

THE WOMAN AS PORTRAYED IN MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE

IN MAPU AND MENDELE

by

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Abstract

This thesis is intended to examine the state of women within the Jewish Pale of Settlement during the nineteenth century. The mode of analysis is strictly a literary one, though considerable space is given both to the relevant religious and historical backgrounds.

Chapter One examines the place of women in the traditional Jewish literary sources, both Biblical and Rabbinic. Attention is drawn to the increasingly confined social atmosphere in which Jewish women lived their lives, which explains their apparent subjugation within the kehillot of Eastern Europe.

Chapter Two deals with the historical framework germane to the issues that have to be dealt with. It is the main contention of this chapter that the forces of the Enlightenment provided a firm challenge to the hegemony of the male within the community; women sought a certain amount of liberation from traditional constraints and education provided the main impetus for greater individualism.

Chapters Three and Four take a look at the way in which two leading 19th century Hebrew novelists treated women in their works: Abraham Mapu and Mendele Mokher Sefarim. The whole spectrum of the social tensions that women faced are to be found via the vivid characterisation of both authors.

The conclusion points to the contrasting approach of both these authors and the extent to which their portrayal of women is both a valid and valuable contribution to our knowledge of women in 19th century Eastern Europe.

Contents

	Page
Abstract	2
Contents	3
Transliteration	4
Acknowledgments	5
Introduction	6
CHAPTER ONE: The Position of the Woman in the Traditional Jewish Sources	10
a The Function and Status of Women	10
b The Role of Women in Social and Economic Life	15
c Marriage	16
i Divorce	25
ii Levirate Marriage	26
iii Widowhood	28
d The Role of Women in Religious Celebration	30
e Attitudes to Women	32
CHAPTER TWO: The Jewish Woman in 19th Century Eastern Europe	34
a Social Status	34
b Women in Hasidic Circles	38
c The Economic Role of Women	42
d Marriage	44
e Education	47
f The Emancipation of Women	48
g Conclusion	50
CHAPTER THREE: Abraham Mapu: Life and Works	52
a Publications	56
i Novels	56
ii Educational Text-books	56
iii The Love of Zion	57
iv The Hypocrite	60
b Mapu's Treatment of Women in his Novels	64
CHAPTER FOUR: Mendele Mokher Sefarim: Life and Works	76
a Life and background	76
b Mendele's Treatment of Women in his Novels	81
Conclusion	94
Bibliography	98

Transliteration

א	not transliterated
ב	b
בּ	v
ג	g
ד	d
ה	h
ו	v -when not a vowel
ז	z
ח	h
ט	t
י	γ - when vowel & at end of words - i
כ	k
ך, כּ	kh
ל	l
מ, מּ	m
נ, נּ	n
ס	s
ע	not transliterated
פ	p
ף, פּ	f
צ, צּ	z
ק	k
ר	r
שׁ	sh
שׂ	s
ת	t

The above system follows the 'general' rules from Hebrew and Semitic Languages as used in the Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem, 1972).

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Introduction

It is pertinent to suggest at the outset that the role of women within the context of various societies has become both a legitimate and a fashionable concern for the historian. However, with the increasing liberation of women in the West, the place of women within minority societies, which have consistently advocated the presence of patriarchal particularism, suggests that at some time tensions which certainly existed within the wider society permeated into minority groups.

A more specific justification lies in the extent and nature of current trends in Modern Jewish History. It has become fashionable since the end of World War II - and an inevitable legacy of both the holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel - that a serious attempt had to be made to create a modern Jewish historical tradition. Certainly the 1960s saw a plethora of publications outlining modern developments of Jews in the Diaspora and this trend could perhaps be viewed as a serious attempt to re-assert traditional identities and to search for more contemporary forms of national expression.

Yet these studies have as yet not made full use of the whole range of possibilities facing the historian and in particular the historian of literary traditions. Elsewhere the past decade has seen attempts at rapprochement between the 'pure' historical tradition, and the central perspectives and/or research strategies of other disciplines,

particularly anthropology, sociology and psychology. It has been argued (by T.W. Zeldin among others) that it is only by examining the history of the individual, or the group within the community, that one can avoid the over-simplifications and inaccuracies of the narrative approach.

It seems to the present writer that within a study of women, one can find empirical data which can present suggestions for the East European Jewish Community as a whole. Furthermore, the extent to which women are portrayed in the pages of Modern Hebrew Literature will give valuable insight into the degree that the novels under discussion 'mirror' the societies from which they spring. Using the novels of Mapu and Mendele as historical sources in their own right it is intended to consider the following questions:

1 Traditional views of Jewish Women's roles in Eastern Europe

Taking into account the fact that Biblical and Talmudic traditions are fairly consistent in their treatment of the woman's role within the home, and in the wider society, to what extent did such traditions affect the weight of opinion amongst Eastern European Jewish Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century?

2 The Enlightenment and Jewish Women

In view of the prolific literature that has been produced on the German-Jewish Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century, is there any serious evidence in the novels to suggest that such developments had had any great influence on thinking in Eastern Europe, particularly amongst the Maskilim?

3 Women's drive for Emancipation

Given the greater secularism of many women in the nineteenth century Jewish communities - particularly with relation to educational opportunity - is there any suggestion that there was a serious attempt *to resist* emancipation amongst women?

4 The Treatment of Women in Literature

To what extent, if any, did the changing circumstances affecting women at this time have any influence on their characterization in the nineteenth century Hebrew Novel? It may also be pertinent to assess whether this portrayal as such anticipates what Marrus termed "the terrible breakdown of community in our time".¹

The Use of Literature in History

A common view of historians is that it is necessary to understand the historical context behind a novel in order to appreciate that novel properly. It is no coincidence that A.L. Rowse wrote:

a knowledge of history is helpful or even indispensable with regard to novels; the novels of Scott and Disraeli for example, or for that matter of Stendahl and Balzac ...²

However, in the same work Rowse does admit to the importance of literature as a historical source in its own right.

1 P. Marrus, The Politics of Assimilation (Oxford, 1973), p. 3.

2 A.L. Rowse, The Use of History (Revised Edition, London, 1963), p. 42.

The sociological circumstances of a given time and people will find expression in their literature; the dominant ethical code in their law and legislation.¹

This latter statement is particularly significant when applied to the beginning of the Modern Hebrew novel. Howard Sachar sees the importance of Haskalah in this context as follows:

After the initial period of the Science of Judaism, Haskalah unfolded in various phases. The first was the polemical-rationalist phase, which concentrated on battering down the intellectual confines of the Pale, with its dogmatism and its emphasis on the minutiae of pietistic observance. The second stage sent the maskilim back to a rather over-glorified past; it was responsible for the romanticism and stylistic exaggerations of men like Abraham Mapu and Abraham Bar Lebensohn.²

Changing circumstances and the rise of a real intellectual threat to orthodoxy are reflected in the literature with which this work is concerned. The treatment of women is seen as of particular importance in such a social transition and it was felt that the two most representative authors were Abraham Mapu and Shalom Abramovich, who is better known by his pen name of Mendele Mokher Sefarim (Mendele the Bookseller). The former sought in his novels a return to a more vigorous and imaginative interpretation of Jewish culture. The latter's work is best summed up in the words of Chaim Tschernowitz:

There is in me two Mendeles - the wise, pious Jew of the Beth Ha-Midrash, and the modern skeptic. He loved Jews and Judaism but also criticized trenchantly the pettiness he found in Jewish life in the Diaspora ...³

1 Op. cit., p. 112.

2 H.W. Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History (New York, 1958), p. 204.

3 Cited by Sachar, op. cit., p. 214.

CHAPTER ONE

THE POSITION OF THE WOMAN IN THE TRADITIONAL JEWISH SOURCES

A natural precursor to any examination of the image that 19th century Hebrew novelists present of the Jewish woman, is to consider appropriate references in traditional Jewish sources; also, it is pertinent to discuss the status that Jewish Women enjoyed in 19th century Russia.

The treatment of women in orthodox Jewish life is a subject which requires far more rigour and depth than is possible in the context of this present study. All that is possible at this juncture is to pinpoint those particular facets of interest dealt with by modern scholarship.

a The Function and Status of Women

There is no doubt that the way in which the whole concept of the family is presented in the Bible shows the vast extent to which early Hebrew civilization was dominated by essentially masculine considerations and virtues. The patriarchal form of family life was an extremely important factor in the parameters which can be drawn around the function and status of women in the Bible.¹ The special lustre which is accorded the phrase 'bet ab' ('the house of one's father') in the Hebrew texts is one small illustration of the masculine dominated society that was prevalent. The genealogies are always given in

¹ E.B. Cross, The Hebrew Family (Chicago, 1927), p. 55, and see O.J. Baab, 'Woman', in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York, 1976), vol. 4, p. 866.

the father's line, and women in such lists are rarely mentioned.

The 'paternal uncle' is the nearest relation mentioned in such

genealogies (cf. Leviticus 25:49). R. de Vaux shows the essential

institutionalisation of the father's role in the life of the early

Hebrews.¹ He shows this by pointing out that the father has absolute

authority over his children even if they are married and still living

with him. An obvious corollary to this phenomenon would be the

father-in-law's authority over his daughter-in-law. In early times

this authority included even the power over matters involving life

and death. Judah condemned his daughter-in-law Tamar to death when

she was accused of having committed adultery.²

The woman's chief function is seen in her role as wife and mother.

Her major function as a wife is to act as a reproductive agency for the

perpetuation of the male line. Her role as mother is to sustain a

relationship with her children which, in the initial stages, stems from

nursing them and feeding them.³

Genesis I 26-28 records that the reason why God created two sexes

is so that man could reproduce his own kind. According to Genesis

3:16 the principle function of the woman is to reproduce and as such,

in early Hebrew thought, any infertility on the part of the woman is

frowned upon and seen as a natural result of God's judgment. Such

attitudes are reflected in the (possibly editorially duplicated⁴)

1 R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel (London, 1962), second impression (Trans. from the French by J. McHugh), p. 20.

2 See Genesis 38:24.

3 O.J. Baab, op. cit., p. 866.

4 Cf. Genesis 12: 10-20 where Abraham passes off his wife as his sister and a similar account in Chapter 20.

accounts relating to Sarah and her handmaiden Hagar¹, and to Rachel and her sister Leah.² These traditions stress the extent to which childbearing affected the woman's position in the family.

Such traditions are not confined to the Old Testament but form a common denominator with much contemporary literature of the Ancient Near East. Research on the Nuzi texts which reflect the customary law of a predominantly Hurrian population in the East Tigris region in the fifteenth century B.C. are of direct interest in this context.³ According to Nuzi marriage contracts the wife was obliged, if childless, to provide her husband with a substitute. Should a son be born of such a union, Nuzi law forbade the expulsion of the slave wife and her child. This explains Abraham's reluctance to send Hagar and Ishmael away in the twenty-first chapter of Genesis.⁴

However, although a woman does not choose her husband, her wishes are not always ignored, when a marriage agreement is made (Genesis 24: 5-8 and Numbers 36: 6). The father receives a 'bride price' (Hebrew 'mohar') for his daughter and thus implements a contractual agreement with the prospective husband, leading to the sexual fulfilment of the marital liaison. Baab⁵ suggests that to fully understand 'mohar' one has to forget that the transaction signifies the transfer of a

1 See Genesis 16: 4-14.

2 See Genesis 31: 15.

3 See J. Bright, A History of Israel (London, 1960), p. 17.

4 For a particularly interesting account of the Nuzi Texts see E.A. Speiser, 'I Know Not the Day of My Death', in the Journal of Biblical Literature (Philadelphia, 1955), vol. 74, pp. 252-56.

5 Ibid.

chattel; rather, it represents the surrender of one man's authority over a woman to another man. Subsequently the woman is treated as an equal by her husband. One such example is the fact that she retains her maiden name.

It is comparatively rare for the Bible to cast much light on the expected nature of the relationships which ensued from a marriage contract. R.H. Kennet argues¹ that an Israelite man loved his wife and regarded her as equal. Samuel's mother (I Samuel 1: 4-8, 22-23) and the Woman of Shunem (II Kings 4: 18-24) provide good examples.² Sometimes the woman's character is portrayed as stronger than her husband's. One may note the initiative of Sarah in suggesting to her husband that he takes her maid in order to have children by her (Genesis 16: 2).

Elsewhere in the Old Testament one has confirmation of the fact that in many respects the position of the woman is not one of complete subordination to her male partner. The last chapter of the book of Proverbs contains the qualities of a worthy housewife who is blessed by her children and who is the pride of her husband (Proverbs 31: 10-31).³ However, it must be added that the woman claims a degree of independence consonant with her capabilities in the household. This is her motivation for attaining domestic excellence in the 'name' of her husband and family.

1 See his Ancient Hebrew Social Life and Customs (London, 1933), p. 18.

2 R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 40.

3 Ibid.

There is some evidence to suggest that though, overall, the legal rights of a wife were extremely tenuous, there were exceptions to the rule. The mother, whether she was the senior wife of a harem or the only wife of a monogamous marriage, occupied a place of honour and authority. At the husband's death she might become the legal head of the household (II Kings, 8: 1-6) if the sons were under-age.¹ Although they had the primary function of producing children, the influence of famous mothers in the Old Testament (e.g. Sarah in Genesis 21: 12) is indicative of the significance attached to their role. The mother's strategy is seen to be covert in order that her aim is achieved. One need only allude in this context to the stratagems of Rebekah (Genesis 27: 5-17), Leah (Genesis 30: 16) and Rachel (Genesis 31: 34).²

The mother also shows love and care for the members of her family. The prophet Isaiah compares the comfort that a mother gives with the compassion of Israel's God (Isaiah 66: 13) whilst the Psalmist records that if a mother's care is taken away the Lord will provide the person with a substitute (Psalm 27: 10).

In her valuable and illuminating article C.M. Breyfogle³ has summarised the role of the woman in the Old Testament as essentially that of a harbinger for family unity. The points that emerge clearly are:

1 C.M. Breyfogle, 'The Social Status of Woman in the Old Testament', in The Biblical World (Chicago, 1910), vol. 35, pp. 114-15. See R. de Vaux, op. cit., pp. 39-40, and see Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 6, col. 1167.

2 Encyclopaedia Judaica, *ibid.*

3 Op. cit., p. 110.

- (a) that the greatest misfortune to befall a woman was childlessness (Genesis 30: 23; I Samuel 1: 2).
- (b) She was the source of children, the greatest blessing that God could bestow (Numbers 27: 4).
- (c) The mother was chiefly responsible for the way children were brought up in their early years (Proverbs 1: 8).
- (d) The father was responsible for instructing the son (Genesis 18: 9).
- (e) Children owed their mother obedience and respect (Exodus 21: 17).
- (f) The Decalogue commanded that equal honour be accorded to father and mother (^{Exodus 20: 12,} Leviticus 19: 3).

The Wisdom Literature also insists on the respect due to one's mother (Proverbs 19: 26, 20: 20, 23: 22, 30: 17, Ecclesiastes, 3: 1-16).

b The role of Women in Social and Economic Life

The extent to which women played any active part in the social life of the community is hard to assess, simply because of the paucity of relevant references in the Old Testament. Certainly there are constant references to the presence of women at weddings and funerals¹ (as well as at other occasions of a social nature). When Saul and Jonathan were killed, they were mourned by women (II Samuel, 24-27). However an interesting feature of the last ten verses of the first chapter of II Samuel is the fact that the bulk of the lament is the contribution of David himself.

¹ S. Schechter, Studies in Judaism (London, 1908), (Second Series) pp. 390-91.

