WOMEN
in
SOUTH SOTHO
NARRATIVE
LITERATURE.

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## WOMEN IN SOUTH SOTHO NARRATIVE LITERATURE

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**Translation of Sotho Texts**
WOMEN IN SOUTH SOTHO NARRATIVE LITERATURE.

1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. This essay attempts to trace the position of women in Sotho society as it transpires from South Sotho narrative literature and to evaluate the attitudes and ideas about women by South Sotho writers. I include in "narrative literature" fictional or semi-fictional prose works concerned with human beings and their circumstances and using plot and suspense to depict human character.

1.2. This definition applies equally to oral narrative works, such as the traditional folktale, as to modern written literature. The first part of the essay is therefore devoted to the folktale, to be followed by a survey of the field in contemporary novels and stories.

1.3. The South Sotho folktale has been kept alive largely by women, more particularly by the nkgono, the grandmother, who relates traditional tales to the children in the evenings. (1) One of my informants, a Motswana, tells me:

"Both my grandfather and grandmother used to tell us stories. But my grandfather's stories were mostly about himself and about the wars and chiefs of our people. My grandmother used to tell us tales about cannibals, about Tselane, about various animals that talked, generally fairy tales."

(1) See also P.D. Cole-Beuchat: NOTES ON SOME FOLKLORE FORMS IN TSONGA AND RONGA IN AFRICAN STUDIES, Vol. 17. No. 4., 1958.
1.4. Yet there are, to my knowledge, no women fiction writers in contemporary South Sotho. This may be due partly to the fact that formal education for women is a comparatively recent development and also because until recent times women have been reluctant to intrude on what are customarily regarded as masculine domains. South Sotho narrative writers are exclusively males and insofar as they create female characters, the ideas about women, the image of womanhood, feminine values - these are seen through masculine eyes and are shaped according to masculine imagination, desires and interests. These male attitudes are, however, not static, but have been subject to changes. As I am hoping to show, there has been a steady development in South Sotho fictional women characters, which may be ascribed to the new role of women in society, to changing social relationships and to the increasing absorption of Sotho society into the general framework of world culture.

2. WOMAN IN ORAL LITERATURE.

2.1. Sotho folktales, transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation, are the treasurehouse of tribal culture. They reflect history and customs, taboos and values, social relationships, attitudes and sentiments of a bygone age. The original versions are encrusted with the moss and barnacles of obscure symbolic references, of distortions by successive generations of story-tellers, of archaic phrases and vocabulary.

2.2. Despite these multiple influences which, over the ages, have changed or even obliterated the initial creative work, the Sotho folktale retains the picture of the complex and unique social order which gave rise to it. Yet, its
Woman with grain basket.
style, language and contents reveal a universality of human emotions and attitudes which cannot fail to arouse the interest and affection of the so-called "Western" student.

2.3.1. Women at work. In the collection of folktales by E. Jacottet (2) we can trace the daily activities of women. We see them preparing food:

"Hosasane ngwetsi tsa tsoha, tsa batla mabele ho sila; ... ba pheha, ba tshola. Ha ba se ba tshotse, yaba ba fuwa mafi le nama....." (3)

2.3.2. "Modisa-wa-dipodi" goes out to work in the garden (serapa) and in the fields (masimong). "Ho ya masimong" - is a frequently recurring phrase in the tales; so is "ho rwala patsi" - to bring in firewood. In "Ranchemane" we have another domestic scene:

"Yaba o bula ka tlung, a fumana lebese le lengata, empa ho se bohobe, ho se letho. Yaba o fumana mabele. A phea dikgobe. Eitse ha a di tshotse, ya wa di phuthula; yaba o fehla lebese, yaba o le tshela dipitsaneng; yaba o fiela hohle moo e leng ha morena." (4)


All quotations and references to folktales are from these two volumes, and will from now on be referred to as "Ditshomo".


(4) ibid, Pages 71/72.
2.3.3. In these extracts the specific sphere of influence of the women in the Sotho household is revealed. Of particular interest is the rhythm, which the narrator manages to convey in the two quotations, a stylistic device which strongly brings out the repetitive sequence of the daily routine. This rhythm is not without its emotive overtones: a woman's lot is hard, work is monotonous, continuous, never ceasing, but with all she finds fulfilment in her allotted tasks, which she performs with the skill born of long training. The female listener to the story identifies herself all the more with the characters as her own experience of the same activities brings her close to the women in the story. This is clearly the intention of the narrator, for in this way the eventual moral of the folktale is easily assimilated.

2.4.1. Initiation. "Marutladitau" is a story about the mystic female initiation ceremony. Thakane's departure from home on an obviously symbolic journey is analogous to the isolation of the "Mathisa" from the village and the family. An old woman puts her through the initiation together with her own daughter; she prepares their special initiation costume, plaits their hair in the traditional manner and puts them inside the drum, which the "bale" usually play for their dances. Then she says:

"Kajeno ke o isa ha eno, hoba o bolotse."

(5) ibid Page 102.
2.4.2. The story includes some verses, in which tradition requires the listeners to join in at certain stages. This audience participation is very important to the technique of the folktale; the words bring out the inevitable sense of isolation and homesickness of the girls in the initiation school. When Thakane eventually finds her way to her brother's cattle post, the effect of the verse is graphically described, in words reminiscent of biblical simplicity:

"Wa kena Masilo pelong."

2.4.3. This simple tale, like other folktales, has the making of a great work of art. There is a wealth of creative stuff even in the juxtaposition of the individual character and aspirations of the young women and their enforced communal type of living during the initiation period, leading to the resolution of these conflicts and the adaptation (or non-adaptation) of the women to the traditional standards of the society. An in-depth treatment of these psychological and emotional developments of the women in the initiation school should be a very rewarding subject for a discerning writer. It is regrettable that modern Sotho writers have failed to exploit this material.

2.5.1. **Marriage.** The folktales abound with details of marriage customs. An interesting description of marriage negotiations is to be found in "Nyopakatala" (6). Masilo's men come to seek a wife for him and they decide on Sojane.

(6) ibid Pages 59/60.
They ask for water to drink, the traditional opening to a marriage bid, and Sojane draws water for them from the river. The prospective bride, Sojane, plays a trick on the men — she stirs up the mud in the river and they unwittingly gulp it down. (Khaketla describes a similar trick in "Mosadi a Nkgola", when Mosito courts his future wife. Such customs may take new forms, but they persist for a very long time !) Masilo then goes home to fetch the "bohadi" cattle; he fetches Sojane; then there are festivities:

"ha silwa diphofo; ha hlajwa dikgomo..."

Great stress is laid on the continuing link with the bride's kin as a guarantee of fair treatment. Sojane's mother impresses on the groom that he must look after her child, because the mother will have her own way of finding out if Sojane is in trouble. Towards the end of the story Sojane bears a child and she and her husband dutifully revisit her family to show the child, after which they return to the groom's home, presumably to live happily ever after.

2.5.2. Although the tradition prescribes that a Man's wife is to be chosen for him by his parents, more particularly by his father, the folktales admit the exceptions. Monyohe, the chief's son, reaches marriageable age. He says to his father:

"Ntate, ke batla mosadi." Ntatae o itse:
'Ngwana ka, ketla tsamaya ke e'0 o batlela!,'
Mora a re: 'Ha ke batlelwe, ke tshwanetse ho tswa ke ya ipatlela." (7)

(7) ibid, Page 119.
2.5.3. To which the father eventually agrees. By analogy, a woman must accept the husband chosen and contracted for her by her parents, but in the same story of "Monyohe" the woman rejects the prospective groom and has to be forced to marry him. This resistance may, however, be part of the equally ancient tradition, that the bride must play "hard to get". Presumably, this is part of the haggling over the bride price inherent in the somewhat mercantile transaction. Yet underlying this superficial appearance, there is also the deeper context of respect for the bride's wishes, for her personal dignity and integrity.

2.5.4. For instance, Tsaile in "Ranchemane" (8), refuses to be married and leaves home to the distress of her family. She goes out into the world, does good deeds and eventually finds her own niche in society by successfully re-establishing a chief, whose tribe was dispersed and whose lands were ruined. This tale implies moral approval of feminine independence.

