CHAPTER IV
COMING TO TERMS

1. Confessions: Confessional tones of the autobiographies 1) Protima Bedi Though Dorothy Jones said in another context, precisely about Kamala Das’s My Story it is equally applicable to Protima Bedi’s Timepass for what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. ‘Jones admits’, writes Shirley Geok-lin Lim, ‘that it is hard to know how to respond to this book which, adopting an openly confessional tone, conceals quite as much or more than it reveals’. Protima in Timepass has also adopted the confessional tone.

She was very eager to see her boobs bloom and her periods to begin. ‘But the years passed and I had still not sprouted boobs. The periods had not started. My sister was wearing bras at the age of twelve, and here I was, flat even at sixteen’. (Timepass P. 15)

Her joy knew no bounds when ‘then on New Year’s Day, 1965, I took off my pajamas and there was the great red stain. It was the happiest day of my life. I skipped and danced and sang and was beside myself’. (Timepass P. 16) How jubilant she is at the starting of her menses.

She openly mentions things which generally women don’t speak at all out of modesty. Speaking of the women who take beatings from their husbands, she says, ‘These same women who yelled obscenities at each other who abused their servants, who viciously attacked their neighbours, who fought with the vegetable man and bullied him down to half the price… couldn’t dream of fending for themselves’. (Timepass, P. 18)

1. Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Terms of Empowerment in Perspective Kamala Das My Story, Edited Iqbal Kaur (P. 92)
She feels no compunction to reveal openly the things which any normal, middle class woman would blush even to think of telling anybody let alone writing in black and white in a biography. For example, she freely and frankly recounts how she was deflowered by an ugly cousin of hers. It is possible and even not objectionable in a novel that too about a prostitute as in Mirza Hadi Ruswa’s famous Urdu novel Umrao Jan Ada, Ameeran or Umrao Jan Ada describes how she was deflowered by a young boy. The novel has been made into a film by Muzaffar Ali.

‘There were a great many people in that large house and among them was a cousin, a horrible, pathetic boy, dark and ugly. He must have been barely fifteen...

‘One night he climbed into my bed, dug his hands into my panties and oiled me there. I didn’t quite understand what he was doing. I was terrified as he put his hand on my mouth and climbed on top of me. He raped me’. The saying goes a burnt child dreads the fire or once bitten twice shy but in Bedi’s case neither of it happened. She confesses, that the following nights also ‘that cousin repeated what he had done to me the previous night. This happened over and over again, almost every night’. (Timepass, P. 10)

She removes all her clothing, disrobing totally in the name of Art: ‘I took my clothes off, as artistically as I could, except the bra stuffed with cotton. But this removal of garments was done with Art in mind, with proud expression on the face and grace in the body. The routine could not, under any circumstances, be vulgar’. (Timepass, P.12)

Protima Bedi is very frank about her confessions whereas she scoffs at the other girls’ ‘holier than thou attitude.’ She exposes their hypocrisy – who apparently are prudish but are actually prurient because the boys who
had sexual exploits and had escapades with them had divulged these girls’ sexual secrets because these girls had slept with them.

She recounts; ‘Anil and his friends would tell me about their escapades with other women and talk with great sarcasm about those goody-goody girls who put on such an air of morality, but who were in their opinion real ‘fast’ and sexually frustrated ones. I would be aghast to hear them talk of these steady girls' sexual habits and what-nots. I knew which girl was good in bed, which one liked to be fingered, which one gave a hand job\(^1\) and which one used her mouth\(^2\). Whenever I talked to those girls at parties and they replied to me in a very prim tone (rather piously), I would imagine them doing the things that the boys had told me about and I would roar with laughter.’ (Timepass, P.25, parentheses mine)

Bedi doesn’t brush under the carpet how her friend Rani’s father Dinkie, a sugar daddy after wining and dining at Taj took her to a friend’s house. She writes, ‘I woke up in a large bed in ‘the friend's house’ around six in the evening. I remembered what had happened and the depression started. I burst out crying’. (Timepass, P. 27)

Describing her first night of love-making with Kabir she feels no qualms: ‘We went to bed. I changed into his Kurta and smuggled... I knew I shouldn’t make it so easy for him. I had to have some respect, if he was going to be in love with me’. (Timepass, P.36)

Mark her confession: ‘I was not a virgin. I’d had a couple of boyfriends before and I was already engaged to Jalal, but I was not confident in bed at all... By the time Kabir emerged from the bathroom, I had made

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1. Masturbation
2. Fellatio of cunnilingus.
up my mind there would be no love-making tonight’.

But Kabir checkmated her to her great chagrin. ‘He got into bed, switched off the light, turned towards me and gently took me in his arms. He hugged me tight and whispered, ‘Let’s not make love tonight. I just want to hold you close and go to sleep. Okay?’

‘I could have hit him. The cheek of the man. I was furious’. (Timepass, P.36)

Though not married Bedi and Kabir were living like husband and wife which may be allowed in the western society but not permissible in the Indian Society. She is bold enough to confess, ‘But because we were not married, we didn’t take each other for granted. I learnt to love him not only for his good looks and gentle voice, but also for his varying moods, his entire being’. (Timepass, P. 43)

She confesses that she was not afraid of the social stigma as a result of living as husband and wife without the sanctity of marriage.

‘But we were both economically independent, and as for the social stigma, we never had any fear of it’. (Timepass, P.43)

After the ‘made for Each other’ ad for Wills cigarettes, and then he became known as the Wills man. And we became known as a couple who were heralding in the era of permissiveness, primarily because of my friend Anees Jung who wrote about us in Eve’s Weekly, Junior Statesman and Youth Times’. (Timepass, P. 44)

She had to get married in spite of herself. She says frankly and forthrightly, ‘I wanted a relationship with Kabir, I did not want a marriage. I saw no reason for it. In the beginning Kabir didn’t want marriage either. But when I became pregnant with Pooja, he said that we should get married’. (Timepass, P.45)
The life she was leading with a man without being married to him, was a ‘life of sin’. She had confessed rather in so many words that she was a sinful woman’. She didn’t expect any dowry from her mother justifying, ‘After all I had run away from home almost a year ago and had been living with Kabir ‘in sin’. (Timepass, P.46)

Her lust was never satiated despite being married to Kabir who was not only handsome but a macho man, a stud. She never shies away from recounting her sexual escapades with Fred, a handsome German who lived next door.

She confesses of her ‘hunger’, sexual of course: ‘I was amazed at my hunger. I would go to Fred early every morning, in the afternoon, when he returned from work, then at night ‘...he wanted, to take me away to Germany...’ (Timepass, P.58)

She was so much carried away by her affair with Fred she confessed to Kabir that she had liaison with Fred and had made up her mind to go to Germany with Fred. But the situation, however was saved as she made up with Kabir, who was after all her husband. After her affair with Fred when she became pregnant and Kabir asked her ‘whether it was his baby or Fred’s?’ As she herself was not certain about who had fathered the child, she frankly admitted, ‘I don’t know’. But Fred, when learnt about Protima’s pregnancy, was sure that it was his baby. The Bible exhorts wives not to father bastards on their husbands. But such niceties were not for Protima.

Bedi confesses that she was a bimbo. She says, ‘I was convinced that I couldn’t think for myself. I was just a bimbo. The only assets I had were my youth and sex appeal, and I used them to their fullest extent. I dressed outrageously -- see-through fabric, plunging necklines, halters, skirts with slits all the way to the top – to compensate for my lack of
Protima is bold enough to confess: ‘I had been walking around naked for years..... To me a human body was as ordinary and natural as anything else in nature. If I saw a man’s penis hanging out of his flies, I wouldn’t get overly excited about it. So I didn’t expect others to get excited like that about me.’ (Timepass, P.84)

Protima Bedi herself was responsible to create a situation of ménage-a-trois – Kabir, Parveen and herself – under her own roof as she confesses: ‘it is true that I encouraged Kabir and Parveen to have an affair.. I wanted Kaibr off my back. Besides, as Kabir and I were no longer attracted to each other sexually, I didn’t see why I had to be a dog -- sorry, bitch – in the manger. Kabir needed a sexual outlet’. (Timepass, P.104)

Parveen, when fell out with her group, the so called Juhu gang for spreading rumours about her, Parveen and her ‘crowd’ had the cheek to confess that ‘Of course we smoked hash and had orgies and that Parveen was a part of it’. (Timepass, P. 103/104)

Bedi not only admits but is also proud of being ‘the forefathers of the whole new permissiveness in India..’ (Timepass, P.110)

The sex was so overwhelming and overpowering with Protima that after divorce with Kabir she had fallen in love with Mario. When with Kabir she didn’t like the bondage of marriage as she herself confesses: ‘I found out that being married was too binding and I rebelled against it, and against Kabir’. (Timepass, P.117) Her nature dictated to remain a free bird.

And what is her opinion about divorce: ‘What’s a divorce anyway? As much of a peice of paper as marriage’. She is very free and frank to express such views about sex: ‘sex had finished between Kabir and me. My
body was not his’. (Timepass, P.117)

But she confesses that she had sex with her ex-husband even after divorce. ‘When sex did happen, after the divorce, it was full of self-consciousness, and was possible mainly because we smoked hash’. (Timepass, P.118) So hash was the stimulant without which the sex was not possible. Is it an insinuation and innuendo to Kabir’s erectile dysfunction?

Once she excited him sexually tantalizing him only to whet the sex-desire. Warning thus far and not further. (Timepass, P.118)

Without batting an eyelid she makes such frank statements about her Da (Rajni Patel): ‘it was pointless looking for a man to replace Da, no one it seemed, could ever fill that vacuum. Even when he was alive, I had looked for sexual excitement elsewhere, though I hadn’t really enjoyed the encounters. I wanted none of that now’. (Timepass, P.156)

After the scandal of her publishing the love letters she wrote to Rajni Patel, she attended a party thrown by a Gujarati couple who were very rich. Her presence there was like a bombshell as she was a tainted woman who gained notoriety for having many lovers. She, with her characteristic impudence and chutzpah justifies her love exploits because of her courage whereas the self-same women who cocked a snook at her and looked askance at her, themselves wanted to sleep with many men. But they didn’t get a chance hence became pious. As a Hindi saying goes ‘majboori ka naam Mahatma Gandhi hai’ they posed themselves prude as there was no chance for being nymphomaniac. If you have no clothes keep yourself half-naked and attain the status of Mahatma, however out of helplessness, not voluntarily.

At this juncture she admits, ‘I had the capacity to love many at a
time, and for this I had been called shallow and wayward, a good-time
girl. I had had many beautiful relationships’. (Timepass, P.164)

She, instead of being ashamed flaunts them like medals or trophies of
achievement. She counts them like gold sovereigns and carries the
memories proudly ‘I carried them with me, always, like the relationships I
had with Kabir, Jasraj, Manu and scores of others. Most people perhaps
did not have the capacity to love so much, to give so much. But why did
they hold that against me?’ (Timepass, P.164)

But she, being a rebel, never cares for the social norms prevalent in
an Indian society. A case in point is her craving for smoking in the
Gujarati party where she was looked down upon like a pariah. She
recounts the cigarette episode to show her rebellious side of the nature:
‘We finished eating our food and I asked Dr. Dayal for a cigarette. He
ignored my request’. (Timepass P. 164) Why, because it would confirm her
‘azadi’ i.e. freedom from all social norms of an Indian society. She was
stretching Feminism too far, she was deliberately behaving like that. Mark
her confession: ‘If I smoked now, I would be endorsing the image they
had of me. It was strange how I felt like smoking and drinking especially
when I was in places where such things would be misunderstood. What
was I trying to prove? In social gatherings like the one I was in that
evening, I felt impelled to rebel’. (Timepass, P.164)

Yet she felt about herself ‘clean and pure when she handed over the
controversial Rajni letters to his son Amit. ‘In my heart and in my mind I
felt completely clean and pure’. (Timepass, P. 165) One is reminded of the
sub-title of Hardy’s novel Tess of the d’Urbervilles as ‘a pure, woman’. In
comparison with Bedi, Tess is really a pure woman.

While giving her letters which she wrote to Rajni Patel to his flesh
and blood, his son she told him: ‘You do what you like with them’. He could burn them if he liked – perhaps fire would be best’. (Timepass, P.165)

Kabir was her ex-husband but it is strange that she ‘never felt towards him as a lover’. Not even in the heyday of their marriage (or just living like man and wife). She relates, ‘those early days at Mrs Delph’s came back to me, when we made love five or six times a day, but I could not remember feeling any great sexual need for him even then!’ (Timepass, P.167)

What sort of woman is she that is not satiated or satisfied making love even after 5 or 6 times? Sleeping with her ex-husband Kabir she asks the question, ‘Must I be a woman to every man?’ She had become such ‘a common wealth’ that such a horrible question arose in her mind. In spite of many men trying to quench her lust, she remained insatiable and unsatisfied by her own confession. Even after divorce she had sex with Kabir. She doesn’t feel any qualms to relate such experiences openly.

