

Mirroring Women's World in Utopian and Dystopian novels

In Sultana's Dream, Herland, The Bluest Eye and Memoirs of a

Survivor



Inspiring Excellence

Anika Tabassum Ima

ID: 13263002

Department of English and Humanities

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Mirroring Women's World in Utopian and Dystopian novels

In *Sultana's Dream, Herland, The Bluest Eye* and *Memoirs of a*

Survivor

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Anika Tabassum Ima

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Abstract

This thesis examines how from the early to late-20th century women writers of different contexts and cultural backgrounds have utilized the genres of ‘Utopian’ and ‘Dystopian’ literature to challenge the social and cultural norms of gender. This thesis also explores how such writings are shaped by the critical forces of modernism and post-modernism to develop the feminist narrative of power relation within the intersectionality of colonial and postcolonial histories. In order to support my arguments, *Sultana’s Dream* (1905) and *Herland* (1915) have been selected to demonstrate the utopian novels. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Memoirs of Survivor* (1974) have been selected for the dystopian part as the primary source. In terms of theoretical arguments, Michael Foucault’s [theory of power and sexuality] *History of Sexuality* (1978) and his other writings have been given priority. Simone De Beauvoir and Judith Butler’s theories have been used to interrogate the issue of gender. This thesis has three main chapters where key themes of the texts in particular gender issues and how the ‘women question’ is interrogated in the novels are examined.

Chapter-1 Introduction

As novels are the reflections of life, the changes in social, political and economic lives are consciously or unconsciously synthesized in the novels by the authors. Considering the novels after the First World War and the Second World War reveal the fact that there has been the emergence of a mild to severe disillusionment in the novels after the subsequent world wars. The atrocities of the wars shatter the normal perception of things around the survivors. As a result, the views of the authors also change regarding the subject matters as well as the narrative style of the novels after the subsequent wars. The following disorder and disarray caused by the world wars entail severe mental disorder or neurosis or psychosis among the survivors. Authors, poets and novelists embody characters in their writings reflecting the identical ambience. As a result, the post-apocalyptic era or the following consequences of the subsequent world wars denote a sharp change in literature. The whole style and mode as well as the philosophy of the novels of the 20th century observe a terrible shift from utopian romanticism and Victorian beliefs to dystopia as well as the disillusionment of ideals and beliefs. In this paper, I'll discuss the notion of utopia and dystopia as literary genres, and how women writers have used the genre from the early 20th century, especially to propagate the gender issues as well as to stress on the 'women question'.

In order to reach the goal, this dissertation has been divided in to five parts whereas the Introduction covers the background knowledge for the 'utopian' and 'dystopian' novels and emphasizes on 'the women question'¹. Then, the Second chapter analyzes the nature and scope of the two utopian novels and their implications in relation to theories related to

¹ These questions- what women could and did have in the nineteenth century, when Fuller was writing-comprise "the woman question". Far from being a singular question, this concept encompassed the various political, economic, and social challenges women were facing around the time of the emergence of the suffrage movement (Whitson 274-275).

power/knowledge and sexuality. This chapter particularly focuses on how the women writers mirror a better life for women by articulating the utopian novels. Hence, the Third chapter similarly analyzes the dystopian novels selected for this thesis under the same lens of power/knowledge and sexuality. Therefore, the Fourth chapter seeks to establish a comprehensive comparison to analyze both types of novels under some common grounds. Lastly, the Fifth chapter draws conclusion to the arguments and also tries to consolidate the debated issues in this thesis.

However, literature of every age in particular, is influenced by the major historical events, by the new discovery in science, by technological advancements and the trends of the life style etc. Accordingly, 20th century literature is also influenced by its contemporary social, political and economic conditions as well as the scientific innovations and trends. In fact, the 20th century literature is a complex one. Moreover, the significant historical events like the First and Second World Wars dramatically change the mode of literature and change the life as a whole for the ordinary people and/or the survivors of the wars. Poetry of the 20th century becomes, more symbolic, than ever before, novels incorporate the existing chaos and the topics of politics and power become more resonant than the novels of the former eras. In a nutshell, after the subsequent world wars, the history of literature recounts the emergence of a whole new genre of literature which marks a prominent rupture from the literature of the earlier times like the literature of the Romantic or the Victorian era.

As a result, the 20th century literature opens with a deep sense of skepticism and uncertainty. The mood of inquiry and tendency to question everything became the motif of the writers. During this time Imperialism faced challenge in many British colonies. Socialism began to influence on the English life and thought. Class feeling became very dominant among the

people. Women movements for voting rights and other fundamental rights became strong. Consequently, the 20th century writers tried to concentrate on these elements in their writings.

Influenced by all these ruptures from the golden past and being impressed by the First wave feminist movements, the women writers of the early 20th century started to think the world with a different lens. The impact of these is reflected in the utopian novels of the early 20th century like *Sultana's Dream*² and *Herland*. Generally, utopian literature represents a world which is more than perfect and the excess of the perfection leads towards disorder and chaos to some extent. In earlier periods, like the Romantic period, the excess of pain and grief in real life led the poets to take a romantic flight in an imaginary world of peace and beauty. This quest for escapism is evident in the poem *Ode to a Nightingale* where John Keats leaves “the world unseen” (Keats 145) but at the end of the poem he comes back to the real world and says-

“Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf!” (Keats 147)

Similarly, the writers like Gilman and Hossain imagine a utopian world in their novels as in real life they face difficulties in personal life that lead them to think out of the box to envision an elevated life for the contemporary women. There has always been this quest for barter when there is anarchy in the world that we live in. Henceforth, being oppressed and/or repressed in personal life, the women writers create utopian worlds in their novels to foreshadow flourished lives for women.

A number of critics . . . have adduced from this a broader principle: that utopian narrative, by virtue of its origins, is inherently dialogic, even

²Henceforth cited as SD

dialectical, inviting readers into active participation in the text, rather than relegating them to the status of passive observers (Ferns 23).

Thus, utopian novels not only envision a visionary lofty life for its readers rather it engages the readers to take part with the characters. In this way, it also inspires the readers to implement the radical ideas expressed in the novels to improve the standard of life for women.

Hence in order to understand the impact of utopian and dystopian novels, it is important to acknowledge the meaning of these terms. Thus, 'Utopia' is a Greek word which means "no place". In etymological sense, 'utopia' means a world of fantasy where everything is perfect and peaceful. On the contrary, 'dystopia' means "Too bad to be practicable" (Claeys 16) which refers to an apocalyptic world that demonstrates neither order nor discipline. So, the terms 'utopia' and 'dystopia' are contradictory, and therefore, are paradigms of binary oppositions. In literature, utopian novels in general represent a world of abundance and progress where everything is picture perfect and every dream is cherished. Dystopian literature by contrast, exhibits a world of chaos where "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (Yeats). In dystopian literature, along with the external chaos like war or natural disaster, the characters also suffer from mental disorder and most of the plots deal with psychotic or neurotic persons. The fact is that neither the utopian nor the dystopian world represents the material world. Rather both are representation with exaggeration. The former of beauty and abundance whereas, the latter of ugliness and break down of orders.

The initial idea of a utopian society dates back to 380 B.C. The vision of a utopian society can be traced in Plato's contemplation of an ideal state in his political dialogue, the *Republic*. Thus it can be said that it is Plato who for the first time "postulated the main themes of utopian society and his visions of the perfect Greek city-state that provided stable life for all

of its citizens” (Smith n.p.). The revival of this archaic notion of an ideal state which is an epitome of perfection, took place in the 16th century. Thomas More nomenclatures such an ideal society as ‘utopia’ by naming his book *Utopia* (1516). Here, he uses the term ‘utopia’ to describe the new discoveries of far off unknown lands or the unbolting of the New World. He ascribed the term being inspired by the sea voyages of the invaders of the new world. For instance, the experiences shared by Christopher Colombus and other renowned sea fearers influenced More to write the book *Utopia* with the motto to present a better vision of the world.

Thus, “In order to create the new literary genre, Thomas More used the conventions of travel literature” (Claeys 7). Later on, with the progress of English novels since the 18th century onward, utopia becomes an active genre of literature. “Over the centuries, utopia as a literary genre . . . stayed focused on the description of the alternative ways of organizing the imagined societies” (Claeys 7). Accordingly, novels that represent a sugar coated version of life which is almost ideal, are categorized as Utopian literature.

