The fifth chapter in the thesis reads Taslima Nasrin’s *French Lover*. Nila’s position is many steps ahead of either Grandmother or Sudha. It is interesting to listen to Taslima Nasrin, who says,

I, come what may, will not be silenced. Come what may, I will continue my fight for equality and justice without any compromise until my death. Come what may, I will never be silenced. (www.taslimanasrin.com)

Taslima Nasrin focuses on the hidden, inner life of a woman, especially the conflicts festering within their mind. She traces the growing up of woman, torn between the conventional and unconventional attitudes. It is the real experience that moulds the protagonist, as she reaches the outside world, which is beyond their reach. In her novel *French Lover* (2002), she probes the depths of the protagonist Nila’s inner-self. She attempts to uncover her mode of behavior and lays bare the tales of her joys and sorrows, pain and pleasures, failures and success. She presents a wider range of the plot and character in her fiction. In *French Lover*, Nila, the protagonist, did not have a care in the world. She dreams teaching in Lady Brabourne College or in Calcutta University. But finally Sunil, her family friend, sends an ugly businessman to trample over her dreams and push her into the kitchen. Her patriarchal
acculturisation begins quite early, in school, her schooling evokes this response from Sunil,

You crazy girl, what's the use of all this studying? Eventually you will have to handle the kitchen and your husband's house.

(French Lover.46)

In Kakar's view, mythological stories like those of Sita, Savitri and Damayanthi form the very core of an Indian woman's identity. An Indian girl's journey to an exploration of the self begins with these mythological stories of a patriarchal society. However, they are not just imaginary stories like any other animal stories. Each of these stories is the true tale of a woman, a celebrity in Hindu legends. These celebrities are given to the little girls as the models of Indian womanhood to which they are to adhere throughout their life. This is how their patriarchal acculturation begins. Mythology sows the seeds of a cultural awareness and a social expectation in the tender psyche of Indian girls. It tells the girls about society's expectations from them, i.e. to be Sita and Savitri. These seeds are so deeply sown that it becomes almost impossible for an Indian woman to ignore it in her adult life. Feeling proud of the set tradition of Savitri and Sita they try to live a pure life. And when, in some exceptional cases, they try to consign all these stories of 'Satis' to
oblivion, these childhood tales haunt them like ghosts. A deep sense of guilt at having crossed the *Laxman Rekha* weighs heavily on their souls and does not allow them to be at peace with them.

Girls grow up with a notion of their temporary membership within the natal home. Considerable importance is attached to the way a girl carries herself, the way she sits, stands and talks and interacts with others. A girl should walk with soft steps. Taking long strides denotes masculinity. They are often rebuked for jumping, running and hopping, which is un-becoming to a female. A girl has to be careful about her posture. She should not sit cross-legged or with her legs wide apart. ‘Don’t stand like a man’, is a common rebuke to make a girl aware of the demands of femininity. There is considerable emphasis on the possible need to bow before the wishes of the husband and his family. Submissiveness and obedience are considered as feminine ideals. Women were considered different for whom strange codes of dress, conduct and morality were framed. Scriptures, to follow the path of chastity, piety, loyalty and sacrifice, ordained them. They live in a different world where they have to stay submissive and dutiful. Amazingly, a woman also accepts their subjugation as natural and lays restrictions on each other, following ages of conditioning. They lack the sense of self, as they are reduced to the state of commodities. These commodities have to be
transported from the natal home to the marital home. Nila’s story as revealed by Taslima Nasrin is testimony to this long and rigorous form of conditioning that a woman undergoes in India.

Nila, a young Bengali woman from Kolkata moves to Paris after her marriage to Kishanlal, a restaurant owner. In the airport when the officials ask questions about Kishanlal, Nila gives a vague detail about her husband who is living in Paris. She says that she is not sure about the age, work and citizenship of Kishanlal, which sparks disbelief on the lips of officials.

‘But you don’t have the same last names’.

Nila gulped, ‘that’s not the same because....’

‘Because?’

‘I have deliberately not taken his name’. (Ibid.7)

This is the first instance where the author reveals the strength of the protagonist to assert herself. In India or in many parts of the world, it is quite common to take the husband’s name as their last one. In a patriarchal society, the man proclaims the authority over his wife by making her accept his name. In such cases, she has to leave her natal family name attached to her, along with her identity, bond with her natal home and subjugate herself with the husband’s family by accepting her
new surname. Nila’s rejection is perhaps the first step to assert her identity. She believes that her marriage with Kishanlal is only an escape from the situation where she is in India. Thinking about that she wonders why she married Kishanlal, whom she does not even know very well. But Calcutta had been a torment to her and if she had not left that city, she would surely have died. For a whole year, Sushanth, Nila’s lover, went around with Nila; everyone thought that they would get married. But he ditches her, because they were not from the same caste. Sushanth was a high caste Brahmin, while Nilanjana Mandal was of scheduled caste. So he settled for the girl his parents chose for him. After that Nila feels the sharp talons of memory ripping her to shreds, and she gets married to Kishan. There are moments in her life, when she contemplates about her marriage to Kishan. Did she do it in order to escape from Sushanth or to live a different kind of death? Did she do it because one had to get married; otherwise people would frown upon her. Perhaps she did it to defend herself against nasty conjectures about why she did not marry until so late and also to prove to everyone that she was not deaf or lame and could still get a good match. A man living abroad, whomever and however he is, is a matter of prestige. All these are aspects of social conditioning, which still cling to her. On the first day with Kishan after their marriage, Kishanlal says to Nila,
‘Today you’re on leave, but from tomorrow you’ll have to get
down to housework, okay?’