During the shooting of James Bond film Octopussy one night they slept in the double bed. Then what happened, Protima herself divulges: ‘I remained in my bed, not wanting to make the first move. He touched my arm, I caressed his and he moved into my bed. There was a quick scramble to take off our clothes and then the bodies met. I still did not feel aroused by the man at all. It was just a feeling of being comfortable. I knew the man within that body; the body itself was completely unfamiliar. The sex wasn’t bad, but I would rather have cuddled and talked’. (Timepass, P.168)

She had physical relations with one man or the other – Kabir, Jasraj, Rajni Patel and then the union minister Manu. As she confesses ‘after Rajni
I could only connect with Manu... we met more often now’...

So much open that some youth-Congress men ‘were passing around to the press and many government officials’ a circular. ‘It was about Manu having had an affair with ‘Mrs P. Bedi’ The circular also said that he was involved in all kinds of shady deals and had bestowed favours on Popsi and her father’. (Timepass, P. 172)

Protima didn’t hide or brush anything under the carpet. For her physical contact with the minister Manu she was trying to wheedle out a flat from him in Delhi. It paints her not only sexy but greedy as well. She is honest enough to write all these gray areas of her character in her autobiography. This is the quality that Gandhiji had appreciated in Nayantara Sehgal as Nayantara Sahgal recounted in her autobiography ‘Prison and Chocolate Cake’, I did not like Gandhiji when I first met him. I was four years old when he was in Allahabad, staying at Anand Bhavan, my uncle’s home. I remember toiling up the stairs to the open veranda where his prayer meetings were held. In one perspiring fist I clutched a bouquet of red roses.

“Now, remember to give the flowers to Bapu,” my mother coached me, using the name by which Gandhiji was known to his followers.

I thought she meant Papu, my father, and ran up to him with the bouquet. Mummie pulled me toward the little man sitting on the floor, leaning against the white bolster.

“But he’s ugly’, I objected loudly, I don’t want to give them to him’.

I stubbornly clutched my roses and scowled at him. Bapu gave his gleeful laugh and lightly slapped my cheek, which was his way of showing affection, and remarked that he hoped I should always be as honest’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, PP. 37, 38)
And what was her purpose to live in Delhi?

She gives the reason: ‘...I also needed to be in Delhi to see more of him’ (Manu) and ...I wanted proof of the intensity of his love for me’. Moreover all the ‘intellectualizing’ and ‘philosophising’ was a gloss as Manu put it, ‘Only to cover up the real issue – we were falling in love and refusing to accept it’. And Bedi endorsed his views as the fact of the matter.

She realized ‘how much harm I was doing to our relationship. I was trying a kind of emotional blackmail to make him feel responsible for my lodging problem in Delhi’. (Timepass, P.174)

When Manu vehemently discouraged Bedi to shift to Delhi she began to harbour doubts about Manu’s sincerity of his advice against her stay in Delhi.

‘Why was he so adamant about my not shifting to Delhi? I had always believed him when he said that I was the only woman he had had a really complete relationship with. Now I wonder about him. Was he afraid that I might ruin his political career? Was he afraid that someone more important than him would claim my affection in the ministry?

He didn’t seem to need me physically, or even emotionally anymore’. (Timepass, P.176)

Is she in her right senses? But ‘There is a very fine dividing line between sanity and insanity, they say’ (Timepass, PP. 175, 176)

What sort of woman even if she is a freethinker, would write about sleeping with a date, as she did about her first meeting with Mario and also that of her ‘periods’. Her confessions take the cake:

‘I fussed with my sari and my hair in the elevator, a little nevous about the date. Would he be attractive? And would he think that I was
willing to sleep with him but because I had agreed to have dinner with
him. In any case, I had my periods…’ (Timepass, P.193)

Though sleeping in the same bed with Mario, she put him on
tenterhooks but abstained from sex. She allowed Mario to write ‘with his
fingers on my back, he stroked my head, he caressed me, he kissed me,
but that was as far as he got’. (Timepass, P. 195) her gesture was thus far
and no further.

Thus she ‘kept him on strings for three weeks’. And just to prove
that she was not ‘frigid’. ‘I was seeing him almost every evening’.
(Timepass, P.195)

She is very fond of having a man in her bed and doesn’t hide it,
rather loses no opportunity to declare it unabashedly even if there is no
occasion to do so. A case in point is the coming of a dance teacher into
her tent. She writes ‘Kalyani Kutty Amma… came into my tent early one
morning (thank God there wasn’t a man in my bed!) …’ (Timepass, P.254)

Sex was never a taboo for Protima Bedi, not even regarding her son
and daughter as she writes:

‘When my son had his first erection at a very small age, I knew
about it. He used to play with it and say, ‘Look, look, how it goes up’ and
Pooja and I would sit there and watch it and say excitedly ‘Oooh,
wonderful, we can’t do that!’ We never felt shy about things like that’.
(Timepass, P.274)

What she said to her daughter when she had her periods, ‘I’m not
saying that sex is good or that it is bad or when you should have it – that’s
left to you… But be careful because the result is that you could get
pregnant… And explained to her all about the pill’. (Timepass, P.274)

It was the height of her forthrightness and frankness that she
confessed to her son Siddharth about her sexual relations with Fred Kinzel which resulted in his (Siddharth’s) birth. She writes, ‘I wrote (to) Siddharth a letter telling him about my affair with Fred Kinzel and the uncertainty for some years about who his father was’. (Timepass, P. 294)

She justifies her revealing such a horrible secret to her son about the origin of his paternity: ‘I wrote the letter because I thought that it would perhaps help him sort out some of the queries that occupied his mind’. (Timepass, P. 294)

ii) Confessions of Kamala Das:

Kamala Das’s My Story is an autobiography that adopts an openly confessional tone as Shirley writes: ‘Jons admits that it is hard to know how to respond to this book which, while adopting an openly confessional tone, conceals quite as much or more than that it reveals. Among the middle class Indian women it was a taboo to make mention of the discharge of first menstruation but Kamala Das feels no qualms in declaring the hush-hush matter openly throwing the modesty to the winds: ‘My frock had large spots of blood on it. I felt the hot blood flowing on to my thighs and dripping down to the floor. I am ill, I am dying, I cried to my mother… My mother lifted my dress and said with a laugh, it is nothing to be worried about, it is what all girls get at twelve or thirteen’. (My Story, P.61)

Her reaching the age of puberty finds a mention as follows: ‘But gradually I grew. One or two places sprouted hair. The smell of my perspiration changed. (My Story, P. 62)

The innocent Kamala did not believe that all ‘the dignified couples coming to my house to discuss politics and literature with my parents could in the dark perform sexual acrobatics to get what my dear friend called great orgasm’. (My Story, P. 70)

She confesses of the infatuation with the art-tutor that had distraught her to such an extent that when the tuition was discontinued ‘all I could think of was his face and his earlobes’. (My Story, P. 71)

She was so much overwhelmed by her teacher’s craze that drenched to her skin she reached him while he was in his office busy with his files. She related the scene vividly: ‘I clung to his shirt-front sobbing uncontrollably… Then with a hand-towel he dried my hair and put the tunic on my body again. And without another word he took me by taxi to my house and shook my hand at the gate’. (My Story, P.72)

Such was the power of love which Kamala Das in all candour confesses.

The innocence of a girl reaches the climax, the apogee when she asks her friend: ‘Why did he not kiss me? Why didn’t he make love to me?’ (My Story, P.72)

But Kamala harps, on and off, on the tune of homosexual relationship which between two girls is called lesbianism. ‘She lay near me holding my body close to her’. (My Story, P.20)

It is the story of her acquaintance with an 18-year-old girl who was a hosteller. Kamala describes her first meeting with her, ‘When her eyes held mine captive in a trance; as if mesmerized by a magician or fascinated by a snake, …I felt excited’.

While she was going to spend summer vacation at home, she was going alongwith the teachers and classmates in a large compartment, the
same girl slept with her in the same berth. She slept near her as she puts it, ‘then she lay near me holding my body close to hers. Her fingers traced the outlines of my mouth. She kissed my lips then... It was the first kiss of its kind in my life’. (My Story, P. 79) The kiss of a homosexual or a lesbian!

At Major Menon’s place ‘my friend took me to the bathroom and coaxed me to take a bath with her... both of us felt rather giddy with joy like honeymooners’. (My Story, P.80) What transpired at Nalapat she writes: ‘But at lying in my late grandfather’s room... it seemed to me that the older girl was haunting me with her voice and with her simile’. (My Story, P. 80)

Then that relative arrives on the scene who finding her alone embraces Kamala to her chagrin. This is the man about whom her grandmother ‘told me that I ought to marry him’. (My Story, P.81) One day the selfsame ‘relative pushed me into a dark corner behind a door and kissed me sloppily near my mouth. He crushed my breasts with his thick fingers’.

Don’t you love me he asked me...? I felt hurt and humiliated. All I said was ‘goodbye’. (My Story, P. 82)

With brutal frankness Kamala Das confesses of the lust she feels for a labourer -- a brick-layer at that, she was a married woman, though: ‘Among the workers there was a young brick-layer who had come from another village on contract. He was extremely handsome. My cousins and I kept visiting the site to watch him at work. He used to make indecent suggestions to my maid servant which she confided in me. I thought it a good idea to have him as a pet’. (My Story, P.95)

Then she ‘lets’ a cousin of hers ‘hold her in his arms.

‘He panted with his emotion. When he kissed me on my mouth I
disliked the smell of his stale mouth’. (Mu Story, P.96)

In her autobiography we come across recurringly ‘my handsome friend’. On the occasion she was passing through the sad phase of her son’s illness while she was crying her heart out ‘he held me close to his chest and kissed my wet eyes’. (My Story, P.114)

So much so that ‘once or twice standing near him with his arms around my shoulders I whispered, I am yours, do with me as you will, make love to me...’ This confession shows that she was ready to break the bond of marriage at a drop of hat. Thank God that the good sense prevailed upon her ‘handsome friend who said, ‘no, in my eyes you are a goddess, I shall not dishonour your body...’ (My Story P. 115)

Kamala Das’s confessions of her extra-marital relations with certain fellows take the cake. One such lover is Carlo – the pen-pall to whom she one day asked: ‘Am I ugly?’ ...’No you are a pretty girl but the fellow is a cad, he said. We walked along the narrow dirt road leading to the sea and Carlo held me close to him with an arm around my waist. What is my future, he asked me. Have I a future at all?’ (My Story, P. 123)

She is very frank about her husband. He finds sex even in her favourite oil Dinesavalyadi. His observation was ‘it had the sexiest scent of all. He was obsessed with sex’. (My Story P. 127)

She incorporates her conversation in the bed as well in ‘My Story’. Once he complained to her that she had not read some prestigious report on some credit survey. She retorted, ‘But I let you make love to me every night... isn’t that good enough’. (My Story, P. 128)

To say that a woman allows her husband to have sex every night is an example of stark indecency but frankness, candour and forthrightness are the ingredients of a good autobiography.
She shed light on such festivals as that of Thiruvathira which is observed especially by virgins and also married women ‘by plunging into the cold ponds two hours before the dawn, to splash about and sing’. Expatiating on the significance of the Thiruvathira festival, Kamala writes, ‘The observation of Thiruvathira was expected to make women more beautiful. This was a festival for the worship of Kamdeva, the God of sensual love’. (My Story, P.134) The stress is on sex because after all India is the land of Kama Sutra, -- a Sanskrit word which means ‘the love treatise’ written by Vatsayan.

A very interesting confession that Kamala Das makes is about an old man who planted ‘slobbering kisses’ (My Story, P.156) on her cheeks. She was not a ‘kissy’ type of woman but she had to oblige the old man for being a sugar daddy. There is method in her madness as she justifies intimacy with old men. ‘I was drawn to old people, for they seemed harmless and they had charm’. (My Story, P. 156)

This old man whose face ‘resembled Stan Laurel... He made me laugh clowning in our veranda, and with mimicry that delighted my sons’.