On the contrary, the term ‘dystopia’ was coined almost three hundred years later to the invention of the term utopia. The first use of the term dystopia dates back to the 19th century by John Stuart Mill in a parliamentary speech in order to describe a perspective “which was opposite to utopia” (Claeys 16). Mill used the word as synonymous to ‘cacotopia’. He first used the term ‘dystopia’ in 1868, in a speech given before the British House of Commons in which Mill denounced the government's Irish land policy:

It is, perhaps, too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dys-topians, or caco-topians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what

they appear to favor is too bad to be practicable” (A Simpson, Weiner and Press).

Thus, in terms of literary genre, dystopian novels exemplify anarchy in private or public or political sphere and depict the picture of a flawed society with moral degradation.

Hence, it is apparent that the formation a better society is the core agenda of both utopian and dystopian novels. Society is the basis for the development or the deterioration of humanity and it records the progression or the regression of a nation. It is said that-

Utopists depart from the observation of the society they live in, note down the aspects that need to be changed and imagine a place where those problems have been solved. Quite often, the imagined society is the opposite of the real one, a kind of inverted image of it (Claeys 8).

Accordingly, both the utopian and dystopian novels represent the possible changes in the future and therefore, there is a celebration of change in these genres. Whereas, the utopian novels kindle the desire for a better future among the readers, the dystopian novels tend to make the readers aware to abstain themselves from the malpractices both in public and private life in order to refrain themselves from an apocalyptic future. The latter also raises concern regarding better policy making in state affairs, raises question regarding the credibility of media and how it can misguide the mass people.

For instance, in *The Bluest Eye*³ (1970), Pecola Breedlove is also a tragic victim of child abuse. She becomes pregnant by her father. Pecola’s family represents the breaking down of family order whereas, in spite of having parents, she is bound to take shelter into MacTeer family. Irony lies in Pecola’s family title, in spite of having the surname ‘Breedlove’, there is the

³ Henceforth cited as *TBE*

scarcity of love in her family. Pecola also suffers from mental disorder due to her extreme longing for the bluest eye. She acknowledges with her little knowledge that whiteness and blue eye are inevitable for being loved and she becomes mad in to quest of being loved. The novel points out that media create an illusion of white beauty and blue eye is a symbol of aristocracy and beauty. This obsession for pursuing beauty is so strong among the mass that even the youngest members of the society are also affected by this very obsession. Thus, “the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of a society; a child; the most vulnerable member; a female” (Morrison 168). Pecola is by far the best demonstration of how the intersectionalities like race and gender can be responsible for the oppression tolerated by the contemporary women.

A deep contemplation on the incident makes it clear that power plays an important role along with intersectionalities in victimizing Pecola. She is a young girl at her puberty who doesn't know enough defense mechanism whereas, Pecola's father is a man and in a patriarchal society, men exercise power over women. Here, Pecola is doubly inferior to her father as she is female, moreover she is young. Knowledge also plays an important role here. As a young girl at her puberty Pecola should've had some knowledge on sexual intercourse but due to the lack of proper knowledge she couldn't even understand what was happening to her when she had been abused by her father. This knowledge could enable her to gain certain power or at least she could try to defend herself from the tragic happening. Considering all these issues, *TBE* can also be considered as a dystopian novel.

Both the terms 'Power' and 'Knowledge' are permeable in the essays of Foucault which enrich the field of philosophical epistemology. In his epoch making book *History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes these terms like “power/knowledge' which means that power and

knowledge has a correlation and these terms are inter-wined. In other words, he uses these terms synonymously and thus asserts that power is a form of knowledge and vice versa. In his discussion, he takes sexuality as an example to exhibit the role of power and knowledge. The reason for taking sexuality as an apt reference is that since the enlightenment era, “sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law or taboo, but also of truth and falsehood” and thus “sex was constituted as a problem of truth” (M. Foucault 56). Hence, sexuality had been a clandestine issue and therefore, a matter of taboo which had been restricted for public discussion. Foucault takes an attempt to make people aware about the power of silence- he shows that simply by talking about sexuality there has been the extension of science regarding it which enriched the field of biology. Moreover, by talking about this secret genre there also has been the emergence of new vocabulary like- ‘Homosexuality’ or ‘homophobia’ etc. Thus, Foucault shows that by developing the discourse on sexuality there has been the formation of a completely new genre of epistemology and this newly formed knowledge is also associated with power.

Hence, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) also recounts the instrumental use of power by the state authority. It records the chronology of the survival of a woman during the harsh time of the First World War. It seems with the gradual progress of the novel that the whole plot is an emulation of Darwin’s “The survival of the fittest”. However, a stranger visits her suddenly with Emily and utters nothing but “she’s your responsibility” (Lessing). Since that day onward, she passes the countless days of hardship of the war alone. Moreover, she shelters Emily and also feeds her dog Hugo at such a time when having a pet is nothing but extravagance and a matter of public attention. Gradually, under the supervision of the narrator, Emily turns out to be a young woman of strong personality who never yields to any harsh situation and also remains faithful as well as grateful to her local guardian, the narrator. The strangest thing in the novel is that the

narrator never scolds Emily or opposes at any of Emily's actions but she creates such an atmosphere that Emily dares not to go against her local guardian. The oppression of the war is doubled with the emergence of the savage or barbaric children who have either lost their parents in the war or have become destitute in other ways. However, these severe atmospheres make people evacuate the city and move towards remote parts but the narrator remains in her apartment till the end of the war. It is also surprising how the characters like Emily, Gerald, the Hugo vanishes like a vapor at the end of the novel. Thus, it makes the readers puzzled about the fact whether these characters were real or all were the hallucinations of the narrator.

Thus, in *Memoirs of a Survivor*, represents the paradigm of a society which has no social, political or economic stability or order. The characters in the novel silently observe the ensuing death of humanity but they don't react or take action to restore humanity or bring harmony in social, political or economic status quo. The old idea of family is lost and there is the formation of a new kind of family which resembles the pre-historic savagery. There is the depiction of the formation of family without marriage which seems to be a radical notion. For example, Gerald forms a queer family by sheltering waifs and destitute children where Emily plays the role of a mistress. At times Gerald's house is also called a 'Harem' as he keeps relationship with other girls paralleled to his relationship with Emily. The sacred bonding of parents and children is also questioned in this novel as Emily has been sexually coerced by her father when she was an infant. Thus, dystopian novels are the archetypes of anarchy and anomaly.

Chapter 2: Mirroring a Better Life for Women in 20th Century Utopian Novels

Utopian literature

“normally pictures the journey (by sea, land or air) of a man or woman to an unknown place (an island, a country or a continent); once there, the utopian traveler is usually offered a guided tour of the society, and given an explanation of its social, political, economic and religious organization; this journey typically implies the return of the utopian traveler to his or her own country, in order to be able to take back the message that there are alternative and better ways of organizing society” (Claeys 7).

In the same way, both the utopian novels selected for this paper *SD* and *Herland* represent guided journey to unknown lands and recount contrast with the social, political, economic and religious organizations of the utopian land to the native land of the narrators'. After visiting an ideal life which is almost perfect and cherished by everyone, the travelers come back to their native place or the ending of the novel at least indicates the departure from the utopian land. The travellers return to the material world and accept the reality with all its flaws. Even though the travelers return to the reality, their journeys inspire the readers to form a bettered understanding of their society and to engage themselves to rectify the existing shortcomings in the society, the country as well as the world at large.

This type of stereotypical plot is observed in most of the utopian novels in the early 20th century. Henceforth, there is the reflection of this pattern in both the novels- *SD* (1905) and *Herland* (1926). For instance, in *SD*, Sultana undergoes a journey to the Ladyland where Sister Sara is her guide who explains the social, political and economic conditions in Ladyland. Sara also explains the use of advanced technological inventions in their daily life like “water balloon” (Hossain 12) or “air-car” (Hossain 13) etc. Again, in *Herland*, all the travelers are assigned with

individual native mentors who teach them language as well as explain the social, political, economic and religious condition of the land that the travelers visit. They also teach the travelers the history of the Ladyland and how they survived being a mono sex in that exotic land.

The exotic land essentially represents excellence in state affairs, educational system, economic condition, religious beliefs as well as in all other spheres of life. Such exoticism becomes more vibrant for the reason that both the novels centres on women's possibilities of a better future. Another prominent characteristic of the utopian novels is that it exhibits advanced scientific inventions which are sometimes quite ahead of time. These technological advancements make life easier for the inhabitants of the utopian land.

However, in ascertaining the definition of feminist utopian novel, Frances Bartkowski states, "The feminist utopian novel is a place where theories of power can be addressed through the construction of narratives that test and stretch the boundaries of power in its operational details" (Welser 13). This definition is helpful to understand utopian novels like *SD* and *Herland*. Both the novels are possible to reify by exploring the theories of power and examining the following consequences of emancipation of power when it emerges from an alternative social order to which the characters belong.