When Nila asks him to join hands with her he says,

‘You do, you’re a woman’. (Ibid.18)

Though we claim to be modern, the patriarchal exploitation of the
female as a servant who has to look after all the needs of a household
does not change. Kitchen is her kingdom and she should stay there. It is
her responsibility to look after the needs of her man. Soon after marriage,
when Kishan, leaves the house locked, Nila feels restless and impatient in
all her nerves. To her, locking the door is like locking herself. She is
waiting to be free, although she does not know free of what, and where to
go. She feels like a caged bird. Absentmindedly, Nila begins to sing,

Break free thee doors and take me away. (Ibid.26)

Nila thinks of a myth where the princess was caught and trapped in
the house of a wicked giant, and a nice, good looking prince came riding
by a horse, and rescues the princess. Nila, in her myth, places herself in
the position of the princess who needs to be rescued. Though, Nila may
assume herself to be a romantic heroine, in reality, she is caught in the
web of marriage, and is alone in the foreign land. When Kishan arrives,
he says he would leave the keys behind with Nila and she may use it only in the case of ‘fire’. The ‘fire’ can be alluded to the Indian concept of ‘fire test’ which is also known as Agnipareeksha, a concept we find in the Ramayana, where the women were exploited by the phallocracy. If Nila wants to go out, to set herself free from the bonds of patriarchy, it is only through ‘fire’. The ‘fire’ of escaping from exploitation has been there in the minds of Indian women. But the key is absent to set them free. So if the house is on fire, then Nila has the freedom to run outside and save her life. She lives in a world of fantasy, awaiting the arrival of her prince charming, who would take her away, on the wings of love and romance. Unfortunately, the bitter truth knocks her down, that is, marriage is no longer an emotional bondage but purely a matter of calculations. There is no way out of this. Everyday, Nila feels that Kishanlal has used her in the name of ‘wife’. When Kishan asks her to take off his shoes,

... Nila sat at his feet and untied the shoelaces with her slim fingers and took off his shoes. She felt like the housemaid, who used to take off everyone’s shoes and thought at night she’d have to be the perfect whore and sell herself just as they sold their bodies for money. (Ibid.28)
Nila wonders if there is any difference between a prostitute’s client and a husband. The only difference she finds is that the client can get away only after paying off the prostitute whereas the husband can get off the hook without ever paying his wife’s dues. She feels,

The prostitute actually had more freedom than the wife in more ways than one. A mother, a sister and a prostitute- are they the three roles which a woman has to play to the hilt or are they merely the three persons that a woman is born with.

(Ibid.28)

She complains about her idle time and wishes to join a job. But Kishan disapproves her proposal saying,

Am I not earning enough? if I didn’t work, where would you live? What would you eat?” Nila retorts with a calm voice saying ‘Are you doing all this for me? You were working even before we got married. You haven’t started working simply to be able to take care of me, have you? (Ibid.55)

Kishan’s reaction of ‘Indian wives can’t talk like this’ is met with another retort.
You should have married a dumb girl who'd silently do the housework and never protest at anything, who doesn’t have a soul to call her own and cannot read or write who didn’t have her wits about her and didn’t dream a single dream. (Ibid.56)

Nila, fed up of living in a ‘cage’, ventures into the outer world to defy the authority of her husband. She came out of the place and walked aimlessly.

... She wanted to lose herself, to go to a place from where she wouldn’t know her way back. ... Nila saw the two young men kissing the woman and stroking her back lovingly. The two bodies were entwined. Nila wanted to be kissed like that, she wanted such a handsome young man to her, hug her and kiss her as deeply... Like a crazed being, she ran towards the museum. Nila forgot that she had go back home forgot that she had just one identity. She was Mrs. Lal, Mrs. Kishan Lal. (Ibid.67)

When Nila describes her way out to Kishan, he grits his teeth. He thought that she was exceeding her limits. She had not put her feet down
when he came in, instead she was forthright enough to describe her
terrible behavior in the most calm, unperturbed and serene manner.