She feels ‘guilty of encouraging him because I wanted someone to take my little son out’. She says of the ‘slobbering kisses that had to be washed out in a hurry...’ (My Story, P.156)

But one day she had to decide ‘to end the friendship because he ‘brought me a pornographic book wrapped in brown paper’. (My Story, P.156)

1. Laurel and Hardy: Stan Laurel (both Arthur Stanley Jefferson (1890-1965) and Oliver Hardy (1892-1957) American comedy duo. British born Stan Laurel played the scatterbrained and often tearful innocent, Oliver Hardy (Ollie) his pompous overbearing and frequently exasperated friend. They brought their distinctive slapstick comedy to many films from 1927 onwards.
Then there were voluptuous ‘uncles of her infancy’ ‘who had changed to such an extent that they gave me lecherous hugs from behind doors and leered at me while their wives were away. I hated them’. (My Story, P.157)

Carlo, her pen-friend has a soothing effect like a salve. She confesses, ‘But he offered himself a stiff drink, he offered to help me forget and in the afternoons I lay in his white arms, drowsily aware that he was only water, only a pale green pond glimmering in the sun’. (My Story, P.158)

One more example of how an old man behaved with her obsessed with ‘sexual desire’ though he looked quite innocuous. ‘….a visitor from Bombay called us for breakfast to his hotel room. He was intelligent and well read’. Kamala was sitting near him while he talked of books. ‘I was relaxed and happy when suddenly his hand moved closer to my thigh and rested touching it lightly… I thought that it was accidental. But his hand crept under my thigh and became immobile…. (My Story, P. 150) This man’s movements surprised me. He cultivated the habit of stroking my legs during conversation and caressing my long hair. I nearly fell in love with him’.

This frankness takes the cake when she admits brazenly, ‘one day when he held me close and kissed me on my mouth I stood acquiescent and he released me. I asked him are you in love with me, and he said I love you’. How bold were the old men! (My Story, P.151)

But what is incredible that her husband too didn’t mind such mixing excepting that he wanted her to be choosey. One wonders if he was a willing cuckold!

His reaction, as she puts in her book is, ‘You are always a child in
my eyes, Amy, he said, you may play around with love but be choosey¹ (six) about your palymate. I do not want you ever to get hurt in your life’…(My Story, P.151)

A stage came she felt that her power rather prowess was failing and deteriorating to lure a man enmeshing in the dragnet of her love. She asked herself: ‘Was I finished as a charmer?’ But her reservoir of love suddenly gushed forth. The last lover in the words of Kamala ‘with the force of a typhoon he conquered me, the last of my lovers…’ (My Story, P. 176)

He was ‘handsome dark one with a tattoo between his eyes!’

Her eyes met with those of his while ‘He was coming out of a cloth shop at Churchgate…’ There were several stories circulated about his innumerable love affairs and his sexual prowess. In my eyes he was a magnificent animal’. (My Story, P. 178)

‘He wondered why she stared at him when she did not resemble any of the usual nymphomaniacs’. (My Story, P. 178)

Once more she grew attractive after her serious illness. ‘Then at the airport I collided with the elderly man who had once fascinated me... he drew me to him as a serpent draws its dazed victim. I was his slave. That night I tossed about in my bed... thinking of his dark limbs and of his eyes glazed with desire. Very soon we met and I fell into his arms. (My Story, P.180)

How significant her description is about ‘the eyes glazed’ with sexual lust.

1. Choosey is incorrect. It is ‘Choosy’ (Oxford English Reference Dictionary, P.258)
One wonders how in Hinduism religiosity is intermingled with sex and lust. Krishna is a god but a male sex symbol. The beloved Kamala is his Gopi. Self-explanatory are such interjections of Kamala: ‘You are my Krishna’. I whispered kissing his eyes shut. He laughed I felt that I was a virgin in his arms’. (My Story, P.180)

The symbol of Krishna is recurring and repetitive with Kamala, this ‘God of girlhood dreams’. She is sexually mad after him as she exclaims: ‘Oh Krishna, Oh Kanhaiya, do not leave me for another!’ (My Story, P. 180)

She was so sex-mad that she ‘stayed near him, sniggling against his hairless chest burrowing my tear-stained face into the deep curve of his arm’. (My Story, P. 181)

What she feels in real life she transfers in her poetry as U.R. Shanker reviewing her collection of poetry Only The Soul Knows How to Sing, writes: “The realisation of womanhood is a nightmare that persists to haunt her: “The weight of my breasts and/womb crushed me (An Introduction) She ‘reminded her own generation... that tomorrow must erupt from between a barren woman’s thighs.”

Her frankness regarding her experimentation with adultery (Chapter 43) borders on prurience. She confesses brazenly, ‘Like the majority of city dwelling women I too tried adultery... but I found it distasteful’. So much so that ‘My love aroused in me, more than love, a strong sense of pity’. (My Story, P. 183)

She wanted to give her life as an offering to her love god ‘but it was only a tarnished trophy’. (My Story P. 183)

‘There was only one arbour left for him the snuggery between strong limbs... The pink blindness against my pores. (My Story P. 183) And what is snuggery or den?\(^1\)

Yet she ‘hated the exploitation of my body’.

And she asked herself, ‘must my body always ride the gentler, wiser mind. His body became my prison’. (My Story, P. 183)

In the long run it dawned upon her that why she loved him in spite of his ‘incapacity to love’ (My Story P. 183)

Being a voluptuary she needed ‘security, I needed permanence, I needed two strong arms thrown around my shoulders and a soft voice in my ear’. (My Story P 184). Despite her strong leanings towards sex, Kamala is not a sex maniac like Protima Bedi.

Is it philosophy or casuistry for the dictates of a voluptuous body as she says, ‘perhaps it was necessary for my body to defile itself in many ways, so that the soul turned humble for a change’. (My Story P. 184)

Her impression was ‘as if his dark body was the only body left alive. All the other deaths were silent no requiems were sung for those love affairs’. (My Story P. 184)

She has no regrets, no qualms for wanting to grow in him like cancer’. (P. 184)

Her only regrets are ‘he and I met too late, we could get no child of our own, my love for him was just the writing of the sea, just a song borne by the wind...’ Just compare ‘writing of the sea’ with writing on the wall’. How dexterously she camouflages her lust in poetry and philosophy.

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1.  A snug place, esp a person’s private room or den. (Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 1995, P. 1373)
She meets with strange coincidences. Before a major operation in the hospital she ‘tried to picture to myself the form of the glorious Goddess Durga. ...When I woke up after several hours I saw a lovely face bending over mine. You are Durga, I asked her and she said, yes, but how did you know it was my name...’ the mystery was solved when Kamala later found out that the lady doctor attending on her ‘was named Durga by her parents but had it changed to Rama after marriage’. (My Story, P.185)

iii) Political overtones:

Politics was not the cup of tea of the Khars, the inlaws of Tehmina Durrani of My Feudal Lord.

Gurmanis were their traditional rivals. ‘When Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani became the governor of the Punjab, the power of the Gurmani clan increased’.

But in 1962 Mustafa Khar, though a greenhorn, plunged head on in politics. Lo and behold, he was elected as Member of the PNA (Pakistan National Assembly) defeating a Gurmani, at that. Being just a raw country boy he sheepishly listened to the speeches by Manzoor Qadir, Mr. Bhutto, president Ayub Khan and Nawab of Kalabagh and learnt from them’. (My Feudal Lord, P.252)

His raison d’etre for entering politics, as given by himself to Tehmina was that ‘he had gone into Parliament because he had realised that the feudal world could not function any more without having political clout’.

Mustafa came closer too Mr. Bhutto who groomed him politically. Tehmina says, ‘Mr. Bhutto admired his courage, his native cunning and his quick power of absorption’. (My Feudal Lord, P.253)

‘Mr. Bhutto resigned as foreign minister following, the Tashkent Agreement with India in 1966’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 252)
As Mustafa ‘listened closely to the heart-beat of the masses’ so ‘Mr. Bhutto began to rely on his assessment’. (My Feudal Lord, P.253)

When Bhutto had an affair with Husna, Mustafa played the role of a go-between. Despite writing on the Koran Bhutto went back on his pledge that ‘he had accepted her as his wife’. (My Feudal Lord, P.255) Relations with Nusrat Bhutto had turned sour. At this time Mustafa proved the adage ‘a friend in need is a friend indeed’.

‘Pakistan People’s Party was launched in the house of Dr. Mubashar in Lahore. Mustafa was one of the founding members’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 256) Better founding fathers.

The agitation to remove Ayub Khan succeeded. Ayub Khan stepped down. Gen Yahya Khan succeeded. Martial Law was declared. True to his word Yahya held general elections.

“Mujib-ur-Rahman’s Awami League captured all the seats in East Pakistan save two. ‘Nurul Amin and Raja Tridev Roy of the Chakna Tribe survived the Awami League ramrod’ rather the tidal wave.

The Pakistan People’s Party with its slogan of ‘Roti-Kapra- aur Makan’, saw itself cast in the role of a permanent minority despite its strength in West Pakistan.

In all fairness to Yahya he ‘promised to call the Assembly on the 23rd of March and publicly introduced Mujib as the future prime minister of Pakistan. In return Mujib promised Yahya Khan that he would invite the General to stay on as President of the country’. (My Feudal Lord, P.259)

But an ambitious Mr. Bhutto sabotaged the whole plan poisoning Yahya’s ears against Mujib. Yahya fell to Bhutto’s persuasive logic. A plan was made that the politicians would speak out against the six-points and demand the postponement of the National Assembly session’. (My Feudal
‘Yahya flew into Dacca. The army struck with brutality. Mujib was arrested and flown out to West Pakistan’. Tehmina depicts a vivid but horrid picture of the dismemberment of Pakistan:

‘The civil war raged. Yahya Khan made Nurul Amin (from the East Pakistan) PM of Pakistan and Bhutto as Deputy PM and Foreign Minister. On the pretext of refugees Indian troops moved into East Pakistan and in December 1971, Iqbal’s dream was shattered at the Paltan Maidan. General Niazi handed over his sword to Gen. Aurora’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 260)

Next in command to Gen. Yahya, Air Marshal Rahim Khan and General Gul Hasan deposed Yahya from presidency placing him under house arrest and transferred power to Mr. Bhutto. He was installed as President of Pakistan and Chief Martial Law administrator. Mustafa Khar was appointed as Governor of Punjab and chief martial law administrator of Zone ‘A’.

How stinging is Tehmina in her comment at Bhutto’s assuming power at the expense of Pakistan which was bleeding because of its dismemberment. ‘The two comrades had achieved their goals. The dead were still being buried in Dacca. The map of Pakistan was being redrawn’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 261)

India at that time did not take the onus of breaking up of Pakistan. But the truth could not be concealed as Rahul Gandhi, Indira Gandhi’s grandson and Rajiv Gandhi’s son blurted out the truth during an election speech for UP assembly in May 2007 boasting and taking pride that it was
Gandhi who broke up Pakistan into two.\footnote{The Asian Age – Mumbai an English Daily}

To clip the wings of the overbearing General Gul Hasan and Air Marshal Rahim Khan, Bhutto invited them to his study and by the help of Mustafa Khar and Hafeez Pirzada forced them to resign. First they resisted but Mustafa railroaded them to put their signatures. In return for this gesture ‘the two men were made ambassadors and sent into glorified exile’. (My Feudal Lord, P.266)

General Tikka Khan was brought to Islamabad from Okara and was appointed as the new c-in-c of the army’. (My Feudal Lord, PP. 264, 265, 266)

But ‘the relationship between Mr. Bhutto and Mustafa soon developed strains’. Mustafa began to disobey Mr. Bhutto’s orders. Some of Mustafa's confidants’ ‘carried tales back to Mr. Bhutto’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 266)

His stories of megalomania echoed in Islamabad. ‘Mr. Bhutto was told of his boasts’ (My Feudal Lord, P.267)

‘Mr. Bhutto had many enemies’ for them Mustafa was a handle to use against Mr. Bhutto. He was warned by a well-wisher, Mian Sajid that ‘Ayub lost Kalabagh the same way. Intrigue. Petty insidious intrigue’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 270)

The rift was deep and ‘the chasm ‘unbridgeable’. But as they ’kept up appearances people thought it was case of ‘noora kushti’ fight that was a farce and not a real one. (My Feudal Lord, P. 270)

A scandal of kidnapping of a Samanabad girl was put into the account of Mustafa resulting in his character assassination. ‘By distorting
this story, the newspapers made Mustafa out to be a sex-fiend’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 271)

After a short spell of wilderness, he patched-up with Mr. Bhutto who reinstated him as governor of the Punjab. Yet again ‘political intrigue drove a wedge between Mustafa and Mr. Bhutto even after the reconciliation’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 272)

When Mustafa was refused a party ticket to contest a by-election Mustafa ‘left the PPP along with 40 MNA and MPAS or so he thought’. But that number was reduced only to a small group of seven MNAs and MPAs’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 273)

He fought election against Bhutto’s official candidate. Tehmina writes about the end game of this election: ‘The elections were rigged and Mustafa lost’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 274)

At his last meeting deadly snakes were released by Mr. Bhutto’s henchman. A young man died in the stampede. His dead body was brought to Mustafa’s house. Mustafa was enraged for he could have been hauled up for his murder. Mustafa’s associates arranged his disappearance. His wife Sherry howled on phone ‘accusing innocent Bhutto of kidnapping her husband. “Where is my husband? You have killed him I know. Where is he?” Sherry ranted and railed at Mr. Bhutto. (My Feudal Lord, P. 275)

‘When Ramey was removed by Mr. Bhutto as C.M. he joined hands with Mustafa on the analogy that ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’.