In relation to an alternative source of power, Michel Foucault is the pioneer in envisaging the possibility of the development of an alternative source of power. For the first time Foucault asserts that "power comes from below" (Method 116) and he believes that power is not static rather it has its rotation. According to Foucault, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." (Method 116).

The 'centre' of power thus is impossible to be defined as a static one rather it changes its location. For instance, in *SD* the readers get to know from the history of the Ladyland that the

women were not in power until they defeated the soldiers from an enemy country with their scientific knowledge and with their prompt intelligence. Again, in case of *Herland*, it is also evident that “They were a polygamous people” (Gilman, *Herland* 56) but a volcanic outburst filled up their “only outlet” and a few men were left including some servants. The servants killed their remaining masters including the youngest boys “intending to take the possession of the country with the remaining young women and girls” (Gilman, *Herland* 56). This incident is an example where “power comes from below” (Method 166) as the servants who belong to a lower social rank tends to seize power considering that female are feeble in spite of belonging to a higher social status. Under this circumstance, the young women “instead of submitting rose in sheer desperation and slew their brutal conquerors” (Gilman, *Herland* 57). It seems that “the state of emergency is always a state of *emergence*” (Bhabha xxiv). Thus the women emerge with a consciousness to exercise their power and become the only living sex in the land. After overcoming the initial despair the women enrich their knowledge with research and gathering more knowledge in every necessary aspect of life and create their own land. The accumulated knowledge makes the women powerful. Here, it is clear that before this tragic incident, men were in the position of power, then right after the incident the male slaves tended to exercise power over the powerless women and later on the women resist and defeat the slaves and they seize power in their clutch by slaughtering the brutal conquerors. Thus the centre of power is essentially a fluid term.

Whatever is the centre of power, considering the novels *SD* and *Herland* it appears to be true that whereas, physical strength is the ‘power’ for men, wit or intelligence is the feminine incarnation of ‘power’. Women are traditionally thought to be weaker than men. In *SD*(1905) based on this notion, Hossain asserts that if women are weak and harmless there is no logic at all

in putting women in seclusion in 'zenana' rather it is men who should be put in seclusion. In this way, Rokeya shifts her focus from a utopian world to a diplomatic notion of sexuality. In fact, body and sexuality plays an important role in relation to power because the knowledge of sexuality is also a source of power.

However, analyzing the nature of the Utopian literature from a critical point of view it seems that "it is more often designed to have precisely the opposite effect-to produce the illusion rather than the reality of dialogue" (Ferns 23). In both the novellas, *SD* (1905) and *Herland* (1915), the writers create a world of utopia but in contrast both the novels foreshadow the bitterness of the material world that human beings live in. Starting with a notion to rebel against heteronormativity, both the novels reiterate the traditional patriarchy towards the end of the novel. These novels prove that sexuality assures certain mode of privilege to one sex and deprives the other. In real world, men enjoy more power and freedom in comparison to women whereas, in both the utopian novels, we find the opposite of this established notion.

In modern society, the distribution of labor in a patriarchal society engages men in workplace in productive activities for the nation but occupies women in housekeeping and child rearing. In a patriarchal society, men are regarded as powerful and they dominate the women who are physically weak and powerless by default. It may be assumed that the knowledge of being stronger than the other sex guarantees certain mode of superior power for men that they tend to exercise on women. As a result, they consider themselves superior to women and exercise their power over the other sex in every possible means.

In fact, it is not only physical weakness that is the source of oppression for women rather it is the lack of knowledge that stands as a hindrance on the way to the liberation of women from the oppression caused by men. In a heteronormative patriarchal society, women are stereotyped

as weak, vulgar and submissive and in a social hierarchy they are placed at the nadir. For this reason, women are the subject to domestic violence, sexual violence like rape, their labor is also valued less in comparison to men and in this way, women are oppressed in every sphere in their lives.

In contrast, Gilman creates an exotic land in *Herland* where instead of the traditional male dominated Patriarchal society, she forms a society which is built on a sort of “matriarchal principle” (Herland 9). Furthermore, there were rumors regarding the Lady land that it was a “dangerous, deadly” (Herland 4) place for “any man to go there” (Herland 4) and “It was no place for men” (Herland 5). Learning all these anticipations centering around the Lady land the speaker, Jennings predicts that in *Herland*, men are “less socially developed than the women,” which represents an upside down view of the traditional patriarchal society.

Considering these facts, both the novelists- Hossain and Gilman acknowledge the importance of acquiring knowledge in the novellas like *SD* and *Herland* respectively. One of the prominent reasons that women are deprived in patriarchal society is that they are kept out of the power regime as a large portion of women are uneducated. As a result, they are considered to be unimportant in decision making in family affairs. The power relation articulated by the patriarchal society asserts the necessity of female education in *SD* as well as in *Herland*. In fact, women cannot enter into the power network without having enough knowledge. The novelists understood that education or knowledge is the only weapon for women to gain power and to ‘resist’ against a more powerful institution like the patriarchal society. Therefore, knowledge is the key to gain power for women and that is why in both the novels there is the presence of intelligent and knowledgeable women who exercise supreme power which indeed is a contrast to the real situation of the contemporary women and in this sense- a utopian idea.

In *SD*, the Queen of the Ladyland declares that “all the women in her country should be educated” (Hossain 7). With the establishment of girls’ schools, “Education was spread far and wide among women” (Hossain 7). In the novella, the newly cultivated knowledge of the women in science is used as a substitute for their lack of physical strength than their binary opposition-men. By using their intelligence, the women in Ladyland “overpower” (Hossain 8) men and send them inside seclusion and they “call the system “Mardana”” (Hossain 11). Here, Foucault’s method of “Rules of Continual Variation” (Foucault 169) is quite applicable as he states that- “Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution they are ‘matrices of transformation’” (Foucault 169).

Thus power/knowledge is a fluid and permeable discursive and in case the novella, the earlier knowledge that greater physical strength is a source of power is challenged by the women of the Ladyland as they are capable of seizing the power from men by their newly cultivated knowledge in science. Here, the shift in power position is evident and the women of Ladyland have a base notion regarding men as the Queen utters, “*Men, we find, are rather of lower morals...*” (Hossain 14), hence, they think that it is prudent to keep the men inside seclusion. So, power is never ‘static’ rather it is fluid and it circulates within the power network.

However, the women in *Herland* seem to be more aggressive than the women in *SD* in terms of their attitude towards men. In *SD*, the women allow the men folk to be imprisoned in “Mardana” whereas, the women in *Herland* banish the presence of men altogether from their lady land. This exclusionary method to think of a better life certainly resembles Plato’s exclusionary method in his visionary Ideal State where he banishes the weak and feeble to build a better nation. In this regards it can be said that “both Plato and More imagined alternative ways of organizing society” (Claeys 5). Not only this but the this mono sexual Lady land is also the

centre of the formation of different type of ghastly tales which warns the visitors from intruding the Lady land in *Herland*.

In his book *History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault argues that power/knowledge is inter-related and there can be no existence of power without knowledge. For instance, a substantial comparison between the women in Sultana's country and the women in the Ladyland makes it clear that power/knowledge is inter-related. In *SD*, the women in Ladyland are knowledgeable and that is the source of their power. On the contrary, the women in Sultana's country remain inside seclusion and are bound to maintain purdah and are not allowed to be educated. That is why, the women in Sultana's country are oppressed by the men and are powerless as they have not yet cultivated knowledge. By gaining knowledge the women in Ladyland reign over the men and they have successfully subverted the normative gender roles where the men are assigned for housekeeping and child care and the women rule and govern the country. They have defeated the powerful troop of army from another country which wanted to conquer their land. Moreover, the women of the Ladyland have also intellectually defeated the men of their country by their knowledge in science. They have overpowered the men by using their intelligence and have proved that they are capable of defeating the enemies by using their brain whereas the men could not defeat the enemy in spite of being stronger than women. Similarly, in *Herland*, the women in America are dominated by men but the women in *Herland*, are not only powerful but they have altogether extinguished the male sex. The women have also cultivated the skill to tame nature according to their own need.