2.5.5. The custom of "bohadi" payment for a prospective bride is intended chiefly to cement relationships between the families involved and to act as a guarantee of good behaviour and fair treatment. But often the mercenary and selfish aspect of the transaction outweighs the social implications. In "Ranchemane" Tsaile is badgered by her grandmother:

"Thaka tsa hao di ntse di nyalwa;
o tla nyalwa neng, re ke re je,
re none ?"

(8) ibid, Page 70.
2.5.6. Similarly, when Monyohe's prospective bride refuses to marry "ntho e jwalo", because he does not look human and is enveloped in a snake's skin, her father rebukes her:

"Ngwanaka, ke rekile metsi le dijo ka wena",

the implication being that the daughter is to be sold for the bohadi wealth and that it does not matter if she has to put up with the unnatural appearance of her husband.

2.5.7. Many Sotho folktales deal with the man, who is born as an egg or in a snake's skin. Invariably, he is eventually liberated by the woman he marries and he assumes the shape of a beautiful man fully equipped with spear, shield, headdress and all the regalia that go with a leading warrior's status. A subtle symbolism is hidden in these stories. The man is transformed by the care and affection of the woman, who looks after him, caters for his needs and generally mothers him, despite his inhuman appearance. These stories seem to imply that the formality of marriage by itself is insufficient to secure a happy household; a marriage is only consummated and both partners find their full awards when husband and wife win each other's affections and trust by self-sacrificing devotion. In "Lehe" (9), there is an interesting development of this theme. Lehe, who has been transformed from an egg into a perfect man by his devoted wife, marries another woman and turns his back on his first wife:

(9) ibid, Page 30.
...a se ke a hate le lapeng la hae, leha e le ka tsatsi le le leng feela. A mo hlokisa kobo. A mo hlokisa tsohle, tsohle. Ka tsatsi le leng a hlomoa pelo, a lla letsatsi lohle. A ya ho ntat'ae a Lehe, a re: 'Ntate, ke ka baka la'ng ha Lehe, a nthlilile hakalo?' Ntat'ae a re: 'Ke buile ke kgathetse; Lehe o re ke morena'...

2.5.8. The story-teller conveys utter deprivation of affection by the all-embracing repetition of "tsohle" and the woman's yearning for such affection is evoked by the statement, that she would have welcomed it, if her erring husband would enter her home even for one day only. The drama of her deep sorrow is struck by the hyperbolical "a lla letsatsi lohle". These simple techniques of the folktale cannot fail to move the hearts of the listeners whose sympathy is directed entirely to the woman's feelings of hopelessness, so that they find her fully justified when she leaves in desperation and returns to her own kin. In consequence, Lehe is again transformed into an egg and, by contrast with the loyal one, his second wife deserts him in horror. Lehe's father earnestly pleads with the first wife to return and after some hesitation she does so and once again Lehe becomes a man:

"Kajeno ke bakile, mosadi wa ka; ha ke sa tla pheta ke etsa jwalo. Yaba o tlohela mosadi yane, o kgomarela mosadi wa hae; a re ho yena: Kajeno ha ho ka shwa ma, o tla nyalwa; ha ho eshwa wena, ke tla nyal."  

2.5.9. A splendid affirmation of both conjugal loyalty and the principle of monogamy!

2.6.1. Polygamy. Despite this traditional stress on monogamy, it is quite obvious that the custom of "sethepu" was fairly wide-spread among the Basotho. As late as 1936,
The evidence in folktales is ambiguous. We read in "Bulane le Tselane" that the Batloung actually had a taboo against polygamy, so much so that when Bulane marries a second wife, his first wife, Tselane, who comes from the Batloung clan, is turned into an elephant. This may be symbolic of the bride's return to her own clan, which bears the totemic name of the elephant. However, the tragic terms in which Tselane's life as an elephant is depicted, lead one to believe that the return of the woman to her own clan in such circumstances is a calamity difficult to bear.

On the other hand, the folktales abound with evidence of polygamy and sometimes two wives join together to save their husband. In "Mathose le Mathosane" (13), the
wives of Sephothofane bring him back to life, after his brother Sephothofe has killed him. In one of the tales the legendary Chief Masilo marries two sisters (Morongwe le Morongwenyana).\(^{(14)}\) On the other hand, the story of "Lehe"\(^{(15)}\) already referred to above, is also distinctly disapproving of polygamy. "Moqonono" \(^{(16)}\) tells about the jealousy which sometimes arises between the wives of one man and, by implication, condemns "sethepu", if only for this reason.

2.6.4. Polygamy was probably always accepted for economic reasons in a society in which female labour was of such tremendous importance in the household, whilst men had to go about their business as hunters and warriors. That the Basotho were fully conscious of the inevitable social problems of "sethepu" is evidenced by the fact that society provided strict hierarchical rules of succession and inheritance in the case of several wives.

2.7.1. **Levirate and Sororate.** It is well-known that the Basotho practised (and probably still do) the system of levirate.\(^{(17)}\) It is all the more remarkable that there seems to be no reference at all to this practice in the folktales, either approving or disapproving. There is nothing at all, as far as I can see, remotely connected with the custom of "ho kenela tlung".

\(^{(14)}\) *ibid*, Pages 106-115.  
\(^{(15)}\) *ibid*, Page 30.  
\(^{(16)}\) *ibid*, Page 88.  
\(^{(17)}\) Hugh Ashton: *The Basuto*, Pages 83/84.
Guma deals with this custom in his historical novel "Tshehlana Tseo Tsa Basia", but other modern Sotho writers are silent about this tradition. One may assume that the inhibition is due to the same Christian distaste which throws a veil over other similar ancient practices, though it is not at all clear why the folktale should ignore their existence. However, the sororate is freely admitted.

2.7.2. In the dispute between Sephothofane and Sephothofe, the women, both wives of Sephothofane, refuse to be divided up between the two brothers. They say:

"E-e, ka hobane re baradi ba motho a le mong, e ka kgona re nyalwe ka monna a le mong."

2.8.1. Attitudes towards women. In traditional Sotho custom women remain minors for the best part of their lives. They are not permitted to attend the kgotla and generally have no say in the affairs of the tribe. Their influence in the household is, however, immense, by reason of their economic and educational contribution. As they grow older, their immediate influence on the children tends to become more tenuous, but is never entirely lost. In times of stress and trouble, it is the "nkongo", the "mosadi-moholo" or grandmother, to whom the family tends to turn for advice. The story-tellers stress this benevolent influence of old women. In the story of "Modisa-wa-Dipodi" (19), the grandmother is the only one who is always kind to the heroine (whose story is amazingly akin to our "Cinderella"), and she is suitably rewarded in the end, when she is the only one in the family to be saved from death.

(19) ibid, Page 19.
by famine. Another old woman helps Morongwe and Morongwenyana (20) to escape from the cannibals. The wife of a cannibal also saves Moshanyana Mathoba (21) by refusing to disclose his hiding place to her husband.

2.8.2. Women are upholders of tribal and kinship values. In "Moshanyana ya bolailweng ke rangwanae" (22), the wife, unlike her husband, whose actions are contrary to the prescribed benevolent role of the "rangwane", welcomes the orphan and adopts him into the family:

"ke kgaitsedi ya banana ba hae."

2.8.3. There are evil women, too, in Sotho folktales. These are mostly motivated by jealousy and their activities are linked with despised practices of witchcraft. "Sewela o tshwanelwa ke majwana" (23) tells how jealousy leads to attempted murder and is eventually punished by death. Those who wish to harm others by witchcraft are caught in their own trap (24). On the other hand, "Moqonono" (25), who refuses to be associated with witchcraft, is awarded by becoming the queen of the tribe.

2.8.4. Why does the Sotho folktale invariably associate witchcraft with women? It is true that men are wizards, too, but whilst wizardry does not exclude benevolent influences, witchcraft is invariably evil. I think that

(20) ibid, Page 106.
(21) ibid, Page 115.
(22) ibid, Page 40.
(23) ibid, Page 82.
(24) ibid, Page 89.
(25) ibid, Page 88.
the women story-tellers have invented these evil powers of women as a reaction to their generally inferior status. It might be argued that they might rather have ascribed evil to men, but this would have conceded additional powers to the men who are already excessively endowed. The witch is thus a psychological revenge of the women, a supernatural endowment which recompenses them for their general powerlessness.