Tehmina sketches Mustafa’s character as one who ‘changed his colours to suit a terrain like a chameleon’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 276)

And such an abominable character that ‘He was able to bite the hand that fed him’.

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To crown it all Mr. Bhutto referred to Mustafa as his Brutus. But he never bothered his twinge of conscience for in Tehmina’s words, ‘betrayals had become second nature to him’. (P. 276)

It once more became manifested thirteen years later in 1990 as ‘the same Mustafa Khar was standing before the President reading out the oath of office. He had supported a constitutional coup against an elected parliament. He had supported a move against his own party. He had once again stabbed a Bhutto in the back’. The allusion is here to Benazir Bhutto. Quite appropriately the writer had couched the title for this chapter as ‘Et Tu Btutus’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 277)

Mr. Bhutto called elections in 1977 before their scheduled time perhaps fed by false intelligence reports. Nine parties cobbled an opposition against him calling themselves Pakistan National Alliance.

Once more he joined Mr. Bhutto who appointed him the Special Assistant and Chief Political Adviser to Mr. Bhutto. He threw the gauntlet at the P.N.A. (My Feudal Lord, P. 233)

Due to his good offices ‘signs of a reconciliation with the PNA could be read clearly.... an understanding had been reached with Maulana Noorani of the opposition and some kind of accord was on the anvil’. (My Feudal Lord, P.234)

Tehmina surprises her reader by depicting Bhutto’s would-be hangman, Gen. Zia that He was very submissive and overly courteous towards Mr. Bhutto whom he seemed to hold in awe’. (My Feudal Lord, P.234)
It was Mustafa who broke the news that there was a sea change\(^1\) in Zia’s attitude which means he was ‘being manipulated by bigger powers’. He warned Mr. Bhutto: ‘Something is brewing. I cannot trust the C-in-C any more’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 234)

‘Then there was ‘the proverbial midnight knock on the door. It was 5th of July 1977’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 235)

Mustafa was arrested. The mission coded as 2-2 was accomplished’. (My Feudal Lord, P.235)

In his first speech Zia assured to hold election within 90 days. She learnt from a hand delivered message that Mustafa was in Abbotabad.

Mustafa received Mr. Bhutto’s phone informing him that ‘Martial law has been declared’. (My Feudal Lord, P.236)

General Zia had told the politicians that they have been kept in protective custody’. (My Feudal Lord, P.237)

Zia meticulously indulged in the smear campaign, for ‘He did not want any moist eyes when he finally did away with his arch enemy’. (My Feudal Lord, P.237)

Mr. Bhutto was ‘indiscreet’ about his outbursts against the generals: ‘The house was obviously bugged’.

Zia was playing the mouse and cat game with Bhutto and company as ‘two days later Gen. Zia released Mr. Bhutto and other politicians’. (My Feudal Lord, P.240)

To take up his case to the masses Mr. Bhutto came to Lahore. ‘Now they were all gathered to welcome him back. They wanted him back to

\(^1\) a notable or unexpected transformation (with reference to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* I. ii 403) (Oxford English Reference Dictionary, Oxford N.Y. 1995, (P. 1305)
add some colour to their inspired (sic)\(^1\) bland life’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 242)

Mustafa met the generals but to no avail. ‘He said the generals were adamant about eliminating Mr. Bhutto physically’. (My Feudal Lord P. 243)

Once more Mustafa met Zia for he disagreed with Hafiz. Being a practical man he was right in his contention, ‘A spontaneous uprising was a chimera. (My Feudal Lord P. 243)

At yet another meeting with the generals he gathered the impression ‘that the generals would not be averse to the idea of Mr. Bhutto going into exile’. But Mr. Bhutto ‘had burnt his boats. He could not run away. He had to stay and fight’. (My Feudal Lord, P.243)

Subsequently Mr. Bhutto was rearrested as ‘the generals had panicked, with his freedom. The generals had given a green signal to Mustafa to go to London into exile. On the Eid-day in October 1977 Mustafa and Tehmina took a flight to London via Mecca to perform Umra’.\(^2\) (My Feudal Lord, P.244) While performing Umra ‘Mustafa put his hand on the Kaaba and swore that he would never look at another woman for the rest of his life’.

The generals were using Mustafa as a bait against Mr. Bhutto. The conscience of the autobiographer was pricking at ‘the manner in which we had left Pakistan... He (Mustafa) had promised to return from London with some documents that would incriminate Mr. Bhutto. The generals trusted him. This in itself was a stigma on his character that Mustafa would have to carry all his life’ (rather to his grave) (My Feudal Lord, P. 112, parentheses mine)

\(^1\) Tehmina intended to say ‘insipid’ instead of ‘inspired’.

\(^2\) Mini Haj
Mustafa had to make a choice whether to stay in London for the cause of PPP or to return to Pakistan for aiding and abetting the generals.

‘Traitor or hero?’ was the dilemma as Tehmina couches it’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 113)

He decided. ‘He could not play Judas’. (My Feudal Lord, P.113)

While Mr. Bhutto was being tried for a murder in Pakistan, Mustafa has kicked start a campaign to save Mr. Bhutto. His personal friends, the great political figures such as Col. Gaddafi of Libya, Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan of UAE and Yasser Arafat of PLO all were trying to save Mr. Bhutto by hook or crook. Bhutto’s sons Mir Murtaza, Shahnawaz Bhutto and Mustafa – the trio were even meeting Hafez al Asad of Syria and Boumedienne of Algeria to hijack Mr. Bhutto by storming the Rawalpindi jail and an aircraft will be waiting at Chaklala Airport from where ‘Mr. Bhutto would be flown out to safety’. (My Feudal Lord, P.115)

‘The plan to secure Mr. Bhutto fizzled out’. (My Feudal Lord, P.116)

Her comment about Bhutto’s sons, young Bhuttos, is ironic and with a literary touch: ‘Their role as politicians out to avenge the wrong against their father gave them a magnetism that was fatal for wide-eyed bed room revolutionaries... They seemed like fiction terrorists. They were a mix of Che Guevra and a Harold Robins\(^1\) character’. (My Feudal Lord, P.116)

They (Bhutto’s sons) distanced themselves from him (Mustafa) and started to plan their own strategy’. ‘Al-Zulfiqar was born in those heady days’. (My Feudal Lord, P.117) Training camps for the terrorists were set up in Kabul without taking Mustafa into confidence.

‘Mustafa was of the opinion that ‘terror would be met with terror. The innocent would suffer torture....’ (My Feudal Lord, P.118)

\(^1\) Writer of popular, cheap novels in English
Mustafa organized a protest demonstration in front of the Pakistani Embassy in London where Pakistanis gathered in large numbers at speakers’ corner. It listened to fiery speeches by Mustafa, Mir and Tariq Ali amongst others’. (My Feudal Lord, P.119)

But ‘the Generals were not impressed’. Mr. Bhutto had been reduced to ‘a pale reflection of his former self’ as reported by Tariq Islam, his nephew who had met him in prison just before his assassination’.

Mr Bhutto wanted his lieutenants Mumtaz Bhutto and Hafiz, who had been released just a month before his hanging, to give a call to the people. But they turned a Nelson’s eye. How stinging is Tehmina who says, No call was given until ‘the noose around the neck of the man who was the party leader was tightened’. (My Feudal Lord, P.120)

Perhaps the army was taking revenge of 93000 POWS taken prisoners by India for ‘it thought Bhutto was responsible for the break-up of East Pakistan. So as a mental torture a brigadier was deployed ‘His function was to abuse Mr. Bhutto... he used the most foul language to debase Mr. Bhutto’s mother’. (My Feudal Lord, P.120)

The adverse circumstances are a test of a man’s character. How was Mustafa’s behaviour in contrast with Tehminas. She puts it in one sentence:

‘I took refuge in God, Mustafa sought solace in the bottle’. (My Feudal Lord, P.121)

Mr. Bhutto was cudgelling his brains: ‘The triumphs, the adoring crowds. Where had it all fled?’ (My Feudal Lord, P.121)

Pathetic is the description of the last meeting between the father and the daughrer – Mr. Bhutto and Benazir:

‘She (Benazir) pleaded with the guards to allow her to embrace her
father. Mr. Bhutto admonished her, ‘Don’t ever beg them for anything’. (My Feudal Lord, P.121) He proved his ego: ‘Here he was alone... with a blank sheet staring at him, instigating him to compromise and save his life. The brave leader knew. This was his finest moment. He seized it he tore up the papers. He flung away his life’. (My Feudal Lord, P.121) Mr. Bhutto was executed and a legend was over. ‘Zia had proved too crafty’. (My Feudal Lord, P.123) Bhutto’s ‘mantle fell on Begum Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto’. Mustafa was reviving the party abroad. The generals were furious with him. They were plotting against him. Benazir was the focal point for the political struggle for PPP in Pakistan. Meanwhile Shahnawaz was killed mysteriously. The needle of suspicion pointed to his wife Ruksana – an Afghan woman. Tehmina comments: ‘It was a tragic waste of life’. (My Feudal Lord, P.132) People began to be disenchanted and disillusioned by Benazir. Aftab Gul is a case in point. (My Feudal Lord, P. 130) Even Mustafa was sidetracked in preference to the pigmies of the Punjab ‘like Jahangir Badar, Farooq Leghari, Faisal Saleh Hayat and Dr. Niazi’. (My Feudal Lord, P.133) He felt that a move was afoot to make him ineffective and redundant. The gulf between Benazir and Mustafa was widened. Things came to such a pass that ‘Mustafa received a show-cause notice from the PPP President’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 134) Tehmina, under the evil-influence of her husband harboured the hatred against Pakistan army as she writes: ‘a large section of the population subscribes to the thesis that the Pakistan army is the root cause of all our problems’. Mr. Bhutto was the first politician who was the
proponent of this theory (My Feudal Lord, P.136)

This thinking had gone to such an extent that ‘the total annihilation of the monster is only possible if India crushes it.’ They had no qualms that it was ‘unpatriotic’.

By joining hands with India to overthrow the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq PPP has made a cardinal mistake’, Tehmina feels at the hindsight as she says:

‘I know better now’. She reveals Mustafa’s part in this treason, ‘Regular contacts were maintained with the Indian intelligence agencies’. (My Feudal Lord, P.137)

The stunning revelation of Indira Gandhi giving an audience to Mustafa is incredible for only seeing is believing Mrs Gandhi’s contention was:

‘The time before, Mr. Bhutto had made a mistake. He had built up the morale of an army that had laid down its arms against Indian troops. The army had thanked him by hanging him ‘We will have to crush and humiliate your army. Only then can our two countries live in harmony’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 139) During Rajive Regime they flew to Delhi via Sharjah. One Joshi of RAW was the go-between, the mediator’. ‘This time he went through his contact – Joshi. He flew to India and met Rajiv’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 141)

PPP under Mustafa planned a putsch by encouraging ‘Young Turks’ of the Pak army to overthrow Zia and company. Tehmina gives the blow by blow account of coup that reads like a cliff-hanger. From the very beginning they were doomed to failure’. (My Feudal Lord, P.P. 148,149)

The so called young Turks, ‘the boys’ were the junior commissioned officers who were disgruntled with the generals. Their dictum was ‘the
generals were corrupt. The rank patriotic professionals’. (My Feudal Lord, P.142) Tehmina discloses: ‘Mustafa had infiltrated the Pakistani armed forces. A group of disaffected officers were in contact with him. They were junior officers disgruntled with general Zia and believed that the military had no business interfering in the politics of the country.