According to Foucault's "*Rule of Double Conditioning*" (M. Foucault, Method 170) there must be a harmonious balance between the 'local' and 'central' power but the power must not be homogenous and the local power should not act as a simulation of the central power rather

they thought follow their specific strategies in order to maintain a balanced power structure. The reflection of this “Rule of Double Conditioning” is evident in *SD*. In Ladyland, it is evident that the Queen is the representative of the central power and the Lady Principal of the universities belong to the local power category but the Lady Principal does not act as a signifier of the central power or the vice versa. There is a distinct link between the central power and the local power and one can’t essentially overlap the other. For example, in the novella, the Queen asks the wise ladies of the country to defeat the foreign army by stating that

““If you cannot save your country for lack of physical strength,” ... “Try to do so by brain power”” (Hossain 10)

It is with the consent or order from the central power that the Lady Principal take the action to defeat the foreign army by applying their scientific invention of applying the solar energy as a weapon to beat the enemy of the country. Thus, there is an evidence of healthy link between the central and the local power.

However, Foucault’s fourth method “*Rule of the Tactical Polyvalence of Discourses*” can also be applied in to the novella *SD* (1905). Here, Foucault argues that “silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions;” (Foucault 170). It is evident that in the Victorian era homosexuality was banned but at the same it was during this time that the topic of homosexuality was part of a discursive regime which gave birth to certain unique terms to talk about this topic. Similarly, in *SD*, the women of the Ladyland cultivated some jargons like “mannish” to refer to someone who is “shy and timid like men.” (Hossain 3) Moreover, they invented the term “Mardana” (Hossain 11) in order to indicate the secluded place for men where “they are accustomed to the purdah system...” (Hossain 11) which is a sharp contrast of the “zanana” (Hossain 5), a secluded place in Sultana’s country specifically for women. These

jargons are the evidence of the women's knowledge on sexuality and how do they re-define the sexuality of both men and women with the aid of their power that comes along with knowledge. They also invented scientific vocabularies like "aerial conveyances" (Hossain 12) or "air-car" (Hossain 13) in order to refer to their unique scientific invention. Similarly, in *Herland*, Perkins also coins some jargons like "Feminisia" (Perkins 9) in order to refer to the Ladyland and also the "Picherion" is another example of jargon.

The post enlightenment trope of the colonial enterprise is also evident in both the novels. In the era of post enlightenment, it was thought that it was the "White man's burden" to enlighten the savage and brutes or the slaves. The whites consider themselves superior to other races and in the name of civilizing the other they actually torture the others and take possession of their native place and in many cases imprison them and turn them into slaves. In this respect Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* would be a relevant example, where the king Oroonoko faces the tragic fate of imprisonment and ultimately he faces one of the most tragic deaths in the history of English literature. It is said in the analysis of The New World setting that

"Unlike Dryden, she doesn't blame cruelty on distant leaders; instead, she places the blame on Colonialism. Behn's New World seems almost utopian as she describes how the people get along; "with these Pepole, ... we live in perfect Tranquility, and good Understanding, as it behooves us to do"" (Behn xxxiii).

Thus, it seems that any exotic place is considered by the foreigners having an aura of Utopianism which leads them to explore the unknown land.

This colonial enterprise is also evident in the novel *SD* whereas, Sister Sara is a representative of the Whites. In the novella, Sister Sara is Sultana's entourage and she also gives detailed descriptions of the places Sultana visits in the 'Ladyland'. Thus Sister Sara as a representative of the 'Whites', tends to preach knowledge to Sultana who is a native or in other

words, the colonized. Thus it is aptly said that “Asia speaks through and by virtue of the European imagination,” (Said 57) as Hossain as part of colonized India might be influenced by the colonized group and thus her thoughts and ideologies seems to be modified by the west. Moreover, she refers to science frequently in her novella which means that she was quite aware of the latest scientific inventions throughout the world. In Homi K. Bhabha’s terms, the novella can also be analyzed as an evidence of mimicry because the novelist uses the language of her colonizer. In spite of being a Bengali, she writes the novella in English which is a foreign language for her.

However, in *SD*, from the conversation of these two ladies it is clear that Sister Sara is educated but due to Sultana’s lack of education she sometimes fails to understand technical terms or technical descriptions explained by Sara. Due to the contemporary social condition of women in India, it was not possible for women of all classes to get educated. The history of female education in India records that during the colonial era, “early schools, and arrangements for teaching women at home, were organized by Christian Missionaries” (Chatterjee 245) and it was considered as a threat for the aggression of western culture among the natives and it was also a matter of concern for losing Indian values and cultures. This issue was fixed in 1850s as the “Indians themselves began to open schools for girls” (Chatterjee 245) and in the second half of the nineteenth century there was a remarkable dissemination of formal education for women in India. Now, considering the history of education for women in India, it is clear that the novelist in spite of being educated shows her concern for the uneducated women in India and makes a contrast between the educated women in ‘Ladyland’ and the unprivileged Sultana who sans formal education.

Similarly, the colonial enterprise is also evident in *Herland* to some extent even though it is written by a western writer but the nature of the Enlightenment trope is presented in a different way. In *Herland*, the three American young men think that they would conquer the Ladyland as there is no existence of men and would become the king of that place as Terry proudly declares- "I'll get myself elected king in no time- ... Solomon will have to take a back seat!" (Gilman, *Herland* 11). Here, the irony is that in spite of being part of a colonized country (as America was also once part of British Colonial enterprise) Terry expresses the desire to conquer the unknown land. The aspiration to seize the control of the unknown land becomes stronger with the observation that the native women "were "white," but somewhat darker than our northern races because of their constant exposure to the sun and air" (Gilman, *Herland* 56). Thus, the three young American men nourish the desire to explore and discover the new place and they bear in their mind that they are knowledgeable and it would be their noble mission to civilize the savage of the Ladyland. To their utter surprise they realize they realize that Ladyland itself is a civilized country. After this realization, the narrator proclaims with confidence that ""this is a CIVILIZED country!" ... "There must be men." (Gilman, *Herland* 13). Here, the narrator expresses a firm belief that no nation could be civilized without the aid of men. Thus, it is clear that even being a highly educated person, Jennings, nurtures the stereotypical notion that behind every civilized nation there is the obvious contribution of men.

Exoticizing the 'Other' is a common phenomenon in colonial and postcolonial literature. Again, this tendency to exoticize the 'Other' is double edged by which it is meant that it is always not the West exoticizing the Orient but the East also has a tendency to exoticize the Occident. It is Edward Said who for the first time points out this particular encounter between the West and the East. Exoticism is also present in both the novels *SD* and *Herland*. The

description of the utopian land in the superlatives can be noticed in both the novels. The utopian land resembles perfection, serenity, easy life and affluence along with natural beauty. These features appear to be exotic to the visitor from the other land in both the novels, “For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away.” (Said 55). As both the novelists create the utopian world with their imagination, there is a consistent presence of exoticism in the description of the “Ladyland” both in *SD* and *Herland*. It seems to be an unresolved mystery how Hossain from the far East and Gilman from the West creates an imaginary “Ladyland”. However, both the “Ladylands” are the epitome of perfection. For instance, Sulatna expresses her surprise after stepping into Ladyland by saying- “The whole place looks like a garden,” (Hossain 4). Moreover, Sister Sara announces that “This is Ladyland, free from sin and harm.” (Hossain 4). Both these utterances add heavenly glory to the place which creates an exotic appeal for the readers. Here, Sultana is a representative of the East and Sister Sara is the same for West and thus, it exhibits how the West is exoticized by the East or the Oxidant is exoticized by the Orient.

Thus, it is apparent that both the colonizer and the colonized form utopian notion of the world by exoticizing the other. The issue of othering is thus important in understanding the colonial aspects. In Lacanian terms, the ‘mirror image’ makes one feel the existence of the other and thus both the authors from the East as well as from West think about the alternative or other ways of life where women are in the position of power. Both *SD* and *Herland* novels brings both the novelists into a common ground by gender issues as neither the contemporary West nor the East could ensure equal rights and opportunities for women of different class or race.

Chapter 3: The Dystopian Vision from Women's Perspective

In the field of literature, there are different types of lenses under which we can consider different pieces of arts or novels. Keeping this fact in mind, this paper will analyze the novels *Memoirs of a Survivor* and *The Bluest Eye* under the lens of Foucault's 'Power/knowledge' proposition. By analyzing the novels this paper will justify that both the novels can be considered as dystopian novels. Both the terms 'Power' and 'Knowledge' become permeable in the essays of Foucault which enriches the field of philosophical epistemology.