...Nila said blandly, Now you see, I could find my way around
quite easily... I am not a little girl after all’? His teeth were on
edge, ‘I can quite see that you not a little girl. Why are you
sitting like a man with your feet up?’ Nila’s laughter rippled
around. ‘Who says it’s like a man? I have put my feet up in
true female style.’ (Ibid.70)

Nila adopts a variety of strategies to disrupt this patriarchal culture,
which capture women to behave in a prescribed code of conduct. She
wanted to come out of the exploitation with patriarchal regulation of
social and economic constraints. She says,

I have never been so dependent before. In Calcutta even when I
was a student. I also gave tuitions. I earned my own pocket
money. (Ibid.71)

After her marriage she asks Mujammel, her husband’s employee to
find a job where she can earn enough money. She also says that Kishan
ears his money, not hers. In her letter to Molina, Nila writes,
If I had money, ma, I’d have lived happily, my own money. Ma.
Without your own money you have to obey the person who has money for all your life. If you are a pauper, your wishes don’t count. You can’t live on someone else’s money and also have your freedom. (Ibid.68)

Nila represents the new Indian women’s voice. Her definition of self-identity is a refreshing break from the mythological image of the Indian woman in early fiction. The unfamiliar, unknown, untrodden path poses new challenges to Nilanjana Mandal as she engages in redefining and restructuring her beliefs and attitudes. She has the ambition to see the world through her own eyes, speak her own voice, and apprehend the world through her own experience. Her protest against the female subservience, self-sacrifice, self-denial, is not a new phenomenon. She should have the freedom to decide her own identity, freeing herself from the sex-determined role. She has the freedom to express her thoughts and feelings. In her letter to Kishan, she justifies her action of walking out of her marriage. She says,

I am leaving because we don’t get along, and you know that as well as I. Life isn’t easy in this foreign country, I am seeing a
different you ever since I have started working. You are insulting me at every step. But have you ever thought that I can’t possibly be enjoying that box-packing job and that I didn’t take a degree to do this kind of thing? The reason why I took the job is that I hate begging from you. I know you don’t consider it begging. You feel you are looking after your wife, doing your duty. But it comes with a price: I have to live according to your wishes because you are the master, you are the boss; without you my life is pointless and I am a mere servant who’ll clean your house, cook, serve and provide sexual gratification at night. Is there any other role in which you see me? Oh yes, the other day you said you need a child. I have to give you an heir. I have to because you want it. As if it has nothing to do with me, and everything to do with you. We could have both wanted it together. The other night I invited two of my friends and realized that I don’t have the right to do that. Probably I don’t even have the right to have friends. I have tolerated your nonsense about fish and meat; but take that smell all day long in the restaurant, don’t you? You just want to force me to give it up. This I, who has evolved over so many years, have to give up her habits, her language, her culture, her nature, and fit herself into your mould. You know
that I haven’t done anything wrong. The main reason why you are angry with me is that I haven’t obeyed you. I cannot survive within so many restraints and strictures. (Ibid.79-80)

Nila leaves Kishan’s house, walking aimlessly. At that time she meets Danielle, who provides shelter. With Danielle, Nila’s education in sexuality begins. When they are sitting in a café, Nila whispered to Danielle, ‘that girl has just kissed both the men. Who do you think is her lover?’ For that Danielle indifferently answered,

That’s not a girl, it’s a man. (Ibid.85)

Nila shuddered when Danielle told her that they were homosexuals. She was dazzled by the extent of freedom in that society. Later when Danielle gets intimate with Nila, she asks,

‘Why? Don’t you want it too?’ Danielle was surprised.

‘Want what?’

‘Sex’.

‘What...How can two women...?’

Danielle smiled, ‘Who told you they can’t?’

‘I’ve never heard of it’. (Ibid.99)
Nila has not only ever heard of it, she could not even stretch her imagination so far as to come up with a mental image that vaguely resembled such a possibility. Nila comes to know that Danielle had fallen in love with her teacher when she was twelve years old and they had this lesbian relationship until she left the school. Later she had the relationship with Nicole. Nila’s relationship with Danielle is a step towards understanding her own sexuality.

**All night long, Danielle’s thirsty tongue played on Nila’s motionless body. Suddenly Nila’s deadwood body was flooded with life. Like a skilled painter Danielle painted her dreams on Nila’s body. Nila was drowning in orgasmic tremors.** (Ibid. 147)

Nila’s desire to be free is manifested in her fascination with the foreigner, whom she meets on her way back to Paris. Nila sees Benoir, a blonde, blue-eyed, pink lipped, Frenchman as the prince of her dreams, who will come and carry her away on horseback. She had never felt love so strong. It awakes in her dreams of a home, a family. She is afraid to live a loveless life like Molina. Nila looks like a liberated woman who has the courage to break a relationship, which has become meaningless with no sense of companionship or partnership between husband and
wife. She opts for divorce. The situation is rather ironic because she steps out of the world of Kishan, not to live a life on her own in her own way, but to step into the shadow of another man. At this time, she really does not have to struggle alone for survival, not even at the economic level, which leaves woman even more disintegrated and vulnerable. Never for a moment does she suspect that Benoir might be only carving her into a shape he himself likes. Nila gets easily subdued under Benoir’s dominant postures. When she asks Benoir about his relationship with Pascale, his wife, he says that he loves both of them and also insists Nila to love his daughter Jacqueline, saying,

Jacqueline is a apart of me, Nila if you love me, you have to love her too. (Ibid.227)

Nila sensibly protests this imposition saying,

Love does not fall from the sky. Any relationship needs sometime to grow.