They had chosen Mustafa...’ as their leader. Tehmina confesses her criminal complicity in the abortive coup:-

‘I was abetting treason. I was playing the conduit. My husband was hiding behind my skirts’. (My Feudal Lord, P.144) What a commentary on the lion of Punjab – hiding behind his wife’s skirts.

But it proved a fiasco, an utter failure. Tehmina writes: ‘We learnt later about the details of our misadventure’.

Poor boys who were bragging: ‘it served the damn generals right. We will put this country back on the rails’ soon woke to reality that it was an ambush. The shrewd generals instead of calling it a coup by junior officers, labelled it as an encounter with the smugglers’. (My Feudal Lord, P.150)

The struggle to overthrow Gen. Zia began ‘on 14 August 1983’.

Even Sindhis took up cudgels, though they are not a martial race. When Tehmina writes ‘Sind had been sinned against long ago’.

Indira Gandhi with a view to fishing in the troubled waters made a statement in which praised the valour of the Sindhis ‘and extended her moral support to their cause’. (My Feudal Lord, P.151)

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1. Peccavi- To cry peccavi, to acknowledge oneself in the wrong. It is said that Sir Charles Napier, after the battle of Hyderabad in 1843, sent a preliminary dispatch with the single word ‘Peccavi’ (I have sinned i.e. Sinde). (Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, (London, Casell and Company, Ltd. 1953, P.693)
It was a political blunder. The generals reacted. ‘They cried foul, that Indians were ‘interfering in our internal affairs’. India’s ‘Hidden hand that was behind all our national problems’.

‘Hand’ is fraught with significance for ‘Hand’ is the electoral symbol of the Congress. Hence ‘the Movement cooled off’. (My Feudal Lord, P.151)

But Indira Gandhi’s statement was a master stroke for she had driven ‘a wedge between the Punjab and Sind’.

From London Mustafa sent ‘some of his closest comrades’. As a natural corollary they were arrested at the airport itself. Then were sent to Ojhri ‘concentration’ camp for interrogation. The life described by ‘Chaudhri Hanif at Ojhri camp cell’ brings gooseflesh – it was such a horror story. It was worse than a hell. The tortures untold. Hanif couches it as ‘death trap prison’. (My Feudal Lord, P.154)

Three months after the coup was crushed, Zia made his appearance on the 23rd March, Republic Day. He didn’t want a repeat of the Anwar Sadat assassination... The dais was bullet-proof. (My Feudal Lord, P. 154)

Mustafa was down but not out. Once again he visited India as Indira Gandhi’s guest. During talks ‘She repeated her thesis about destroying the Pakistan army for two reasons. It was a greatest threat to Indo-Pak peace and to democracy in Pakistan. We had a common foe’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 155)

The war clouds were gathering on Indo-Pak horizon’. For Mustafa it was a boon but Tehmina had her reservations for ‘Indira Gandhi had sent troops into East Pakistan. She had hailed the defeat of Pakistan army in 1971 “as the end of thousand years of slavery.” She implied that the Muslims had enslaved the people of India’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 155)
She thought ‘vivisection of India a religious outrage’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 155)

Mrs Gandhi herself was in trouble as Tehmina puts it: ‘Indira was embattled by the rise of militant Sikhism’. ‘Operation Blue Star’ was a hornet’s nest’ which cost her life by a Sikh guard assassin’s bullet.

To pay India in the same coin Gen. Zia, a very shrewd enemy was assisting the separatist Sikhs: ‘The Gurdwara in Lahore’ was the hub of Sikh militants’ activities’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 155)

Mustafa was shocked at the news of Indira’s assassination by her own Sikh guard.

After a temporary shock, ‘hopes to destroy Pakistan army were rekindled, when Rajive took over as Prime Minister after Delhi’s Sikh population was brutally decimated in reprisal killings’.

Mustafa established contacts with Rajiv Gandhi as well and ‘met the son and heir of Mrs. Gandhi. He was in India for six days’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 156)

Rajiv wanted to carry out his mother’s unfinished agenda i.e. to crush Pakistan army. For Mrs. Gandhi believed in the hegemony of India in the whole of subcontinent. ‘Indira doctrine was based on the theory that ‘India was the policeman of South Asia’ who by right of its size could interfere in the internal affairs of the neighbouring states. (My Feudal Lord, P.157)

While Mustafa met Joshi, Tehmina was also there at a distance. Joshi arranged her tour to the shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer.

There at the shrine her prayers were for her husband. ‘I asked God to make my husband normal. To curb his bouts of violence and insanity’.
In his message to India Mustafa ‘was urging the Indians to move to remove General Zia who was an unmitigated disaster’. (My Feudal Lord, P.159)

One Mrs Singh was her escort who was very tight-lipped. Tehmina Durrani asked her, ‘Why this cloak and dagger stuff? Why can’t we be friends? It is impossible was her reaction’. (My Feudal Lord, P.160)

She felt ‘I must have been a zombie’.  

The last thing she revealed about herself was ‘my real name is not Mrs. Singh’.

Thus she came back to Pakistan. ‘Debriefing Mustafa was pleased’. (My Feudal Lord, P.161)

But her prayers at Ajmer were unanswered. Joshi knowing about Tehmina’s separation from him was horrified. He asked Mustafa, ‘How could you trust your wife when you did not have a stable marriage’. In case Tehmina had not returned to Mustafa he would have gone to such an extent as to eliminate her’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 161)

Before flying back to Pak, Mustafa had another options such as to live in exile at Kabul. Mir Murtaza was already there living in ‘an empire’. He was funded by Hafez Al-Asad of Syria.

Or in India as well whe they ‘would live very comfortably’.

But Tehmina ‘wanted to go back home to Pakistan’.

Tehmina says, ‘We returned to Pakistan’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 162)

In Pakistan, Army and Politicians played the game of musical chairs. The politicians’ ire against the army is so overwhelming that Mustafa Khar, the husband of Tehmina Durrani had gone to the extent of conspiring with  

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1. Zombie: a corpse said to be revived by witch craft.
India, their arch rival, to destroy the monster that is Pakistan army. Durrani, in My Feudal Lord, has dwelt upon the subject to great lengths as quoted above.

But that was only one side of the medal. Pervez Musahrrraf the current army ruler tells his side of the story in his autobiography 'In The Line of Fire -- A Memoir'. He unveils the game of politicians calling the democracy ‘a sham’. Pervez writes: ‘After the fatal crash of the C-130 and President Zia’s death in 1988, Benazier Bhutto formed a coalition government and became prime minister in November 1988. During the period from November 1988 to October 1999, a span of nearly eleven years, no national or provincial assembly completed its term. The office of prime minister changed four times. We had three different prime ministers... Presidents and prime ministers began each regime harmoniously but ended at each other’s throats’. The presidents... dissolved the assemblies and ordered fresh elections. There were four national elections in nine years’.

According to Musharraf corruption was rampant. The period of ‘those nine years governed alternately by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif there was ‘the worst kind of governance – or rather, a nearly total lack of governance – along with corruption and the plunder of national wealth’.\(^1\)

President Pervez Musharraf, in the same book elaborates, ‘However, Benazir Bhutto was able ot form a coalition government, and there followed eleven years of sham democracy rotating between her and Nawaz Sharif... it was a decade of political musical chairs’.\(^2\)

The top brass of army were always suspicious of the politicians. President Ayub Khan whose name is mentioned by Tehmina Durrani in My Feudal Lord on page 258 was forced to resign. His successor was Yahya Khan who is responsible for the break-up of Pakistan. In a recent article the newspaper *The Asian Age* has published excerpts form Ayub Khan’s diary entitled as ‘Read Ayub’s diaries to disbelieve’. ¹

Ayub regrets for replacing Yahya as head of the state. In his diary he writes: ‘I have written a letter to Yahya explaining why it is necessary for me to step aside and handover to him so that normalcy and decency can be brought back’. F.S. Aijazuddin the author of the article comments: ‘The word decency was to haunt him during Yahya’s presidency.

Yahya’s note about Bhutto also corroborates with Tehmina Durrani’s views jotted down in My Feudal Lord.

Aijazuddin writes about Bhutto, “For Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whom he hand- picked with the other hand as his commerce and then foreign minister, Ayub Khan scours his thesaurus, ‘The damage done by Bhutto is deliberate, in calculable and unforgivable. He is the past master of disruption and agitation. He has shaken the roots of the country by simply posing as a socialist and the friend of the have not’. Though ‘he dresses and lives like a millionaire, drinks like a fish day and night, misbehaves with women, is a mimic, a clown and a liar unfaithful and thoroughly disloyal’.²

The nemesis of the military fell during the military dictator Zia’s regime who sent him to the gallows and many in Pakistan believe at the hindsight, ‘it serves him right’.

² *The Asian Age, Mumbai, Monday 25 June 2007 (P. 11)*

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¹ *The Asian Age, Mumbai Monday 25 June 2007. (P. 11)*

² *The Asian Age, Mumbai, Monday 25 June 2007 (P. 11)*
So the hide-and-seek between the politicians and the army is a permanent and perpetual feature of Pakistan polity.

Tehmina’s autobiography My Feudal Lord is not only a critique of Feudalism but also the corruption in Pakistan.

The following comment by Tehmina is fraught with deep meaning: ‘He Mustafa knew that, ‘Democracy cannot grow in a predominantly feudal environment’. (My Feudal Lord, P.10)

‘The feudal lord reigned through terror. “Not casting a vote in favour of the feudal master is tantamount to signing your own death warrant.’ (My Feudal Lord, P.11)

Mustafa was in jail and Tehmina was fighting for his release. As she says, ‘I was espousing all his causes and becoming passionately involved in trying to secure his release’. (My Feudal Lord, P.11)

The Khars ‘had been in exile for nine years’. (My Feudal Lord, P.13) The moment Mustafa Khar returned he was sent to the police custody then to jail. He was in Multan sub-jail to see his dying mother.

Even jails were not spared of the rampant corruption in the country. Pakistan has the dubious reputation for being one of the most corrupt countries in the comity of the nations. India being a shade better on that score has a poor consolation.

Mustafa says, ‘The superintendent, Mr. Mufti takes ‘bhatta’ (bribe), from all the prisoners’. (My Feudal Lord, P.4)

Mustafa’s eyes become red as Tehmina puts it, ‘His eyes would take on a hue not unlike the ensanguine (sic)\(^1\), horizon, visible through the bars of his window.’ (My Feudal Lord, P.4)

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1. Ensanguine: There is no word as such. Sanguine blood-red has no verb-form.
Inhuman, rather barbarous treatment was meted out to the prisoners. In Tehmina’s presence the cries of some tortured prisoners rent the air. Mustafa in towering rage went to Deputy Superintendent and gave him stunning and resounding slaps for the poor prisoner was ‘spread-eagled on the ground’. (My Feudal Lord P.5)

Mustafa warned the jailer, ‘If I ever hear a scream again I will beat you into a pulp’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 5)

Such were the barbaric conditions prevalent in Pakistani jails. Though the country was ruled with an iron-hand by Gen. Zia.

The positive aspect of the incident was that Mustafa stood the jail victim in good stead. He took up his cause and espoused it. But the other aspect was that even in a jail the feudal didn’t desist from showing his overbearing attitude, his hubris.

While he was on parole for the marriage of his son Abdur Rahman, from his first marriage, the tragedy struck at Ojhri where ammunition blew up. Tehmina says, ‘Mustafa had a surprise in store for us’ saying ‘because of the tragedy at the Ojhri Camp, the wedding must be postponed. (My Feudal Lord, P. 21) His patriotism comes to the fore. It takes precedence over personal interest. For him the politics and his personal interests could not be separated. They were like Siamese Twins. But bride’s people ‘were in a state of shock. ‘Mustafa explained that it would be wrong to rejoice at a time when a tragedy had befallen the nation... ‘He told the girl that she was marrying into a family that was not run-of-the-mill. (My Feudal Lord, P.22)

iv) Political overtones in Prison and Chocolate Cake

Studying at the US, Sahgal and her sister were often asked such questions as ‘When did you become politically conscious’. (Prison and
Chocolate Cake, P.30) It appeared very strange to them. She wondered. It is like saying "on the 6th of November I got fat. Whereas one of Sahgal’s American classmates revealed about herself: ‘I became politically conscious during the last presidential elections’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.30)

Then she realized the question was proper. She then realizes ‘With us the growth of political awareness was a gradual and unconscious process... India had come under the leadership of Gandhi and was matured to nationhood under his guidance’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.31)

It was Nehru ‘among the first to respond to Gandhiji’s call when he came to India from South Africa in 1916, who influenced... Motialal to join his ranks’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.31)

‘Gandhi inaugurated his first jail-going campaign, calling upon Indians openly to defy the government and court arrest. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.32)

It was Nehru, Sahgal’s ‘Mamu who threw in his lot with him...’ It is a revelation which still, perhaps, most people don’t know that Sahgal’s grandfather Sitaram Pandit who hailed from Gujarat ‘had been in many ways Gandhiji’s Guru’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.32)

But Gandhi’s real Guru was Thoreau. Henry David Thoreau, the American thinker. ‘His essay on civil disobedience 1849, in which he argues the right of the individual to refuse to pay taxes when conscience dictates, influenced Mahatma Gandhi’s policy of passive resistance’. 1

Sahgal writes: ‘Our parents were adults when Gandhiji appeared on their horizon... But we are truly the children of Gandhi’s India, born at a time when India was being reborn from an incarnation of darkness into one of light’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.32)

“When Gandhiji launched a non-cooperation movement’ it heralded imprisonment and self imposed sufferings for the persons who espoused Gandhi’s cause. And what was Gandhi’s cause? The total freedom from the British yoke.