2.8.5. As minors, women are protected by certain rights to fair treatment. These rights are upheld by force of public moral opinion and are entrenched in tribal legal tradition(26). In the story of "Monyohe"(27), the woman and her child are treated badly by the mother-in-law; she is made to do all the work, but both she and her child are deprived of food and are starving. Ill-treatment of the "ngwetsi" is a traditional test of her adaptation to new relationships. If she survives without too violent a reaction, she is deemed to have passed the test. However, there is a limit between what is permitted as a conventional test and what may be regarded as an excess of cruelty. In the story of "Monyohe", the woman's flight and return to her family with her child is justified.

(26) H. Ashton speaks of the "considerable authority and standing women can achieve in the conduct of their affairs and administration of property". He quotes one of the Laws of Lerothodi: "If a man dies leaving only female children, the widow shall be heiress to his estate and property, but she must work in conformity with the wishes of her deceased husband's people, who shall in all matters be deemed her guardians..."

2.8.6. Perhaps for the reason that the story-tellers are mostly women, the folktale often expresses a delicate sympathy with the dreams and aspirations of women. "Pitsi Kororo" (Jacottet I, Pages 114/115), tells of a secret liaison between a young girl and a wild zebra. The girl is in the habit of meeting the zebra outside her village; she calls to it by a poignant magical verse and when the zebra comes, she plays with it. This happens regularly and in secrecy, but one day she is followed by someone from the village. This person later maliciously kills the zebra and when the girl comes to call for her beloved "pitsi", it never comes again. The story achieves a high degree of tragic compassion with the girl by the persuasiveness of its style and by the choice of phrases and vocabulary evocative of a wide range of meanings.

2.8.7. Women who are about to give birth or have recently given birth (batswetswa) are treated with special consideration. They are exempt from the hard work in the fields or from carrying firewood and other women willingly carry water and bring food to them (28).

2.9.1. Fertility Cult. The Basotho lay great store by fertility and the disgrace and shame of barrenness is poignantly described in "Nyopakatala" (29). If a woman fails to bear children, her husband will seek out a medicine-man (ngaka) and will gladly pay a heavy fee for a successful cure (30). The Basotho draw an analogy between human barrenness and the cruel forces of nature, which dry up rivers

(28) ibid, Page 62.
(29) ibid, Page 58.
(30) ibid, Page 118.
and streams and turn the land into a desert. In "Metsi le Metsana", a deeply imaginative tale, the mythological Phaka-Mmalanyane deprives the people of water and only relents when both Metsi and Metsana are allowed to marry him. Then the rivers begin to flow again, the earth gives forth of its fruit, the women menstruate again and both Metsi and Metsana bear children. This is poetic symbolism at its best. The imagery extends to the names of the two girls (Water and Little Water) and to the concluding sentence which says that people admired the beauty of their children, because they had never lacked water.

2.9.2. Some of the folktales contain examples of immaculate conception. Monyoho's wives bear children without having seen the father (32), Modisa-wa-dipodi becomes pregnant and does not know whence it came (33), her husband having remained invisible. These examples may explain why the Basotho found nothing strange or incredible in the Christian myth of the birth of Christ; the affinity with their own mythology may have been one of the reasons, apart from the highly acceptable ethical principles, which made them ready material for Christianity.

2.9.3. The instances of immaculate conception are mostly associated with the phenomenon of the transformation of eggs and snakes into full-blown, beautiful men. They seem to be a residue of some ancient magic beliefs, details of which have not survived.

(31) ibid, Page 54.
(32) ibid, Pages 121-125.
(33) ibid, Page 22.
2.10.1. **Physical Beauty.** The ancient Basotho do not seem to have had any fixed ideals of physical feminine beauty, if one is to go by the folktale, the only available evidence. No detailed descriptions remain of the heroines of those tales. Occasionally we hear about a woman whom people admired for her beauty:

"...ba makatsa ka bokgabane ba hae... batho ba bokana ho mo boha............." (34)

But we are told nothing of her specific features. By contrast, modern Sotho writers glory in detailed descriptions. The important thing that was treasured in a woman seemed to have been a certain personal dignity. A woman should not lower herself by her behaviour in the eyes of a man, she must have self-respect, independence and force of character. Monyche subjects his prospective brides to a character test. He orders putrid food to be placed before them. Some, in a desire to please or flatter him, accept the food; but these women he rejects, obviously because they have not come up to the standard of personal integrity he expects of them. Finally, he marries the one who not only proudly rejects the proffered mess, but orders it to be fed to her dog. (35)

(34) ibid, Page 69.
(35) ibid, Page 132.
3. WOMEN IN WRITTEN LITERATURE.

3.1. Although South Sotho writers have lamentably failed to exploit the narrative material of the folktale, or to develop its themes and literary potential, they have inherited from it a persistent tendency to moralise. The main purpose of the folktale was, after all, apart from entertaining, to educate and to impress upon the young the values of tribal society. It is a general and conspicuous characteristic of modern South Sotho literature that it is almost brazenly didactic, overtly exposing the author’s ideals, values and norms. This trend was reinforced in the early history of written South Sotho literature by the influence of biblical and evangelical writings which, almost exclusively, were the early products of written South Sotho. Even the most recent Sotho authors are inclined to intrude into their tales with lengthy sermons, almost amounting to separate essays, and to put long speeches into the mouths of their characters. We are certainly left with no ambiguity in their ideas about and attitudes towards women!

3.2. Early South Sotho writers contented themselves largely with recording important events in the history of the Basotho, with collecting proverbs and idioms of the language, and with scriptural and evangelical texts. The fictional literature of this period devotes little attention to women. Women play no role at all in Everitt Segoete's "Monono ke mohodi ke mouwane" (36).

(36) Everitt Segoete; Monono ke mohodi ke mouwane Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1910.
Aria Sebaka.
This is more of an evangelical tract than a literary narrative.

3.3. One can safely date the commencement of real fictional Sotho literature with Thomas Mofolo. Like most Sotho writers he places the man in the centre of his universe. Where women appear in his stories, they are usually only a foil to the male characters. Aria Sebaka is essentially a subsidiary character, whose main function is to enhance the personality of Alfred Phakwe (37). Aria does not influence the plot; her character throughout is somewhat nebulous. She is only the background scenery to Alfred's life. Nodiwe's purpose in "Chaka" is to illuminate certain features of Chaka (38). She is presented indirectly as a passive adjunct to Chaka, but at the same time the author endeavours through her to draw a picture of the "ideal" woman, a perfect combination of physical beauty and spiritual devotion. This is, of course, the ideal in the mind of a man. The Rev. "Katse's" wife, who could have featured as an influence in Aria Sebaka's life, just as Katse is in Alfred's, remains a distant and amorphous figure without any significance in "Pitseng". Sainyaka and Maria in Matlosa's "Molahlehi" (39) are not independent tangible characters, but only constitute landmarks in the development of Molahlehi. Even such a recent

(38) Thomas Mofolo: Chaka Morija Book Depot, 1926.
(39) S. Matlosa: Molahlehi Morija Book Depot, 1946.
20.

Even such a recent writer as B.M. Khaketla ignores the narrative possibilities of his women. Fumane and Thakane are only stage props in Moeketsi's life (40). In his more recent novel, "Mosadi a Nxgola" (41), Khaketla introduces Mosito's mother as the old chief's deathbed, but after that completely fades her out of the picture. One would have thought that this is the woman to whom Mosito might turn when he struggles between the evil influences of his wife and the old counsellors and his inner conscience. Women do begin to assume their place as main characters or as influences of great importance on the main themes in recent novels. Ntlokgolo and Mmanthatisi, both historical personages, are brought to life by S.M. Guma. (42) There is nothing submissive about these two women; they are the fighting products of a warrior society, proud, independent, conscious of their importance as individuals, yet not without the qualities of femininity, which make them genuine representatives of their sex. Placed by the author in the context of their historical position, they exercise a decisive influence on the life of their people and, by comparison, eclipse the men surrounding them. Mmathabo is a fascinating woman with unique qualities and a temperament, which not only makes her a powerful catalyst in Mosito's life, but also successfully evokes her own tragedy (not unlike Lady Macbeth !) (43).