An analysis of the economic role of women presents similar difficulties. Proverbs 31 approves the fact of the woman who makes and sells garments, but such examples of private enterprise on the part of Biblical women are rare. Suffice it to say that the limited participation of women in the commercial life of Israelite society was clearly due to their well-defined socio-sexual role and to the relatively underdeveloped economic activities of the children of Israel even after the Conquest.¹

c Marriage

It is interesting that, according to the Biblical account, God decreed that the first two human beings should be married (Genesis 2: 21-24). From the standpoint of the narrative a monogamous state was the only one possible and this tradition carried on through the Patriarchs of Seth's line (Genesis 7: 7); polygamy first appears in the reprobate line of Cain. Genesis 4: 19 records the fact that Lamech took two wives.

It is only when the first wife proves to be barren that the state of monogamy is deviated from during the Patriarchal Age. Abraham at first had only one wife, Sarah, but because she was barren he took her handmaiden, Hagar, at her own suggestion (Genesis 16: 1-2). Abraham also married Keturah (Genesis 25: 1), but only after the death of Sarah (Genesis 23: 1-2).

However it is recorded that both Abraham, Nahor (who had children

¹ See Rev. E. Day, The Social Life of the Hebrew (London, 1901), p. 36.

by his wife Milcah) and Eliphaz, son of Esau, had concubines (cf. Genesis 22: 20-24 and Genesis 36: 11-12). It is at least likely that this attitude reflects practices and values which were predominant in the Ancient Near East, and particularly with the socio-sexual climate of Ancient Mesopotamia.¹ The researches of H.W.F. Saggs² have indicated that part of such a climate was a constant tension between the importance of family unity and the propensity of Ancient Oriental males to promote their own indigenous sexual sub-culture.

Even the technical principle of monogamy was broken by some Patriarchs. Jacob married the two sisters, Leah and Rachel, each of whom gave him her maid (Genesis 29: 15-30; 30: 1-9), and Esau had three wives who were of equal rank (Genesis 26: 34; 28: 9; 36: 1-15).

Under the Judges and the Monarchy old habits had died. Bigamy was given a legal basis in Deuteronomy 21: 15-17 and there is evidence that eventually there was no limit to the number of wives and concubines a man might have. Gideon had many wives and at least one concubine (Judges 8: 30-31) and R. de Vaux points out that kings sometimes kept a large harem.³

In order to analyse the reasons for the modification of the Israelite view of monogamy one must accept that after the period of the Conquest there had to be some degree of cross-cultural influence between

1 See John Bright, op. cit., p. 70. "The stories of the Patriarchs fit unquestionably and authentically in the milieu of the second millenium, specifically ... this can be registered as a historical fact".

2 See H.W.F. Saggs, The Greatness that was Babylon (London, 1962), pp. 185ff., 201ff., 349.

3 Op. cit., p. 24.

the original inhabitants of Canaan and the Israelites themselves. The Old Testament and other literature (notably the Ras Shamra texts, excavated by French archaeologists between 1929 and 1939¹) have many references to Canaanite religion particularly in the area of sexual license. The close correlation that existed in the Canaanite mind between agricultural fertility and human fertility produced a "like for like" principle at the great Canaanite religious festivals. Since these were concerned with questions of seedtime and harvest there tended to be much sexual license practised. Amos 2: 7-8 refers to "a man and his father who go into the same maiden" and commentators² have suggested that this contains a reference to cultic prostitution.

Genesis 38: 13 ff. tells the story of the death of Judah's wife and how Tamar who had not been given ^{to} Shelah, Judah's son in marriage had intercourse with Judah. The usual translations of this tradition render two different words as 'harlot', namely kedeshah in verses 21 and 22, and ^{Zonah} (zantah) in verse 24. What Tamar actually did was to pretend to be a cult prostitute and it appears that to Judah and his family there was no stigma attached to this kind of activity. 'Harlotry', however, was immoral and worthy of death. Such practices were prevalent in Canaan before the Conquest but influenced later Israelite practice. The blame for such phenomena affecting the nation is constantly put on the Canaanites and it was a constant part of the prophetic movement to resist such influences. One theory holds that

on alphabetic script based on

- 1 These texts are in cuneiform and deal with the scriptures of the Canaanites from circa 1400 B.C.
- 2 W.R. Harper, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea, latest impression (Edinburgh, 1973), p. 51.

Hosea's wife was at one time a kedeshah.¹

Much later the Talmud was to limit the number of wives a man could have to four for a layman and eighteen for a king. In practice, however, only royalty could afford the luxury of a large harem, and commoners had to be contented with one wife, or two at the most.² According to the Second Book of Chronicles (24: 3), the priest Jehoida chose two wives for King Joash. Certainly the presence of several wives caused tension and this has had some linguistic effect; the wives of one man are called 'rivals' (Heb. zarot) cf. I Samuel 1: 6; Ecclesiastes 37: 12.

De Vaux³ and R. Loewe⁴ suggest that, despite the protests of the Prophetic movement that the favourite form of marriage in Israel under the monarchy was monogamy. These scholars in fact point to an argument from silence. They argue that it is noteworthy that the books of Samuel and Kings, which cover the whole period of the monarchy, do not record a single case of bigamy amongst commoners with the exception of Samuel's father. The wisdom books in addition never mention polygamy. The many passages in these books, which describe a wife in her home, are all strictly monogamous (cf. for example Proverbs 5: 15-19; Ecclesiastes 9: 9). The image of a monogamous

1 R.K. Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament (Michigan, 1975), pp. 862-864, see also E.M. Yamauchi, 'Cultic Prostitution' in H.A. Hoffner (ed.), Orient and Occident (Neukirchen-Vluy, 1973), pp. 218, 219. Also O. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: An Introduction, translated by P.R. Ackroyd (Oxford, 1974), p. 391; S.R. Driver, An Introduction to the Old Testament (Edinburgh, 1913), ninth edition, p. 303; and B.H. Alford, Old Testament History and Literature (London, 1910), p. 102.

2 R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 25.

3 Ibid.

4 The Position of Woman in Judaism (London, 1966), p. 27.

marriage is always present in the mind of the prophets who thought of Israel as the one wife chosen by the one God (cf. Hosea 2: 4; Jeremiah 2: 2). The book of Ezekiel can be said to develop this particular metaphor into a complete allegory (Chapter 16). It is true that the same prophet compares God's dealings with Samaria and Jerusalem to a marriage with two sisters (Ezekiel 23; cf. also Jeremiah 3: 6-11), but this is merely to adapt the allegory of Chapter 16 to the historical conditions which prevailed after the Division of the Kingdom.

It is apparent that in a study of marriage in Ancient Israel several important questions are raised:

1 Was the wife considered as her husband's property?

The Decalogue includes a wife amongst a man's possessions (Exodus 20: 17). The husband is called the ba'al or master of his wife and she is the possession of her ba'al (Genesis 20: 3).

Certainly the Mishnah regards a wife as being 'acquired' by her husband.

By three means is the woman acquired ... she is acquired by money or by writ or by intercourse.¹

Furthermore, the Talmud explains why betrothal should be called acquisition:

... Why does he [the Tanna] state here, 'A Woman is Acquired', whilst elsewhere he teaches 'A man may betroth' [etc.] - Because he wishes to state 'Money'; and how do we know that money effects betrothal? By deriving the meaning of 'taking' from the field of Ephron: Here it is written, If any man take a wife; whilst there it is written, I will give thee money for the field: take it of me. Moreover, 'taking' is designated acquisition for it is written the field which Abraham acquired.²

1 Kiddushin 1:1 in The Mishnah, translated by H. Danby (London, 1933), p. 321.

2 Kiddushin (2a).

Scholars have suggested that the Israelites practised a form of 'marriage purchase'.¹ This might be confirmed not only by the vocabulary employed but partly by the story of Rachel and Leah who complained:

Are we not counted of him strangers? For he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. (Genesis 31: 15).

This purchase theory is given ample support by the references to the custom of the mohar. The mohar was a sum of money which the prospective husband was expected to pay to the girl's father. The word only occurs three times in the Bible (Genesis 34: 12; Exodus 22: 16; I Samuel 18: 25). The amount was fixed by the girl's father and this was influenced by the financial and social position of the girl's family (I Samuel 18: 23).

The obligation to pay a sum of money, or its equivalent to the girl's father, gives the Israelite marriage the outward appearance of a purchase. But in fact it could be regarded as a form of compensation to the family of the bride and the law saw this as a different consideration. The future husband acquired a right over the woman, but, as R.H. Kennett argues, she was not bought or sold.

2 At what age were girls married?

The Bible gives no information about this. Certainly the practice of marrying the eldest was not universal (cf. Genesis 29: 26). Both girls and boys were married very young. The books of Kings usually give the age of each king of Judah at his succession followed

1 R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 26, and O.J. Baab, 'Marriage', in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 3, p. 283.

by the length of his reign and the age of his son (normally the eldest) who succeeded him. R. Patai¹ has calculated that Jehoichin married at sixteen and Amos and Josiah at fourteen. However these figures are not entirely reliable. The age to marry proved an important point for subsequent generations. According to the Mishnah eighteen was the age to marry.² The Talmud presents a number of views on this question, namely:

(a) Raba and also the school of Rabbi Ishmael taught that:

Until the age of twenty, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and waits. When will he take a wife?
As soon as one attains twenty and has not married,
He exclaims, 'Blasted be his bones'.³

(b) Raba said to R. Nathan b. Ammi:

Whilst your hand is yet upon your son's neck /marry him/,
viz., between sixteen and twenty two.⁴

(c) Rabbi Hasida attributed his intellectual superiority over his colleagues to the fact that he had married at the age of sixteen.⁵

As far as the girl was concerned, puberty was deemed the appropriate age for marriage⁶ and these factors help to explain the fact that marriage arrangements remained the province of parental responsibility. Thus, for example, Abraham sent his servant to choose a wife for Isaac and the servant arranged the contract with

1 R. Patai, Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East (New York, 1959), p. 51.

2 Abot (5: 21).

3 Kiddushin (29b).

4 Kiddushin (30a).

5 Kiddushin (29b-30a).

6 So Joshua ben Levi: "If your daughter has attained puberty, free your slave and give her to him". See Pesahim (113a).

Rebekah's ~~brother~~, Laban (Genesis 24: 33-35).

3 Was there any evidence of freedom of choice?

One can trace three distinct ways in which the wishes of young people were taken into account regarding their marriage partner.

- (a) at times father and son are portrayed as having a dialogue on the subject. Samson asked his parents to grant his wish when he fell in love with a Philistine woman (Judges 14: 2-3).
- (b) Sometimes the young man is seen as taking the initiative in establishing a love match. Genesis 34: 4 shows that he could make his preferences known or take his own decision without consulting his parents (Genesis 26: 34-35).
- (c) There is no doubt that in early tradition a woman had a comparatively ample amount of freedom. R. de Vaux¹ points out that young girls were not secluded and veiled. They engaged in outdoor work which involved looking after the sheep (Genesis 29: 6), drawing water (Genesis 24: 13). They could talk to men without embarrassment (Genesis 24: 15-21; 29: 11-12). The veiling of women and sexual seclusion came later.

4 Was marriage confined to the tribal unit?

The taking of a woman from one's own tribe was a relic of tribal life but a principle which was not applied constantly. Samson's father was saddened because his son did not choose a wife from his own clan (Judges 14: 3).² Esau married two Hittite women (Genesis 26: 34),

1 Op. cit., p. 30.

2 Ibid., pp. 30-31.

Joseph an Egyptian (Genesis 41: 45) and Moses a Midianite (Exodus 2: 21). David had a Calebite and an Aramean amongst his wives (II Samuel 3: 3). Mixed marriages, made by kings for political reasons, became common amongst subjects after the Conquest. They were a challenge to the religious purity of Israel and as such forbidden by law (Exodus 34: 15-16; Deuteronomy 7: 3-4).

Close marriages in the family, tantamount to incest in today's legal parlance, were forbidden. Leviticus 18: 6 forbids one to unite with "the flesh of one's body". Marriage with one's half-sister was permitted in the Patriarchal age (Genesis 20: 12) but forbidden by the laws of Leviticus (18: 11; 20: 17) - as is marriage between a nephew and aunt (Leviticus 18: 12-13; 20: 19).¹

Engagement, or betrothal, is a promise of marriage made some time before the celebration of the wedding. The custom existed in Israel, and Hebrew has a special word for it, 'Erusin', which occurs eleven times in the Bible.

The historical books provide little information. The engagements of Isaac and Jacob are rather peculiar. Although Rebekah was promised to Isaac in Mesopotamia, the wedding took place only when she joined him in Canaan (Genesis 24: 67); Jacob waited seven years before marrying, but he had a special contract with Laban (Genesis 29: 15-21). The story of David and Saul's two daughters is clearer. Merab had been

¹ L.M. Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), pp. 22, 223, 232, 233, 234, 235. Also, R. de Vaux, op. cit., pp. 31, 32, and The Jewish Encyclopaedia, vol. 8, p. 347.

promised to him, but when the time came she was given to another man (I Samuel 18: 17-19). Legal texts showed, however, that engagement was a recognized custom with judicial ramifications. According to Deuteronomy 20: 7, a man who is engaged though not yet married to a girl, is excused from going to war. Deuteronomy 22: 23-27 makes provision for a case in which a betrothed virgin is violated by a man other than her fiancé. If the crime was committed in a town, the girl is stoned along with her seducer, because she should have cried for help; if she was assaulted in the country, only the man is put to death, because the woman might have cried out without being heard.

(i) Divorce

The man alone had the right to divorce his wife. The reason for this is given in Deuteronomy 24: 1 "because he hath found some uncleanness in her". The expression is very vague and a great deal of debate took place over the phrase's meaning during the Rabbinical age. The right wing school of Shammai admitted only adultery and misconduct as grounds for divorce. The more radical school of Hillel would accept any reason, however trivial such as the charge that "she spoiled a dish for him". Rabbi Akiba adds, on the basis of Deuteronomy 24: 1 "Even if he found another fairer than she".¹

It was not until the 11th century A.D. that the absolute right of the husband to divorce his wife at will was formally abolished.² The

1 Gittin (9: 10).

2 R. Yaron, 'The Restoration of Marriage' in The Journal of Jewish Studies (Oxford, 1966), vol. 17, p. 1, and see A. Gulak, Yeshodei ha-mishpat ha-ivri, (Berlin, 1922), sefer shlishi, p. 25. See also The Jewish Encyclopaedia, vol. 4, p. 624.

form of divorce was simple: the husband made out a declaration contradicting that which had sealed the marriage contract. The husband had to write a "Bill of Divorce" (Deuteronomy 24: 1, 3; Isaiah 50: 1; Jeremiah 3: 8) which allowed the woman to remarry (Deuteronomy 24: 2).¹

The law laid few restrictions on a husband's rights. A man who falsely accused his wife of not being a virgin when he married her could never divorce her (Deuteronomy 22: 13-19), nor could a man who had been compelled to marry a girl he had violated (Deuteronomy 22: 28-29).²

(ii) Levirate Marriage (Heb. yibbum).

This is the Biblical injunction to marry the widow of one's brother who died without offspring, as stated in Deuteronomy (25: 5-6):

If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel.

The story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) indicates that the practice of levirate marriage preceded the Mosaic Law and was markedly different from it. In the case of the levirate marriage the obligation seems to have lain on the deceased husband's father (Genesis 38: 26) and there is no mentioning of a release by way of halizah

1 R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 35. See also P. Dykan, dinei misguin ve-gerushin (Tel-Aviv, 1956), pp. 289-90, and see C.M. Breyfogle, op. cit., p. 113.