Sahgal elaborates, ‘This programme brought about the separation of husbands from wives and parents from children’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 33)

The memory of her father’s first arrest far from being unpleasant is associated with a chocolate cake. Hence the title Prison and Chocolate Cake is significant with this incident. According to Sahgal:

‘We had chocolate cake for tea... It was a rich dark cake, chocolate through and through, with chocolate swirls on top’. Just then the police came to arrest their father. ‘We ate our chocolate cake and in our infant minds, prison became in some mysterious way associated with Chocolate Cake’.

It goes to Gandhis credit that ‘jail going was always treated as a gala occasion, not a sombre one... The jail-goers were not silent sufferers but pilgrims armed with song, for wherever Gandhiji went he was followed by the haunting strains of the hymn Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 34) But jail is after all a jail where ‘the political prisoners interned with thieves, murderers, other desperate law-breakers and sometimes even lepers, but that was all part of the crusade and nobody complained’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.35)
There is subtle irony on the cussedness of the British police (police is police whether British or Indian) that they were coming ‘at our house to search for ‘seditious literature’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.36)

The so called seditious literature was pamphlets which had an appeal ‘to the people not to indulge in violence of any kind. It was a time when stormy feelings ran high in the country and, had isolated cases of violence turned into open revolution...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.36)

There is manifest irony when she describes a midnight knock by the police to arrest her Mummie: ‘It was an incongruous situation. Rows of khaki-clad men and seven military lorries waited in grim silence in the dead of night to take away one defenceless woman whose creed was non violence. Such was the power of non-violence’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.36)

May 1940 ‘was a tense time for India for the Congress had decided not to co-operate with Britain in the war effort and prison loomed near for Congressmen again...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.47)

British government was appealing to the people to pray for the British victory: ‘The Viceroy in India appealed to every one to pray for the British empire and victory against Hitler’.

Reacting to this announcement Nayantara say: ‘I had no desire to pray for the British Empire’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.47)

How English historians were mischievous in writing fiction in the name of history. Sahgal feels revulsion to read ‘The book (which) was filled with livid accounts of a Black Hole of Calcutta, the villainies of Tippu Sultan and the valour and courage of Clive and Warren Hastings and other British heroes in the land of vindictive natives’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.58)
How wise is her verdict on those so called historians, ‘The author had a rather lively imagination and should have written fiction instead of fact because much of he wrote was in any case fiction’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.58)

Such was Gandhi’s impact on anyone who joined him, he abandoned all luxuries.

Motilal Nehru, Sahgal’s Nanuji who was known to get ‘his clothes laundered in Paris… when he joined Gandhiji… he made a huge bonfire of all his family’s foreign apparel, pledging himself to wear only swadeshi and to use only swadeshi articles…’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.62)

This change in 60 year-old Motilal Nehru along his equally fastidious son Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘is to understand a fraction of the mind of a nation bewitched by Gandhi’.

Gandhi had not spared even brides of his fad of Khaddar. ‘When Mummie was married in 1921 she wore Khadi during the ceremony instead of traditional silk. Her only ornaments were fresh flowers…. She wore none of the jewellery…. Her sari was made of yarn spun by Gandhiji’s wife’. Thus Gandhi and all his fads had become ubiquitous.

‘Prison and Chocolate Cake’ provides some answers to frequently asked questions about Gandhi. Take for example this one: ‘Why does Bapu wear so few clothes?’

‘Because most people in India have very little to wear and he feels that by living and dressing as they do he will be nearer to them and understand them better’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.64)

But he was not always so scantily dressed, as Sahgal’s father was reminiscent of Gandhi’s visit to his father’s house ‘in a frock coat and a top hat. He had a moustache, too, in those days’. It was when he was ‘the
dapper young lawyer’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, PP. 64, 65)

Yet to some people Gandhi was ‘a crazy man who believed that freedom would come through self-sacrifice’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P 66)

Though India was still under the British yoke, elections were declared according to a new constitution. In Sahgal’s words, ‘To a foreigner it may have looked like a curious paradox’. ‘Mummie’s constituency was the rural area of... Kanpur,¹ while Pappu’s was even the nearer district town called as ‘Jamuna-par’ (across river Jamuna). (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.68 parentheses mine)

Both her parents won the elections and when the UP cabinet was formed Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was 'the first Indian woman to become the cabinet minister'. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.72)

Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant was the C.M. of the state.

To illiterate masses it was incredible that a woman has become a minister. ‘During one of her speeches’, a kisan wagging his head remarked to his neighbour, ‘It is true – she really is a woman’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.74)

Such was the power of Nehru family that ‘Hari (who) had strayed into the Nehru household dishevelled urchin of five or six years old’ in the 1936 elections was elected to the UP assembly. Sahgal describes, ‘We were wildly excited when Hari was elected and we took the credit for his victory. Hari attended the Legislative Assembly in solemn importance until the Congress ministries resigned in 1940’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 87)

¹ The British spelled it 'Cawnpore'.
The World War broke out in 1939 and slave India was expected to side with the slave-driver Britain. Nehru drafted a statement as a policy manifesto of Congress Working Committee. It said in short... We do not want to see the spread of triumphant Hitlerism. If England is in favour of the freedom of the nations then she must not forcibly occupy India and keep the people of India in bondage ... then Indians may cooperate with Britain...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.95)

Her father asserts that tenets of Christianity are laudable but “what the Christian English, French and Germans and others are doing, and how different their conduct is from what it should be. And so it is with the Communists.

The Nazi and Communist governments are tearing up the body of sorely stricken Poland bravely fighting against overwhelming odds’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 96)

The girls’ minds were wracked with the question: ‘Is non-violence good enough to defend a country against aggression?’ Well now that was exactly the question before the Working Committee of the Congress and Gandhiji. Briefly, the former thought not. Gandhiji was quite sure and still is that non-violence is the way’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.97)

The Congress decided not to cooperate with Britain in the war-effort. ‘So they all went to prison’. After their release life was normal for the Nehrus. But after August 1942 ‘politics once again entered our lives in earnest’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 99)

The 1942 campaign of Quit India was different for the government had become very repressive and oppressive. Hence ‘on 9 August... the members of the Congress Working Committee had been arrested on that day in Bombay’. Those ‘arrested were known as Q prisoners’. 'Students
and citizens organized peaceful processions... while police made mass arrests’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 118) People whose children were arrested began to blame Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Sahgal’s Mummie.

‘Anand Bhawan was a silent beehive of activity... Lekha... Indi and Feroze’ were liable for arrest. They were engaged in the so called seditious activity of printing pamphlets about the Satyagrah campaign.

Gandhi began his fast unto death in early 1943. The girls devised ways and means to send newspaper cuttings to their mother in jail.

Poor Sahgal was torn between her studies and the brewing political storm around her. The following sentence depicts her state of mind which is fraught with meaning. ‘Reading history had no meaning, for history was being made in a blood-stirring way everyday in our lives’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 122)

While in America ‘The Thought of Pappu and Mamu in prison was a perpetual shadow across our enjoyment. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.130) Sahgal writes: “Mamu had been released soon after we reached the United States.

v) Idiosyncrasies of autobiographers

They say inherent nature doesn’t change. According to an old eastern adage the mountain might move from its axis but not a man’s nature, his idiosyncrasy. But our protagonist Protima Bedi once decided to learn the Odissi dance she renounced all her comfort, her sexy life and went to Orissa to learn the dance from the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. But it was not a joke. Guruji told her that Protima could not learn the classical dance at her age. ‘Dance was not a passing thrill, he said, but a complete way of life’. (Timepass, P.94)

How this fad gripped her psyche? When she was dejected with life
despite all the comforts and amenities of life, life became pointless for Bedi. She writes: 'It was a pointless existence. I was overcome by extreme depression and acute frustration. All the logic and rationale which I had learnt were of no use to me; I wanted to end my life several times'. (Timepass, P.87)

She was utterly dejected with life. So much so that she thought that even if she found the divine truth, the Cosmic Truth, ‘What would it solve?’

She felt, ‘Something had to claim me. Unless life made use of me for a purpose, it was all a waste’.

Then she found a purpose that suddenly transformed her life as she relates: ‘And then one day in August 1975, my life changed. It was a stormy day and I ran into the Bhulabhai Memorial institute in Bombay to take shelter…” (Timepass, P.87)

There in the dark auditorium she saw an Odissi dance being performed by two young dancers. She sat fascinated and spell-bound. She was transfixed by the magic of the dance, the beauty of ‘rhythmic patterns and sophisticated hand and eye gestures’.

She puts its effect on her mind graphically:

‘The movements brought to mind swaying of the palm trees, the breeze upon the water in a lake, the slow and gentle rising of the sun, the rise and fall of waves in the ocean, the quick darting and flight of insects, the sinuous grace of the snake and the gazelle’. In short, it was the very breath of life’. (Timepass, P.88)

What a poetic imagery!’

And what was the effect of the magical dance on Protima Bedi: ‘It filled me with the kind of passion I had never known before. It was as if I
was in a trance. I saw myself as one of the apsaras. I was Uttara and Amrapali. I was Urvashi. I knew the reason for my existence’. (Timepass, P.88)

She further exaggerates, “My soul, long neglected, had come alive. It was not an address but a call, and I could do nothing but follow it.” (Timepass, P.88)

In spite of the Guru Kelucharan’s discouragement she tenaciously clung to the idea of joining him at Cuttack in Orissa and caught up with the Guru by reaching the Guru’s ashram travelling by air.

Though she adjusted herself to the life but she refused to bow before the priests who came from the temple of the goddess Kali. She writes about her reaction:

‘I stood there cynically, watching the others prostrate themselves before the priests. Poor creatures I felt they are being taken for a ride. I would never succumb to that kind of enslavement’. (Timepass, P.95) Being a rational being she never believed in the miracles often ascribed to Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath. Interestingly enough The English word ‘juggernaut’ is derived from the same Jagannath of Rath Yatra of Puri. When the Guruji talked of ‘the miracles that could happen in one’s life if one merely touched the ropes, I refused to believe him’. (Timepass, P. 95) She shunned superstition, though.

Protima Bedi is a bundle of rationality and superstition. She is overpowered by her whimsies.

‘I had a small temple made in my bedroom where I installed her idol, specially bought from the Kalibari Jasraj and I prayed to her every morning when we were together. (Timepass, P.130)

This was one extreme and the other extreme was, as she herself
described in the chapter ‘A New Direction’ runs as follows:

‘Gradually, as my relationship with Panditji deteriorated, I stopped praying at my little temple. When the relationship snapped completely, I pulled down the temple and kept the pieces away in the storehouse. I didn’t feel guilty at all. It was only for him the temple was there in the first place’. (Timepass, P.130)

One is reminded of the pagan Arabs while idolatry was their religion before the advent of Islam. When the votary of a particular god/idol vowed to him of a votive offering at the fulfilment of a wish but when the wish was not fulfilled, in towering rage, he would piss on the idol and then would break it into pieces. Such is the natural corollary of idolatry. Protima Bedi’s behaviour is not much different from the pagan votaries of Arabia with the difference of time. Those were the dark ages and Protima Bedi’s were the enlightened days of Modern Age.

Bedi shifted her loyalties and fidelities from person to person with the swiftness with which a man or a woman changes his or her clothes.