Sebolelo, too, plays a decisive role in the plot of the novel by Maboee. (44)

(40) B.M. Khaketla: Meokgo ya Thabo A.P.B., Johannesburg, 1951.
(43) B.M. Khaketla: Mosadi a Nxgola
Female Alcasso.
3.3.1. **New values.** It appears that the treatment of women in written Sotho literature keeps pace with cultural developments in Sotho society. As the position of women changes in society, as their status rises with their increasingly important socio-economic role, so women's part in narrative literature assumes a more enhanced position. In the Sotho folktale the woman's sphere of work, we have seen, was clearly defined within the domestic bounds of the household. The proverb "mosadi ke yena ya hahang ntlo", though stressing her importance, limits her influence to the narrow confines of the home. This has changed. Already Thomas Mofolo, a little unjustly perhaps, can regard Indian, Chinese and Zulu women as nothing better than slaves by comparison with the higher status Sotho women have achieved (45). That is not to say that writers no longer attach any importance to the basic domestic virtues. Fumane, a highly educated girl, delights her father with her ability to cook (46) and Nofestile, though of foreign extraction, becomes acceptable to her father-in-law, the old chief, because she is such a good cook and a reliable domestic worker. (47) Even at school the formal education of the girls differs from that of the boys and includes cooking, sewing and domestic work.(48)

3.3.2. But Sotho writers take pride in the educational achievements of their women (49). The novels reveal the

(45) Thomas Mofolo : *Pitseng*, Pages 81 - 83.
(46) Khaketla : *Meokgo ya Thabo*, Ch. XVII.
(48) Khaketla : *Meokgo ya Thabo*, Ch. VI.
(49) According to Lesotho's Minister of State, Chief Selbourne R. Letsie, 70% of Lesotho's women are now literate. (*Kwena News*, Vol.7 No. 8 of 11/1/1973).
widened horizons. Women travel extensively. Flumane is an emancipated scholar, she attends Teacher's College in Natal, spends a recuperative holiday in Durban, is seen to take refreshments in a public restaurant and attends a social function in "the big city". (50) The meticulous description of all the glittering details of this transformation (highheeled shoes, flashy city clothes, all the trappings which go with sophisticated urban existence) bears testimony to the glowing pride of the author. Matshediso is elected Secretary of the College society, works as a Nurse as far away from the Maluti of Lesotho as East London (51). Ramailane's wife, Miss Penelope Botlenyana Molefe, is a school teacher (52).

3.3.3 All this is highly significant. Travel has in the past been the subject of numerous Sotho narratives; after all, as far back as modern writers can remember, it has been the lot of the Mosotho to go and work for the white man on the farms in the Free State, in the docks of Durban or on the gold mines of Lejweleputswa. And, as the proverb goes, "Ho tsamaya ke ho bona" (To travel means to see, to learn). But hitherto the heroes of these travel stories were men. Now we see the women coming into their won. Majara in "Mmakotulo" applies this travel theme exclusively to a woman!

3.3.4 The right to education and higher social achievements does not come easy for women. Prejudices based on tribal traditions have to be overcome. Thabana, father of Fumane, argues:

(50) Khaketla : Meokgo ya Thabo, Ch. VI.
(51) B. Malefane : Nqalong ya Lerato, Bona Press.
(52) E.A.S. Lesoro : Leshala le tswala molora, Bona Press.
Dance of the initiated girls.
Modern women's liberation leaders might find fault with some anti-feminist prejudices of Sotho writers. They would, for instance, vigorously resent Khaketla's suggestion that women are more liable to instigate intrigues and to be subject to bouts of vindictiveness than men. Yet his tale of the women who feel that their daughters have been scorned by the eminently eligible Moeketsi (54) rings not untrue. The prototype of the "male chauvinist pig" is surely the bumptious and exceedingly self-confident Sergeant Kokobela, who firmly believes that women are the root of all evil (55). Yet one wonders whether Ntsane did not intend a little gentle irony here, for the same Kokobela has a most laudable relationship with his wife and is not above taking advice from her.

3.4.1. Initiation. Despite the powerful missionary influence, initiation ceremonies and schools are still conducted in Lesotho. This may not be so noticeable in the Lowlands, but in the mountainous Maluti regions the "bale" in their bead masks and clay painted bodies are a frequent sight. Woe unto the traveller on the road, who does not part with a gift at their insistent and threatening badgering! As likely as not he will be severely beaten up. Maboee describes an act of violence by these girls against Sebolelo (56). What is significant in this part of his story is the conflict between

(53) Khaketla:  Meokgo ya Thabo, Ch. XIV.
(54) ibid:  Ch. XIII.
(55) K.E. Ntsane:  Nna Sajene Kokobela, C.I.D. A.P.B.
(56) Maboee:  Sebolelo Page 57.
the ancient educational tradition and the idea of modern schooling. Sebolelo’s father Nthunya has sent her to school to be educated. Now he is tempted by the prospect of marrying his daughter to the chief’s son, which would mean secure prosperity and social status for him. But one of the conditions of the proposed marriage is that Sebolelo is to undergo the initiation ceremony. To Sebolelo, the whole idea of marrying Kantini, the Chief’s son, is abhorrent, because she has promised herself to Paki Tshupane. But, particularly, the very thought of the savage initiation custom goes counter to all of Sebolelo’s modern and Christian thinking. She flees to her aunt, the traditional refuge of wronged children, and the latter upbraids Nthunya: how can he, who was the first man at Nkasele to be enlightened enough to send his daughter to school, now take this retrogressive step and make his daughter go through a completely senseless ceremony? On the other hand, old man Ntautane, who organises the initiation school, would regard it as a feather in his cap if he could get this educated girl to retrace her step back to the initiation school, for that would prove to the people that modern schooling is just a "vanity of Vanities".

3.5.1. The sex-urge and flirting. A modern writer like Khaketla recognises the sex urge as a natural and healthy phenomenon:

"Hona ho lokela, mme hase le taba yo babadi ba ka e nyedisang, ba e tadima e le ntho e senyang batho ba hae, hobane motho e mong le e mong o ntse o tshwanela ho fihlelwa ke takatso ya mofuta oo, haebo betho ba hae bophethehile hantle. Yo e so mo fihileleng, e ka hla yaba phoso e kgolo e teng bothong ba hae... (57).

(57) Khaketla - Meokgo ya Thabo Page 37.
All Sotho writers have, however, in common a prudishness about flirting between the sexes. This attitude is most certainly a Christian acquisition. Ioda Msimang's betrayal is held up as an example of the hollowness of "lefereho". Although Mofolo, like Khaketla, accepts the naturalness of courting, he presents Alfred Phakwe's serious abstinence ("a ithuletse thoko, a lebeletse") as an ideal to be emulated as against the behaviour of Linganiso Diniso, to whom courting is but a game not to be taken seriously (58). To Malefane's hero, too, flirting and talking to girls is but a waste of time:

"...ho yena meqoqo ya barwetsana e ne e se e mo thabisang, a sa kene ho yena hobane lefereho o ne a sa bone molemo wa lona, a ka mpa a qoqa ka tsa dipapadi jwalojwalo..."

(59)

3.5.2. Thomas Mofolo introduces a tribal note into the theme. He does not seem to object to friendly intercourse between men of different tribes or nationalities. In fact, he stresses the importance of travel and mixing among other peoples as an educational experience. But he firmly discounts flirting between young people of different tribal origins, for, according to him, they lead to unhappy liaisons (60).

3.5.3. A man's mother is inclined to be nervous about flirting, both for the reason that it may lead to an undesirable liaison, as well as for the selfish fear that she may lose her son's support. Moeketsi's mother warns him against "lefereho", because

(58) Mofolo: Pitseng, Page 81.
(59) Malefane: Mqalong ya Lerato Page 41.
(60) Mofolo: Pitseng, Page 81.
it may interfere with what she regards as his main task in life, namely, "ho re phedisa le Dineo" (61). A young man must take care not to fall victim to the snares and wiles of scheming females (62).