2 R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 35.

(drawing off the right shoe of the brother by the widow of his deceased brother).¹

The obligation of levirate marriage applies even though the widow has children from any previous marriage. The death of the husband provided the sole criterion for subsequent actions and arrangements.² The obligation of Levirate marriage falls upon brothers who have the same father (but not if born only of the same mother) as that of the deceased; all such brothers are liable but preference is given to the oldest who, however, is relieved from the duty if a younger brother volunteers. If the brother refuses to fulfil the obligation, or the widow refuses to marry her brother-in-law, or where the levirate marriage may be inadvisable on other grounds, the rite of halizah is performed instead. Only if the widow is incapable of bearing children is she freed entirely from both of these alternatives. halizah must take place before a court of five people and consists of:

- (a) a reading by the widow of the relevant Biblical verses (Deuteronomy 27: 7-10).
- (b) drawing off the right shoe of the brother as a sign of contempt and a rebuke for one who brings disgrace upon himself by shirking the duty of perpetuating the name of his brother.
- (c) After the halizah has been performed the widow is free to marry whomever she chooses.

1 R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 37, and see I.I. Mattuck, 'The Levirate Marriage in Jewish Law', in Studies in Jewish Literature (Berlin, 1913), p. 210; L.M. Epstein, op. cit., pp. 78, 122; and A. Gulak, op. cit., p. 30.

2 B. Schereschewsky, dinei mishpahah (Jerusalem 1967), pp. 228-29. See also P. Dykan, op. cit., pp. 152-53.

(iii) Widowhood

The Hebrew term almanah is usually translated as "widow" but its meaning has a dual function. As well as meaning the wife of a deceased husband it also refers to a once-married woman who lacks financial support and therefore needs special legal protection. Many widows would fall into the latter category because of their husband's death.¹

The law provides the almanah with an appropriate degree of legal protection. Thus Deuteronomy 24: 17:

Thou shalt not prevent the judgement of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge.

A widow from a valid marriage is entitled to maintenance out of her deceased husband's estate (Ket. 47). This obligation is clearly understood at the time of marriage as one of the terms of Ketubbah. The Talmud states that the obligation to maintain one's wife from one's Estate arises from Exodus 21: 10²

... her food, her raiment and her duty of marriage shall he not diminish.

This right is so firmly established that a husband's last-minute renegeing on his obligation cannot be implemented. (Maimonides 19: 13 follows Ket. 68b.) Neither could the husband allocate just a portion of his estate to the wife.

1 J.M. Powis Smith, The Origin and History of Hebrew Law, (Chicago, 1960), new impression, pp. 233-34. See 'Widow' in Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 16, col. 488, and see 'Widow' in The Jewish Encyclopaedia, vol. 12, p. 514.

2 Ketubbot (47b) and see 'Widow' in Encyclopaedia Talmudica (Jerusalem, 1974), vol. 2, col. 291.

The practice of Ketubbah varied in essence from area to area. In Judah the heirs could pay the widow Ketubbah in order to cease her maintenance. However, in Jerusalem and Galilee the Ketubbah stated: "You shall live in my house and be maintained out of my estate as long as you remain a widow in my house" (Ket. 4: 12).

There are two circumstances in which the widow loses her right to maintenance:

- (a) If she claims her Ketubbah judicially, or, if she sells, pledges or mortgages it (Ket. 54a).
- (b) If she becomes betrothed she loses her maintenance, because a betrothed woman is a married one and, ipso facto, not a widow. However the betrothal must consist of more than a mere verbal agreement and must include the date of marriage and a list of the penalties incurred for retraction.

The costs that maintenance covered included:

- 1 Medical costs.
- 2 Her poll tax and other taxes.
- 3 Costs for fulfilling precepts of a personal nature, such as the hanukkah¹ lights and the four cups of wine (drunk at the Seder).²
- 4 Clothing, general furnishing and bedding.
- 5 She is entitled to the home she occupied in her husband's lifetime.

1 Hanukkah (dedication): an annual eight-day festival commencing on the 25th day of Kislev.

2 Order of Service and Worship for Passover eve.

The level of support she can expect must reflect, in the case of her husband's income being bigger than her own, the level of the former. Neither must she be made poorer if her husband was of lower status and wealth than her "because she is to participate in the rise of her husband but not in his descent"¹ (Ket. 61a).

According to the Talmudic law a widow receives maintenance only from property which cannot be moved (Ket. 69b). However, with the development of more fluid forms of occupation and the consequent decline of landowning amongst Jews, creditors did begin to rely on the moveable property of the debtors for repayment. Certainly the geonim² ruled that the moveable property of the husband's estate should be attached to the widow's right. It had also been customary since the time of the Middle Ages, to include in every Ketubbah arrangement a provision rendering the husband's moveable property as part and parcel of the woman's legacy.³

d The role of Women in Religious Celebration

Rabbinic Law did not regard the woman as competent to carry out offices outside the home. The Midrash states: "The Woman has no wisdom but in the distaff".⁴ Therefore such responsibilities as monarchy, guardianship, judicial functions, were considered outside the

1 B. Schereschewsky, op. cit., p. 248.

2 Gaon (Pl. geonim) refers to the formal title of the heads of academies of Sura and Pumbedita in Babylonia. It was also used in later periods by the heads of academies in Baghdad, Damascus and Egypt.

3 Schereschewsky, op. cit., p. 241.

4 Mid. R. Numb (9: 48).

scope of female activity (Maimonides Yad Hazakah Melakhim 1: 6).¹
 Thus the woman's participation in cultic life was reduced to a secondary role. The people whom Moses consecrated at Mount Sinai were all men and were instructed not to have sexual relations with women for a limited time (Exodus 19: 7-15). Priesthood was a male profession. In Deuteronomy (16: 16) only men were commanded to ^{go on pilgrimage or} the following religious festivals: Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles.²

However the Old Testament does indicate certain times when women played some part in cultic activity. Exodus 35: 22-29 records that women contributed to the Feast of Tabernacles. When David brought the ark to Jerusalem women cried out in joy during the Procession - an interesting parallel to their role at times of family mourning (II Samuel 6: 19). Young girls with tambourines played with male musicians on festive occasions. (Psalms 68: 26.)³

The concept of ritual purity was indigenous to Jewish religious life. P. Tribble⁴ points out that the most fundamental rule was that all bodily discharges, albeit from men or women, were unclean. Uncleanness was obviously more of a feminine than a masculine phenomenon.

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- 1 See H. Rambani, 'ha-ishah ba-halakhah', in Meassef (Tel-Aviv, 1966), vol. 5/6, p. 673.
- 2 O.J. Baab, op. cit., p. 866; and see 'Woman' in Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 16, col. 625.
- 3 C.M. Breyfogle, 'The Religious Status of Woman in the Old Testament', in The Biblical World, vol. 35, pp. 414-15.
- 4 P. Tribble, 'Woman in the Old Testament', in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 5, (supplementary volume) p. 964.

During the menstrual cycle a woman was regarded as unclean and for seven days thereafter (Leviticus 15: 1ff). When a child was born the mother was regarded as unclean for seven days and she was forbidden to touch consecrated objects or visit a sanctuary for the next thirty-three days. The man's discharge of semen was regarded as rendering him unclean until the evening.

e Attitudes to Women

It cannot be stated that the Old Testament presents any uniform set of attitudes towards women. The Old Testament covered a period of over a thousand years, and obviously commentators were considerably influenced by the social, economic and religious circumstances of the day. The same can be said of post-biblical rabbinic literature. In addition it can be argued that the masculine view of women is often dictated by personal temperament. However, the following points can be made:

- (a) The Bible suggests that although monogamy was the ideal form of marriage, polygamy was legally sanctioned (Deuteronomy 21: 15-17). The husband can divorce his wife but not vice versa.
- (b) Rabbinic literature presents a variety of attitudes. The wording of the Benediction recited each day conveys the notion of a man who praises God for not having made him a woman.¹ C. Montefiore states:

No amount of modern apologetic, endlessly poured forth, can alter the fact that the Rabbinic attitude towards women was very different from our own. No amount of apologetic can get over the implication of the daily blessing, which orthodox Judaism has still lacked the courage to remove from its official prayer book.²

1 The Authorised Daily Prayer Book (London, 1935), 15th Edition, p. 6.

2 C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology (London, 1938), p. 507.

- (c) Women were generally exempted from studying the Torah and as a result few women were learned.¹ It may be that this provided the oft-expressed Rabbinic view that women were greedy, gossips, lazy and jealous; women were generally considered to be unreliable.² (Shab. 33b.)
- (d) Women were often feared as a source of temptation. It was said that a woman's voice provides as much sexual enticement as her hair and legs. (Ber. 24a.) However a woman is also regarded as a sensitive creature, prone to tears and therefore men should act accordingly.
- (e) In the Middle Ages, thinkers like Maimonides followed Rabbinic instructions on the importance of the man caring for his wife and to generally treat women with kindness and compassion.

Significance of the Sources for 19th Century Russia

Most problems alluded to in this chapter were the concern of learned men rather than the ordinary Jew living in the Pale of Settlement. However traditional attitudes die hard. This very fact explains the perpetuation of orthodox values within the Galut. Jewish attitudes - illustrated in the popular literature of the time - had to reflect the consciousness of the community and its attitudes, both positive and negative, towards its female members.

1 N. Drazin, History of Jewish Education (Baltimore, 1940), p. 130.

2 Zvi Chan, The Philosophy of Judaism (New York, 1974), p. 101.

CHAPTER TWO

THE JEWISH WOMAN IN 19th CENTURY EASTERN EUROPE

a Social Status

O thou, Jewish Woman, who knows thy life! Unnoticed thou
 interest the world, unnoticed thou departest from it.¹

These opening lines of J.L Gordon's poem Kozo Shel yod (The Dot on the I) reflect the view postulated by Rabbi D. Swiren that "the longer the Jews lived among the nations the more was the Jewish woman pushed to the background".² Her life was one of daily drudgery and social constraints.

It would be fair to state that the Jewish communities, by and large, kept faithful to Rabbinic teachings and regarded women as inferior to men. Indeed the Kahal³ was a paternalistic society which excluded women from voting in elections. Women's organisations, according to I. Levitats⁴ did not enjoy the general characteristic of a hevrah⁵ nor were they admitted to a hevrah as being of equal status to men. Women did not take part in the hevrah's social life, or study within the group, or join with men to pray.

1 See N. Slouschz, The Renaissance of Hebrew Literature (1743-1885), trans. from the French (Philadelphia, 1909), pp. 189-90.

2 Rabbi D.W. Swiren, Our Life is Like That (New York, 1931), p. 95.

3 Jewish Settlements in the Middle Ages created their own communities and became administratively responsible for taxation, education and charity.

4 I. Levitats, The Jewish Community in Russia, 1772-1844 (New York, 1970), p. 126.

5 Society or association.

However the woman's role should not be stated in purely negative terms. Rabbinic customs were maintained inasmuch that women performed crucial functions in the role of mourning. Most burial societies had women assistants who prepared bodies for burial.

Women also had important charitable functions. In Libava in Russia for instance women organised a society for providing the poor with medical care called bikkur holim (visiting the sick). This was, in Rabbinic thought, an extremely important matter. It had the practical effect in social terms of making women emerge from the home's seclusion and provided an outlet for female social activity.¹

Lew² cites a statute from one Jewish community in Poland which read:

Thus shall the pious women act: they shall collect money for charitable purposes, for dowering the bride, for poor women in confinement etc.

Levitats makes the point that in Russian Jewish communities, the woman who was dedicated to charitable works was regarded as a saint. Legends were woven around her life and became sanctified in Jewish tradition. The role was of such significance to some communities that:

A woman who witnessed her daughter libel another woman and did not stop her was deprived of the privilege of taking up collections for charity in the Synagogue or elsewhere.³

Obviously the great social and economic difficulties which the indigenous 19th century Russo-Jewish population felt made the woman's role essential. It was, in any event, the only source of philanthropy

1 I. Levitats, op. cit., p. 113.

2 Rev. M.S. Lew, The Jews of Poland (London, 1944), p. 122.

3 I. Levitats, op. cit., p. 212.

available.

However M. Levin¹ points out that the effectiveness of Jewish charitable work proved to be a matter for both theological and social conjecture. The Maskilim², in common with many people in the Victorian age, viewed charity with a certain reserve, claiming that it corrupted people and that therefore the really deserving within society were neglected. Some Maskilim suggested that wealthy Jews should establish factories where poor Jews could be productive.

Writing at the turn of the century, F.H.E. Palmer made certain observations about the position of Jewish women within Russian society. He records that amongst working class Jewish families in the country, women were not allowed to eat at the table with men. He also observed that a corollary to the appalling conditions in which nineteenth century Jews lived, was the fact that prostitutes were mainly recruited from amongst Jewish women in large Russian towns. Such a viewpoint may well have been influenced by the Jewish communities in the West at the turn of the century. Palmer concludes unconvincingly that such a phenomenon was the product of Jewish contempt for women which was especially prevalent amongst the lower classes.³

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- 1 M. Levin, erkhei hevrah ve-khalkalah ba-idiologia shel tekufat ha-haskalah (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 53.
 - 2 Maskilim (plural of Maskil, enlightened) is a term given to the adherents of Haskalah (Enlightenment). This movement started in the last quarter of the 18th century among West European Jews and later spread among East European Jews. The Maskilim endeavoured to disseminate European culture among the Jews of the ghetto. See S. Dubnov, The Jews in Russia and Poland (trans. from the Russian by I. Friedlaender) (New York, 1975), vol. 2, p. 125.
 - 3 F.H.E. Palmer, Russian Life in Town and Country (London, 1901), p. 128.

Palmer's conclusions lack credibility and in particular beg one simple question: whether external or internal factors mostly influenced the lives and attitudes of lower class Jewish females. It is likely that, given the orthodox nature of Eastern European Jewry, the woman's role in the house would have imposed sufficient demands on her time and energy - and it may well be that the Jewish emphasis on the family, with its concomitant results in the number of children produced, may have prejudiced a Western mind.

Several sources indicate modes of dress amongst female members of the Community. Palmer¹ records that Jewish women like their men avoided wearing garments made out of the rough materials worn by the peasantry. They wore dresses made of flimsier material, designed, according to Palmer, to ape the styles of higher classes. Bonar and MacCheyne² portray Eastern European Jewesses in fairly regal terms:

The fondness of the daughters of Zion for a fine head-dress which called forth the indignant warnings of Isaiah³ still lingers in the hearts of the Jewesses at Brody. They wear a black velvet coronet adorned with strings of precious stones or imitation pearls; and though this piece of finery costs several pounds, yet so devotedly attached are they to their 'round fires like the moon', that scarcely can an old woman be found seated at her stall who does not wear one, as if they were queens even in their captivity.

There is some evidence to suggest that there were certain Kahal provisions for the well-being of women. In their secluded section of the synagogue the women had a zogerke who led the illiterate women in prayer and weeping. In terms of moral protection, any girl who had lost her technical virginity either through illness or an accident, had the case recorded in the minutes of the Kahal or of an association,

1 F.H.E.Palmer, op. cit., p. 127.

2 A.A. Bonar and R.M. MacCheyne, A Mission of Inquiry to the Jews (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 452.

3 Isaiah, 3: 16-17.

which established the fact of the loss and the circumstances that surrounded it.¹

b Women in Hasidic Circles

It has often been the contention of scholars² that the hasidic woman was exclusively concerned with the kitchen, nursery and family. However, the fact is that the ^{hasidic woman} had important functions to fulfil both in her role as follower and leader.³ Rabinowicz argues that her position was nearly equal to that of her male partner. One can find evidence in the family of Rabbi Israel⁴ the founder of the Hasidic movement. He constantly spoke in praise of his wife and refused to re-marry when she died.