In the post-apocalyptic literature, surveillance, totalitarian state, corruption etc. are dominant trait which influence and mold the psyche of the characters in the 20th century novels. Under this circumstance, Foucault's panopticon view explains this power/knowledge dichotomy in details. He asserts in his panopticon view that the feeling of being watched makes the prisoners more cautious about their activities. Here, the authority exercises power over the prisoners by means of producing the fear that they are being watched. This fear that any offence done by the prisoners will be acknowledged by the authority generates certain mode of power and in contrary the power of panopticon view enables the authority to have proper knowledge about the incidents in the prison. Thus, it is clear that power/knowledge is inseparable and this power/knowledge dichotomy gets another dimension when coined with the term 'sexuality'.

Sexuality specifies gender identity and also defines gender roles of the members of a society. Furthermore, it also plays a vital role in defining labor division in a society which acts a catalyst to determine one's economic standard. In a patriarchal society, women are generalized to be fit for household chores whereas, men are for outdoor activities. This generalization changes with the passage of time. In modern times, women are also involved in business and their involvement in economy has guaranteed more power for women in this globalized world in

recent times. Foucault talks about sexuality in order to represent the simultaneous overflow of power relation in different domains. Thus, Foucault establishes 'sexuality' "as an important location of power and knowledge" (The Atlas Society).

The issue of power is very sensitive and complicated as well. There is an omnipresence of power in every field of social, political or economic relationship. In other words, it can be said that interplay of power and knowledge dominates the state apparatuses. For example, family is the basis of a society which means that the plethora of small family units form a society. In this case, if we consider this in case of a family and how power operates in it, it reveals that every family is led by the head of the family. Thus, in a patriarchal society, father is the head of the family and all other family members are under the subjugation of the father. There is a hierarchical power relation between father-mother and parents-children or father-children relationship. Similarly, in politics, the ruler or the government exercises power over all other institution in a state including all other 'ideological state apparatuses'. In such a political power network, the government holds ultimate control over all other institutions of power whereas all other state apparatuses exercise power from their own grounds. Economy also creates binary power relations and there is also the evidence of different form of manipulation of power starting from production to distribution to consumerism. In every step of economics, there is also a hierarchy of power relations. Thus, in every step of power relations in the field of economy, the more powerful one exercises power over the less powerful ones.

Both Foucault and Harraway talk about difference in defining the power relations. According to both of them in order to know something, we must know the difference. For example, Foucault says, if someone wants to learn "what our society means by "sanity," ... we must investigate what is happening in the field of insanity (M. Foucault 327)." Thus it becomes

clear that difference is important in epistemological field in order to define something. Similarly, in order to know the field of 'Dystopia', one must know its binary opposition that is 'Utopia'. As opposed to Utopian world, there is the presence of sheer anomaly in dystopian literature.

Sometimes, the anomaly is visible in the form war, murder, obnoxious activities done by the people where the destruction can be visualized and sometimes, the anomaly is found in the form of deterioration of ethical values, lax morals, breaking up of family ties etc. which is evanescence. Whatever is the form of the dystopia, it has a crude relation to power and knowledge.

Dystopian novels make the readers puzzled about "who will survive and who won't" (Astor n.p.). Similarly, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* also makes the readers ponder on who will survive at the end. The most enigmatic part of the novel is that there is no mention of time in the novel. The author doesn't directly mention anywhere that the book is written on the crucial quest of the protagonist's survival during the catastrophic time of the war. Moreover, during such a hard time, the survivor being a female is bound to shelter Emily who was a stranger to her. On the other hand, a similar incident can be noticed in TBE where MacTeer family is bound to shelter Pecola Breedlove and this duty was assigned by the state authority. Here again, the emancipation of power is observed as neither the narrator in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* nor the MacTeer family dares to negate the decree of the supreme authority. The novel recounts the tale of hardship faced by the anonymous female survivor and it also represents the ensuing death of morality and the segregation of family bonds. The writer's personal experience also inspires her to reflect on the destructions of war and the experience of war in the eyes of a woman. One reason, the author doesn't mention the name of the protagonist may be that she wanted to

generalize the protagonist's personal experience which is same for all other women survivors of the Second World War.

Another aspect of the dystopian novel is that it marks a rupture from the earlier novels in its narrative style. Contemplating on the style of novel writing of the former centuries like Victorian era or the novels of the 19th century demonstrates that those earlier novels represent order and are divided into several chapters. Some novels also have titles for each chapter which help the readers predict the content in the novel. Furthermore, the reader can read the novel with several sittings and can start from a new chapter. Even the novels that incorporate dystopian elements are also divided into several chapters- each chapter containing specific purpose. For instance, novels like *Gulliver's Travels* (18..), where Jonathan Swift dehumanizes the human beings and emphasizes that Huyhnhnms are far better than human beings with lax morals is also an organized whole in style.

On the contrary, the novels of the late 20th century are quite complex in style. Apparently, there seems to be no order in the presentation of the novels. Neither it is divided into different chapters nor there is any epilogue or prologue like the novels from the earlier centuries. The novelists of the late 20th century prefer ambiguity rather than clarity for narration. The emergence of 'stream of consciousness' style is preferred by Doris Lessing or Virginia Woolf as well as many other contemporary writers of the 20th century instead of the descriptive narration of Charles Dickens or Jane Austen. This change of style gives the readers the privilege to read the characters' subconscious mind but it also enables the reader to interpret the novel according to their own understanding and personal view point.

For example, the narrative styles in both *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and *TBE* are complicated. In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the author creates an ambiguous atmosphere by presenting the novel by an anonymous narrator. One of the most striking features is that the gender of the speaker is not mentioned at any point in the novel. It is also not clear in the novel whether Emily is a person of flesh and blood or she is the alter ego of the narrator. There is also no logical explanation to the fact how the narrator is capable of revisiting Emily's past and visualizing certain childhood memories so vividly. One possible solution for this puzzle could be that Emily's childhood visions seen by the narrator are self-reflective and nothing but the memories of the narrator herself. The end of the novel is also complicated as all the three companions of the narrator-Emily, Hugo and Gerald vanish altogether like a vapor as if their presence were evanescence. Thus, such complicated narrative style leads the novel to numerous interpretations. In a sense these types of ambiguous plot engage the reader more than the descriptive narration of the novels of the former centuries.

Again, the narrative style of *TBE* also breaks the traditional narrative style of the realist novels. The novel starts with a passage from Dick and Jane nursery book which depicts a lovely home and a happy family life, a stereotypical representation of the so called "American Dream". The first excerpt from the book starts with proper line spacing and punctuation marks. The second passage repeats the same passage but lacks punctuation marks even though it has spacing between each word which may be considered an example of 'stream of consciousness' because there is no use of punctuation when we think in our subconscious mind. The last and the third repetition of the same passage is hard to read as it has no punctuation as well spacing between each of the words in the sentence which may well be inferred as the thought process of a psychotic person. Furthermore, instead of using title for different chapters, the author applies

some selected lines from the Jim and Dick story at the beginning of different parts of the novel which may be considered as different chapters. Thus, the narrative style of both the novels marks a rupture from the traditional narrative style of novel writing which gives a new dimension to the 20th century novels.

Chapter 4 - Critiquing the World Order: Utopia and Dystopia

The utopian and dystopian novels of the 20th century can be compared and contrasted under some common grounds like Family, Gender, Society and Politics. Here, both the utopian and dystopian novels selected for this paper have been analyzed under the above mentioned categories.

1. Family:

In sociological term, “The family is generally regarded as a major social institution and a locus of much of a person's social activity. It is a social unit created by blood, marriage, or adoption, and can be described as nuclear . . . or extended . . . ” (Nam n.p.) . So, in short family can be considered as the nucleus of a society. Human being as a social creature cannot live alone and that is why they form family and live in a society. In every family there is a family head who is the leader of the family. The rest of the family is abided by the head. In patriarchal society, father is the head of the family.

However, the traditional family structure is questioned and challenged by the novelists of the 20th century utopian and dystopian novels. The familiar notion of patriarchal family structure is turned up-side down by the novelists in both *SD* and *Herland*. The novelist only talks about men and women but does not mentions the nature of relationship between them. To some extent it seems like she imagines the opposite type of relationship between men and women than the world that she lives in. For instance, the men are engaged in house-hold chores whereas, women are engaged in state affairs as well as they are very much occupied with outdoor activities. In connection with this it can be said that “The asymmetrical relations that are so obviously privileged towards men have been deconstructed...” (Islam). On the contrary, one of the ways the dystopian novels project the apocalyptic world is by critiquing the breakdown of family.

Dystopian novels exhibit the terminations of family bonding and they also represent problematic family relationships.