3.5.4. A moral distinction is drawn between flirting and the formal courting prescribed by traditional marriage negotiations. Once parental approval has been obtained, it is obligatory on the groom to call on the bride in order to become acquainted. But here a certain decorum must be observed and the bride must at all times be chaperoned by other maidens of her village, but in this type of courting even kissing is permitted! (63)

3.5.5. The humorous side of courting between young people does not escape the attention of Sotho writers. The affectations of young men who try to impress the object of their love with exaggerated forms of speech are described by Thomas Mofolo:

"A botsa dipotso mohlankana, mme a di botsa hamonate, ho le jwaleka hoja e le motho ya bonang hore o tla kgutla a fumane ho hong ho thabisang, mme di hona a di keny a bo-na-na ba bangata, e leng ntho e monate haholo ho bua Basotho ba sebele, hobane di-na-na tseo di natefisa lentswe le modumo wa potso, leha mohlomong di eketsa bobo le bohale ba kgalefo..." (64)

3.5.6. It may be appropriate at this stage to examine Khaketla's treatment of the theme of "leferedho" a little more closely, since it reveals not only his own attitude, but also the relationship between two young people. In "Mosadi a Nkgola", Khaketla describes how young Chief Mosito comes to woo

(61) Khaketla : Masekgo ya Thabo, Page 25.
(62) ibid, Ch. XI.
(63) Khaketla : Mosadi a Nkgola, Page 11.
(64) Mofolo : Pitseng, Ch. XIII.
his future wife (65). The passage is permeated with a delicious humour, in which the image of a young untamed foal is introduced. Anybody who has watched the taming of a "petsana" will appreciate the sort of mutual attraction that exists between the animal and its prospective rider. We know the foal is shy and perhaps even a little afraid, yet it knows the man and it knows it has nothing to fear from him; he may even give it a few grains of mealies to chew. We also know that the man will eventually succeed, for isn't the man the master of the animal world?

3.5.7. All these associations of the image are transferred to the relationship between Mosito and the girl. Khaketla does not have to describe this relationship in direct terms, the imagery is enough to evoke these thoughts in the reader and they are further reinforced by the visual impact of the horse's head in the feeding-bag - we actually feel the process of taming the young "foal".

3.5.8. The equation of the young girl to a "petsana" is, of course, particularly amusing to a Mosotho, to whom the whole process of taming a foal is not only a common experience, but who would derive a good deal of joy and entertainment from it. 3.5.9. Moreover, we immediately perceive how appropriate the image is to the custom "fereho". All the delicate emotional currents flowing between the two main protagonists are presented in a visual picture, through which our emotions are aroused and our thoughts are directed.

(65) Khaketla: Mosadi a Nkola, Page 11.
3.5.10. By juxtaposing two well-known customs - "fereho" and "thapiso ya pitsi" - Khaketla makes us conscious of the qualities they have in common. He also skilfully uses diminutives to convey emotional overtones. "Mokgwanyana" is a slightly ironical allusion to the silly repartee which young people exchange on these occasions, yet "petsana" evokes tenderness and delicateness.

3.6.1. Love and Marriage. One of the women in "Tshehlana tseo tsa Basia" paints in a few words a telling picture of the rights of women in ancient Sotho society:

"...rona bana ba basetsana, ha re ke be re ithere, re a rerwa. Mohlang re iswang bohadi, re ye re lauwe hathatathata hore re ye aha motse moo re yang, ho be ho qetelwe ka matswe a sa lehaleheng ho rona kaofela, mantswe a reng: 'eya, ngwanaka! Ngwana wa mosetsana o shwela ditjhabeng; a lahlwe la moo a nyetsweng teng! ..." (66).

3.6.2. Yet in a novel written in 1965, the father of a prospective bride, says to the emissary of the groom:

"...kgopolo ya ka ke hore ngwanaka a iketsetse boithatelo tabeng e kang ena. Ke hora a ikgethele e le yena, a sa kgethelwe...Bana bana ba tlameletswang ke batswadi ba bona ba hloka katleho Ho qhobeshana ha monna le mosadi ha ho fele, mme qetellong monna ha a sa kgathalla mosadi, mosadi ha a sa kgathalla monna, o se a fetoha moqaqeko wa batswadi ba monna..." (67).

(66) Guma : Tshehlana tseo tsa Basia, Page 37.

3.6.3. This is an immense gap in attitudes and testifies to changes in marriage customs. Old Chief Lekaota, father of Mosito, who desires to keep pace with changing times, strikes a subtle compromise between the old and the new. He tells Mosito that he has found a suitable match in keeping with his status as a chief, but there are two daughters in the family and Mosito is graciously permitted to choose one of them himself:

"...re ṭuile, re ṣetile le batswadi ba hae; empa ka baka la mehla ena eo re phelang har'a yona, ha ke a rera ho etsa jwalo, hobana ke a tseba hore thuto ena eo re le neileng eona, ya Makhowa, e le rutile hore eka kgona motho a ikgethele ka boyena molekane yo a utlwang hore o utlwisiswa ke pelo ya hae..." (68).

3.6.4. Malefane thinks that parents should only be there to advise their children, but that the choice should be left to the children:

"...Ke batswadi ba bakae ba tlisitseng ho bana ba bona mahlomola lenyalong moo lerato le leng siyo, mme ba lebale hore hase tsobilie tse neng di lokile tsa pele, tse neng di lokile le kajeno. Mehla e a fetoha. Leha lenyalolo le eaba letle, ha le ananelwe ka batswadi, empa ho hotile hakakang hore bana le bona ba kgotsofale ka seo ba itheretseng sona, mme batswadi bona ba eletse feela..." (69)

3.6.5. Tradition does not disappear in a day. Even today strict parental authority has to be accepted in this matter even by grown-up men. Moeketsi incurs his father's wrath, when he approaches him for approval to marry Thekane:

"Le wena mosadi o tla mo kgethelwa ke nna, mme o ko mo rata kapa o ke ke wa mo rate, ha ho thusu, ke ditshwantshaweng ho nna, o sa tla be o mo nyale !.... nna nke ka ba ka laelwa ke ngwana le kgale ! " (70)

(68) Khaketla : Mosadi a Nkgola, Page 7.
(69) Malefane : Noalong ya Lerato, Page 63.
(70) Khaketla : Meokgo ya Thabo, Ch. XVIII.
3.6.6. For a woman the difficulties involved in opposing her parents' wishes are almost insurmountable because of her economic dependence. Pumano puts it poignantly in her letter to Moeketsi:

"O utwisise, moratuwa, hore rona basadi hase ntho e bobo be ho ithera, hobane ha re tseba moo re yang, hore na ho jwang. Athe Iona ho bobo be ho ithera, hobane le banna, mme le a i phedisa." (71)

3.6.7. The conflict between children and parents over marriage plans is a constantly recurring theme in Sotho literature. Missionary influences, slackened tribal ties, greater economic independence of men and women, wider cultural horizons, - all these tend to undermine former marriage customs. Sotho writers seek to reconcile the old and the new, as, indeed, reconciliation must for a long time be the pattern in real life. Mofolo offers a thoroughly Christian solution. The marriage of Alfred and Aria, fervently prayed for by the Reverend Katse, is ultimately ordained by God. Neither Alfred nor Aria are conscious of the road they are travelling; there is no intervention by parents or other outside influences, the climax of marriage is a natural development, when the time is ripe everything falls into place; it is something that has already been determined when we start reading the book. It is an act of God! (72)

3.6.8. Khaketla's resolution of the conflict is somewhat contrived. It is sheer accident that Moeketsi, after an unhappy love affair and considerable conflict with his father,

(71) ibid, Ch. XXVIII.
(72) Mofolo: Pitseng.
meets up with Fumane and falls in love with her. Both find that their parents have already arranged marriages for them and they are eventually ready to resign themselves to parting. Then Moeketsi discovers to his joy that Fumane is the very girl his father negotiated for him. The author has satisfied the demand for parental authority and the young couple can live happily ever after! (73).

3.6.9. Maboe relies neither on God nor chance to bring about the happy union of Paki and Sebolelo. The greedy machinations of Sebolelo's father, Nthunya, the violent wooing of Kantini, all the vicissitudes and heartrending anguish that lie between Paki and Sebolelo are overcome by the latter's strength, fortitude, determination and loyalty. Here a woman in some measure determines the course of the story and gives expression to the new freedom of the Sotho woman.