Heaven has departed with her. I thought that a storm would sweep me up to Heaven like the prophet Elijah, but now that I am only half a body, that is no longer possible.⁵

1 J. Levitats, op. cit., pp. 245-56.

2 See H.M. Rabinowicz, The World of Hasidim (London, 1970), p. 202.

3 Ibid.

4 Israel Ben Ba'al Shem Tov (known by the initial Besht = Ba'al Shem Tov) (1700-1760), the founder and the first leader of Hasidism in Eastern Europe. He was born in Okop, a small town in Podolia in the south east of Poland. Through oral traditions handed down by his pupils and through legendary tales about his life and behaviour, he became Hasidism's first teacher and its exemplary saint. See S. Dubnov, toldot ha-hasidut (Tel-Aviv, 1974/75), pp. 41-76; and D. Ben-Amos and J.R. Mintz (trans. and ed.) In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov (Bloomington/London, 1970) /Shivhei ha Besht/ passim. See also Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 9, col. 1049.

5 H.M. Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 202.

J.S. Minkin¹ speaks of Adel, the daughter of Ba'al Shem Tov, who accompanied Rabbi Israel on many of his journeys and enjoyed a special reputation in Hasidic circles, being regarded as an extremely pious woman. Her daughter, Feige, was said to have been endowed with a "divine spirit" which, according to both Rabinowicz² and Minkin³ had considerable influence on Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav⁴ whose father, Rabbi Simcha was ordinary and undistinguished.⁵

Other sources mention Perele, the daughter of Rabbi Israel of Kozienice and the wife of Rabbi Ezra Zelig Shapira, Rabbi of Magnuszew. Leading a life of poverty, fasting every Monday and Thursday, she is spoken of in terms of a saint who would receive petitions from her followers. She would distribute money among the needy. One of the founders of the Hasidic movement in Galicia⁶ said of her "The Shekhinah rests upon her". Even her own father urged his Hasidim to visit her.

hasidic woman

Another leading *hasidic woman* was Rachel, the daughter of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Opatov.⁷ Her father regarded her as full of holiness, took her on many journeys and consulted her on many matters.

1 J.S. Minkin, The Romance of Hasidim (New York, 1935), p. 345.

2 H.M. Rabinowicz, ibid., p. 202.

3 J.S. Minkin, ibid., p. 345.

4 Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1811). Hasidic Zaddik in Podolia and the Ukraine and a controversial figure in the theological debate throughout his life. Regarded by many as a leading mystic. A. Green, Tormented Master (Alabama, 1979), passim; and Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 12, col. 782.

5 H.M. Rabinowicz, ibid., and J.S. Minkin, ibid.

6 Rabbi Elimelech of Lyhansk (1717-1787). A great traveller who identified his wanderings with the principle of nedudei galut (wanderings of exile): their travels symbolised their identification with the wanderings of the Shekhinah (Divine Presence).

7 Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (died 1825) "The Rabbi of Opatov" (Apta). A strong opponent of the Maskilim whom he regarded as spreading heretical ideas amongst Russian Jews.

Most Hasidim treated her with the same veneration that they directed to her father.

It could be argued that the most famous ^{hasidic woman} was Hannah Rachel, the only child of Monesh Werbermacher, known as the "Maid of Ludmir". She enjoyed a considerable standing amongst the Hasidim. Rabinowicz writes of her in extremely glowing terms: his allusion to the fact that she conducted herself like a Zaddik with a Synagogue following all of her own, amounts to considerable praise. From the great fortune that she inherited from her father she build a synagogue and a heder adjacent to it.¹

All the figures alluded to in this chapter were related to distinguished hasidic figures in their own right. However women also played a notable role amongst poorer Hasidic families. One such was Yente, the daughter of a working class Jew from Galicia and a wife of Jonah Spradlaver, one of the followers of the Ba'al Shem Tov. She was entitled the "prophetess" by the leading Rabbi when her husband came to him complaining about her strange behaviour.²

The Zaddik differed considerably from the traditional Rabbi because women were encouraged to come to his court. Like their male partners the ^{hasidic women} wrote the Kvitl³ and paid the pidyon (redemption

1 Rabinowicz, op. cit., pp. 205-06, and J.S. Minkin, op. cit., p. 345. See also S. Ashkenazi, ha-ishah be-aspaklaryat ha-yahadut (Tel-Aviv, 1953-55), p. 59.

2 S. Ashkenazi, op. cit., p. 58, and H.M. Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 203.

3 A written account of the hasid's problems which he submitted to his Zaddik, usually accompanied with a monetary contribution known as pidyon (abbreviation for pidyon nefesh) "redemption of the soul". See H.M. Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 187.

money). This may be one of the reasons why Hasidism attracted women who were amongst the movement's more enthusiastic followers; often women converted their husbands to Hasidism.¹

Such women were obviously exceptions and one must modify the picture with the observation that the majority of ^{hasidic women} were illiterate because they devoted themselves entirely to looking after their families whilst their husbands studied.² The tradition of charismatic women within Hasidism belongs to the movement's embryonic stage, before its rules and traditions had been firmly established. Authority remained in the hands of men, the Zaddik's leadership was hereditary in nature, his son being regarded as holy from the time he was in his mother's womb.³

It is worth mentioning in passing that two classical works on the History of Hasidism fail to give women any prominence: one by Yizhak Raphael⁴ deals with the lives and works of one hundred Hasidic Rabbis, and the second by Yizhak Alfasi⁵ deals with the two branches of the hasidic dynasty of the Hager family in Kosov and Vizhnitz.

In practice, Hasidic customs often lowered the status of women. A central precept of Hasidic doctrine was the teaching that woman was

1 J.S. Minkin, op. cit., pp. 345-46, and H.M. Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 202.

2 So Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 207.

3 See especially S.A. Horodezky, Leaders of Hassidism (translated by M. Horodezky-Magasanik) (London, 1928), pp. 126-27.

4 יִזְחָק רַפְּהֵל Raphael, Sefer-ha-ḥasidut: me'ah zaddikim ukhtavim (Tel-Aviv, Second Edition, 1955), passim.

5 Yizhak Alfasi, Tiferet she-be-malkhut: beit kosov-vizhnitz (Tel-Aviv, 1967), passim.

taken, in the first instance, from the man's rib; she had been a source of sexual enticement which made a rigid demarcation between man and wife so necessary.¹

Thus, given that - as in many other religious groups - certain women enjoyed a high religious status, the social position of Jewish women in Eastern Europe was, in the main, one of bondage to the family and domestic commitment. Such a phenomenon can be accounted for in part by the great effect that the Rabbinic tradition had on the lives and thoughts of Eastern European Jewry.

c The Economic Role of Women

The earning of livelihood is sexless and the large majority of women, even among the Sheyneh, participate in some gainful occupation if they do not carry the chief burden of support.²

This picture contrasts sharply with the picture of hasidic women which Rabinowicz presents as supporting their husbands materially.³ Charlotte Baum⁴ has argued that Jewish historians have tended to elevate the role of women in home-making and underestimate their participation in economic pursuits.

Palmer argued that a divergence exists between practices in small rural centres and larger towns like Vilna. In the case of the former

1 Dr. I.M. Biderman, Mayer Balban: Historian of Polish Jewry (New York, 1976), p. 174.

2 M. Zborowski and E. Herzog, Life is with People (New York, 1974), p. 131.

3 H.M. Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 207.

4 C. Baum, 'What Made Yetta Work', in The Jewish Woman (edited and compiled by Liz Kolturn) (New York, 1971), pp. 34-35.

men showed greater enthusiasm for matters concerning industry and trade. The communities in larger towns showed a greater degree of flexibility and, apparently, economic sophistication. Certainly this created a flexibility of movement and a certain demographic freedom which would have been missing in the countryside.¹

This does not fit in with the tenets of orthodoxy and since women were not allowed to leave the Pale of Settlement it could be argued that community ties were not so strong in urbanised areas as might be supposed. R. Stites² points to the fact that women had to resort to fictitious marriages in order to leave the Pale. The sources might suggest greater economic participation by women as the century progressed. Certainly the 1780s saw male peddlars roaming the streets while the women stayed at home.³ Other sources refer to women running their own businesses later in the century. Lew⁴ points to a woman who was the proprietress of a printing establishment in Lublin. Others provided accommodation for Yeshivah students. E.Z.H. Lewin-Epstein wrote in his memoirs that he lodged in the house of a tailor's wife in Volozhin for one rouble and twelve kopeks a week. He described his landlady and the rest of the women in the town thus:

My landlady was a righteous woman and so were the rest of the women. They did not mind troubling themselves provided that they could buy everything at a low price. One example: my landlady used to go out of the town, to meet the vendors, who bring food to the market and buy 'fresh' eggs from them. On her return she used to select the large eggs for her 'young men'

1 F.H.E. Palmer, op. cit., p. 127.

2 R. Stites, The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia (Princeton, 1978), pp. 133, 136.

3 A. Frank, ha-'ironim ve-ha-yehudim be-polin (Warsaw, 1921), p. 85.

4 Lew, op. cit., p. 123.

(in addition to me she had three more) and sell the small ones in the market.¹

The ^{hasidic women} are said to have engaged in various jobs. Among them we find a vendor of cloth,² a sugar-merchant, an estate-supervisor.³ This was the product of their role in hasidic circles.

d Marriage

Marriage was an extremely important institution for Eastern European Jewry at this time, particularly as parents counted it as a blessing to live and see their grandchildren.⁴

Jewish marriage customs often resulted in a clash with the external authorities who tried to persuade Jews to get rid of some of their marriage customs. In Czarist Russia under the 1835 Law, marriage was prohibited for boys under 18 and girls under 16, but it was largely ignored.⁵ A pupil in the heder or Talmudic academy often became a husband and father whilst pursuing his studies. The hakhnasat kallah ("bringing in the bride") societies provided poor brides with dowries and trousseaus and poor grooms with suitable clothes. In general the societies promoted the marriage of poor girls. Such evidence indicates the high esteem which the institution of marriage enjoyed.

1 E.Z.H. Lewin-Epstein, zikhronotai (Tel-Aviv, 1932), pp. 28-29.

2 See pp. 15-16.

3 H.M. Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 207.

4 See pp. 12-13.

5 S. Dubnov, History of the Jews (translated from the Russian by M. Spiegel), (New York and London, 1973) vol. 5, pp. 160, 199.

Marriage involved the whole family rather than just the participants. Families were always cautious about the other family involved. Equal financial and social status was an important consideration - a particular yardstick of 'suitability' being the number of rabbis a family had produced. The financial standing of the girl's father was of particular importance, since according to custom he had to support the couple whilst they lived in his house for an initial period.¹ The bride's qualities were judged in terms of her suitability for running a family whilst the husband was to be well-versed in the Torah.²

Such qualities were tested by examination. H. Tarnoviz³ explains in his autobiography that his influential and wealthy future father-in-law brought him an examiner whom he satisfied. However, his father-in-law, being inclined towards the maskilim was not satisfied with an examination simply concerned with Jewish religious matters. Tarnoviz was therefore asked to compose three poems in Hebrew, Russian and German. These poems were passed on to various Maskilim, who considered them as bad and consequently Tarnoviz was rejected. Amongst Jews of the lower orders the most important consideration was the general religious attitude of the family.

Although parents rather than children were instrumental in making

1 Z. Sharfistein, op. cit., pp. 180-81.

2 Ibid.

3 Cited by Z. Sharfistein, op. cit., p. 184.

the choice often the services of the shadkhan¹ (matchmaker) were needed. His work was considered more important than that of the ordinary business broker. The difference in the level of fees which he received illustrated this point - the latter receiving 1% of the business transaction whilst the shadkhan received 2% of the bride's dowry.²

Certain rabbis made much of their role as Shadkhan. Jacob Margolioth, Rabbi of Regensburg (Ratisbon)³ was one such, whilst Jacob Moellin⁴ devoted the whole of his salary as a rabbi to the support of his students and earned his own livelihood from matchmaking.

The role of the Shadkhan and the personality which the profession typified is almost unique in the annals of modern Jewish history. He was the liaison officer who provided the meeting place and helped to 'examine' both respective parties. This required a person who was talkative, cheerful and, most important, could generate confidence in the people involved.⁵

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- 1 The verb Shadakh was used in the Talmud (meshaddekhin) to indicate that the heads of families were making an arrangement for their children's marriage (Shab. 150a). The Shadkhan first appeared in the thirteenth century and his legal status is dealt with briefly by Isaac of Vienna (1180-1250). See I. Abrahams, Jewish Life in the Middle Ages (London, 1932), pp. 186-87 and see H.J. Zimmels, Ashkenazim and Sephardim (London, 1958), p. 175. See also The Jewish Encyclopaedia, vol. 11, pp. 225-26.
 - 2 S.W. Baron, The Jewish Community (Philadelphia, 1942), vol. 2, p. 319; vol. 3, pp. 208-09; and The Jewish Encyclopaedia, ibid.
 - 3 I. Abrahams, op. cit., ibid.
 - 4 Head of the Jewish Communities of Germany, Austria, and Bohemia circa 1360-1427. See I. Abrahams, 'Jewish Ethical Wills' in The Jewish Quarterly Review (London, 1891), p. 480, and see Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 12, col. 210.
 - 5 P. and H. Goodman, The Jewish Marriage Anthology (Philadelphia, 1965), p. 104.

e Education

At the beginning of the period under discussion women were not well educated but the rise of the Haskalah movement was to create a profound change in direction.¹ By the 1830s schools for Jewish girls had begun to spring up. Saul Perl opened a modern school for Jewish girls in 1830 in Vilna. It is, therefore, not surprising that Sir Moses Montefiore was impressed by the well-educated wives of Vilna in the 1840s.² Tarnopol praised highly the women of Odessa in the 1860s and writes of their general cultural confidence and the ease with which they articulated their points of view in several European languages.³

Greater educational opportunity brought with it a more active role within society. In Odessa in 1872 Jewish women asked for permission to organize a society for the purpose of establishing schools to teach poor Jewish girls handicrafts.⁴

However, internal and external factors acted as obstacles, whilst the general Jewish milieu tended to be against such developments. The Russian authorities did not restrict Jewish entry to their own schools but there was a system of checks and balances conducted at the local level by the anti-Semitic authorities of various institutions.⁵

1 Rev. M.S. Lew, op. cit., p. 121. See F.H.E. Palmer, op. cit., p. 128 and see J.S. Raisin, The Haskalah Movement in Russia (Philadelphia, 1913), pp. 45-46.

2 Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore, ed. Dr. L. Loewe (London, 1890), vol. 1, p. 345.

3 J.S. Raisin, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

4 Ibid., p. 253.

5 S. Dubnov, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland (trans. from the Russian by I. Friedlaender), (New York, 1975) pp. 30-31.

In the case of Higher Education, Jewish girls were subjected to the same restrictions as the boys. Pedagogic courses in St. Petersburg limited the admission of Jewesses to 5%. The Constitution of the Medical Institute for Women, founded in 1895, provided at first for the exclusion of Jewesses. In 1897 entry was facilitated by a strict quota of 3%.¹

Certainly enlightenment created tensions between the study of Torah and secular academic considerations. But this was more true of men than women. The daughters of rich families were the first to learn the language of their neighbours and to acquire the social graces necessary for successful assimilation.²

f The Emancipation of Women

Much has been written about the effects of emancipation on European Jewry. At the time of Moses Mendelssohn the real thrust to total assimilation was provided by Jewesses who played such a large part within the salon society of Berlin.³

However in Eastern Europe the emancipation of women came much later. It began with Lilienthal's reform of the Jewish school system. In 1841 the Czarist Commission and the Haskalah paved the way for a revolution in women's education and women then began to be imbued by

1 Ibid.

2 J. Katz, Out of the Ghetto (Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 84.

3 S. A. Wohlgenuth, 'The Jewish Woman in Eastern Europe', (trans. by I.S. Adlerblum) in The Jewish Woman, ed. by L. Jung (New York, 1934), pp. 399-400.

the revolutionary spirit of the age. One Jewish girl of 16 led a revolutionary mob in St. Petersburg urging for "land and liberty".¹

The participation of Jewish women in the labour movement in Russia in the 1890s was regarded by many as a threat to the social and religious fabric of Jewish community life.² Middle class daughters played an active part in the rich intellectual/liberal establishment of state universities. It was within the poorer families that notions of educating women to any standard at all was resisted most bitterly. At this social level family tensions were aggravated by girls participating in, for example, political meetings on the Shabbat.³

Some women did not want to see such dramatic breaks in tradition.