However, considering the family structures in all the utopian and dystopian novels selected for this paper, it is evident that both genres look for an alternative family structure which suggests that the authors identify the failure or futility of the existing family structure. For instance, in *Herland*, there is a detailed description of how the women in *Herland* form family, their history and their family ethics. In *Herland* the structure of family is strange and they form a giant family of all the citizens of the land. They think that they breed from a central mother and there are the specific records of the mothers but they don't intersect and treat motherhood as their chief motto. As the "start of Herland" is defined by Gilman as -

"one family, all descended from one mother! She lived to a hundred years old; lived to see her hundred and twenty-five great-granddaughters born; lived as Queen-Priestess-Mother of them all; . . . she alone had founded a new race!" (Gilman, *Herland* 59).

In this respect it seems to be true that woman "is the soul of the house, of family, of the home. And she is the soul of such larger groups, also, as the city, state, and nation" (Beauvoir). This is how Gilman indirectly talks about humanity and re-defines the essence of family. In her opinion, the definition of family has got a cosmopolitan view. There is no binary division from one family to another rather she homogenizes the idea of family where every member of a country is considered as a family member.

In this regard, dystopian novels also play with the notion of deconstruction of family structure which accelerates the sense of an ending in social life. For instance, in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* there are references to three different types families- A-The Whites- represent the

ideal family structure but they are the representatives of the bourgeoisie. It is puzzling that why in spite of belonging to the elites they didn't escape like others evacuating the city, looking for a safe shelter. B- The speaker demonstrates another atypical family unit which consists of herself and the strange girl she begets in a magical way. Later on, she considers herself the guardian of the young girl but restrains herself from becoming over protective. C- The third or the last type of family is formed by Gerald who shelters the waifs and they lead sort of a gypsy life. By presenting these different types of family structures, the novelist refutes the importance of family life and family values. Lastly, the neighborhood is evacuated with the advancement of a savage bunch of children lacking all the features of humanity. Gradually, people start using the phrase "*Gerald's house*" the way people "once said *the Ryans*,"⁴ (Lessing 60). They just shatter the normal course of life in Gerald's household and also appear to be an object of public threat for the neighborhood. Thus the formation of this strange type of family questions and challenges the normative definition of family.

Furthermore, in a distorted family like the narrator's or Gerald's it's hard to define family relationships. It is said in the novel that "Gerald had become a father or elder brother to the children" (Lessing 47). It also challenges the distribution of labor as is observed in a typical patriarchal society. At the same time, it questions the very purpose of forming a family. From a sociological point of view, family is formed with a goal to procreate but the formation of family without this goal also has a threatening effect on the society as well the as the country as a whole. The late 20th century literature marks the advent of a sterile, frustrated and inhuman generation in the western world. This feature is reflected not only in novels but also in poetry.

For instance in *The Waste Land* Eliot writes-

⁴ The Ryan house is explained in the novel as "filthy, and what furniture it had fit for rubbish dump . . . the parents were usually drunk and sometimes the children were, too" (Lessing 58)

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
 Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
 Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? (Eliot)

A similar tension of approaching barrenness is observed in the beginning of *TBE* where Claudia says, “there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941” (Morrison 4). This particular reference to barrenness at the very beginning of the novel indicates the futility of family relationships in the novel, the sterility of ideology and the barrenness of the World War II. The time 1941 in other ways has an implication as it marks “the beginning of the World War II for the United States” (Morrison 170). The moral decay of the nation is recorded in the novel by the crude comparison like “We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola’s father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt” (Morrison 4). Later on Claudia says that “The seeds shriveled and died; her baby too” (Morrison 4) which indicates that Pecola’s baby dies too. Thus, the Victorian beliefs and ideals gradually wither away with the invention of birth control pills and sex becomes associated not only with reproduction rather it incorporates desire and pleasure. As Eliot states –

“What you get married for if you don’t want children?” (The Waste Land)

Similarly, in *TBE* Frieda MacTeer is also a victim of sexual harassment by Henry Washington, the boarder in MacTeer family. Though apparently Henry tends to be a pious young man, he also keeps relationship with whores like China and Maginot Line and pretends that the girls come to him “to read the scriptures together” (Morrison 61). In this regards, it can be said that Washington makes instrumental use of religion in gaining his personal pursuit.

Moreover the tragic incident of Pecola's rape by her father can be associated with another incident which dates back to Cholly's teenage "when he was . . . newly but earnestly engaged in eliciting sexual pleasure from a little country girl" (Morrison 31). During this time, two white police men suddenly appeared at the spot. Seeing the police men when Cholly tried to kneel down and dress up himself, one of the police man commended "Go on and finish. And, nigger, make it good" (Morrison 31). This incident remarked in young Cholly's mind that it is normal for a nigger to do any violent act even in front of public eyes. The surprising fact is that "Cholly had not hated the white men; he hated, despised, the girl" (Morrison 31). The reason that he couldn't hate the white men is because "They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless" (Morrison 118). Hence, the race feeling, power position and lack of physical strength led Cholly to hate Darlene, the young girl instead of the white police men. Thus, his first sexual orientation was traumatized and this incident might be responsible for leading him towards a perverted sexual behavior.

However, both the novelists of the dystopian novels, question the sacred parental relationship through the inclusion of incidents like daughter being physically molested by father. For instance, in *TBE*, Pecola is raped by her father. Similarly, Emily is also a poor victim of incest. Both Pecola and Emily can't protest due to being kids as well as being ignorant on the fact regarding what was happening to them. Generally, family is the safest place for anyone and it's the store house of solace and support but this shrine of safety is shaken by these types of paradigms in the dystopian novels.

2. Gender Roles:

It is said that “Particularly in the 1970s, feminist utopian fiction focused strongly upon the role played by gender in the process of creating a better society. In fact, utopian fiction of the 1970s embraces some sort of technology and almost always eschews the notion of gender separatism [sic]” (Skordoulis n.p.). In practise it is found that the utopian novels of the early twentieth century also uphold some of these key features. For example, in both the novels *SD* and *Herland*, the novelists uphold the ideological belief that a better society can be formed by women. Both the novels also uphold the belief that women can perform better when they are in the position of power and shatter the traditional gender roles by depicting an up-side down gender roles. Utopian thoughts get a new dimension with Perkin’s propaganda to extinguish men altogether from their territory and forms a prototype of an Amazonian society.

Terry in *Herland* says, “We do not allow our women to work. Women are loved-idolized-honoured-kept in the home to care for the children” (Perkins 63). Then he adds that even though some women have to work and he categorizes the working women as “the poorer sort” (Perkins 63). In this way, Terry pretends that women are not fit for working outside and they are fit for household chores and raising children. At the very beginning of the novel, the speaker, Jennings summarises terry’s ideas regarding women as the following-

“pretty women were just so much game and homely ones not worth considering.” (Perkins 11)

So here, women are divided into two categories the pretty ones and the homely ones. With due confidence, Terry utters that there are “two kinds of women- ... Desirable and Undesirable was

his demarcation” (Gilman, *Herland* 23). Moreover, the narrator states the stereotypical notion of women by men in general as the following-

“In all our discussions and speculations we had always unconsciously assumed that the women, whatever else they might be would be young. Most men do think that way, I fancy.” (Gilman, *Herland* 22)

However, after revealing the history of the feminine women, Jennings admits that he learns “to appreciate what these women had accomplished, the less proud I was of what we, with all our manhood, had done” (Perkins 62). Thus, the speaker admits the excellence of the women in *Herland*. The women in *Herland*, have a high notion regarding the women in the world from where the visitors have come.

Judith Butler says in *Gender Trouble* “sex poses “the real” and the “factic”, the material or corporeal ground upon which gender operates as an act of cultural inscription” (Butler). Here, Butler asserts that sex is a cultural inscription rather than a natural fact. Accordingly a girl is taught to become a girl by playing with dolls whereas a boy is given cars or bat and balls to play with. Again a girl acquires feminine characteristics by following other female members in the family and same happens in case of women. Thus, Butler asserts that gender role is performative and it the sex distinction is not as much cultural as gender distinction is argued to be.

Again, according to the French Psychologist Simon de Beauvoir, “one is not born a woman but becomes a woman” seems to be true after all in *TBE*. In the novel, the novelist records the fact that as a girl, Claudia Mac’Teer is given dolls as her birthday presents and the adults consider that a girl of her age would be happy with the gift. The society has made it normative that female children should be given toys which represent their activities as a grown up person and male children accordingly. Thus, it considered best for young girls to play with

dolls which makes them interested into child rearing and house hold affairs. On the contrary, for young boys, toys like cars, guns etc. are considered as the best which will make them interested into outdoor activities.