Benoir shouts,

“Shame on you, Nila, You can’t love an innocent child! It’s easy to love any child and you are actually jealous of Jacqueline”.(Ibid.227)
Nila feels that Benoir’s next wish would be that she had to love Pascale because she was his wife and if she didn’t, it would make her a very selfish, sordid person. She asks Benoir, 

I feel our relationship is becoming very complicated. I really cannot understand whom you love, who you want to spend the rest of your life with. Of course, you say you love both of us, you need both of us. Tomorrow if another woman comes into your life, what will you do? You would want her in your life as well, won’t you?(Ibid.228-229)

At one time, Nila thought that her days of uncertainty were over. When Nila had fever, Benoir stayed with her and nursed her. He went back and packed two suitcases and comes back to Nila, saying that she meant everything to him and that was his final decision. When Nila asked about the other relationship, he said he’d wind it up slowly. But gradually she came to know that Benoir was giving more importance to himself, not her. Nila knew that if Benoir left she’d trip over her own shadow in that house. So she would became an easy prey to Benoir and wherever she was upset, his words like, 

I have given you everything, Nila, including myself. What else do you want?(Ibid.272)
would soothe her. She takes Benoir to Italy to make him happy. But he misunderstands her motives. The difference starts creeping in, when Benoir says,

So, you have hired me as your driver.... You want to buy love with money. (Ibid.283)

Nila retorts,

I don't know. Perhaps I think of you as a gigalo ... I spend money because I love you. (Ibid.283)

Experience chastens her, refines her further, and winnows her soul, which becomes transulent. Benoir goes wild with exhilaration when he learns that Nila is pregnant. But Nila asks Benoir to leave Pascale. Her voice is strangely calm. Nila progressively attains clarity of perception, a lucidity of soul when she says,

No Benoir, you don’t love me .... You don’t love Pascale, ... you love yourself, Benoir, your own self. No one else... you are no different from my father Anirban, my lover Sushanta, My husband Kishanlal and that Sunil ... all of you have same things in common... You need a Madame Buffer fly don’t you, Benoir? But I have no desire to be her.(Ibid.286)
Finally she makes a firm decision and says,

I had no self esteem or self—confidence, and that’s why I came this far for your love. Now you must let me go. I cannot spend the rest of my life in tears. I won’t let you have that pleasure at least! You would love to watch the fun, the love and tragic grief of a stupid, silly eastern woman... I believe you — you will marry me. But I won’t marry you and this child will not be born. I will have an abortion. (Ibid.287)

Nila takes an unusual stand at the end. Though pregnant, she refuses to marry Benoir, when he offers it. She wants to abort her baby. All her actions seems strange and unusual to her upbringing in Indian society. Nila doesn’t need a man for her identity or status. It was in Paris that Simone de Beauvoir had fought for abortion in the fifties. Her battle resulted in the legalization of abortion. Nila feels happy that she is enjoying the fruits of the revolution in the same city. Nila is Molina’s daughter, and people expect her to be as sweet, polite and gentle as her mother, as well as being flawless in serving her husband. Molina’s life begins and ends with Anirban. She makes whatever Anirban likes to eat; she would never falter in the art of homemaking. Anirban is the
patriarchal husband expecting his wife to cook and serve, no questions asked and no demands made. Nila writes in her letter to Molina,

Ma, you have wasted your entire life trying to please other people. Now you should think of yourself, enjoy your own life. After grandmother died, the inheritance was split up and you got a fair amount of money from selling your share. Who are you saving for? Spend it on yourself. Life isn’t forever. The people here have enough to eat and good clothes to wear. So they enjoy the life to the hilt. They laugh heartily. And we are afraid to laugh because we are in fear. Why? Because some stupid man somewhere has said that if you laugh too much you will pay for it with tears. (Ibid.54)

again an example of a cultural proverb influencing the Indian’s psyche. Molina had wanted a little love from Anirban, but she did not get it. He loved Swati Sen. He brought her a sari and went to Simla with her. Molina had always wanted to go to Darjeeling, but Anirban never had the time to take her there. For as long as Nila could remember, she had never seen Anirban and Molina share a bed. Anirban came back from his hours of fun with Swati, critiqued every item that was put on the table, crashed on his nearly made bed by Molina and snored the night away. Molina
died an untimely death due to negligence of her illness by Anirban. The Doctor said,