Sarah Schenirer wrote:

On one Friday evening a cousin invited me to attend a meeting of the organization called Ruth. I was shocked to see with my own eyes one of the officers lighting candles on the Sabbath. I had known this group set no records in piety but I never imagined they would have publicly violated the Sabbath. The lecture of the evening, distorted and impious, was heard by girls whose hasidic fathers were at that moment studying the Gamara and whose mothers were reading Tseena Urena. There it first occurred to me: if only these girls were in the right environment then things would be different.⁴

The reference to 'Ze'edah U-reenah' is appropriate in this passage. It was written at the end of the 16th century by Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi of Yanov. The book was a paraphrase-translation

1 J.S. Raisin, op. cit., pp. 257-58.

2 See especially E. Mendelssohn, 'The Russian Labour Movement' in Sozialism Yehudi u-tnu'at ha-po'alim ha-yehudit ba-me'ah ha-19', ed. by M. Mishkunski (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 240.

3 H.J. Tobias, The Jewish Bund in Russia (California, 1972), pp. 43-44.

4 S. Schenirer 'Mother of Beth Jacob Schools' in The Golden Tradition, ed. L.S. Davidowicz (New York, 1967), pp. 207-08.

in Yiddish of the Pentateuch, the haftarot, and the Five Scrolls.

It was mainly used by women as reading matter on the Shabbat. Its popularity among women was so great that it became crowned (in the words of Zinberg) with the title of the "women's Torah". The exemption of women by Jewish law from the precept of studying the Torah, resulted in mass illiteracy among them and the minimisation of their religious knowledge. Therefore the appearance of such a book in the vernacular provided a very good opportunity for Jewish women to fill the gap created by Jewish law.¹

Conclusion

Basing custom on Rabbinic teaching and precedent, the woman's role in Russia was one of domestic servitude. They played little part in public life and perhaps their most important function within the community was that of participation in charity. Even the remarkable role of women in the Hasidic movement was soon eroded.

However the sources may not be too fair on those women who supported their families because their husbands were studying full time. Women showed great flexibility and ingenuity in pursuing a well defined socio-economic role.

Towards the end of the century the forces of emancipation were such that greater secularism, political activity and freedom of

1 I. Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature (New York, 1975), vol. 7, pp. 129, 130-33; and R. Patai, The Jewish Mind (New York, 1977), p. 247. See also Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 16, cols. 626, 967.

movement became evident, unleashing that remarkable energy which characterised so many of the Russo-Jewish Immigrants who made their home in the West at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER THREE

ABRAHAM MAPU: LIFE AND WORKS

If one follows the dictum that the literature of any novelist must in the final analysis be influenced both by family and social background, then it is indeed arguable that Mapu holds a central position in that literary genre which typified the lives and fortunes of nineteenth century Russo-Jewry. He was born in 1808, a symbolic date in some respects, inasmuch that historians date the origins of central European nationalism to that year, such an important factor in the development of the Romantic movement.¹

The socio-economic conditions in which Mapu was brought up correlated closely with those enjoyed by the majority of Eastern European Jewry. He was born in a poverty-stricken area of Kovno, but despite an adverse pecuniary environment the demands and traditions of orthodoxy were imposed from a very early age. Abraham's father, a teacher of Talmud, pushed the boy too hard, too soon. Israel Zinberg² suggests that Mapu was learning difficult sections of the Talmud well before mastering simple translation and exegesis of the Pentateuch. The young scholar responded with typical vigour and intelligence and it was considered that by the age of fifteen he was ready to acquaint himself with elements of Kabbalah.

1 D. Thompson, Europe since Napoleon (London, 1973), p. 6.

2 I. Zinberg, op. cit., vol. 11, p. 126; and D. Patterson, Abraham Mapu (London, 1964), pp. 14-15.

Mapu's teenage years saw a steady development in terms of increasing scholastic progress and the next important stage of his life was at the age of seventeen. He married the daughter of a wealthy inhabitant of Kovno and afterwards - as was the custom - moved to the house of his father-in-law where he continued to study. At this time he developed an interest in Hasidism, being influenced very closely by a Rabbi Eliezer. It was at this point that tension increased between himself and his parents, particularly his mother. Certainly the later career of Mapu suggests that the rigid formalism of his education could well have provoked a counter-reaction and certainly the spiritual power and mystique of the Hasidic movement would have struck at the deepest chords within his soul.¹ However his mother was to remove him from the Hasidic circle with which he associated and, as a result, Abraham renewed his old struggle with Kabbalah, being influenced closely by Elijah Ragoler, the Rabbi of Slobodka. Our sources² tell us that on one visit to the Rabbi's house Mapu noticed, accidentally, a copy of the Psalms which contained a Latin translation. He used this as a tool to teaching himself that language, thus demonstrating a talented and intuitive linguistic bent.

A certain collapse in the fortunes of his father-in-law meant that Mapu had to develop his pedagogic as well as his linguistic skills and he was invited to tutor the children of an innkeeper in a neighbouring village. There he became acquainted with a Catholic priest who made the young man familiar with various Latin texts. As a result Mapu's

1 D. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

2 I. Zinberg, op. cit., p. 127; and E. Silberschlag, From Renaissance to Renaissance (New York, 1973), part 1, p. 137.

meagre Latin library was supplemented with various Latin classics and this provided a firm basis for expertise in French, German and Russian at a later date. Such attitudes and leanings were strongly at variance with the prevailing attitudes of Jews in Eastern Europe, namely an animosity towards the learning of foreign languages.¹

The twelve years between 1832 and 1844 were varied and, to some extent, chequered ones. Like so many after him, Mapu was totally dependent upon his income as a teacher and at times had had to leave his family behind in order to facilitate getting employment. Between 1832 and 1834 he was separated from his family, leading an insular existence as tutor to the children of a wealthy merchant in Georgenberg. About 1837 he moved to Rossieny, this time with his family and spent some seven years there as a teacher. Financial hardship forced him to move to Kovno where his wife joined him the next year. However 1846 marked a watershed in Mapu's life when his wife died.²

Mapu's fortunes began then to decline even further. In 1847 he moved to Vilna which, ostensibly, would have provided an ideal social and cultural context for such a man - the city's reputation as the greatest centre of Haskalah in Lithuania was thoroughly deserved.³ He was appointed as tutor to the son of Judah Opatov, a man of wealth and extreme scholarly pretensions, but possessing no formal academic recognition as such. In 1848 Mapu was appointed as a teacher in the

1 D. Patterson, op. cit., p. 16.

2 Ibid., pp. 17-18.

3 A. Shaanan, ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah lizermecha (Tel-Aviv, 1962), vol. 1, p. 223.

government school and Opatov physically assaulted him, as a result of which he was forced to flee. Mapu never forgave this particular action and modelled the ignorant and bombastic Ga'al in "The Hypocrite" upon Opatov.¹

The 1850s were in many ways Mapu's happiest years. As the teaching post at the government school proved permanent, Mapu settled down in Kovno and remarried in 1851. He lived happily married for a decade and it is interesting to note that this proved to be his most fruitful literary period. External recognition for his talents came in 1857 when he earned the personal congratulations of the Russian Minister of Public Institutions.²

1860 began a period of decline in his fortunes. Four factors debilitated his general attitudes and progress. The first was, undoubtedly, overwork - a legacy perhaps of the orthodox phase of his career. Attacks from the Orthodox opponents of Haskalah were always treated personally and seem to have robbed him of the essential optimism of his earlier years. Domestic commitments proved more and more demanding due to his wife's long illness, from which she died in 1863; and the subsequent loneliness of his last years was intensified by a disease of his fingers which obviously made writing an extremely painful task. The Spring of 1867 saw his final illness and between vacillating plans to have an operation and to visit his brother in Paris, he died - appropriately perhaps - on the Day of Atonement.³

1 D. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 18-19; and E. Silberschlag, op. cit., p. 138. See also A. Ben-'Or, toldot ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah (Tel-Aviv, 1963), vol. 1, p. 180.

2 Y. Klausner, historiah shel ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah (2nd edition) (Jerusalem, 1952), vol. 3, p. 308.

3 A. Ben-'Or, op. cit., p. 181; and D. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

a Mapu's Publications

1 Novels

Mapu's place in the history of Modern Hebrew Literature can be said to rest primarily upon his first and most successful novel "The Love of Zion", published in 1853. Written over a period of some twenty years it is a painstaking and considerable monument to his memory. He also wrote three other novels. "The Hypocrite", in five parts, was penned over a considerable period, its original date of publication varying from part to part. The first part was published in Vilna in 1858, the second in 1861 and the third in 1864. A second edition containing all five parts appeared after his death in Warsaw in 1869. The third novel, "The Visionaries", was sent to the censor in 1858 together with the first two parts of "The Hypocrite". The manuscript of "The Visionaries" disappeared and all that remains is a seven-chapter fragment. His fourth and final novel, "The Guilt of Samaria", was published in Vilna in two parts, the first of which appeared in 1865 and the second in 1866.¹

2 Educational Textbooks

A major preoccupation of Mapu's lay in the inefficient educational methods of his day. He produced three textbooks, two of which appeared in Vilna in 1859. These are: Hanokh, Lana'ar and Der Hausfranzose. The former outlined Mapu's method for teaching elementary Hebrew whilst the latter was a textbook for the teaching of French. A third textbook was published in Koenigsberg in 1867 under the title Amon Pedagog

1 D. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 22-24, and Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 11, cols. 934-935.

which outlined his methods of teaching Hebrew.¹

3 The Love of Zion²

The novel is set during the reign of King Ahaz and the central characters relate to the families of two wealthy friends who live in Jerusalem, Yoram and Yedidiah; the former is an army officer^r and the latter the Royal Treasurer. Yoram has two wives, Haggit and Na'ama. Na'ama has had difficulty for some time in conceiving. When the Israelites go to fight against the Philistines, Yoram - who has gone to war - leaves his family in the care of Yedidiah and they make a covenant with each other. The tenor of this agreement is that should Na'ama bear a son and Tirzah, Yedidiah's wife, a daughter, the children should be betrothed. However, Yoram's other wife, Haggit, bears a son, Azrikam, who is nursed by Hel'ah, her servant, who, in turn, gives birth to a son, Nabal.

Yoram is captured by the enemy; consequently Haggit becomes the mistress of the household and her character is portrayed in uncomplimentary terms since she maltreats her servants. Hel'ah's husband complains of Haggit to Mattan, a Jerusalem Judge and he in turn uses the situation to revenge the fact that formerly he had been a

1 D. Patterson, ibid., and E. Silberschlag, op. cit., pp. 138-40.

2 Only two of Mapu's four novels have been dealt with in this study: (ahavat zion) The Love of Zion and (ayit zavu'a) The Hypocrite. His two other novels, (hozei hizionot) The Visionaries and (ashmat shomron) The Guilt of Samaria have been excluded for two reasons. Firstly, The Visionaries is incomplete. Secondly, The Guilt of Samaria is essentially an historical novel in which the main problems of 19th Century East European Jewry are overlooked.

rejected lover of Haggit. Mattan persuades Akan to murder Haggit and her children by setting fire to her house, substituting Akan's son Nabal for Azrikam and then to lay the blame on Na'ama. Subsequently Na'ama is forced to flee to the shelter of Abishai, Yoram's shepherd, near Bethlehem. Shortly after her arrival she gives birth to a twin son and daughter, Amnon and Peninah. Yedidiah remains faithful to Yoram, managing his estates and bringing up the 'pretender' to Yoram's estate along with his own son, Teman, and daughter, Tamar.

At the fall of Samaria, Yedidiah's father-in-law is taken captive - his name was Hananeel. A co-captive, Zimri, a priest of Ba'al, escapes from imprisonment and conveys a letter from Hananeel to his family. In this letter Hananeel describes a dream he had, the essence of which revolves around the appearance of a young man. The young man claims to be the lover of his granddaughter and that in time he would redeem Hananeel from his captivity. The letter was authenticated by the fact that Hananeel had also handed his seal to Zimri, which the latter was to keep for future use.

The scene of the novel then turns to Bethlehem where Tamar is attacked by a lion. She is rescued by a handsome shepherd who, not surprisingly, turns out to be Amnon who has grown up completely ignorant of his noble birth. With great gratitude she invites Amnon to come and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles at her father's house in Jerusalem.

Another important development in the structure of the plot comes when Teman on his visit to Mount Carmel falls in love with a lovely girl; she was Peninah, the sister of Amnon. When asked for a

betrothal she tells Teman to wait three days for an answer, but when he goes to find her on the fourth day he finds that she and her mother have departed.

At the Feast of the Tabernacles Amnon calls at Tamar's house and is received warmly by her parents who ask him to stay with them. Amnon develops into a keen follower of the Prophetic movement and becomes a member of the Royal Family. The growing friendship between the newly-arrived personable young man upsets Azrikam who, as a result, seeks advice from the opportunist, Zimri. Zimri takes advantage of the situation by forging a letter from Hananeel - courtesy of the seal - in which Hananeel allegedly informs Tirzah that he is dying; the letter contains the customary blessing in such an event. Yedidiah, believing that the letter is genuine, loses faith in Hananeel's dream. This is not the case however with Tirzah and Tamar who both continue their vision of hope and love. Zimri informs Yedidiah of the latter's daughter's love for Amnon, and, as a result, Amnon is dismissed from Yedidiah's house.

The guilt-ridden Mattan repents of his actions and sends for Yedidiah to confess his guilt; however he is prevented from doing this by the fact that he dies and is only able to hand over the key to his treasury.

Akan is similarly stricken with remorse and informs Amnon that Hananeel is still alive and that he (Amnon) should free him from his captivity. Amnon goes to Assyria and brings back Hananeel, and in the subsequent atmosphere of joy and happiness Yedidiah consents to

the marriage of Tamar and Amnon.

However Zimri intensifies the plot by deciding to cast a blemish upon the union of Amnon and Tamar. Spying on Amnon's actions, he uses the fact of Amnon's visiting his mother and sister to suggest to Tamar that his feelings are elsewhere; as a result Tamar naturally becomes upset. Zimri then suggests to Amnon that he should send Tamar a letter asking for forgiveness, together with a bottle of wine. The former poisoned the wine and then informed Tamar, thus proving Amnon's treachery to Tamar. Amnon is told by Tamar to leave Jerusalem and he joins the expedition against the Philistines.

Zimri then turns against Amnon's mother and sister, accusing them of sorcery. The still-repentant Akan admits to Azrikam that he is the latter's father and confesses his crimes. In order to silence his father, Azrikam sets the paternal house on fire and stabs his mother. The son and his dying father are brought to court where everything is revealed and Na'ama and Peninah are returned to their inheritance.

The end of the novel conveys the confusion into which Jerusalem was thrown at the time of Sennacharib's invasion. In the aftermath of that invasion and the consequent salvation of Jerusalem it transpires that Amnon has befriended an old man in captivity who is, coincidentally, Yoram, and they are both released.