3.6.10. The main argument in support of parental authority in the choice of marriage partner is that the parents know better because of superior age and experience. They are in a better position to assess the degree of security of the future in-laws, their relative social position, their wealth, their reputation. This is important in a society in which the woman invariably lives in the household of her in-laws. But even more important, when the father of the prospective bride has spent money and effort on educating his daughter.

3.6.11. Thabane, father of Fumane, will make quite sure that his educated daughter will not marry an ordinary mine worker:

(73) Khaketla: Meokgo ya Thabo.
"Eno wa ka o tla nyalwa ke lekgowa le kang yena: hape ere ka ha ke Mosotho, o tla kgethelwa ke .." (74)

3.6.12. Matlosa says the whites in Johannesburg are more concerned with wealth than with love, when they marry, 
"...ha a rate mosadi hakakang, a rata leruo la hae..." and he fears that blacks are beginning to follow this example (75). As we have seen from the folktales, even the ancient Basotho were not above such mercenary motives in bohadi negotiations and modern parents, too, often think more of the possible benefits to themselves of a marriage arrangement rather than of the good of their daughter. Sebolelo’s parents certainly have their eyes "on the main chance", on social and economic advantage, rather than on the happiness of their daughter, when they press her to marry the chief’s son:

"...ba tadimile mejo ho feta bophelo ba ngwana wa bona ya mong feela....." (76)

Economic security and the advantages of a wealthy marriage are, naturally, of great importance to any woman. Matschediso is attracted by Dr. Mvimbi’s affluence, his £30 engagement ring and luxurious motorcar and she is faced with quite a dilemma, when she has to chose between this brilliant prospect and the poor Mahlomola (77).

3.6.13. Mosito and his friends Pokane and Kgosi believe that a man should not marry beneath his own cultural level; if the man has had an extensive education, he should seek a wife at

(76) Mabose : Sebolelo, Page 43.
(77) Malefane : Ngalong ya Lerato, Pages 91-94.
least equally educated, otherwise all kinds of unpleasant situations may arise (78). Unfortunately for Mosito, he marries a woman without education, who is benighted by ancient tribal superstitions. Khaketla blames her for drawing Mosito into despicable witchcraft practices with eventual tragic results.

3.6.14. Aria discovers early on that a marriage that is not based on true love cannot be successful (79) and Alfred is saddened by the fate of James Moraka, who is deserted by Ioda Msimang, the latter in turn being deserted by Milton Thotho (80). Paki warns his cousin Ntini against hasty marriage:

"Lenyalo le tlodiswang ka lekgala la pholokgwaba, le hona ka mafifi, ha le na katleho ka mehla...." (81).

3.7.1. Polygamy. As we have seen, polygamy is not uncommon in Lesotho today. But most modern Sotho writers shun the subject except when dealing with historical subjects. Matlosa devotes a page to "sethepu", in which he outlines the reasons for the custom and also deals with the harmful results (82). No Sotho writer has yet attempted a novel about polygamy despite its intriguing possibilities, although Khaketla has written a play about the subject ("Ditholwana tsa Sethepu").

(78) Khaketla : Mosadi a Nkgola, Pages 8-10.
(79) Mofolo : Pitseng Ch. XVI.
(80) ibid - Ch. XII.
(81) Maboee : Sebolelo, Page 11.
(82) Matlosa : Mopheme Pages 6-7.
3.8.1. **Tj hobediso.** Malefane holds that the young people of Lesotho still practice the custom of bride capture:

"Ka ha naha ya Lesotho e se e ntse e fetoha, le yona mekgwa le meetlo ya yona e ntse e fetoha. Ho molemo ho hlahisetsa mobadi pheto ho e seng e le teng manyalong a jwale. E batla e se e le ntho e tlwaesileng hore mohlankana ha a kgahlilwe ke morwetsana, mme a se na morero wa ko mo nyala hantle ka tselo ya pele, le ya ho mo kopa bo batswadi ba hae, e be o a mo shobedisa. Tj hobediso e atile haholo hara Basotho, mme e tlwaetswe haholo ke thaka e ntjha." (83).

3.8.2. **Ntini,** a cousin of Paki, is a willing victim. She waits in the dead of night for the man who promised to abduct her, but he fails to turn up. (84) Maboee expresses his disapproval of Tj hobediso through his hero Paki, but it is obvious that bride's capture, or elopement, is not a disreputable practice; it is quite acceptable as a solution if there are special difficulties in normal marriage negotiations. Since Sebolelo consistently rejects Kantini and her parents are rather keen on the advantageous union, her mother herself suggests it:

"Nna ke re ho lekwe leqhaka la hore mora wa morena a shobedise Sebolelo. Re ka bua le morena, re mo hlalosetsa mabaka hantle, le hore mora wa hae a hlasinya Sebolelo, re ka nna ra bona tsa bohadi ka morao" (85).

Once the bride has been abducted, the marriage can be formally concluded:

(83) Malefane : Noalong ya Lerato, Page 49.
(84) Maboee : Sebolelo, Page 11.
(85) ibid Page 65.
3.8.3. In the context of more modern conditions, bride capture, because sanctioned by a certain tribal respectability, becomes a fairly acceptable solution in cases of parental obstinacy or other obstacles.

3.8.4. Matschediso, who has been betrothed by her parents to Thekiso, but prefers Mahlomola, is also prepared to force the issue and run away from home:

"ho tla ba molemo ke hore ba shobele ba nyamole ho se be mang kapa mang ya tla tseba moo ba teng." (86)

3.9.1. A Mother's Breath. Girls stay close to their mother until they marry when their allegiance is supposedly transferred to their new clan. Boys, on the other hand, leave their mother's company at a comparatively early age, in order to join their male age group to be fitted for their tasks as men:

"Ha e le mmae yena ha na kopano le modisana...." (87).

3.9.2. That might explain why Khaketla allows no part to the mother in the moulding of Mosito's character (88). Here the wife superseded the mother's influence, but the same wife is the jealous guardian of her own son's future. Nmathabo clothes her ambitions for her son with suitable lofty references to the need to protect the institution of chieftainship, though Khaketla leaves no doubt that she is plainly motivated by a mother's concern for her offspring.

(86) Malefane: Nqalong ya Lerato, Page 49.
(87) ibid Page 10.
(88) Khaketla: Mosadi a Nkgola.
The motives are subtly different in the case of Ntlokgola and Mmanthatisi, for these two women can also justly claim the title of "mothers of the tribe" (89). Their commitment, though directly related to their sons, transcends the purely personal and becomes a political involvement. Theirs is an heroic motherhood in the mould of Homeric greatness. Though initially prompted by mother love, both Ntlokgolo and Mmanthatisi shoulder immense tribal and political responsibilities and acquit themselves with great courage, steadfastness and wisdom. This tribal heroism is tempered by Guma with a certain Christian romanticism. There is, for instance, the moving scene when Mmanthatisi presents the newlyborn "mojalefa", Sekonyela, to the people; it is reminiscent of the theme of the Madonna and child attended by the adoration of the "magheku". Maboee touches on the theme of the mother torn between loyalty to her husband and love for her daughter. Sebolelo's mother at first supports her husband in what must appear to her, out of selfinterest, as a brilliant plan, but she gradually softens towards her daughter and finally openly rebels against her husband. (90)

3.9.3. Boys might be removed from their mother at an early age, but there can be no doubt of filial affections amongst the Basotho. Malefane rises to a poignancy rare in his work and in Sotho literature generally, when he tells of Mahlomola's mother's death and of its effect on the former. (91)

(89) Guma : Tshehlana tseo tsa Basia
(90) Maboee : Sebolelo Page 69.
3.10.1. Between two worlds. The clash between tribal traditions and impinging modern ideas has made a significant mark on Sotho literature. Every novel since Mofolo has dealt with the break up of the older order and with the impact of new ideas on men and women. Despite a certain nostalgic harking back to the heroic olden days, Sotho writers have settled in favour of progress and have welcomed the contact with world culture. They have also accepted that a conflict does exist and have shown this awareness in the varying reactions of their characters to the changing times. Women are to be found on both sides of the cultural fence and some are seen hovering on the border.