In the novel, *Herland* Gilman challenges the traditional feminine notion by presenting women who have short hair instead of the traditional long one, who are sportive and agile like men and they are knowledgeable enough to tame nature according to their necessity. They extinguish ferocious animal and bred special kind of cat which means that they are advanced in Genetics which is an advanced field of science. These types of advanced scientific imaginations seem to be the influence of Darwin's 'Theory of Evolution' and there is also the evidence that the women remain in that land but the men are perished which means that in a Darwinian world, women can surpass men. Thus, the novelist suggests that with intelligence and volition gender binaries could be redeemed.

Gilman has a political purpose in presenting the reversed gender roles. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator states the general notion of the male sex in the following manner –

“When we say MEN, MAN, MANLY, MANHOOD, and all other masculine derivatives, we have in the background of our minds a huge vague crowded picture of the world and all its activities. ... , doing everything- “the world”” (Gilman, *Herland* 141).

This is how the knowledge of sex asserts certain mode of power for men in particular. This knowledge is set in the collective psyche and throughout the world it is taken for granted that men are strong and they are fit for outdoor work and women are comparatively weaker and are apt for housekeeping and child rearing.

Similarly Gilman also records the general notion regarding the female sex in the following lines in the novel-

“And when we say WOMEN, we think FEMALE-the sex” (Gilman, *Herland* 141).

There is no big value or giant picture is associated with womanhood. But on the contrary, for the two thousand year old feminine civilization in the *Herland*, “the word WOMAN called up all that big background,... and the word MAN meant to them only MALE sex... in Herland women were “the world”” (Gilman, *Herland* 141). In this way, Gilman creates a utopian world with an intention to urge the readers to get over gender binaries and she looks forward to establish humanity over gender binaries. Finally, towards the end of the novel, the narrator says that he has got “used to seeing women not as females but as people.” However, this clearly expresses Gilman’s political approach to talk about universal humanity and thus she urges the readers to widen their vision and overcome the limitations of gender as a mode of categorization. Almost a decade later, Virginia Woolf also talks about androgynous writers and she initiates that “one must be woman-manly or man-womanly.” (Woolf 108). Thus, both Gilman and Woolf talks about homogeneity in gender roles whereas, Foucault emphasis on heterogeneity in gender roles which creates binary oppositions in society in terms of power relation.

However binaries related to gender also plays an important role in *Memoirs of a Survivor* where the narrator mentions a small band of girls led by a woman who were “critical of male authority, male organization . . . [and] commenting on everything the men did” (Lessing 78). This description denotes that women are becoming self-conscious and are not vulnerable anymore who raise voice against the male authority. Thus, it is aptly said that “the distinctions

between the sexes in the significant areas of role and temperament, not to mention status, have in fact, essentially cultural, rather than biological, bases” (Millett 29)

These are the demonstrations of how society and culture codify gender and asserts specific behavior, norms, performance and choice for male and female respectively. Claudia protests vehemently about these kinds of stereotypical notions as she states her considerations regarding these in the following lines-

“I had no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood. I was interested only in human my own age and size, . . . I learned quickly, however, what I was expected to do with the doll: rock it, fabricate storied situations around it, even sleep with it” (Morrison 13). The author further clarifies that these types of stereotypes are established by the media as she mentions that “Picture books were full of little girls sleeping with their dolls” (Morrison 13) . Here, it refers to the print media but later on with the advancement of electronic media, the same tradition has been preserved to establish stereotypical gender roles and expected behavioral codes.

It is true that in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the same stereotypical gender norm is preserved whereas, Emily is taught first to take care of Hugo instead of a doll but the intention is the same, to nurture in her the sense of motherhood. Later on, in Gerald’s house hold, she performs the role of a mother whereas Gerald performs the role of a father. However, the narrator in the novel seems to rebel against the heteronormative patriarchal family and she tends a form her strong identity as an androgynous being who possesses a strong personality to be a spontaneous being who can struggle against an anarchic society, against hostile environment, against political deprivation as well in a world which turns out to be impossible for the existence of a sane person. Under this circumstance, the narrator seems to be molded by the power of the

state authority that “separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way” (M. Foucault 330).

Thus, behind the constitution of a gendered identity or the construction of gender roles in a given society there are several forces at work as is said in *A Cyborg Manifesto* that “Gender, race or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism” (Haraway 295-296). Henceforth, it is clear that acquiring specific gender roles are concerned with one’s historical experience. For instance, in *Herland*, the women acquire the art of Parthenogenesis in order to preserve their race in absence of male member but it in a patriarchal society, heterosexuality is welcomed to preserve the humanity from extinction. Hereby, gender as a sociological term defines one’s role and behavior in the society. On the other hand, sex is a biological term which is associated with one’s physics or body. So, in biological term one’s body defines one’s sexuality. According to the accepted norm, heterosexuality prevails whereas homosexuality is associated with taboo and has been a debated topic since the Victorian era. Thus, it is customary for a man to desire a woman and the vice versa for woman.

3. Society and politics:

Social condition has a deep impact on the writing of the writers of any age. Again the social condition of any society has a close connection with its political status (including both stability and tumult). The novels belong to the different poles of the earth- one is from the East and the other is from the West. For this reason, the social condition of Hossain is completely different

Perkins. Considering the social and political situation of the publication time of *SD*, it appears to be a crucial time-

when the partition of Bengal became a possibility, when sectarian and communal violences threatened the semblance of order that was there in Bengal... There was the talk of increasing the military strength of the British to suppress the ever growing Swadeshi movement. The Ladyland of Sultana's Dream despite the marvels it presents to her is a European country. Sultana's image of final empowerment is thus not only a release from the first colonization by men, but from the equally dehumanizing one of the British.

(Islam)

Thus the extracted lines indicate a time which must have a disastrous effect on the conscious and educated class of people of the Bengal. This social and political upheaval must influence Hossain to dare to break the tradition in all aspects of a social structure in *SD* where she imagines the women ruling the country whereas in reality, even the men in Bengal were subjugated by the British Raj. Furthermore, the basis of society is family but in *SD* we don't get to know about any family rather there are working women and the description of an omnipotent Queen. The character of the Queen must remind the readers about Queen Elizabeth who also rose on throne at an early age but later on performed her duty with excellence. As education was promoted by the British to the different parts of the world, Indian subcontinent was not an exception. It can be assumed that Hossain incarnates her ideas of Queen Elizabeth and adds her imagination to create the character of the Queen in Ladyland in *SD*.

Hossain's contemporary Indian society was very conservative. Towards the beginning of 20th century, women in India were not allowed to get educated and for Muslim women like Hossain, education was a mere dream. The Muslim women were strictly covered with purdah

and girls were married at an early age. For Muslim women education meant “flouting the rules of purdah, enjoined by the Quran and sanctioned by hadith.” (Jahan 3) Moreover, “*The separation between “male” and “female” spheres, common in all societies, was particularly sharpened among Muslim by strict observance of purdah.*” (Jahan 6) This purdah system created cultural deprivation for women. In Hossain’s time, formal education was never thought to be granted for women. Hossain was lucky enough that her elder brother and sister taught her to read and write both in Bangla and in English and after her marriage her husband also encouraged her in her writing as well as helped her in publishing her books.

Considering this helpless condition of women and also experiencing the strict rules imposed upon women like purdah and no scope of education for women, Hossain cultivated the dream of a utopian world in her novella, *Sultana’s Dream* (1905). During Hossain’s time women also had to maintain purdah to hide themselves from unknown women as well. Hossain’s short stories in the book *Inside Seclusion* (1981) edited and translated by Roushan Jahan recount the wretched condition of Indian women of Hossain’s contemporary time. So, it is the visibility of the body that is restricted and there has been a premonition set by the patriarchal society as well as religion that the revelation of the body itself is a source of danger for women. For the upper class married women purdah was more strictly imposed as they were treated as a ‘property’ rather than a human being of flesh and blood by their husbands.

Thus, in the beginning of the 20th century, the social system confined the life of women within the four walls and barred them from the opportunity to get educated which could be a means of liberation for the oppressed women of that time. According to Foucault, knowledge is the source of power and he argues that “Where there is power, there is resistance,” (Foucault 176) and accordingly female education could be a means of power for the powerless women and

with the power of their knowledge they could resist the oppression and injustice imposed upon them by the patriarchal society. The implication of this possibility is evident in *Ladyland* in *SD* and in the *Ladyland* in *Herland*. The wise women reign over men in *SD* whereas the women in *Herland* totally extinguish the existence of the other sex. Both of these are utopian ideas which shed a light on the imaginary situation

On the other hand the social condition of the publication of *Herland* also relates social change and political tumult. The beginning of the 20th century marks the advent of conscience regarding women issue. In America women got first voting right in 1920 and gradually the feminist activists worked for ensuring education for women and along with that working outside for women. During the subsequent World Wars there were a large number of women in the West. These thrive for liberation of women tends the women writers to create such utopian worlds where women are privileged and knowledgeable and powerful. Considering both Hossain and Gilman's socio political surroundings, it is evident that both of them were influenced by the condition of women of their contemporary women who were under constant oppression by the men. However, it is surprising to reveal the fact that whether it is the West or the East, the Occident or the Orient, it is a common phenomenon to consider the female sex as inferior and weak and powerless. Thus, the knowledge of sex is a tool of victimization to some extent and for this reason Foucault has aptly discussed in his "Method", "a certain form of knowledge regarding sex ... in terms of power (M. Foucault, Method 165)."