4 The Hypocrite

Yeruham is a rich merchant who has become the proprietor of a wayside inn due to a reversal of fortune in business activity.

This misfortune was the result of a dishonest and incompetent business manager, Ga'al, to whom Yeruham had entrusted his affairs whilst he was away on business. Another dimension to the plot lies in the failure of Ga'al to marry Sarah, the daughter of Yeruham. Sarah is the widow of one Joseph, whose business Ga'al was also instrumental in destroying. Even after these events, Ga'al continues to persecute Yeruham, his widowed daughter and her three children, Naaman, Ruhamah and Raphael.

The two principal characters in the novel both attract their respective supporters. Ga'al's chief ally is his son-in-law, Zadok. Of Italian descent, his character is portrayed in extremely unfavourable terms since he has deserted two wives and changed his real name from Hophni, using the name and credentials of a famous Palestinian scholar and rabbi. Yeruham's allies are : Saul, a friend of his deceased son-in-law Joseph (a rich and liberal Jew) and Nehemiah, a Maskil.

The rich Saul is able to finance Naaman's studying at an agricultural college. Immediately prior to the conclusion of his course Naaman is arrested because false documents are discovered in his room. These had been planted by a friend of Ga'al, Zimon, at the former's behest. Ga'al then spreads the rumour that Naaman has been drowned; Ga'al then plans to force Yeruham to hand over documents which might incriminate him through his various activities, also hoping in the meantime to marry Sarah.

Ga'al's servant, Levi, was planning to marry Joseph's daughter, Ruhamah. She is due a substantial inheritance from her relative in London, Michael. Levi, following a plan constructed by Ga'al,

works out a plan whereby Yeruham will be arrested for theft. As a result Ruhamah would be left without a guardian and would fall an easy prey to Levi's intentions.

A new twist arrives when, on the Eve of the Passover, Naaman suddenly arrives at home disguised as Zimon. He reveals that he has spread the rumour of his own death so that he can put an end to the evil plotting of Ga'al. He also describes how he has saved Eden, Obadiah's son, from a band of robbers. Naaman returns home with munificent gifts from the Baron and in addition presents from Eden to his daughter Elisheba and his wife Zibiah. Naaman also brings a letter from Eden to Obadiah stressing the fact that Elisheba should only marry a man of her own choosing and warning him against Ga'al. Saul also arrives on the same day and - since he is a widower - he proposes to Sarah.

Yeruham and Sarah are arrested and charged with being in possession of jewellery which Levi has concealed in their home. Obadiah then moves to the centre of the plot; as a gesture of mercy he is prepared to offer bail but he is forestalled by the Baron's wife. Naaman is still disguised as Zimon and cannot, therefore, gain Obadiah's consent to marry Elisheba. The situation is worsened by Ga'al's desire that Elisheba should marry his own son, Zerah. The competition for Elisheba's hand is intensified by the fact that Zadok, whose wife has just died, is also thinking of marrying her. Furthermore, Elisheba is prejudiced against the supposed Zimon since, in fact, she is in love with Zimon.

Another character of the novel, Zaphnat, the keeper of a neigh-

-bouring inn, who has participated in the slander against Yeruham's family, is having an illicit liaison with Levi. She is unhappily married to a pious but impractical man called ^{Yerah} Yirhameel who has recently returned home after several years of travelling. Zaphnat conspires to have her husband arrested, but her plans are thwarted by Levi's death due to a fever, but before his death Levi reveals something of Zadok's background. Zaphnat flees to London after her adultery has been revealed and her Jewish identity is concealed by her companion Emil. They are also accompanied by Zerah who had fled the country after having stolen money from Zadok.

The story switches to the ship en route for London. Emil, Zaphnat and Zerah meet up with Naaman and Ruhamah; Azriel, a young scholar returning from the Holy Land with his wife, Shiphrah, Heman an Italian Jew and a friend of Azriel, with his sister accompanied by another person called Shlomeel. They are all on their way to collect an inheritance from Michael.

Whilst the party is in London - and undergoing an adventurous journey - Obadiah persuades Elisheba to marry Zadok, since he completely believes in that person's integrity. But when the party returns from London with the inheritance Naaman reveals his true identity to Elisheba, telling her also that her father is alive. Obadiah consents to their marriage and Eden appears on the wedding day. Ga'al is amongst the guests and, on sitting next to Zibiah, he urges her to forget her supposedly dead husband and become his wife. Eden overhears Ga'al's proposals. The Baron announces that the time has come to end the strife. Ga'al announces his willingness to marry Eden's widow as a gesture of reconciliation, but at that moment Eden

comes forward in his true identity and denounces Ga'al. Similarly Zadok is denounced by his many accusers and then Obadiah becomes aware of the former's real nature.¹

b Mapu's treatment of Women in his novels

It is perhaps significant that both novels possess similar themes albeit in different historical contexts. Mapu has succeeded, via a literary form, in analysing various aspects of Jewish life which seem to him at least to stress the mentality of the Pale. It is the extreme concern with family relationships within the Community to which Mapu draws our attention, and a reading of both these novels stresses the perpetuation of Jewish concerns throughout history.

This leads the critic to confirm that the issues which concern Mapu's characters are not forged by the external barometers of time. Whilst changing social circumstances may to some extent determine or modify community attitudes, the way in which succeeding generations view each other serves to promote the same feelings of love, hostility and concern, whether it be in pre-Sennacharib Jerusalem or the Pale. It is in the timeless concerns of Jewish life that Mapu succeeds in conveying to his reader his feelings. This in turn enhances his undoubted greatness as a novelist.

It is ~~the~~ the nature of Jewish particularism, a certain insularity from outside social pressures, which all help to explain the phenomena which Mapu portrays via his caricatures (as opposed to characters). In skillful and descriptive prose he presents a whole range of human emotions and his characters act as the personification thereof.

1 In the previous section I have used D. Patterson's summaries of The Love of Zion and The Hypocrite.

Both "The Love of Zion" and "The Hypocrite" have as their central theme the constant Jewish preoccupation with the ideals that surround the institution of marriage. Whilst the historical context of each novel is totally dissimilar, it is evident that to some extent the characters are interchangeable. One reason to support this viewpoint is that both novels are dealing with issues that cannot be fitted into a rigid temporal context, namely love and marriage. Another reason is the problems confronting his two heroines, Tamar and Elisheba are the same - they are both engaged in a struggle against arranged marriages and are prepared to rebel against the family's authority, in particular that of the father. Traditional Judaism perhaps projects two virtues as an outstanding necessity if a woman is to gain respect both at home and within the wider society; one is the virtue to be a good wife, the second is to be modest and God-fearing. One recalls a conversation in "The Hypocrite" between ^{Yerahmeel} Yirhamiel and a Yeshivah student called Klonimos, whom ^{Yerahmeel} ~~Yirhamiel~~ meets on his way home. Klonimos refers to those things giving man most satisfaction. One is:

a woman of valour, who is capable of maintaining you while you achieve success.¹

An interesting equation is presented by Mordecai, ^{Yerahmeel's} ~~Yirhamiel's~~ father-in-law. When welcoming his son-in-law he argues that his daughter's success in acting as manageress of the inn is directly comparable to a husband's effort in learning Torah.

She receives them with fine words; princes and rulers also speak with her whenever they pass by because they like her conversation.²

1 The Hypocrite, p. 66.

2 Op. cit., p. 127.

In this context it could be argued that Mapu has succeeded in providing his reader with a model of the way in which nineteenth century Eastern European Jewry distinguished between duties of husband, and wife. Zaphnat's success pleases ^{Yerahmeel} ~~Yirhamiel~~ who completely approves of his wife's activities and speaks of the way in which he has prayed to God to bless her in her labours.

However Zaphnat does not succeed to fulfil the rhetoric of ^{Yerahmeel's} ~~Yirhamiel's~~ expectations. Nehemiah's wife, Esther, is more akin to the Jewish model of an ideal wife. She supports him in his modest business but also proffers encouragement in an ideological sense. Nehemiah is an active adherent of the Haskalah in the town and Esther shields him from many of the taunts of that movement's opponents.¹

The extent to which a woman dressed and generally behaved in public was a factor which produced a requisite polite or frigid social response towards a particular women. Modesty was regarded as an absolute prerequisite for a woman's success. One could argue that Zaphnat is a woman keen to create the right impression in her interaction with other characters in the novel. She is keen to create the right impression.² However, the perceptive reader would surely argue that she only shows herself in her true colours once; to the sadness of her husband and his companion, she appears before both bare-headed. Klonimos responded with a whisper in ^{Yerahmeel's} ~~Yirhamiel's~~ ear:

What will the pietists say when they see your wife bare-headed?³

1 The Hypocrite, pp. 96-97.

2 Op. cit., p. 71.

3 Op. cit., p. 129.

It is ~~is~~ the juxtaposition of this theological stance with the apparent coolness of Zaphnat towards her husband that creates a moment of emotional pathos and an atmosphere of satire directed at the immodest woman. ^{Yerahmeel} ~~Yerahmeel~~ is very weak in his reply, praising his wife for her increased beauty - lusting quietly - and finally and softly asks her to cover her head. Zaphnat's wild laughter - her retort - is totally immodest in her mocking:

So you look at women's faces, do you?

Elsewhere in "The Hypocrite" Obadiah, one of the wealthy people in the town and one of Ga'al's allies, after remarking that his granddaughter Elisheba, the heroine of the novel, was crying by his bed because of the sudden illness that attacked him, urged her not to raise her voice ... "lest God gets angry because of her voice and remembers her unbearable sin".¹

More evidence of women's modesty at this time lay in the separation of men and women, particularly at meal times. Thus Zibiah, Obadiah's daughter-in-law, withdrew at dinner time. She called for her stepdaughter, Elisheba, to join her in a separate room so that they could leave Obadiah and his guests in the dining room.²

In a wider context, Shobail, Sarah's uncle, did not like the idea of Ruhamah going abroad in the company of the stranger, Zimon, particularly since she was betrothed to his son. He tells Sarah about

1 The Hypocrite, p. 193.

2 Op. cit., p. 204.

his disapproval and justifies it by saying: "To be guiltless before the Lord and before Israel".¹

Elsewhere in the book there is no doubt that Mapu reflects the fact that the orthodoxy of Russo-Jewish communities was such that all kinds of criteria were imposed to demonstrate whether or not a woman could be regarded as God-fearing. Obadiah draws a parallel between the look of contentment on a woman's face and the state of the soul - this is seen in his remarks when Zibiah and Elisheba appear well dressed for the Passover.²

Women were always regarded with great suspicion and regarded as being particularly vulnerable to deviation from the right path. Woman's secondary role within society - an adjunct of her supposedly intellectual inferiority - was an issue between Orthodox Jews and their opponents, the Maskilim. Mapu briefly touches on this subject when Hugo, the family doctor and a close personal friend of Obadiah's family, shows Elisheba a letter from the Land of Israel, sent by a friend called Azriel. In the letter Israel is described and Elisheba is fascinated by the language and the beauty of the description. She says that Azriel's words should be hallowed by all Israel and receives this stony reply from Shobail:

But women should not say what is good and what is sacred, for these are the judgements of the holy ones in the land, and they will pour their wrath upon eloquent language and destroy the books of rhetoric and their writers with their hubbubs.³

1 The Hypocrite, p. 254; and Numbers 32: 22.

2 The Hypocrite, pp. 203-04.

3 Op. cit., pp. 213-14.

However, Obadiah's views are markedly different. As a member of the Hasidim he is far more lenient. He agreed with the general leniency of the Hasidim who tended to treat their daughters leniently, letting them read (in general) whatever they liked.¹

To fit this new genre into a historical context it should be noted that with the advance of Haskalah traditional virtues of what constituted a 'good' woman were not enough to satisfy growing aspirations. A new generation of Jewesses emerged: they possessed virtues and qualifications, many the product of a secular education, which their mothers had not enjoyed. "The Hypocrite" has several instances which reflect the growing demand by women of a new place within society.

Knowledge of several European languages was one characteristic of such women. Heman recollected his journey to London accompanied by his sister. There were also three other people in their company, two men and a woman. Heman's sister made some rude remarks about the other woman but these were made in Italian.² Another example of secular culture is seen in the fact that Elisheba's aunt played the harp.³

The right to mix with male company at certain times was traditionally frowned upon; however Elisheba herself possesses so many qualities that her company is extremely attractive. She enjoys

1 H. Rabinowicz, op. cit., p. 207.

2 The Hypocrite, p. 261.

3 Op. cit., p. 89.

dancing¹, has a reasonable knowledge of Haskalah literature² and enjoys embroidery.³

The total result of these gifts is that Elisheba possesses an independent mind. This is illustrated in the following discussion between herself and her grandfather's agent about Ahitov, Nehemiah's grandson, and Zerah. The agent castigates Ahitov for spending his time in reading books and not having professional inclinations - Elisheba argues that Zerah is unfamiliar with the principles of social intercourse and also ignorant of literature.⁴

Despite her secularist tendencies, Elisheba portrays an awareness of, and pride in, her Jewish identity. When invited out to the theatre by a young Jew named Avner she turns him down. The reason is that he conceals his name, using "Emil" instead.⁵ However Elisheba is able to enter Gentile society, treat them on an equal footing and gain their admiration. She is a friend of the local Baron's daughter and his wife.

Often Elisheba finds herself at the centre of a conflict between the Maskilim and their opponents. In this respect the paragraph on her in the Shadkhan's book is very illuminating. Nahshon the Shadkhan writes:

Elisheba is a girl of great charm and perfect beauty, she is incomparable amongst girls; she knows several languages and she is well-read. Her Hebrew is better than that of the men.

1 Op. cit., pp. 28, 43, 76.

2 Op. cit., p. 51.

3 Op. cit., pp. 197-99.

4 Op. cit., p. 101.

5 Op. cit., p. 199.

Some speak favourably of her, and some speak unfavourably of her. Those who speak favourably of her say that her wisdom is consonant with her gracefulness and beauty. Those who speak unfavourably of her say that her wisdom and knowledge lead her to indulge in unruly conduct, and her beauty is not natural but artificial. She paints her cheeks with kohl (antimony) and colours her eyebrows. She wears perfume, and the aim behind her behaviour is to attract men. She also dances with young men, and the spirit of righteousness does not lie within her. Thus people dispute, time and again, her right and duty.¹

The very idea that young people were actively trying to meet each other was something that shocked and worried the older generation. Obadiah was deeply upset when Nahshon revealed to him that his granddaughter was in contact with Naaman, the son of Joseph his old enemy. Nahshon has to explain to the old man that

the old days are not like these days; now they have chosen another way, and the letter is the interpreter between them. Woe to a shameless generation, a malevolent generation ...²

Other considerations related to the female role arise in a study of "The Hypocrite" albeit less controversial. Mapu treats woman's role in charitable undertakings with a certain sarcasm because of the purpose of the charity. Zaphnat tells Levi that she carries out good works (i.e. charitable ones) in order to extirpate the volume of sin in her life.³ Zaphnat is caught up in a controversy as to whether to donate a particular sum (her husband's redemption) to anyone in particular. She rejected the suggestion of Zibiah that it should go to Ahira, a close friend of Zerah. ("A man who always reads strange books".) Instead she divided eighteen shekels up between various causes.⁴

1 Op. cit., p. 28.

2 Op. cit., p. 48.

3 Op. cit., p. 162.

4 Op. cit., pp. 174-75.

This, it would appear, reflects a tradition on Zaphnat's part at least that charity should be divided. The areas to which Zaphnat distributed reflect the fact that the Jewish community was self-sufficient.¹

The character of Asnat is interesting because she portrays a woman who was generally trusted by the community. Nobody asks the question for whom she is collecting charity. She visits the synagogue twice a day, dispenses cakes and sweets to children. She is known for her ability to content the spirits of dead people and mediate between them and their living relatives.