3.10.2. When Fumane's father hesitates to send his daughter to school, an unprecedented idea for a girl, it is her mother who persuades him to accept the teacher's proposal to send her on for higher education. Is this because her mother projects her own desire for self-fulfilment onto her daughter? Is it because the mother really wants to go along with the changing times, or is it just a token of mother love? The author does not elaborate on the mother's inner motives - a weakness which is still rather characteristic of Sotho novels. There is a general lack of character penetration in Sotho narrative literature, not the least of the features which makes the actions of some of its heroes often rather unconvincing.

3.10.3. Khaketla does elaborate rather more fully the motive power driving Mmathabo. Here we have a woman passionately adhering to the past. Christianity and education have passed

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(92) Khaketla: Meokgo ya Thabo Ch. XIV.
(93) Khaketla: Mosadi a Nkgola.
her by; witchcraft is the essence of her belief and her ambition drives her husband to commit ritual murder. Khaketla is particularly fond of juxtaposing the old and the new women in Sotho society. Moeketsi's mother, worried because her teacher son cannot get a job despite his expensive education, strongly urges him to enrol the aid of the medicine-man (ngaka), who, she says, will mix him a potent medicine to overcome this problem (94). At the other extreme, Fumane proudly insists that she must pass her examinations by her own intelligent efforts and contemptuously throws out the "medicine" obtained for her for this purpose by her father (95).

3.11.1. The ideal woman. Fumane does pass her exams well and she says to herself:

"Fumane, kajeno o sebeditse sesadi !" (96)

What is this complex image of "sesadi" that passes through Fumane's mind? She means to convey to us that she has done her work as befits true womanhood. But what is true womanhood? Sotho literature provides a composite picture of the ideal Sotho woman or, at least, what Sotho authors regard as ideal.

3.11.2. Earlier Sotho society laid great store by the qualities of heroism, courage, bravery. That was only natural; it was a society engulfed in nation building, in wars with invading enemies, in campaigns of cattle rustling; a typical frontiers society, partly nomadic, whose survival depended on the hardihood

(94) Khaketla : Meokgo ya Thabo Ch. IX.
(95) ibid, Ch. XV.
(96) ibid.
of its members, men and women. No wonder then that Guma's historical novel is peopled with women who are warriors and statesmen.

3.11.3. At times women are shown to be even braver than men: for instance Mmaseile, who rallies the fleeing Dikonyela with her triumphant war cry, "Mohlang ho leng hobe, ha ho ntho e matla jwaleka lentswe la mosadi banneng ba Basotho." These women are capable of clever war ruses - Mmanthatisi rallies her women successfully in the fight against Pangazitha. There is a touch of magnificent irony where she ruthlessly tears the veil from an ancient superstition and prevents the men from being turned into fools by the hocus-pocus of witchcraft:

"Ba mpa ba le tshosa ka mafeelafeelane a basadi. Ha ho letho moo!" (97)

3.11.4. These are the types of women, who will stir the men's courage in action:

"Mosadi o tla panyaola modidietsane a baka banna bohale. " (98)

They dress up like men to simulate a male army and frighten off the enemy (99). Mmanthatisi does not hesitate to overthrow all established precedent when the historic moment demands it. In a coup d'etat of fierce grandeur, which stuns the shocked elders of the tribe, she assumes the chieftainship and becomes the first woman in Lesotho to rule her people. Thereby she made legal history, for her precedent was quoted many decades later in a Supreme Court decision in Maseru, when the regency of Seeiso's widow, Mmantsebo, was confirmed.

3.11.5. This is fictionalised history, but the idea of a woman playing a role in affairs of state is also to be found in other modern fiction. Sebolelo, for instance, acts as

(97) S.M. Guma : Tshehlana tseo tsa Basia.
(99) Guma : Tshehlana Tseo tsa Basia.
peacemaker between her husband Paki and Chief Kantini and thus ends a feud which could do neither the tribe nor the chief any good. (100). The ancient warrior women and heroines do not lack the finer feminine qualities. What a tender picture Guma paints of Mmanthatisi, Monyaduwe as she is then, when she is being wooed by Mokotjo! There is a love scene between the two, which in emotive power can take a place of honour in the best of world literature.

3.11.6. In dialogue and the description of nature around the two young people, Guma creates an enchanting picture of young love:

"Ba ema jwalo ba shebane ka mahlong ho se ya buang, metsi a noka le ebile eka a thotse, a bohile",
as if for these two the whole world is standing still. When the two lovers meet again on the road, Guma sets the stage with immaculate perfection. It is a lovely evening; sky, moon and stars shine down on the youths; the blessings of heaven are raining down on them and their longing, their love for each other, their exchange of bracelet and flowers are an omen of their future happy union (101). A romantic halo is cast over the same Mmanthatisi, who later leads Sekonyela's warriors into bloody battle.

3.11.7. The same romanticism permeates Mofolo's treatment of Nodiwe:

(100) Maboee : Sebolelo Page 115.
(101) Guma : Tshehlana tseo tsa Basia Pages 41-42.
"...a qetella ka pelo ya hae e tshweu, o mosa; o mohau" and "...Chaka le yena o ne a rata Nodiwe hahole; ke yena feela motho ye re kgolwang hore ha ekaba Chaka o kile a rata mosadi ka lerato la nnete, lerato le ne le wele hodima hae. Tsohle tse ntle, tse molemo, tseo mosadi wa nnete a ka di etsetsang monna wa hae, ha ekaba Chaka tsona tseo o kile a di fumana, o di fumane ka Nodiwa..." (102)

3.11.8. There has, however, been a development from Thomas Mofolo to S.M. Guma. Mofolo's Nodiwe is a creature ideally suited to satisfy any man's dream of a submissive partner, a woman whose love is self-sacrificing and undemanding, whose sole concern is service to her lord. Neither Ntlokgoelo nor Mmanthatisi are of that type. Loyal though they be to their husbands and to their roles as tribal leaders, Guma's women transcend the image of perpetual female minority - they are tribal leaders in their own rights.

3.11.9. Mostly modern Sotho writers have adopted the Christian ideal of the perfect woman. Thus Matlosa summarises what the perfect woman should be by simply paraphrasing Proverbs 31:

"Mosadi wa nnete, wa sebele ke mpho ya qetello, b kgolo ho tschle e tswang ho Modimo. Monna ya nang le mosadi ya jwalo o tlala thabo ka mehla. Lentswe la mosadi ho yena ke pina e monate; ha a tsheha ka botsikinyane bo makatsang; kako ya hae ke pontsho ya ho hloka sekodi; matscho a hae ke qhoboshane ho monna difefong tse matla; mosebetsi wa hae ke morafo wa leruo la monna; melomo ya hae ke baeletsi ba tletseng nnete. Monna e ba motho ka baka la mosadi wa hae. Empa ha mosadi e le nkele ha ho letho le ka lokang; ha eso qheboshana, dikomang, ditlhapa le mahlabiso-dihlong a makatsang...." (103).

(102) Mofolo : Chaka Pages 130 and 222.
(103) Matlosa : Molahlehi
3.12.1. Physical Beauty. Mofolo tells a tale which illuminates the Sotho love of female physical beauty:

"Basotho ba nang le tshomo ya morwetsana ya ho thweng, ka taka la botle ba hae o ne a sa tswela ntle, hobane ha a etswa ho ne ho se hlokohala ba yang masimong mesebetsing, le badisana ba hana ho ya alosa, bohle ba mathela moo a leng teng hore ba fepisa mahlo ka botle ba hae...(104)

3.12.2. Sotho writers are inclined to wax poetical when writing about the physical appearance of their heroines. Khaketla devotes fully two pages to a lyrical description of Fumane (105) and does not miss a thing, from the mole on her cheek down to her high-heeled shoes and latest fashion wristwatch. Some writers call on the reader's imagination, without being too specific about detailed features:

"... o ne a le motle ka mokgwa o hlollang... bohle ba mo tsabang ba re, Unkulunkulu o tshwantshitshe ditaba ka yena, hore botle ba hae bo fetisang, le mahlo a hae a bonolo a tletseng lerato, di rute bana ba hae botle le lerato le tebileng la Mmopi wa bona, hore ka Nodiwe ba bone phetheho wa mosadi ya hlokang kodi, ba tle ba utlwisisi phetheho ya Unkulunkulu....." (106)

3.12.3. Both Guma and Matlosa speak of the "seriti", the intangible physical dignity of their subjects. (107) Others delight in detailed word pictures, larded with rich imagery. Some of this imagery does not always come off well, for instance, when Khaketla compares Fumane's parting in her hair to a "mocha wa lebodi" (the path of a fieldmouse). Mostly the imagery is hyperbolical to emphasise some extreme quality, which the writer cannot or does not wish to describe.