She herself confesses: ‘My feelings for him (Jasraj) fluctuated. Later when I got involved with Rajni Patel, Jasraj suffered greatly. When he had a heart attack after that and was in hospital, I went to Kali temple and cried bitterly...’ (Timepass, P.131)

While she admits in the case of Jasraj, ‘over time the relationship lost the power and vibrancy it had in the beginning’ (Timepass, P.131).

It sheds light on her idiosyncrasy of waywardness and fickle-mindedness. As the saying goes, ‘Men may come and men may go’ with the slight emendation that Protima behaves in the wilful, wayward and fickle way. That is what her nature. Perhaps she believed in an Urdu proverb tu naheen aur sahi, aur na sahi aur sahi (if not you then another
The news that Kabir married an American woman, Susan, was shocking but she bore it with poise. However to ease the burden she cried, and thus felt relieved. ‘I cried all the way to Juhu’. (Timepass, P. 133)

Then she justified: ‘Hadn’t I myself wanted to marry Jasraj and take him away from his family?’ (Timepass, P.133)

The bangles episode shows Bedi’s panache to tackle a ticklish situation with temerity and audacity.

She had an affair with Manu, a union minister and went to Hotel Centaur to meet him. With her characteristic frankness she told him, ‘Let’s just talk today, I don’t feel like sex’. As if the sex was always on her sleeve. More stunning was her revelation to Manu, ‘You know Manu, I felt so good telling Kabir that I was spending the night out’. (Timepass, P.137)

As she was in a hurry to catch her flight, she forgot her bangles in his hotel room. She asked Manu what if his wife finds the bangles in the drawer what excuse would he make to her? His answer was ‘I’ll just pretend that I don’t know how they got there’. (Timepass, P.138)

Then she taught a lesson or two to Manu. ‘No Manu, whenever your back is to the wall take an aggressive stand. Don’t just deny or look upset. Get angry and yell – “What are these bangles doing in my office? This is an office, not a ladies’ dressing room’. (Timepass, P.138)

Such was the stuff of boldness, impudence and temerity with which Protima Bedi was made of!

It was also her second nature not to sever her relations totally with a person with whom she had associated once. A ‘chhaya shastri’ had rightly analysed her relationship with Kabir even after divorce:
‘...that my ex-husband and I would never be together again, and yet would never be separated’. (Timepass, P.141)

Despite her busy schedule she had devoted and dedicated herself to her children making sacrifices whereas Kabir never cared for them except ‘shelling out a tiny part of his income and feeling he had done his bit’. (Timepass, P. 142)

Protima Bedi lived through conflicting loyalties. She was married to Kabir and yet adjusted herself to the conflicting loyalties of Fred, the German. Then kept a balance between Kabir and Jasraj and now Jasraj and Rajni Patel.

She admits this precarious position when she says, ‘My mind was in turmoil: I wanted to be with Rajni; but I had been loyal to Jasraj for five years, I could not cheat on him’. (Timepass, P.146)

She spilled the beans to Jasraj. In a fit of towering rage, ‘He went to Cuffe Castle and blasted Rajni.

“Just because you are dying you have no right to ruin my life,” he shouted... he said some very nasty things about me to Rajni... that I was not a woman who could be trusted...’ (Timepass, P.147)

So, she faced the consequences of riding two horses at one and the same time.

When Rajni Patel died at Jaslok Hospital, before his family could come to take his body for funeral, through the good offices of Sharad Pawar the then CM of Maharashtra ‘she could spend a few moments with my beloved in death’. How was the feel, her description is vivid: ‘At the Jaslok Hospital morgue I saw Rajni’s body surrounded by ice, covered with a white sheet. I touched his forehead. It was ice cold, not like his touch at all. Gently I stroked his head and all the memories came rushing back – of
him smiling, talking on the phone lying in bed caressing me’. (Timepass, P.151) What strange woman would touch the deadbody of a stranger, who was not her husband. Most of the women would be terrified only in the company of their dead husbands in a room, let alone touching their body or their forehead for that matter! Being bold in asking and giving sex she had the chutzpah to touch a dead lover’s forehead. Despite her open admission regarding her position with Rajni Patel vis-à-vis his wife Bakul, she encroached upon her rightful place as Rajni’s wife. The admission runs as follows: ‘I was only the beloved, not the wife’. (Timepass, P.152)

She took back from Rajni’s cupboard the letters she wrote to Rajni by the help of Janoo. Why? Perhaps she was afraid of a scandal after the death of Rajni.

As a memento of her love with Rajni she also took ‘two sets of his kurta-pajamas and his pillow on which I had cried’. (Timepass, P.153) She was highly emotional and sentimental.

It would have gone against her grain if she had been afraid of a scandal. She took the packet of her letters to Rajni for the sake of publication. For, according to Protima Bedi, ‘He had made me promise that after he died I would publish them, as he thought they were the most precious treasure of his life’. (Timepass, P.153)

‘Even a new typewriter was sent by him to her so that she could type up the letters on it for publication’. (Timepass, P.153)

The offshoot of the publication of letters had also begun to affect her other relationships. Bedi elaborates it in so many words: ‘Manu was always tense about the door not being locked when we were together and he would sometimes scrutinize every inch of his surroundings’. Once he even suspected ‘I had a tape-recorder or camera hidden away somewhere
to trap him’. (Timepass, P. 159)

‘Perhaps he thought that if I could publish Rajni’s letters, I was capable of anything’. (Timepass, P.159)

He also wanted to know the reason for publishing the letters and suggested: ‘Why don’t you give the book to a publisher with a clause saying that it will only be published after ten years or in case of your death, within forty days of death.

A group when discussed the justification for the publication of her love letters written to Rajni Patel, Manu, the minister had said the last word (which inter alia throws light on Bedi’s idiosyncrasy): ‘What will she get out of the book? This is only a bravado. Yes, we know she has the guts to do anything. Tomorrow she’ll say, “Okay, I’ll have sex with the man I love publicly in Connaught Place’. (Timepass, P.160)

But he clinched the matter succinctly when he said, ‘That’s all very well, but some things are best kept private’. (Timepass, P.160)

As the saying goes a leopard never changes its spots, Bedi too couldn’t shed her avatar of a sex-predator’. For example on the occasion of ‘Shekhar Kapoor’s birthday celebrations at Shabana Azmi’s place, Marc Zuber was there – strong and handsome – and out of old habit she tried to seduce him all evening. I think I succeeded with stupid talk, cheap, easy, clever talk... Kunky, a friend said that I should have taken Mark home for the night. It would have been easy, and I wouldn’t have thought twice about doing it some months, ago, but now I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I didn’t want another one-night stand’. (Timepass, P. 179) So now she was not in favour of ‘one-night stand’.

She is very unpredictable about giving her body in sex. Her whimsies about her sexual relationship with Mario are very intriguing. What
happened in Hotel President while they were taking luncheon is a case in point.

‘Mario, I’m going to leave you, I said. ‘I love you much, too much to keep you. I’m sorry, but this is the last time we meet’. (Timepass, P.196)

But Mario’s reaction showed the double whammy, as Protima recounts: ‘He pushed the table... and took me to his room. Not a word was said. ‘He’s going to tear my clothes and rape me...

He went to bathroom and turned on the shower... He had picked me up and dumped led me in the tub with the shower full on my face’.

‘You need that’ he said, ‘and if you carry on in this vein you’ll get spanking on your bottom too...’ He took off my dripping clothes, dried me and tucked me into bed, then took off his clothes too and got in’.

Part and parcel of her idiosyncrasy was an unleashed and unobtrusive freedom which she had given to her daughter and son too. She admits, ‘I was constantly encouraging Pooja and Siddharth to go out there and just ‘do it’. I supported them fully, in every wild caper till they were four and six years old – visiting a haunted house at midnight, bunking school (favourite pastime), starting a kite-flying business on the beach or a library in the lawns, kissing cops so they wouldn’t penalize us for traffic violations...’ (Timepass, P.274)

This freedom had gone as far as the risk to the life of her children. She writes about Pooja who was ‘adamant about doing things her way... So I let her put her fingers into the plug point and get an electric shock. Thereafter she never did that again. I let her light up and take a few puffs of Papa’s cigarettes. She almost choked to death... She never smoked again’. (Timepass, P.275)

On page 275 she described Pooja as a copy cat of her mother, Bedi
 hersel. She elaborates this point in chapter ‘my flesh and blood’ (Timepass, P.275). Thus commenting on her own nature inter alia.

‘There is a lot of me in her, though she never sees it – the same stubbornness, the same independence and confidence, the same brutal honesty, the same preference for personal values over established social values’. (Timepass, P. 275)

The phrase brutal honesty or brutally honest is like a fad with Bedi. She has employed it also in the chapter ‘a dream come true’ making a mention of Surupa Sen, ‘the ideal dancer: ‘She was brutally honest’. (Timepass, P.250)

She had gone to the extent of encouraging her daughter Pooja Bedi to take up the abominable and controversial ad of Kamasutra condoms. When she asked ‘Will I be known as the Condom Girl?’ Protima’s answer was ... Why bother about what people will say’. The answer was characteristic of her nature and idiosyncrasy.

The result was not unexpected for if you sow the wind you must be ready for reaping the whirlwind. She writes: ‘after that advertisement the spotlight was constantly on Pooja. There was a lot of unfavourable publicity’. (Timepass, P.276) But she never cared two hoots for the adverse publicity for she was made of sterner stuff, rather endowed with a thick skin.

The idiosyncrasies of Bedi’s children especially her problem child Siddharth are not void of interest. Siddharth is morose and surly by nature because he was schizophrenic, a schizoid. Death wish was hovering over his thoughts. His observation of his sister’s nature is epitomized in this quotation: ‘Some people have a ‘calmness of the soul’ about them, a deep seated maturity. Booie (i.e. Pooja, his sister) throws calmness to the
winds. There are always major earthquakes happening in her soul’. (Timepass, P.285 parentheses mine)

Then he concludes; ‘When I approach her, it’s with the same gait as a person going to pet a dog that he is not sure about. Is it tame, will it growl, will it bite his hand off? But from what I see, she’s slowly but surely calming down’. (Timepass, P.285)

But he himself was growing confused and perplexed as Protima couches as: ‘He was depressed and totally at sea now’. (Timepass, P.286)

It was a curious aspect of his idiosyncrasy that he wanted to hide his sufferings even from her mother as she reveals as follows: ‘He would cry with great racking sobs in bed late at night and I would wake up to hear him pretending that it was just a stuffed nose and a bad cough. My heart broke watching him so miserable’. (Timepass, P.289)

Kamala Das manifests herself through her idiosyncratic traits especially pity for the lonely goddess of Kali. As she relates in the self-explanatory Chapter No. 8 Lonely Goddess:

‘When Kali danced we felt in the region of the heart an unease and a leap of recognition. Deep inside we held the knowledge that Kali was older than the world and that having killed for others, she was now lonlier than all’. (My Story, P.30)

While the dancer told the tales from Mahabharata, what she likes best throws light on her nature: ‘... the exploits of Bhima who went in search of the legendary flower that grew in a demon’s garden only because his wife Draupadi desired to adorn her hair with its petals’. Here she finds a resemblance with Draupadi: ‘In daydreams I too became a Draupadi who commanded her adoring mate to brave the demons to get flowers for her wavy tresses’. (My Story, P. 31)
N.T. Sahgal’s autobiography is peopled with the dramatis personae of real life whom she met or came across in India and especially across the Atlantic in the States. Her depiction of those people in the light of their idiosyncrasies is a very interesting reading.