The illness isn’t sudden. It was festering for a longtime. It was just a boil in her intestine at first and that was hemorrhaging. It could have been operated quite easily. But because it was allowed to grow, it turned into cancer. This is problem with patient’s families. They don’t begin treatment on time and when it is too late they throw their weight around. (Ibid.143)

The doctor feels the disease is not just physical. It is much more than that. It’s a mental neglect, which is allowed to widen and destroy. Molina becomes a good instance of a good Indian woman who suffers silently. Since time immemorial, Indian women are taught husband-worship, submissiveness and obedience. She is supposed to bear everything in silence, as she should not bring disgrace either to her conjugal home or her natal home. The elders persuade her to forget and forgive everything as ‘compromise’ is the only remedy for all her problems. Divorce is too tough a path to follow, as she has neither the support of the family or the society, nor any skill to manage her own life. Molina could never ever think of protest, let alone separation or divorce. She sacrifices everything for an unfaithful husband, who has an extra-
marital relationship. She is not only killed by her husband, but also by society, tradition and her own internalization of patriarchy.

This internalization is what Nila escapes from and in doing so she is able to free herself. It is not her selflessness but her helplessness, anguish and misery that drive her to death. She had spent her years in the household by keeping her wishes collared and chained. Did Molina have the capacity to make her life more meaningful? She had been a prisoner in her husband’s home. She had invisible chains on her mind and body, the chains of society, and she had not known how to break free. There are millions of such Molina’s the world over, who did not know how to set themselves free. To quote Indira Parikh,

The dominant refrain is; you are always in somebody else’s space. There is no space which you can call your own. The only way to gain acceptance is through conformity, sacrifice and obedience.¹

Indira Parikh’s description of the reality of Indian woman’s life reminds one of the Victorian concepts of Virgina Woolf’s phrase ‘The

Angel in the House’. She describes the muted Victorian woman as ‘Angel in the House’ and defines her as,

You may know what I mean by the Angel in the house. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. She never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.²

The woman in the Indian family is saturated by the ethos of self-denial and sacrifice, of being useful and living for others. The Indian social system reinforces its negative attitude towards the female in many ways. It emphasizes qualities such as being obedient, self-sacrificing, a responsible home maker and an asset both to her parental and husband’s family. It stresses that she must be tolerant, patient, nurturing and fostering: a calm, quiet, resilient force which is not visible but always present. If she does not display these qualities, the woman ends up being

called derogatory names. Nila’s behaviour sums up what Simone de Beauvoir has to say,

She does not accept the destiny assigned to her by nature and by society, and yet she does not repudiate it completely. Thus she is divided against herself. ³

Whatever kink may be formed by the hereditary or environmental factor in the personality of a woman, her biological role is the crux of her problem. Her married life may prove a great help or hindrance, it may lead to the realization of her identity, what Nila looks for in life. In K.K. Ruthven’s view the sense of,

Being a woman is not pre-constructed. It is merely the product of ex-coding process of acculturation” which comes over a female child with her exposure to cultural lore and myth of the society in which she is born. ⁴

In her view what enables a girl to be a woman is not simply the pubertal transformation of her body but the socializing process of culture,

which influence how she thinks. Sudhir Kakar's study of Indian mythology within a psychosocial framework in *The Inner world*, also underlines the role that myth plays in the formation of an Indian's personality. In his view, it is one of the very strong influences on both the male and the female child. But in the case of a female child the influence is stronger. It is a personality type which judges the situation, tries to find its solution after setting certain goals in which they see the solution, and assert themselves silently to achieve those goals. They do not become defiant on any issue but silently try to make their people realize that their convictions do hold truth and should be accepted. But in case they fail in their silent assertion, they give it up at the cost of their domestic life. Her conditioning characteristically marks Indian woman’s attitude to men. The Indian woman would rather suffer low self-esteem and a feeling of worthlessness of her existence than hold antagonistic feeling for the man. Indian woman in general, has to maintain the stereotyped image of a woman in her family. It is her duty to maintain moral standards in society. Gradually, however, this tendency started fading away giving emergence to a new woman. The new women’s desire for independence is manifested in her private and public life.

The modern woman is more rational than emotional. The woman in the past had blind faith in customs, traditions and superstition, but
the modern woman questions this. The question of liking or disliking the husband never arose for a traditional woman. She had to live; however her husband was. But now a woman does not stick rigidly to the ‘pativratha’ dharma of the traditional woman. She is with her husband as long as there is mutual love and understanding. If they lack love, she can move to seek it in some other man. It is not immoral to her. The new woman is so because of her modern thinking, economic independence and an understanding of the psychological issues. The adventures made by the new woman, their physical and mental capacity and their social freedom have become the fresh stuff of women writers.