(104) Mofolo : Chaka Page 130.
(105) Khaketla: Meokgo ya Thabo Pages 182-183.
(106) Mofolo : Chaka Page 130.
(107) Guma : Tshehlana Tseo tsa Basia Pg.38 and Matlosa: Mopheme Pg. 7.
in ordinary words (Tsehlana ya ditsehlana) Guma; butswitswe kahare jwaleka lehapu ) Khaketla, Matlosa).

3.12.4. If one were to gather up those physical details which Sotho fictional heroines have in common, one could draw something in the nature of an "identikit" of the ideal Sotho beauty. She would be fair in colour (mosehlana), something between pinkish-yellow and brown. Her eyes would be large, (but not cow-eyed !), with clear whites and black pupils. She would have a wide forehead, round and dimpled cheeks, a nose neither too long nor too wide, with white and strong teeth. Her figure must be tallish, but not heavy, with a narrow waist, firm flesh and a firm bosom. Very much any man's view of a good-looking woman!

4. CONCLUSION.

4.1. As the title suggests, Guma's "Tshehlana tseo tsa Basia" deals largely with the role of women in the life of a people. This theme is touched early in the book when the pitso considers Montwedi's succession. "Mosadi ke pokola feela", says Tseko, but Modupe disputes this:

"Mosadi ha se pokola, wena Tseko; Mosadi ke tshiya ya monna wa hae le gobosheane ya sebele meferfereng le ditsokotsaneng tschle tsa lefatshe". (Page 15)

(108) S.M. Guma gives Monyaduwe the fierce eyes of a lioness.

(109) These details are taken from descriptions of - Fumane (Meokgo ya Thabo), Matshehiso (Ngalong ya Lerato), Monyaduwe (Tshehlana tseo tsa Basia), Botle (Mopheme) and Sainyaka (Molahlehi).
4.2. Broadly speaking, these are the two poles between which the characterisation of women fluctuates in contemporary South Sotho literature. Here and there, more particularly in Khaketla's, Guma's and Maboee's works, there is a glimmer of a new type of woman, the independent personality, the character around whom the narrative revolves and whose influence and development constitute either the major or even the main theme. This trend reflects the changing reality of the woman's position in society and illustrates an increasing preoccupation of Sotho writers with the problems of modern life. It bodes well for the future of an indigenous literature, which has hitherto rather fought shy of harsh actualities.

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"In the morning the daughters-in-law woke, and looked for corn to grind... they cooked and dished up... When they had dished up, they served sour milk and meat..."

"When she opened the house she found plenty of milk, but there was no porridge, nothing. Then she found some corn. She cooked it and ground it, churned the milk and poured it into little pots. Then she swept everywhere at the Chief's place..."

"Today I shall take you back to your people, because you are now initiated."

"She entered into Masilo's heart."

"Flour was ground; cattëë were slaughtered..."

"'Father, I want a wife.' His father said: 'My child, I shall go and seek one for you!' The son said: 'I don't want one sought for me, I must just seek one for myself.'"

"Your age-mates are all already married; when will you marry, so that we may eat and prosper?"

"My child, I have bought water and food with you."

"He did not enter the hut, not on any day. He devided her of clothes, of everything. She was very sad and cried all day. She went to Lehe's father and said: 'Father, why has Lehe discarded me thus?' Her father said: 'I have spoken till I am tired; Lehe says, he it is who is the chief...."

"'Today I repent, my wife; I shall never do this again.' Then he left the other woman and stuck to his (first) wife. He said to her: 'From now on - if I should die, then you can marry again, and only if you die will I remarry.'"

"Ho kanola tlunl" - literally, to enter the house; the custom of taking as one's wife a brother's widow in order to raise issue for the deceased.

"Oh, no! We are daughters of one man and we must marry only one man."

"He is my daughters' sibling."

"They marvelled at her beauty... people gathered to admire her..."

"If Fumane were a boy, not a girl, then I would agree that she be educated; but I can't see what good it is to educate a girl..."

"That's how it is, and it is not something that the reader should despise or look upon as a corruption, because
Every human being arrives at these desires if they are perfect in themselves. He who does not, must have something seriously wrong with his nature.

"Girls' chatter did not entertain him; he did not enter into their conversations because he saw no purpose in flirting and all they talked about was about their games and so on..."

"He asked questions, this young man: he asked them sweetly, like one who was trying to please, and he larded his speech with plenty of melodious intonations. The real Sotho language lends itself to it, because these lilts and tilts sweeten the voice and the sound of the questions, although presumably they may also add to the chagrin and anger of those who have to listen..."

"...we girls cannot plan marriage for ourselves, it is being planned for us. The day we are given in marriage, we are commanded very strongly that we must live in the village to which we are going. And then they conclude with the words which we shall never forget: 'Go, my child! A girl must die amongst strangers, she must be buried where she gets married.'"

"My idea is that my child must have her own will in a matter of this kind. She must choose herself, not have the choice made for her.....Those children who are compelled by their parents will not be successful. There will be no end of wrangling between husband and wife and in the end, if the husband does not tire of the woman, she will tire of him and then they become a burden to their parents."

"...we have discussed this and finalised the matter with their parents; but because of the times in which we live I do not intend doing this the usual way. I know that the white man's education which I gave you teaches you that a man must choose his own partner, one who he feels his heart will accept..."

"Some parents have brought misfortunes on their children with a loveless marriage and they forget that what was good enough in the past is no longer good today. Times have changed. Although it is good that a marriage should be approved by parents, yet how lovely it is when children satisfy themselves, and the parents are only there to advise..."

"You, too, will have a wife chosen for you by me and whether you love her or don't love her is immaterial to me - you shall marry her! I will not be ordered around by a child!"

"You know, beloved that it is not easy for us women to make our own decisions, because we do not know how things work out where we are going. It is easy for you to decide, for you are a man and you support yourself."

"That one of mine will be married by a "white man" like herself (an educated person); moreover, since I am a Mosotho, her husband will be chosen by me."

"That looked towards riches rather than to the welfare of their only child."
"A marriage jumped into hastily and in the dark, cannot succeed..."

"As Lesotho keeps changing, so do customs and traditions change. The reader might be interested in one aspect of modern marriage, it is now almost customary that a young man who is attracted by a girl but does not follow the old marriage negotiations, or to ask her parents, will simply abduct her. Bride capture in on the increase amongst the Basotho, particularly amongst the youth..."

"I say, let the chief's son try to abduct Sebolale. We can explain the matter to the chief and after his son has snatched Sebolale, we can see about the behadil payment..."

"it might be better if they were to elope and disappear without anyone knowing where they are..."

"As for the mother, she will have no contact with a shepherd boy..."

"Humane, today you have worked like a woman!"

"They are but trying to frighten you with nonsensical rites of witches. There is nothing there!"

"The woman will strike up her strident ululation arousing the man's courage..."

"They stood thus looking into each other's eyes without speaking, and the waters of the river stood still as in wonder..."

"She was kind and gentle and patient" and "Chaka loved Nodive; if ever there was a human being whom Chaka could love, we believe that it was Nodive. All that was good and kind, all that a true woman could do for a man - if ever Chaka found this, he found it in Nodive..."

"The Basotho have a tale about a girl who, it was said, could never go outside her home because of her beauty; if she did, nobody would be going into the fields to work, even the shepherd boys would leave their herds, everybody would come running where she was to feed their eyes on her beauty..."

"She was wondrously beautiful... All who knew her said God had created her, so that her surpassing beauty, her soft eyes filled with love, would teach his children the beauty and deep love he had for them; so that they would see in Nodive the perfect woman without any flaw and would understand the perfection that is God..."

"A woman is but a donkey" and

"A woman is not a donkey, Tsako; A woman is the support of her husband, his true fortress in the troubles and whirlwinds of the world."
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