haunted by a statement[7] she came across "that a novel about Brooklyn would be more terrifying than anything Faulkner had written about the South" (125).

[6] Smith's autobiography is incomplete and is only available at North Carolina Library along with many of her works. So I have no direct access to it.
[7] Smith did not reveal the source of this statement.

Another important incident that increased Smith's hatred for women is an incident she witnessed when she was a child:

> Betty said that once she told her mother that she had seen "an unmarried mother tormented" by neighborhood housewives. "I was eight then, and it was my first run-in with not man's inhumanity to man but women's beast-like cruelty to their own kind. I think I then started hating women—I don't know. But I do know I never forgot those women and that street and I always wanted to make a protest against intolerance and I grew up hoping that I would never throw stones. [. . .]
>
> (Yow 145)

This incident is narrated in Tree as well. Despite or perhaps because of her hatred for callous women, Smith's protagonists are strong women who believed in themselves and did not think that a man is necessary to make them feel valued in life. Smith also suffered due to her mother-in-law's interference in her married life. This made her hate any woman who is a mother-in-law and she severely criticized their roles in the married lives of their sons. Because of the incidents described above Smith reveals that she "never did care much for the friendship of women" in a letter to a friend (134). Based on her experience with her first mother-in-law, she could not tolerate her second mother-in-law and in fact Smith ill-treated her. Yow relates that Smith used Joe's mother's ration books to purchase cigarettes for herself, and kept the books with her for a long time in spite of her mother-in-law's need to buy shoes. She did not even let Joe's family meet him. After her divorce from Joe, Smith married Finch. Smith faced emotional as well as monetary problems due to Finch's sister's influence on Finch. These experiences only

strengthened her hatred for women and in-laws. Smith could have possibly endured her difficult life being a writer. Probably, writing about painful incidents was a sort of catharsis for her. I truly feel that awareness of Smith's life circumstances will help one understand Smith better as a writer.

This study has tried to demonstrate that working class immigrant women as depicted in Betty Smith's novels are determined in improving their lives. They believed in the American Dream and attempted to achieve it. The two main causes for the setbacks in the life of the immigrant poor in Smith's novels are described as lack of education and poverty. People belonging to immigrant slum areas require unbelievable strength to grow up in its streets without succumbing to the accompanied vices of the street. In Smith's novels, compared with men, women have fared better in the immigrant neighbourhood.

An interesting aspect in American literary history is how the American Dream was portrayed by various authors coming from different backgrounds in the same time period, that is the 1920s, the time period that her first novel, Tree is placed in. Scott F. Fitzgerald in his The Great Gatsby (1925) reveals that America was materialistically rich with liquor, power, sex, and money flowing freely all over America. In the same period, Smith talks about poverty, starvation and struggles. Playwrights Arthur Miller, Lorraine Hansberry, Tennessee Williams coming from different backgrounds reveal their own interpretation of the American Dream. In "The Glass Menagerie," (1944) the American Dream for white Americans is portrayed as a pursuit of individual happiness, though in the end Tom Wingfield fails to reach his goal. In "The Death of a Salesman," (1949) the American Dream of Willy Loman's misconceived notion that

superficial qualities like personal attraction and popularity among his peers will assure success for his family fall flat. Incidentally Elia Kazan directed both Tree (1945) and "The Death of a Salesman[8]" (1949) into motion pictures. In "A Raisin in the Sun," (1959) Mama's American Dream is to keep her family together and uphold the family values. For an African American family, after centuries of slavery, abuse, and losing their family members, keeping the family together takes a priority in their life. In the same period, it is striking to see people though in the same place, but belonging to different race, class and gender interpret and work towards their own version of American Dream. Smith, with her efforts, became a writer, but as a writer, could not gain the acknowledgement of other mainstream writers and critics as she hoped for. So we can say that Smith accomplished the American Dream only to a certain extent. The American Dream for immigrants is success achieved through hard work, which Smith's protagonists fail to realise completely like the author herself. But there is hope that the American Dream could be realised for Carl in Joy, which is her last novel. This could also be an indication of the changing perceptions of Smith. In this study, the gradual development in immigrant women and their perceptions are traced from the Introduction to the Conclusion.

In the Introduction, I have attempted to trace the events that led to the growing sense of awareness in American women. Such a study, I have presumed, would bring into perspective the importance of listening to the voice of a young immigrant working class girl in America in the 1940s as thousands of women have been able to identify with Francie. For the first time in the literary history of America, young, working class immigrant women had made their presence felt. America sat up to take notice of the problems of these youngsters.