Taslima Nasrin perceives the character of Nila not as a stereotype but as a real woman trying to find real solutions to real problems. Though she is emotional and sentimental, she is still capable of taking rational choices. We are surprised by her resilience, strength, and ability to survive in a hostile, male-centered world. The bitterness and resentment gradually recede and give place to self-affirmation. Being a victim of the established socio-economic pressures, she determines to vanquish the victor with her self-confidence, self-reliance and self-dependence. In this process Nila had to struggle a lot to achieve. She wanted to revolt against the traditional type of a wife in her thought and action. The revolt is not born of romantic ideas but because of an inbuilt protest.
In her individual capacity, she is placed in the traditional socio-cultural milieu of a conventional society wherein she is projected and recognized, but her vital self remains unrealized, caged and humiliated beyond repair. Her plight becomes the plight of hundreds of women similarly circumstanced. Nila compares herself with Catherine Grand, a beautiful girl from Calcutta, who marries an elderly English Officer, Francis Grand. She falls in love with Philippe and then reaches Paris as his mistress. Catherine changed hands and finally ended up as the mistress of Talleyrand, the foreign secretary. Napoleon commanded Talleyrand to marry his mistress who played the trick of carrying Talleyrand’s child in her womb. Eventually, the girl who spoke French with a Calcutta accent became a minister's wife at a ripe age, after spending many years as different men’s mistress. Nila felt that after two hundred years it was Catherine again who was standing with her on the bridge. Is she taking a hint from Catherine about her future plans with Benoir? While her conscious mind revolts at the prospect of her violation, subliminally she is still a depressed woman. Her relation with Benoir gets more and more complicated and she is in a dilemma about the love of Benoir.

While talking to Danielle, Nila says,
I fell into the trap of love and came out of it myself... Time is never wasted. This time was spent in acquiring wisdom and I needed it. (French Lover, 291)

Women are usually defined not in themselves, but as female relatives of a man. Society considered a woman to do the roles of mother, wife and daughter. Only after she breaks out of these stereotypes, she will find her true self and recreate a definite positive identity for her and discover her individual role in society. The rejection of traditional definitions and images of the woman is the major theme in the novel. Nila feels,

Men, of whichever country, whatever society, are all the same. (Ibid. 291)

The forging and forming of an identity in the case of Nila is reinforced by the fact of being outside India. In this subsection, an attempt is made to briefly discuss the trails and tribulations of an outsider. Though, what is stated here does not in anyway directly influence the protagonist in anyway, nevertheless, the fact remains that Nila succeeds in her search for an Identity, because she does not live in India. Nila tries to adjust to an expatriate society. Migration is a complex process. It calls
for an almost entire break from the traditional environment that one is used to from his birth.

One of the very interesting features of Third world expatriate literature is, in stay at home writing, the national identity gets submerged in the regional, tribal, communal identity. They tend to depict society through particulars of caste/kin group, the concept of nationality is rather strong. When we consider 'Samskara' by the novelist U.R. Anantha Murthy, we find that the novel is not about Indians, but about Brahmins: Brahmins of a certain kind, the Madhvas and the Smarthas. The Madhvas are the followers of Shankaracharya. Despite being Brahmins, the two sects have several points of difference between them. Samskara is a story that centers on the finer distinctions of caste and religion. When we compare this with 'French Lover' by Taslima Nasrin, Nila, the protagonist, declares that she is from scheduled caste, but which sect, which group, we do not know. While in France, she is referred to as an Indian, by her national identity. The clarity of a detached vision is not available to the stay-at-home writer caught up in the welter of provincial identities, and accordingly he creates characters that have parochial identities, as against the expatriate writer who creates characters with national identities.
Though this may vary with differences in personality and circumstances, rejection of the new comer, will in all likelihood, interfere with his internal adjustment with the new country and prevent him from wanting to surrender his ethnic identity, to merge with the cultural main stream of his adopted country. Thus, on the one hand, the host is reluctant to accept the expatriate, and at the same time, expects him to conform to his ways and standards without the former making any attempt to understand the ways, customs, and culture of the new comer. On the other hand, there is a compelling need in the expatriate—perhaps as a mechanism of defence against total facelessness— to cling to his own traditions and to mix with people of his own country. That is why the notion of ethnicity is increasingly being recognized as desirable by social scientists today. Rather than suffer from total rootlessness and alienation from both the cultures, it is easier for an expatriate to overcome the psychological crisis of his identity in the new land by mixing with people of his own community, region, caste or language and by evoking familiar traditions in private or through meetings of institutionalized ethnic organizations. Paramatama Saran, in his article, *Cosmopolitan from India*, observes,

When members of these organizations meet formally, they are, of course, very conscious of their heritage and take a sense of
pride in being part of these groups, which perhaps gives them
great psychological satisfaction. Even when they meet formally,
conversations very often center around these organizations\(^5\)