On the day before Passover Asnat calls at Obadiah's house to see Zibiah. Zibiah is delighted at her visit but she remarks that Asnat only enquires after the living. What about the dead?:

May they rest in peace ... I have disturbed their peace before the beginning of the month. I awakened the righteous people of the world from their graves, I conveyed to them the troubles of living people, I awakened your modest mother-in-law to pray on your behalf. I told your mother-in-law and all innocent souls about your charities for poor women in confinement. I poured my complaint and shed tears. And I hoped from God that my words should not be turned away.²

Such a passage reflects a mystical role in this character, which despite her comparative unimportance to the plot's structure makes her forceful and convincing nevertheless. The fact was that Asnat represented the life and values of an increasingly smaller section of the community. Whilst incidental, she is representative of the old

1 See supra, p. 35.

2 Op. cit., p. 179.

Jewish order and consequently looked upon as strange by many of her contemporaries. Part of Asnat's appeal is that she does not surrender to change, always justifying her statements by appealing to God.

Mapu reveals some interesting insights into women's standards of beauty. He sometimes indulges in mechanical description which probably reflects his own taste. For example of Zaphnat:

She attracted many people with her flattery, and with her beautiful figure, for she was plump like the village girls.¹

And of the Baron's wife and daughter:

She is about forty years old, fat and good-looking and well-dressed. Laura, her daughter, is a beautiful, tall girl; her hair locks are curled magnificently.²

However, in both "The Love of Zion" and in "The Hypocrite" Mapu's portrait of the heroine is highly stylized and idealized. Tamar is spoken of as "a lily washed with heavenly dew"³ and this metaphorical technique is quite common in such contexts. Of Elisheba he writes:

... and here she is walking like a banner in her beauty and her glory, her stature resembled a palm tree, her beauty like a daffodil and her strength like an oak. Her eyes that are shining and spread beauty like light.⁴

Both novels deal with a central concern; the way in which a woman will react via betrothal and marriage to the demands of a new generation. A father was always worried about his daughter as was a brother. Eden wanted to fulfil his duties to Elisheba because of his military

1 The Hypocrite, p. 18.

2 Op. cit., p. 225.

3 The Love of Zion, p. 23.

4 The Hypocrite, pp. 87-88.

service and Obadiah because of his old age.¹

Parental concern for daughters traditionally had led to the arrangement of betrothals at a very early age.² Sometimes children's ^{betrothals} ~~were betrothed~~ ^{planned} before they were born, for instance in the Covenant of Yoram and Yedidiah. Ga'al once sent a letter to Obadiah reminding him of an agreement concerning the marriage of Elisheba to Zerah, his son. This was a difficult agreement for Obadiah to withdraw from as he had entrusted all his wealth to Ga'al.

One can argue that the complete authority exercised by father over daughter in "The Love of Zion" is precisely that element of orthodoxy which is challenged so strongly in "The Hypocrite". In the former novel Mapu shows the strong ambitions of a younger generation - true of any period in history. Yedidiah's views are echoed by Hamul in "The Hypocrite". He decided to marry his daughter to Tola'a, the son of 'Akhbur, even though he was small and ugly, and adds "I will not pay attention to her wish".³

The role of a father has two functions for Mapu. The first is the exercise of religious authority over his daughter. The second is to present a yardstick of excellence with which to measure the qualities of a future son-in-law.⁴

1 Op. cit., pp. 153, 210.

2 See supra, pp. 21-22.

3 The Hypocrite, pp. 71-72.

4 See supra, p. 11.

Therefore one may suggest that in Mapu's treatment of women we see an ipso facto presentation of the orthodox view - so trenchant in the traditions of Torah and Talmud. By creating female characters of great charm and beauty he manages to point to the good in the Maskilim's modernised life-style. Zaphnat reflects much of the double standards of orthodoxy. Yet Mapu sustains and praises that which is good in orthodoxy, providing the reader with an interesting insight into the problems and prejudices of two generations of Eastern European Jews in the early nineteenth century.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NOVELS OF MENDELE MOKHER SEFARIM (1837-1917)

a Life and Background

Shalom Jacob Abramovich was born in Kopyl, Lithuania, into a middle class and pious Jewish family. The sources available suggest that his father's death - when Shalom was only fourteen - had a profound effect upon his future life and development. Given that he was of a scholarly bent, his mother sent him to the Slutsk Yeshivah and for two years he showed a remarkable aptitude and diligence for study.

In a sense it could be argued that his father's death was fortuitous; Shalom's mother, who was very sickly, was hardly able to support her family. During Shalom's period at the Yeshivah she re-married a Jewish villager who was the owner of a flour mill. Such a future seemed abhorrent to Shalom and the following few years of his life became extremely chequered and, as David Patterson has written:

Abramovich's wanderings furnished him with an almost unrivalled insight into the Jewish life of the period, which he was subsequently to utilize with such success in his later stories.¹

These wanderings were in the company of a professional beggar called "Abraham the Lame" who had persuaded Shalom to join him in a tour of the towns and villages of the Pale of Settlement. In a useful contribution to our knowledge, Nathaniel Kravitz has documented the disadvantages incurred by Shalom on this tour:

1 D. Patterson, The Hebrew Novel in Czarist Russia (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 4.

He soon discovered what a foul and cruel deal he had made with the sly and cruel mendicant. Avernil (Abraham) forced him to go from door to door and do for him all kinds of chores.¹

Kravitz points out that many towns maintained a Hekdesh, which provided overnight accommodation for beggars. If no Hekdesh existed often the bathhouse was used for the same purpose. Sometimes cripples spent some time at such places but it was often the case that beggars would disguise themselves as cripples in order to collect alms by false pretences. Such experiences were indeed to lay the foundations for Abramovich's acute awareness of the social conditions that existed in the Pale, and certainly his novels present the reader with acute social commentary of the time - Mendele could be described as a Lithuanian Dickens.

1853 was to be one watershed in the novelist's life. He fled from his impecunious patron to Kamenets-Podolsk, where he ^{was} befriended ^{by} the poet Abraham Baer Gottlober. This friendship was to benefit Shalom in three direct ways. Gottlober introduced him to the ideas of the Enlightenment. The ideas of Haskalah held an immediate attraction for the young man; he was quick to establish proficiency in Russian and German from Gottlober's daughter. The third direct result of this friendship was that Shalom gained employment as a teacher in a local government school (1856).

Abramovich's literary debut came in 1857 with an essay on education written in Hebrew. Soon he moved to Berdichev and continued writing

1 N. Kravitz, Hebrew Literature from the earliest time through the 20th century (London, 1973), p. 484.

in Hebrew and in 1863 published a Hebrew story, Limmed u Hêtev, which was later expanded into his novel "Fathers and Sons".

The most interesting aspect of his life, however, between the late 1850s and the early 1860s was the fact that Abramovich utilised the ideas of Haskalah to formulate his own view of the theory and functions of both language and literature. This can be summed up in his own words where he defines the true task of a writer:

Cultivation of the people's taste for better literature,
portrayal of life and enlightenment of the masses.¹

The universalism which is contained in the last five words of this quotation reveal a mind which was even more radical and visionary than many of the Maskilim of his own generation. It was the belief that all should have access to the literature which represented one particular culture that led Abramovich to adopt the vernacular language of Russian Jewry in his writings, namely Yiddish. This was a third direct challenge to the Jewish intellectual Establishment which held Yiddish in great contempt. Its literature consisted for the most part of simple folk tales, prayerbooks (Tehinnot) for women and books of pious admonitions. However, Abramovich wanted to reach the Jewish masses in his work and this could only be achieved by writing in Yiddish.

Between 1813 and 1886 Abramovich wrote in Yiddish, adopting the literary device of calling himself a bookseller. At this time the bookseller not only travelled widely but also came into contact with the masses. These works in Yiddish are generally considered to have revolutionised that literary tradition. It has been said that

¹ Cited by Kravitz, op. cit., p. 485.

in these works

Abramovich fought the battle of the masses against their oppressors with every weapon in the arsenal of literature - pathos, wit, satire, allegory and invective.¹

In 1881 Mendele as he was now called, was appointed head of the Talmud Torah in Odessa. That city was a major centre of Hebrew literature and in 1886 Mendele returned to Hebrew as his primary language of composition. Patterson argues that though he translated almost all his major Yiddish stories into Hebrew, the process was so subtle that the Hebrew versions must be regarded more as "transmutations than translations of the original".

Since scholars have been quick to point out Mendele's remarkable contribution to both the Hebrew ("grandfather of the Hebrew Novel") and Yiddish literary traditions, there has been some suggestion that both have risen from the same milieu.² Eisig Silberschlag has argued that both literatures grew in different dimensions:

While modern Hebrew literature cultivated many genres in many centuries, modern Yiddish literature may be said to have had a single period of bloom: from the end of the nineteenth century to the thirties of this century - some fifty years all told.³

Amongst Mendele's many works (about seven volumes in Hebrew and twenty in Yiddish) several are worthy of mention. "Dos Kleine Menshele" (The Little Man) is such a powerful satire on a government

1 Kravitz, op. cit., p. 486.

2 See E. Silberschlag, op. cit., (New York, 1973), Part 1, pp. 152-53.

3 See Silberschlag, op. cit., p. 153.

crony that the public recognised him in real life and as a result the man lost his reputation.¹ A vigorous social and political polemical style is also evident in "Die Taske oder die Bande Shtudt Baale Toboth" (The Meat Tax) which attacked a tax imposed upon the poor Jewish masses by the leaders of the Jewish community. One of his best known works "Masse'ot Binyamin Ha-Shelishi" (The Travels of Benjamin III). The first Benjamin was the famous twelfth century Spanish traveller and author, Benjamin of Tudela. The second was Israel ben-Joseph Benjamin, who wrote as Benjamin II; his travels in the mid-nineteenth century took him to Asia, Africa and America. Mendele's Benjamin III was a visionary petit-bourgeois who left his wife and set off on an epic journey to discover the legendary River Sambatyon² and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. This particular work was translated into Polish, Russian and Ukranian.

It has been argued³ that in his Hebrew novels Mendele made great strides in changing the biblical style which had been so evident in Hebrew work from the late eighteenth century onwards. He utilized the conversational ingredients so predominant in rabbinic writings and

1 Kravitz, op. cit., p. 486.

2 A mythical river across which the ten tribes were supposed to have been exiled by the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser. It flowed with sands and stones (no water) and rested regularly on the Shabbat. See E.N. Adler, Jewish Travellers (London, 1930), pp. 14, 18, 20, 75, 238, 246-47; and L. Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews (trans. from the German by H. Szold), 9th impression (Philadelphia, 1947), vol. 4, pp. 316-17. See also S. Grayzel, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 279; and see Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 14, cols. 762-63.

3 Kravitz, op. cit., p. 486.

using the influence of Mishnaic and Midrashic Hebrew, created a prose style which has remained one of the dominant influences in modern Hebrew literature.

This new style was reflected in his first novel "Fathers and Sons" (published in 1868) and until his last work. Silberschlag¹ draws a direct comparison between this work and Mapu's "Love of Zion" because they are both novels containing an extremely complicated plot and naive characterisation. This latter view may be open to question since one could argue that one skill of characterisation may be to present the ideal caricature, in itself a form of literary personification, but nevertheless having some merit as a literary device.

Of Mendele's contribution to Modern Hebrew Literature it can be stated that no historian writing about Russian Jewry in the nineteenth century can afford to ignore his writing. As Silberschlag writes:

With an insight into people and a descriptive ability which were suffused with lyrical warmth he depicted the Jews in their abject poverty; in their tattered dress, in their unprofitable occupations and in their miserable recreations. Their defects, bred by an unwholesome and unhygienic environment were subjected to microscopic observation and to scathingly ironical or mildly merciful observation.²

b Mendele's treatment of women in his novels.³

The degradation of life in the Pale sent Mapu and Mendele in two entirely different and contrasting directions in their treatment of

1 Silberschlag, op. cit., p. 153.

2 Op. cit., p. 154.

3 The following works of Mendele have been selected as representative viz. masseot binyamin ha-sheleishi, sefer ha-kabzanim, and ba'emek ha-bakha.

women in their novels. Mapu returned to the charismatic females who had figured so prominently in the Old Testament, or the elegance of the rich Jewish household in order to convey the notion of an 'ideal' woman. In a sense Mapu is arguing that the perfect Jewish woman would only be fulfilled if Jews lived a normal life in their own homeland.

Mendele is more realistic and accurate in his portrayal of Jewish ghetto life and the lowly position that afflicted women within that society. It may be true that in his anxiety to compose a social document within a literary framework Mendele often exaggerates the position of women; one reason for this could be that Mendele often is influenced by the women he has met. In his wanderings with Abraham the Peddlar - which were to have a considerable influence on his later works - he was accompanied by his Aunt in a cart.¹

Mendele's work is an amalgam of satire and sympathy in its treatment of women. One is not sure whether he is actually satirising Rabbinic tradition which ascribed bad qualities to women or whether he is, in general, accepting their point of view. Certainly an archetypal female character in Mendele's novels is the phenomenon of the domineering wife. One could cite in this context Sandreal's wife in "The Travels of Benjamin III", Hay ah-Treina h, and Fishke's wife in "The Book of Beggars".

Sandreal's wife found out that her husband was planning to leave home and desert her. She informs her local Rabbi, Rabbi Isaac David,

1 F. Lachower, toldot ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah, Book III (Tel-Aviv, 1953), p. 129.

who, having been briefed, warns Sandreal of his wife's animosity and the punishment that she intends for him.

She is so angry that she could tear you like a fish with her hands.¹

The subsequent meeting between Sandreal and his wife shows that the latter has a considerable personal influence over the former. The novel talks of Sandreal "trembling from fear", "sweating and clutching". Her invocation against her husband and his friend, Benjamin, contains some very powerful invective indeed:

Look at these two fine creatures, these two human-beings - may the earth swallow them both as an atonement for Israel.²

The interaction between Sandreal and his wife is used by Mendele to illustrate one of the great paradoxes of life in the Pale. Despite the hold that the wife had over the husband in terms of intelligence and personality, nevertheless the man still had a superior status.

A possible argument might be that Mendele does not portray any great sympathy for Hay ah. However the chief ingredient of Mendele's characterisation lies in the principle of exaggeration and it might well be that he is attacking the custom whereby the woman was responsible for earning the family's livelihood whilst the husband spent all his time engaged in Talmudic study. The very fact that during the holidays Sandreal is forced to carry out the most menial of domestic chores supports this particular viewpoint.

1 Mendele Mokher Sefarim, The Collected Works (Tel-Aviv, 1958), p. 75.

2 Ibid.

It could be argued that his portrayal of Hayah-Treinah in "The Book of Beggars", despite containing many of the typical elements of Mendele's exaggeration is nearer to the truth than his image of Sandreal's wife. Hayah-Treinah is a village inn-keeper and the way in which he introduces her into the novel gives the reader an impression of what is going on in Mendele's mind. During his search for Rabbi Alter Yaknahaz, a fellow travelling book-seller, Rabbi Mendele, the book-seller, comes to Hayah Treinah's inn and engages her in conversation. On asking where her husband is Mendele is told:

What have you to do with my husband?¹

This response throws Mendele into confusion and it is the female who has to rescue him from his embarrassment. The gist of the dialogue between the two characters then revolves around the woman's description of her cloddish, unfortunate husband, her children, and the fact that she has to earn a living. From the conversation Rabbi Mendele discovers that he and Hayah Treinah are distant relatives; then the conversation is interrupted by the arrival of her husband.