[8] It is noteworthy to mention that Smith wrote a short story, "Death of a Singing Waiter" (1934–1936) based on her father, John Wehner who worked as a singing waiter.

In the same chapter, I attempted to place Betty Smith in the context of select writers. A judicious selection of writers has been made after a careful study of the writers who wrote in and around the time period in which Smith was writing. These writers represent different gender, class, and race. I have looked at the novels of these select writers to get a complete picture of the working class and the problems of women in America. I have presented the similarities and dissimilarities in the writings of Smith and the select writers. I have made an attempt to study Smith's writing style, and the reasons for her exclusion from the mainstream literature.

The second chapter's title "Worlds Were Not Unattainable" is a phrase out of Smith's novel, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. As it is highly impossible to overlook any section of this novel, and it explains the progress of the working class women with regard to their awareness and attitude, this chapter is very long. In all the four novels of Smith, as my study has made evident, the theme is women trying to come out of difficult situations and improving their lifestyle. First generation immigrant women like Mary Rommely in Tree, of course, were too frightened to even communicate with members outside their family. As generations change, in Smith's Tree, we have seen a significant transformation in the outlook of women. Katie has identified the obstructions in achieving her dreams. Francie has worked towards conquering the obstructions and realising her dreams. The next generation would definitely be on par with the Americans and be free from feelings of isolation.

Smith, apart from dealing with the common theme of achieving one's dreams, has also worked on various obstacles a young girl faces in life as she grows up. With Tree, Smith made

the voice of a young immigrant girl distinctly heard all over the world. Chapter 2 surveys the genuine problems of discrimination a young girl faces due to her gender as she grows up inside her home and due to gender, race, and class outside in the street. I also incorporated an extensive study on the immigrant issue in America. Other significant aspects in this chapter are discussions of concerns related to alcoholism in working class men, lack of proper sexual knowledge, treatment of unwed mothers, the role of religion in the prevention of planning for a family, the attitude of public school teachers towards working class children, and the role of government in educating the poor regarding their welfare programmes. My study has brought out the discreet questions of Smith's narratives regarding the role of the government and Church in the interests of the poor.

Chapter 3 is titled "Reaching Out," a phrase from the novel, Tomorrow Will Be Better. This chapter attempts to study the reasons youngsters from working class immigrant families try to get married as soon as they become financially independent. It examines the role of poverty as the root cause for immigrant families to break down. This chapter also focuses on the strength in a young girl, Margy, who opts out of a dysfunctional marriage despite the odds against her. Margy has ascertained that as a person she has a right to live and enjoy life. Margy has made an effort to reach out to live in a better way.

Chapter 4 is titled "Chinook," based on the memories rekindled by a powerful southern breeze in Maggie's husband, Claude, in the novel Maggie-Now. The wind which deceives people into believing that spring is near is called Chinook. This chapter, "Chinook", is the study of the false alarm of spring in the life of a young girl, Maggie. Maggie feels that her marriage to

Claude will bring her joy and happiness. Unfortunately, it is a false alarm as Claude is an introvert and is also bogged down by personal problems. Claude, an orphan, tries to take his revenge on the world by being as difficult as the world has been to him. Maggie tries to readjust to life and Claude, and finds her identity in bringing up orphaned children.

Chapter 5 is titled "Something Wonderful," a phrase picked from the novel Joy in the Morning. This chapter attempts to trace the feelings of isolation and dreams of the protagonist, Annie. I made an attempt to show that for a woman, individual vocation is as important as it is to a man to develop self confidence and satisfy her intellectual yearning.

The concluding chapter is an attempt to briefly review the important themes discussed in the previous chapters and to conclude that Smith's writings are significant enough to earn her a place along with the mainstream writers. Today, when we understand that it is time to give importance to the varied voices in the society, we should give Smith's writings its due place. Regardless of class and race, women build and develop the characters of their children. Women have the power to create happy homes and contribute to society. Women's role should be recognized and women should be given the means and opportunities to bring about positive changes in society. "Dreaming" women should work towards achieving their dreams. To achieve a wholesome society men and women in the family should do their best to allow the healthy growth of a girl child's intellect.

Society should change its biased views regarding women and accept them as it would accept a man. I would like to quote Simone de Beuvoir's views in The Second Sex here:

> To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less to exist for him also: mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an other. The reciprocity of their relations will not do away with the miracles—desire, possession, love, dream, adventure—worked by the division of human beings into two separate categories; and the words that move us—giving, conquering, uniting—will not lose their meaning. On the contrary, when we abolish the slavery of half of humanity, together with the whole system of hypocrisy that it implies, then the "division" of humanity will reveal its genuine significance and the human couple will find its true form. (731)

Simone de Beuvoir, who is considered the mother of second wave feminism, argues for equal rights for women in all aspects. To accomplish that equality I reason that the family should help a girl child to dream and plan towards its achievement. The male child in a family should be suitably educated to treat with respect his female sibling, or partner, or a child in the future. Every girl child should realise that education is a vital tool to improve her outlook on life. She should recognize that formal higher education is relevant to lead an independent life. She should be taught not to depend on others for her living. As women realise their rights, they should also be aware of their responsibilities.