By the very act of migration, the expatriate is doomed to a state of
homelessness, despite access to two cultures. His abandonment of the
mother country for whatever reason economic, political, intellectual,
psychological, recoils him in the form of nostalgia for the very land he
has deserted. His reception in the new land may aggravate his longing for
home but it is his nostalgia worn of the act of expatriation that his sense
of exile exists. This is universally true of migrant writers, irrespective of
the part of the world they come from. Revival of ethnicity serves a great
psychological need in the migrant. It releases in part, deep impulses of
yearning in him for his native traditions. As expatriates meet through
these organizations, apparently for arranging social, religious, cultural
functions, they are actually able to maintain their cultural boundaries and
identities and overcome any crisis of rootlessness they may be
experiencing while living in the new land. Irving Howe has rightly

identified nostalgia, as the real reasons for the expatriates need to evoke ethnic origins.⁶

Taslima Nasrin portrays the problems of an expatriate through the character of Nila. The experience as an expatriate helps her to regain her agency and also helps her to establish her identity. Nasrin’s writing has a sense of nostalgia, self-consciousness and abstractness which begins to imprint on her literature and also affect her language. Her use of language exhibits a gradual movement away from rootedness towards unhousedness. There is a perceptible change from the language that captures and translates the native sensibility into English, to a language that displays the effects of dereligionisation and exile. In her novel, The French Lover the title of the chapters creates this effect. The first chapter’s title itself suggests the movement from known to an unknown kind. (Dumdum to charles de Ganlle). Then, ‘The visiting Bridge’, ‘Life at Home’ shifts to ‘From Garu du Nord to Gare d’Austerliz’. This shift is also viewed in her subsequent chapters such as ‘The Invitation’, ‘Paris in a Trance’, ‘Lafamilia’, ‘A Bientont’ ‘Calcutta as usual’, ‘Au Revoir’, ‘Benoir Dupont’, ‘Benoir’s wild elixir, ‘Morounis vernesse’ ‘Jet’aime

Jet’aime, Jet’aime’...Describing the act of verbal creation, Arthus koestter said that as the artists motive is to communicate events to others, “to make than relieve his thoughts and emotions”, he must, “provide patterns of stimuli as substitutes for the original stimuli which caused the experience to occur”.

To achieve this, the artist has to discover suitable analogies to render the abstract experience concrete so that the reader can emotively respond to the experience that the author wishes to communicate to the reader. This, Taslima Nasrin, achieved in the above piece with great creative aptitude. The language of the expatriate country also poses problem to a migrant. Nila felt this embarrassing situation when she went for an interview to a documentary film.

Rita asked ‘would you like to powder your nose’?

Nila wiped it with the back of her hand said,’No, it’s okay, I haven’t brought any powder with me anyway”.

Rita blushed with embarrassment. Danielle brought her mouth close to Nila’ ear and muttered, ‘Powdering your nose doesn’t

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mean that literally. It means going to the toilet, Peeing or Shitting'.

‘Why couldn’t she ask me that then ’?

‘No, that’s shameful ‘

‘Shameful?’ (French Lover.123)

Nila could never understand what constructed as shame in that society. It wasn’t even summer yet and the girls walked around half dressed. For Nila, clothes were a problem. She was confused about the difference between men’s and women’s clothes, because, in Calcutta, the differences between men’s and women’s clothes and shoes were many. Saris, Salwars and Slippers were for Women and Dhotis, shirts, T Shirts, trousers, ties, socks and shoes were for men. The difference was apparent. In France, men and women wore the same kind of clothes and it was hard to tell the difference. The buttons would be on different sides, the chest a bit narrower – one had to look very hard to be able to tell them apart. Nila found herself in the same situation at the shoe store also. When the shoe store attendant asked for Nila’s shoe size, she did not know it, because, in Calcutta, she was used to picking up the shoes or sandals that fitted her. If a size eight fit her one-month, the next month she’d find the size seven too large for her. When someone wanted to buy shoes, they’d just
come to the shop, try out a few and take the one that fitted the - that was how it went.

Nila meets several people at home and outside. Her attachment with Morounise is because she is originally from India. She enjoys chatting with Mojammel and his friends who are working in her husband’s hotel. Sunil and his family participate in the Ganesha festival in France. Nila, virtually on every occasion, invites her native friends to her home to celebrate her joys. With various instances, Taslima Nasrin projects the complexities of a migrant. It calls for a re-orientation of the entire social being of man until he learns to do without,

The whole complex of institutions and social patterns, which formerly guided the actions until the migrant learns to gradually substitute these with knowledge of the new institutions, values, norms, attitudes and sometimes even the language of the new culture.⁸

Nila is not able to comprehend the concept of poverty, when she is informed that those houses belonged to the poor people. She sees the cars

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standing in front of the houses and comes to know that they belong to the ‘poor’ because they would not afford to buy new models of expensive cars. Nila has seen the slums of Calcutta, has seen millions of refugees, homeless, half-clad, suffering with no treatment in sight. But now the concept of poverty was beyond her comprehension. So is the concept of work. When Danielle had said,

‘I’ve worked very hard’

Nila asked, ‘what kind of work?’

‘I have read two books and written review for them’

‘Tell me about the hard work.’

‘That is the hard work’.

‘How many pages did you write?’