The sisters (Nayantara and Lekha) were introduced with Paul Robeson through the book Paul Robeson, Negro? written by his own wife Mrs Robeson. She recounts her maiden meeting with her: ‘One day in September, soon after we had entered college, a letter came to Wellesby from Mrs. Robeson, inviting us to spend a few days at her home in Enfield at Connecticut...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.137)

The couple was ‘generous, straightforward and plain-speaking’. Sahgal is reminiscent of the ‘happy time at the Robeson’s home’. Essie, as they called her endearingly, ‘gave us a standing invitation to arrive any time we liked’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.138)

They met Big Paul on the sets of Shakespeare’s Othello.1 ‘He was still in Othello robe ...My hand disappeared into the huge one... I was dazzled by his smile. ‘So these are my daughters’, was his spontaneous reaction. Daughters because ‘Essie and Paul had met Mummie and Mamu some years earlier in London...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.137)

She was flabbergasted, ‘When he bent down to kiss me...’ An overwhelming experience, ‘In all my seventeen years’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 138)

Another such celebrity was Helen Keller2 whom Lekha and Sahgal

1. Othello: One of the four great tragedies by Shakespeare.
’met at the New York Film premiere of Pearl Buck’s book Dragon Seed’. Though stark blind and deaf since early childhood she ‘was going to ‘hear’ the picture through its vibrations’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.152)

They shook her by the hand ‘she ‘heard’ what we said from the vibrations she got from our voices by placing two fingers close to our lips...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.152)

“Another of our ‘book’ friends was Pearl Buck.” To many readers it will be revelation that Pearl S. Buck was actually Mrs. Walsh. To the Pandit sisters she became Mrs. Walsh’. In her ‘country home in Pennsylvania, Rita and she, had spent a summer vacation. Their library was a treasure trove. Moreover ‘...all that was sane and civilized in American life could be found in this house...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.157) Nayantara Sahgal says, ‘We were struck by Mrs. Walsh’s untiring energy and love of living. She often said that one lifetime was far too short to do all that she wanted to do. Her interest were many and varied... her interest lay in people’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.154)

Another woman who immensely impressed them was Dorothy Norman and her fantastic house which were ‘encountered only in magazine illustrations of interior decoration’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.154)

She says ‘Dorothy’s gracious house became home to us...’ She became her close friend because ‘of the same tastes from chocolate milk shakes to metaphysics and modern poetry’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.155)

One day Dorothy was not at home; she was received by Mary, the red faced, Irish maid who had adopted the American culture.

‘Sit down’, she said firmly, and she brought a platter of ...rye bread
and an enormous hunk of yellow cheese...’ By the time the family came
Mary and she had become thoroughly familiar with each other. Generous
‘Dorothy gave me a long, flat key to her apartment and told me to come
and go as I pleased’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.156)

Elly and Razzack, who lived in New York, were other Americans with
whom Tara had struck friendship. Elly was Bostonian and Razzack South
Indian. Their home was a combination of the one culture with the
philosophical calm of the other. They were self-sufficient. ‘There was a
garden just outside their house instead of merely a street’. The serenity of
the house was wafted there by fresh, flower-scented breeze’. (Prison and
Chocolate Cake, P.157)

Elly was plain-hearted with whom they talked uninhibitedly whereas
Razzack to them was ‘something of a sage’... whom ‘they listened to
respectfully’. It was here in a cold, January morning they heard the news
of sad demise of their Pappu. Sahgal rightly feels, ‘There was no place in
America in which we would rather have been at that time than in this
house of loving and world less sympathy’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake,
P.157)

Sahgal’s picturesque description of the guests who were regaled in
the dining room at Anand Bhawan takes the cake. Especially their
conversation, which was non-political. ‘The polished Urdu of the
distinguished and inimitable Maulana Azad, a stately, Richelieu – like figure
with his trim pointed beard will mingle with the scholarly Hindi of the
flowing-haired, flowing-bearded Tandonji’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake,
P.140)

Sarojini Naidu, was ‘One of the frequent and best-loved visitors at
Anand Bhawan’. She created by her presence ‘a festive, lively atmosphere’.
'There was laughter in the house whenever she was there... she infected those around her with her irrepressible vivacity and joie de vivre (joy of living)'. Prison (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.141, parentheses mine)

Sarojini’s comment about themselves to Mummie was, ‘Good gracious! How did a lovely woman like you produce these odd-looking children? (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.141) Though she herself was an ugly duckling. (My comment!)

Her daughter Padmaja was closer to them. ‘Padmasi’, as they called her endearingly ‘did not belong to... an austere political atmosphere’. She understood the family so well. Rita wondered ‘that anyone should treat her, the baby of the family, as a grown up’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.142)

Padmasi was ‘a confidante to three generations’ of Nehru family.

‘...when I was seventeen I met your grandfather... I fell hopelessly in love with him. After that I met your Mummie and then you three creatures came along...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.143)

About Gandhi Nayantara says, ‘Gandhiji was the most honoured of guests... one could not believe that such a phenomenon was possible’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.143)

To avoid crowds, ‘whenever Gandhiji was a passenger on a train it was stopped before it reached the station platform... This measure never succeeded’.

His ‘diet was very simple and garlic was an essential part of it – once I took some garlic up to his room in a saucer held at arm’s length in an effort not to smell it. Mrs Naidu saw me and chuckled, ‘Don’t be so snooty, young lady. You should eat some of that if you want to have a gorgeous complexion like the old man has when you’re his age’.
Naidu always called Gandhi as ‘the old man’ chocolate coloured Mickey-Mouse’.

‘Prayer meetings were a regular feature of Gandhiji’s day, whether at Wardha ashrama or wherever he was’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.144)

At these meetings he read verses from Bhagwad Gita, sang Hindu bhajan, read from the Koran, from Santsahitya of the Sikhs and the Bible. His favourite hymn was ‘Lead kindly Light’¹ which he got rendered into Gujarathi. The raison de’ etre for the predomination of the Hindu scriptures was ‘because the majority of the ashrama community was Hindu’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.144)

People gathered to attend Gandhi’s prayer meeting beside the fountain with their own copies of Bhagwed Gita while Gandhi recited the favourite passage which was the essence of Gita: ‘Thy business is with action only, never with its fruits...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.145)

Then strains of Abide with Me floated through the garden. Nayantara sang ‘a psalm of the Old Testament. Lord, without thy help how will my boat cross this stream...? (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.146)

At the end Raghupati Raghava Rajaram was sung as a choric song. Tara gives its English rendering scrupulous and faithful to the original text, as follows:


The hymn is included in the ‘Lyra Apostolica’ (1836) sacred poems contributed in the first instance to The British Magazine’.

Sir Paul Harvey, Oxford Companion to English Literatures, Oxford, 1967, (P. 577)
Rama the king of the Univese,
He who makes the sinner pure,
He who is known by diverse names,
Who is both Ishwar and Alllah.
He who gives his blessing unto all!
‘Gandhi had added the last two lines to this Hindu religious chant’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.146)

After the prayer meeting there were visitors from abroad. Such as Mrs. Margaret Sanger, who was deputed to India for its “family limitation programme,” the Family Planning of today. One night while saying good night to her, Rita said, “Don’t you think we are an awfully-well spaced family?” Mrs Sanger was highly amused…’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.147)

(According to family planning terminology, spacing connotes birth of another child after quite a gap).

Sir Stafford Cripps who had been to Anand Bhawan in the past revisited it in 1942, when preparations were going on at the time of Indira’s marriage. ‘Indira, with the wedding on her mind offered Sir Stafford ‘Potato Cripps’ at dinner instead of potato chips’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.147)

Nehru though master of Anand Bhawan, more often than not was a guest for according to her Pappu, ‘he chases all over India like a man possessed...’ Nehru’s ‘nimble walk resembled a run’. He whacked any person who was lazy. ‘Standing on his head was a regular favourite with him’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.148) So was with Mustafa Khar, Tehmina’s Feudal Lord. Tehmina describes his exercise as follows: ‘It was a Sunday... Mustafa was doing his Yoga exercises on the patio watched by
Nehru did this exercise not only because it was a healthy exercise but because ‘the topsy-turvy position was a good way of viewing the world...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.148)

Nehru was interested in what his nieces were reading.

When one morning he asked me what I was reading, ‘I showed him Andre Mauroi’s Byron’, he revealed to me ‘I have a link with Byron’.  

Tara wondered how come?

‘We went to the same school and college: Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge’. Nehru said.

When she remarked, ‘he must have been a wonderful man?’

‘No’, ...He was so amazingly selfish and self-centred’.

Then he suggested Sahgal to read Mauroi’s Ariel -- Shelly’s biography. In Nehru’s opinion ‘...Shelly is, I think, a far more lovable and admirable character than Byron’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.149)

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1. **Byron**: George Gordon, 6th Baron (1788-1824), English poet. His first literary success was Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (1812-18). In 1815 there were rumours of an incestuous relationship with his half-sister, his wife left him, and debts associated with this ancestral home increased. Ostracized and embittered, he left England permanently and stayed with Shelley in Geneva, finally settling in Italy. In *Beppo* (1818) he found a new ironic colloquial voice, which he fully developed in his epic satire *Don Juan* (1819-24). Though criticized on moral ground, Byron’s poetry exerted considerable influence on the romantic movement, particularly on the Continent. In 1824 he joined the fight for Greek independence, but died of malaria before seeing serious battle.

2. **Shelley**: Percy Bysshe (1792-1822), English poet. He was a leading figure of the Romantic Movement, with radical political views which are often reflected in his worked. After the collapse of his first marriage in 1814 he eloped abroad with Mary Godwin and her stepsister, marrying Mary in 1816; they settled permanently in Italy two years later. Major works include the political poems *Queen Mab* (1813) and *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819), *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), a lyrical drama on his aspirations and contradictions as a poet and radical, lyric poetry (e.g. ‘Ode to the West Wind’, 1820), the essay *The Defence of Poetry* (1821), vindicating the role of poetry in an increasingly industrial society, and *Adonais* (1821), an elegy on the death of Keats. Shelley was drowned in a boating accident.
Here it was revealed that Surup Kumari Nehru was Vijaya Lakshmi, Pandit’s maiden name.

With all his hectic activities Nehru was never sick as he admitted, ‘yes, I do get tied at sometimes’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.150)

Nehru detested and loathed life of ease and lethargy as he said in response to Lekha: “…it’s no use expecting life to be easy’. Nehru’s philosophy was, ‘there is adventure in living in abnormal times and life without adventure would be a very dull affair... So you must treat circumstances as an invitation to action. Then they will not get the better of you’. When Tara asked, ‘Do you believe in God, Mamu’ Nehru instead of an answer posed the question as a subterfuge, ‘it all depends on what you mean by God? And then suggested to her, ‘Why don’t you read the chapter on religion in Glimpses i.e. his book, ‘Glimpses of World History’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.151)

In response to American students’ questions about Gandhi at student gatherings, Tara and Lekha told about Gandhi’s charisma in metaphors and images: ‘The sea in high tide sweeps majestically up the shore, enveloping with its salt spray everything it encounters. In the same way everyone who came under the spell of Gandhi was overcome by him and drawn into his way of thinking’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.167)

Apparently there was no perceptible change. The tenor of life was not much changed.

To the people 'he was no imposing leader but a loved brother, one of themselves, living simply... His goal was not some promised glory for them or for India. It lay in “wiping the tears from every eye.”

Gandhi had stirred ‘people in every section of society’. Gandhi made them hold money and success in low esteem. Sahgal says, ‘they were no
longer goals worthy of achievement’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, PP. 168, 169)

When Motilal Nehru, Sahgal’s grandfather sought Gandhi’s permission to continue his practice at the bar with the plea ‘Your movement needs money. Let me continue my practice and help financially’. What was Gandhi’s response: “It is you I want,” said Gandhiji, ‘not your money’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.169)

Gandhi fought the British colonizers in a unique way: ‘Gandhiji believes that you cannot fight for truth with hatred in your heart’ explained Sahgal to her American friends.

“It is unheard of” said Cecile “to talk of non-violence in this day and age, when the whole world is being over-run by violence.”

“In this day and age” repeated Lekha, “it needs all the more…”

“It also needs genius,” said Cecila, ‘and we Americans, as a nation, haven’t got…’ Nor have we, we tried to explain… that ‘He had the genius, not India’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.174)

Though recognition of non-violence came late – but better late than never. In June, 2007 the UN passed a resolution to commemorate every year Gandhi’s birthday October 2 as the non-violence Day.

America is a fertile ground for all religions and sects. So no wonder that Nayantara and Lekha stumbled upon a Ramkrishna mission in Los Angeles, the home of Hollywood.

Nayantara says, ‘our hostess knew the Swami well and took us to visit his ashrama. We met the monks and nuns, most of them who had left their families and homes at an early age to devote themselves to a life of study and worship’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.179)

Though Nayantara was impressed by their programme but believed
that, ‘To realize God... one must live to the fullest and highest’ which was not possible in an ‘ashrama’. To her, ‘Religion had always been inseparable from the idea of service, for this is what Gandhiji had taught us...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.179). She is absolutely right when she says, ‘We must be fit for the company of men before we seek the company of God’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 179)

When the Swami told Rita, ‘You have the makings of a nun’, Rita disagreed downright with the Swami enjoying it thoroughly. She is no more a nun than Goldilocks¹ was, she grumbled’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P.180)

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¹ A person with golden locks. Goldilocks as the name of a girl in the traditional fairy story was first used in John Hasa’s ‘Old Nursery Stories and Rhymes (C 1904)’ (The Oxford English Reference Dictionary Ed. Judy Pearsall & Bill Trumble, Oxford New York, 1995, P. 600)