Lubna Hussain, a Saudi writer in her article, *The Rise of Saudi Women,* in the Deccan Chronicle, dated 12/03/05 quotes Charlotte Whitton as saying that "[w]hatever women do they must do twice as well as men in order to be thought half as good. Luckily this is not difficult" (7). Women who are genuinely liberated and content with their lives can contribute much to the improvement of society. Smith's women protagonists learn from their mistakes and strive to make their lives better. It is significant that Smith picked up her topics and characters from the people she knew and the incidents she experienced. It proves that at least a few immigrant women in America are enthusiastic enough to make their lives better.

After reading the four novels of Smith, one can come to the conclusion that she was writing about loneliness and isolation. Apart from the protagonists, most of the characters feel lonely and isolated, regardless of their race, gender, class and age. The emotional void the working class immigrants feel is not filled by their family, their friends or their spouses. In Tree, McGarrity, Johnny Nolan, Mary Rommely, Katie, Sissy, Evy, her husband, William Flitmann and Francie were all experiencing loneliness in spite of their race, gender and class. In Tomorrow, Margy, Mr. Prentiss, Frankie, Margy's parents and Frankie's family show that they are suffering from loneliness. In Maggie-Now, Maggie, Claude, Pat, Lottie, Mick Mack, and numerous other characters associate with this feeling. In Joy, Annie, her friends Henry, Anthony and Goldie feel isolated due to various reasons. Everyone tolerates this isolation without trying to find its origin. They endure this isolation without getting to the bottom of the problem. When situations go beyond endurance they end up venting up their frustrations on the surrounding conditions. Few can identify the source of their problems and work towards solving them.

Smith's subjects were considered socially relevant by the critics and readers as well because immigrants as well as American citizens could identify with the characters and situations.

My modest study, I presume, has achieved more than what I have anticipated in the initial stage of my research. This dissertation, I hope will generate further interest in Betty Smith's contribution to literature as there is a vast area left untouched on her plays, short stories and articles. Further research on intertextuality in her plays and her short stories can bring out the complexity of Smith's life to the fore. Also there is much work to be done on mother-daughter relationship of the author with her mother, Catherine Wehner and the portrayal of this relationship in her narratives in the context of other women writers. This study asserts that Smith wrote about two major themes in her novels—first, isolation felt by the immigrants especially women and second, the gradual emancipation of immigrant women. It proves that Smith as a writer mirrored society and also her life and her situations. Her writing was strongly influenced by her lived life and her surroundings as well. Her life and works, in sum, proved that success can be achieved despite poverty. She also established that a vocation is essential for women to accomplish intellectual satisfaction. Through her texts she advocated impartial treatment of men and women at home. Smith asserted that marriage is also a significant event, which imparts joy in one's life, if properly planned.

I personally feel that Smith's works could not be a part of mainstream literature due to the condescending attitude of the critics and the contemporary writers of her time due to her humble background. Smith's novels resonate with topics like a woman's right regarding her body, isolation felt by working class young girls, frustration of the housewives due to lack of

intellectual stimulation and recreation, the dreams women have and the efforts they put in to achieve them, the strength in character demonstrated by women, lack of bonding in women and discrimination of the girl child. She also exposed the atrocious treatment meted to the working class children in public schools by teachers and bullying among the students, importance of education, role of the government and the Church in educating the masses about the welfare programmes, and the viciousness of poverty prevalent as vices in the working class streets which ensnare the young and the old alike. Smith's themes in her novels also include alienation and loneliness experienced by the immigrants, the negative impact of mother-son relationship on the son's future, and the gradual shift of ignorance to knowledge in working class women over a period of time. These topics were taken up by feminists like Margaret Sanger, Alice S. Rossi, and Betty Friedan. While only some of these issues were reflected in the works of Anzia Yezierska, Edna Ferber, Pearl S. Buck, John Steinbeck, James Farrell, Ann Petry, Richard Wright, and Gwendolyn Brooks, Smith tackled all these issues in her novels. I strongly feel that we must go beyond the condescending attitude of the critics and readers towards her and accord her due acknowledgement as an author who boldly projects America and the challenges it faces to become a fitting place to live in.

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