Mendele then injects some description into the narrative in order to give greater depth to the husband's image as a weak and miserable creature. Mendele describes Hayim Hana's relationship with his wife:

From the behaviour and the way he talked it was obvious that he was under his wife's authority. Later on I found that because he was under the subjugation of his wife he was nicknamed in the locality Hayim Hana of Haya Traina and because she dominated him she was called Haya Traina Cosak.²

1 Op. cit., p. 12.

2 Op. cit., p. 106.

Fishke's wife in "The Book of Beggars" is also portrayed as the domineering wife. Fishke is a happy-go-lucky beggar who suddenly finds that the early happiness of his marriage is gone because:

In due course my wife began to criticize me severely and pour derision upon me. She mocked the fact that I was lame, called me many disgusting names and frequently stated how disappointed she was in me. She had made an upstanding man out of me, one who could hold his face up in public. She put me on my feet.

Nevertheless I was not grateful to her and I tried to annoy her in everything I did.¹

It could be argued that in the image of the domineering wife Mendele reveals his great skill of characterisation but the most important and striking factor is the repetition of the image. It basically puts traditional Jewish roles of man and woman in reverse and maybe it is an integral part of Mendele's didacticism to satirise what he regards as a prevailing, undesirable social condition. The three examples illustrate men playing secondary roles to their wives, both in public and in private. Sandreal does those things which his wife expects; Hayim Hana looks more like a servant than a husband and Fishke is maintained by his blind wife.

Another form of caricature which Mendele portrays is the woman who gossips. If one turns to his novel "The Vale of Weeping" three characters can be said to possess this bad quality which was frowned upon a great deal in Rabbinic traditions. One passage describes life at night in a town called Kabziel and how the people usually spend their time.

¹ Op. cit., p. 106.

The Kabzielis keep to themselves on the whole; everyone minds his own business, yawn, sneeze, scratch. It is the women who are the first to talk because they are so garrulous. They are fond of talking about the supper they have had that evening. One says: "My porridge shrivelled so nicely it would have been fit to serve on a king's table". Another says: "My vegetables were cooked so tenderly that they melted in the mouth". Another woman tells the others of the great bargain that she found in the market place. The Lord has blessed her because He has enabled her to buy food at a very cheap price which has lasted all that day and will be sufficient for the next day as well.¹

Such description aptly conveys that tendency of women world-wide to engage in such conversation. Whether such an observation is merited in an academic study is not the point; it should not obscure the fact that those characteristics of women which exist in the popular imagination may reflect at least a grain of truth if only because of the socio-economic role of women throughout history.

Another superb example of female characterisation is in the novel "The Vale of Weeping" which revolves around Malkah Toiva who is accompanying her husband, Leizer Yenkel, and her son Hirshele, the hero of the novel, to Kisalon. After staying for one night in an inn they decide to lodge separately because the accommodation is too expensive. Leizer Yenkel stays in the flat of the attendant of the synagogue, in which he himself works as a cantor during the High Holidays. His wife stays with an old friend, Treinah Susil, from her home town of Kabziel, who is working for a wealthy family in Kisalon.

¹ Op. cit., p. 156.

The interaction of these two old friends when reminiscing, ~~and~~ ^{which} in an amusing and evocative passage Mendele describes, is thus:

Both of them were talkative, with mouths like bubbling fountains. They gossiped about people they knew or didn't know. They recollected old stories from their girlhood ...¹

Mendele describes the manner of the gossiping in detail. Treinah Susil is spoken of as gossiping "candidly" whilst Malkah Toivah gestures with her fingers, nodding her head vigorously throughout the conversation. Gossiping is seen by these women as an important art form; almost as a basic challenge to their ability as women and one wonders if Mendele is satirising a society which has helped to inculcate this particular piece of female behaviour.

Reiza, the innkeeper, is portrayed as a chatterbox, though she lacks the viciousness of Malkah Toivah and Treinah Susil. Her major peculiarity is the way she talks:

She talks without pausing to breathe, rebuking and roaring from the bottom of her heart, as though she is constantly complaining. It is not because she is bad-tempered and quarrelsome, God forbid! She is good-hearted, but has developed this natural way of talking because of her constant business with cart-drivers.²

These rather gloomy portrayals of women certainly do not reflect the great sympathy and respect that Mendele has for many of his women characters elsewhere. Suffice it to say that since exaggeration is at the root of most effective satire, the brunt of his scorn is aimed at societal rather than individual features of Jewish life.

1 Op. cit., pp. 166, 167.

2 Op. cit., p. 165.

One feature of Mendele's style which indicates a latent love of feminine beauty is the way in which it is used metaphorically. This is the way he describes two storks near a stream of water:

Two storks were seen from afar in their white coats ...
their eyes are lifted upwards, like modest women
during ritual immersion.¹

Such language is similar to the rabbinic way of referring to the Torah, which is variously called, "a bride", "the Daughter of God".

At one point in "The Vale of Weeping" Smolik, the peddler, is lying relaxing in the grass and Mendele describes the relationship between the peddler and the earth beneath:

The earth underneath him like a merciful mother pulling him towards her with mighty arms, and each time she pulled him she freed him from his troubles.²

Such figurative language conveys Mendele's powerful feeling of the power and importance of the female role. This role must reflect a variety of human moods and tensions. Thus the feminine element in Mendele's similes is not, as far as natural scenery and phenomena are concerned, always used for describing a happy atmosphere of joyful feeling; sometimes one finds a forceful, melancholy and gloomy example.

This is illustrated by Mendele's description of the forest at Kabziel. All its birds have left to search for places which offer warmth, comfort and quiet. The stillness of the forest is symbolised by Mendele as a sign of despair:

1 Op. cit., p. 101.

2 The simile has parallels with an ancient Greek legend about a giant called Antaeus (Antaios) with whom Hercules wrestled. Each time he was thrown, he arose, stronger than before from his contact with mother earth. See The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, Sir Paul Harvey (ed.) (Reprinted, Oxford, 1966), p. 30.

In this silence is spelt grief and depression.
 The trees stand sadly, repenting mournfully;
 their appearance is not what it used to be.
 The movement of the branches - is like clapping of hands.
 Their rustling is like the bitter crying of a compassionate mother
 over her children because they are no more around
 and she is lonely.¹

Mendele's imagery includes an extremely strong association of ideas between the forces and functions of nature and those of women. When Leizer Yenkel and his wife leave Kisalon their young son, Hirschele, is left behind. He is unable to adjust to his new environment, feeling lonely and depressed. This state of affairs makes him regard natural phenomena in a different light. Neither the moon, stars nor the sun seem to have the same splendour that they had in his own town and this leads Hirschele into a mood of complete estrangement from his environment:

The situation is like a man meeting the relatives of his divorced wife; now these are relatives no more, but purely acquaintances from the past.²

The force of this mode of literary analysis leads me to make the suggestion that despite some of his characterisation Mendele does in fact hold women in high esteem. Elsewhere there is evidence to suggest that he possessed great concern for the Jewish housewife and her relationship with her husband. He once described Jewish married life in the following way:

There are Jews who almost never talk to their wives, never eat with them at the same table and hardly ever look at their faces; they think there is nothing wrong with this. Both exist - and both parties are satisfied with their existence; and in their turn they say: we wish that our own children have a good life as man and wife, as we have.³

1 Mendele Mokher Sefarim, op. cit., p. 161.

2 Ibid.

3 Op. cit., p. 132.

Elsewhere Mendele uses a somewhat less exaggerated example:

He does not talk very often to his wife either in the presence of strangers or the family; he never calls her by name but designates her as 'you', and sometimes as 'stupid', albeit in an affectionate sense. Though he knows and loves her in his innermost heart he does not show it because this is incomprehensible behaviour for a Jew.¹

The logic of these two quotations once again suggests that Mendele has as his chief target the particularist rigidity both in the family and in the cultural life of the Pale which produced behaviour so different from the values of the Maskilim. If the Jewish community was to awaken to the forces of secularism then such outmoded customs had to be criticised.

For Mendele, one of the chief factors which illustrates the low status of the woman is the way in which she is remembered after she has died. Though, according to Jewish law, the husband had to sit in mourning for seven days, after thirty days he had the right to try and find another wife. It would be theoretically possible for this process to be repeated several times in the life of one man, and Mendele was of the opinion that this debases womanhood.²

Certainly it is within the context of Jewish law regarding marriage that Mendele points to the most potent sources of injustice for women. It is also the area in which Mendele shows the greatest sympathy for the position of women. In "The Book of Beggars" Alter talks to Mendele, his fellow book-seller, about a number of

1 Op. cit., p. 149.

2 Op. cit., p. 132.

problems; one is getting his eldest daughter married. Though the girl is undoubtedly ready, no suitable husband has as yet appeared on the scene.¹

Hayah Treinah is also anxious to get her eldest daughter married; as soon as she finds out that Rabbi Mendele the bookseller has a son - and has already become a bar-mitzvah - she starts to hint about a possible marriage. The bookseller becomes suspicious about the motives for Hayah Treinah's friendship, particularly when the daughter - who on entering the inn he saw working with her mother - comes in dressed like a bride.² The doubts of Mendele are confirmed when Treinah's husband broaches the subject of marriage indirectly, when accompanying Mendele to his cart outside the inn next morning.³

There are references in Mendele's novels to the fact that because of its religious importance marriage became a matter for the community at large rather than just for the family. The Kahal became responsible for a marriage's survival if, for instance, individuals could not meet financial demands. Mendele records that the Kahal in Kisalon managed to make some arranged marriages between handicapped Jews.⁴ He also mentions a woman nicknamed "the aunt" who used to dance in the main street of the town to the sound of a fiddle, campaigning for people to donate to charity to facilitate the marrying of the handicapped.⁵

1 Op. cit., p. 95.

2 Op. cit., pp. 105, 108.

3 Op. cit., pp. 108-09.

4 Op. cit., p. 98.

5 Ibid.

Thus there is a tacit acceptance on the part of Mendele that marriage is a necessary institution primarily because man has been commanded to marry. Private wishes have nothing to do with it; on the other hand, one cannot help but feel that Mendele is suggesting that more could be made of an institution which has its antecedents in a divine commandment.

The most beautiful relationship in all of Mendele's novels is the one between Hirschele and Beile. They were neighbours and grew up together. He loved her stories - usually tales of the supernatural - and the two were as close to each other as brother and sister. However, when Hirschele started to learn Talmud he became very shy and could not look Beile in the face (in itself a Talmudic commandment). However his desire for Beile grew.¹

When he was young, Hirschele had been greatly influenced by a story about a "magic ring" which could procure for its owner all kinds of food. However, in his imagination, his wishes for what the ring could provide him with, changed drastically as he grew older: a fine lady, a luxurious house, two goats and three cows. But the apex of his dream was the obtaining of Beile.²

The two dreams of Hirschele may seem divorced, but in fact they have an affinity with each other. In his childhood Hirschele thought only of food; in manhood he thought of a woman. Socio-economic conditions prevented him from getting both. Bodily needs

1 Op. cit., pp. 157-58.

2 Ibid.

were transformed into spiritual needs. Religious conditions prevented his success in later life.

Perhaps this provides the reader with a great insight into the views of Mendele. In essence he is arguing that woman is a necessary stimulant to man's imagination and her role is also necessary to the survival of Kehillah. If the observation of the Pale, forged by religious orthodoxy and poverty is removed, then the status of woman will only be enhanced to a position where it has traditionally been and should - in time - return.

Conclusion

Accepting that the literary traditions of Mendele and Mapu represent but a microcosm of the literary traditions of the Pale of Settlement, it is still possible to assess the merits of their works from both historical and literary standpoints. Certainly there is evidence to suggest that much of the root of their female characterisation lies in the reaction of individuals to rapidly changing social circumstances; to what extent does such characterisation represent valid social documentary for the period in question? Another pertinent issue lies in the place of both authors in the rich traditions of Modern Hebrew Literature. Perhaps the following tentative observations can be offered.

(i) With one or two notable exceptions (e.g. the period of the Early Monarchy) the portrait of woman in the Bible indicates, by and large, an image of social constraint. Her role as the representative of family unity is very clearly defined. Rabbinic tradition did very little to deviate from this view and consequently this had ramifications for the way in which local Jewish communities throughout both Eastern and Western Europe retained a strong tradition of patriarchal values. One difficulty lies in making any conclusion about the whole history of the Galut for obviously local prejudices and pressures could differ considerably throughout the course of history. However one can say that by the beginning of the nineteenth century a large proportion of Eastern European Jewry retained an orthodox view of woman which differed little in essence from the Biblical and Rabbinic periods.

(ii) Prior to the 18th century it can be argued that one great achievement of Eastern European Jewry lay in the maintenance of high standards of learning - the prior factor behind this success lay in the commonly accepted notion that it was the father's duty to educate his sons in Torah. With the impact of the Enlightenment, however, Jewish women began to be influenced by those trends which were anticipating the demands of many in Revolutionary Europe for greater freedom and liberty. A woman living in the Pale could acquire greater freedom through the medium of education. Montefiore¹ points to the remarkable impact such trends had made in the Pale by the middle of the nineteenth century, and this is quite remarkable bearing in mind the enclosed nature of the community. Such a change amongst the lives of women would have had profound tensions in local communities, between Enlightened and Orthodox, and perhaps more important than this, amongst individuals of differing persuasions.

(iii) Both Mapu and Mendele were authors who were the product of extremely representative social conditions. Mapu came from a poor, orthodox home and during the course of his life had contact with many modern influences, particularly those of Hasidism. Given too his contact with the classics and his period in Vilna, he went through a personal pilgrimage, wrestling between the demands of his religious sensitivity and intellectual creativity. In "The Love of Zion" and "The Hypocrite" he examines individual tensions at times of rapidly changing social conditions. In both novels women are seen as providing a focal point for the passions and fortunes of the principal

1 Op. cit., p. 345.

male characters. Tamar and Elisheba provide the hub of the respective plots. In these two characters Mapu reveals - despite his own yearning for the forces of change - a surprisingly conservative view of woman's correct role and in this sense he can be seen to be fairly near the orthodox view. During his own move towards the views of Haskalah, traditional female virtues are praised, and his two heroines do not change despite the changing social climate.

(iv) Mendele was quicker than Mapu to embrace the ideas of Haskalah. He came from a wealthier family and could therefore afford the luxury of dabbling in fashionable cultural and religious values. Along with his acute concern for the social climate of the Pale, he also reflects a great deal of sympathy in his works for characters who want to embrace the forces of change. He does not have the 'ideal' of Mapu's perfect woman, and is content to let his characters take their places on the human stage with commonplace vices and virtues. Hayyah-Treinah is intelligent but she is still inferior in status to Sandreal. Mendele constantly reinforces the paradox behind such circumstances and as a result his female characters are rich and vibrant individuals. Mendele has a love of female beauty and is concerned about apparent injustice towards womanhood indigenous to the Jewish Law, and it would not be until such obstacles were removed that woman's traditional dignity would be restored. Mendele's women provide the reader with one example of his political view of the world.

(v) Mendele and Mapu both realised in their respective ways that the cultural stultification of life in the Pale needed to be challenged. Mapu had a romantic view of a past where values were

simpler and the traditional values of Judaism, as he saw them, were far more apparent than during his lifetime. On the other hand, Mendele wanted social change and this affected the status of women no less than anything else.

Together these authors can be said to represent all the tensions which afflicted 19th century Eastern European Jewry and their work is to be viewed as an important component of our understanding of women in the Kehillot of the Pale.

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