As novelists usually expose the drawbacks of society and also criticize the political attitudes of the government. Dystopian novels also observe the inherent anomaly in an existing society and foresee the futile future. In a dystopian society there is no order in social, political or economic life. People suffer from recession, economic discrimination, political exploitation etc.

Class feeling is very dominant among different classes in dystopian novels. Media plays another prominent role disseminating anxiety and rumor in dystopian novels. The role of media is to be truthful to news and also to make the nation aware about different types of social or political issues. Instead, in dystopian novels, it is found that media plays a reverse role and creates falsehood and negative criticism among the mass people. For instance, in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the author says that-

“the newscasts and in the papers would pursue for days the story of a single kidnapped child, . . . the next news flash would be about the mass death of hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people. We still believed, wanted to believe, that the first, the concern about the single child, the need to punish the individual criminal, . . . what really represented us; the second, the catastrophe, was, as such items of news had always been for people not actually in the threatened area, unfortunate and minor- or at least not crucial- accident, which interrupted the even flow, the development, of civilization” (Lessing 13)

On the other hand, media also deceives people by creating stereotypes. Even “the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member, a female” (Morrison 168) by the false notions created by the media.

Another prominent feature of dystopian novel is that the characters in the novels are passive and are reluctant to take any action as just like the silent listener in a ‘dramatic monologue’. They silently observe the anomalies and anarchies around them but never tend to take any initiative to protest against any of these. Furthermore, there is always a quest for material substances in dystopian novels- sometimes it’s the quest for survival or sometimes it’s the quest for gaining love and attention from others. These types of futuristic novels enable the

audience to conceptualize the worst possibilities in the future which in terms render them to rectify the current anomalies in the society in order to avoid the upcoming catastrophe in the society.

In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the narrator comments on contemporary the society and criticizes the ruling class for their flighty activities. The author comments that the diplomats are men of speech but not of action. The narrator even entitles the politicians as “The Talkers” (Lessing). The administrators weren’t even bothered by the anomalies around them. They had plenty of food supply and transport was also available for them. These types of antinomies create binaries like self/other, privileged/unprivileged etc.

These binary divisions are constructed by power and pollute the usual order of things. However sexuality is also associated with power. For instance, in Gerald’s place, in spite of Emily’s contribution in decision making as well as maintaining the clan of the children, Gerald is the lord and the master, not Emily. Not only that, at times Gerald never hesitates to humiliate Emily by showing his fondness to other girls like June or Maureen. Thus, sexuality defines our social identity which is one of the many intersectionalities existing in a social hierarchy.

Similarly, in *TBE* the author also presents social backdrops and presents the experience of the minority in 20th century American society. Morrison asserts that in American society, the African-American are minority and are considered as the ‘Other’ by the white Americans. The novel reveals the fact that this black/white binary division creates a Manichean world where the white are educated, well mannered, polished and are privileges whereas, the black are uneducated, ill manned, barbaric and are unprivileged. As if, the white are in the centre and the others are on the periphery and thus the tendency to marginalize the other bifurcate the society

into different types of binaries. In this context, Haraway seems apt to utter that “Gender, race or class consciousness is an achievement forced for us by the historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism” (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* 296). Thus, according to Haraway in terms of gender, men are in the position of power and they dominate over women in a patriarchal society. Secondly, in a colonial context, the white or the ‘occident’ is considered superior to the other race-the black or the ‘orient’ and they exploit the orient in under this propaganda. Lastly, capitalism divides the society into three sections namely- the bureaucracy, the bourgeois and the proletariat whereas class decrees the facilities one enjoys in a capitalist society. All these intersectionalities are evident in *TBE* which problematize the humanity.

Historically, 19th century marks the advent of modern technology and consequently the society is saturated by the aura of industrialization. Gradually, the earlier fellow feeling withers away and people become self-centered and secluded. The rapid spread of industrialization drives men from rural area to urban area in search for a better life and this urbanization indeed elevates the standard of living until the break out of the First World War. The subsequent World Wars mark the retreat of urbanization in West. In *Memoirs of a Survivor* for instance, people move from cities to countries due to the fact that the latter is safer than the former. The novel is a representation of a Darwinian world where the “the survival of the fittest” is the ultimate motto and in the quest for survival, the urban life is abandoned and the rural life is embraced. Even the urban people tend to embrace feudalism in lieu of capitalism.

During the Second World War, America has none the less been beleaguered like UK due to its active participation in rescuing Europe to overcome the following consequence of the carnage by the Nazis. During the war a large number of men went to Europe to fight against the

enemy and as a result women were engaged in outdoor works to fill up the vacant positions left by men. Later on when men came back from work, women were retreated from work and they suffer from a sense of alienation. In this regard, Betty Friedan states that “The wife, having worked before . . . finds herself in the lamentable position of being ‘just a housewife’” (Friedan 44).

Memoirs of a Survivor represents the banality of European society during the crucial time of war. The narrator expresses her views in the following lines-

“all forms of social organization, broke up, we lived on, adjusting our lives, as if nothing fundamental was happening” (Lessing 12).

The extracted lines refutes the fact that government officials and media represents the social anomaly in a disguised form as if the anachronism is a natural state of the society. This tendency to create a false ideology is also evident in *TBE* where the society establishes the belief in little Pecola’s mind that white beauty can guarantee her love and affection from the people around her. Furthermore, it expresses a saturated race feeling dominant among the members of the society. It reveals that in spite of the Emancipation Proclamation, the black are still subjugated by the white.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Thus, it is clear that neither the utopian nor the dystopian novels represent real life rather both are hyperboles. In the utopian novels, the authors create an imaginary wonderland where everything is perfect. In technological terms it can be said to offer a holographic image of the cherished life by human beings. On the contrary, in the dystopian novels, the authors create an imaginary sense of an ending by presenting an apocalyptic world which helps the readers to foresee the world in its worst forms. It encourages the readers to build a better future by recovering the existing shortcomings. Moreover, the lack of order and descriptions of a deteriorated world makes the readers feel contented with the real life that they live in.

Now the question arises why the women writers of the 20th century imagine the world with such exaggerations of disorder and anomaly. There might be different reasons for the incarnation of a world of imagination with hyperbole. First of all, it is obvious that writers are affected by the happenings or incidents of their contemporary time. If we consider the socio-political condition of the early 20th century, it was a time when people started to utilize the boon of industrialization and the rapid spread of industrialization led people towards urbanization. Moreover, the advancement in science and technology also created a sense of hope for a better future for the contemporary people. This could be considered as one of the reasons why the writers, specially, women writers inclined towards writing utopian novels. Secondly, in general sense, human beings try to imagine or dream about the things that they don't have in their real life. From another perspective, it can be assumed that by comparing the exaggerated world with the material world makes the reader capable of evaluating the world that they live in.

This thesis considers the utopian and dystopian novels from different parts of the world as well as by the authors from different race, class, ethnicity and religious background. The

particular reason for bringing the author from different parts of the world is to exhibit that no matter what divisions or boundaries categorize human beings into different intersectionalities in real life, in the world of imagination, all human beings possess the same type of ideals, visions and expectations about the future. In general, all human beings nourish the same hope for a better future and cherish to see its practical implementation. Thus, the utopian and dystopian novels help the readers to evaluate the world they live in and to appreciate the beauty of life.

Notes

¹ These questions- what women could and did have in the nineteenth century, when Fuller was writing-comprise “the woman question”. Far from being a singular question, this concept encompassed the various political, economic, and social challenges women were facing around the time of the emergence of the suffrage movement (Whitson 274-275).

² Henceforth cited as *SD*.

³ Henceforth cited as *TBE*.

⁴ The Ryan house is explained in the novel as “filthy, and what furniture it had fit for rubbish dump . . . the parents were usually drunk and sometimes the children were, too” (Lessing 58)

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