‘Two.’ (French Lover.119)

Here, we find the concept of work temperamentally different between the cultures. In India, one may feel that hard work is that which makes them physically tired, like the works of the rickshaw pullers, porters, farmers working in the fields under the Sun. For Nila, hard work was when someone lifted a heavy load of sand on their head from dawn till dusk, walked two miles and reached it to the construction site. In France, people had the whole weekend off, when they lazed around, read
the newspaper and wiped the sweat off their brows. They knew nothing of hard work. Nila often felt the people in Calcutta were far busier, in the truest sense, but they did not talk about it so much. Nila realizes that it was customary for the French to drink wine at all times of the day. In Calcutta she had seen people buying liquor surreptitiously, wrapping the bottle in newspapers so that others could not tell. She remembered, when Nikhil, her brother, drank, he bolted his door from within. If someone came visiting them, he’d wash his mouth umpteen times before presenting himself to the guest. Molina always thought bad people drank alcohol. Nila thought so too. But when she saw Sushanth drink a few times, she was of the notion that she still believed if you drink, you should do it in secret. Now, in this ‘amazing city of freedom’, Nila realized she need never do anything in secret. Nila notices, that, in France, it was wrong not to drink; people thought you were uncultured and uncivilized. When Nila painted a group of girls dancing in the field, sky dark with clouds, Danielle frowned,

Then why is it so cloudy? Make it a bright sunny day. Cloudy days are sad. (Ibid.106)
Nila said,

the girls are dancing just as peacocks dance when they spot storm clouds. Their bodies are burnt in the summer sun. The rains have gathered in the sky after a long time and the girls have run out of their homes joyfully into the light breeze outside. They’ll dance in the rain, wet their bodies and cool themselves, cleanse themselves. (Ibid.106)

Nila always confronts this problem of perception, clash of east with the west. On one such occasion, Danielle accuses Nila of insulting her. Nila was startled when Danielle said,

_I poured you a glass of wine and you did not even thank me!_ (Ibid.85)

Nila could not understand what Danielle was saying. Nila already thought of Danielle as a close friend. Did friends ever thank each other? That’s not what Nila was taught. In Calcutta if she thanked a friend for pouring her glass of wine, that friend would have felt insulted! Nila remembered a saying in Bengali,

_please don’t trifle with me by thanking me._ (Ibid.85)
Nila finds it difficult to comprehend the value systems and family set up in France, She asked,

*Women are out in the streets even at this late hour, aren’t they scared? (Ibid.46)*

She compares this situation with Calcutta, where five lusty men or a bunch of robbers would pounce upon a girl and snatch away her money, jewellery, honour or even life. We find that on every occasion Nila is trying to compare the Western society, its values, and its ways with her own Indian society. She cannot understand when Kishan said,

*If on a Friday night girls of this age sit at home, if they don’t have a boyfriend or sleep with a boy, its then the parents would be worried. They’d wonder if something was wrong with her, physically or mentally. If the girls go out, the parents sleep in peace and if she stays at home they’d have a sleepless night. Besides most of them leave home at this age. They stay alone or with a boyfriend. (Ibid.47)*
Pressured by joblessness and hunger, natives from all the former colonies began to migrate in the hope of getting steady, remunerative jobs. Characters like Mojammel, Bacchu experience the trauma in Taslima Nasrin’s ‘French Lover’. Mojammel had completed his master degree in Chemistry from Dhaka University. He could not get a job in Dhaka, so comes to France using a cut throat passport. He says,

I had no choice; there was no way I’d get a foreign visa... so you set to buy passports with visas. I sold the land and whatever else my father had and bought such a passport for five lakhs of rupees and then came to France and started working... selling roses on the streets... they tried to evict me twice from the country. Finally I sued them, showing a valid cause for staying and the case still pending. As long as it is not decided, I can stay on. (Ibid.32)

When Nila asked the reason, Mojammel says,

Didi, how do I say it... it’s really a shame. I got a new passport with a Hindu name and said that Hindus are being persecuted in Bangladesh. It was not safe for me go there. If I say that I’m educated and I was jobless in Dhaka, that I want to work here,
build myself a healthy beautiful life, they’d just throw me out of the country. Political asylum they may just allow, but economic asylum never! (Ibid.32)

Almost every migrant, on arrival in the land, nurtures the fond hope that he would merge with the white man. Discrimination against the immigrant began to be exercised in many ways. Meanwhile, the immigrants are too ashamed to acknowledge openly the realities of their situation and continue to write home highly idealized versions of their life in the migrated country. Mojammel says to Nila,

I haven’t told them... I am shamed... do you know what I have told myself? I work as a DC-People think its Deputy Commissioner. I know it as Dish cleaner. (Ibid.34)

This was the same case with Bacchu, who was a doctor in India. He says,

I had never poured myself a glass of water. Someone would pour it out and then I drank from the glass. I never know what a kitchen looked like or what it was all about. I learnt it all when I came to Europe. (Ibid.35)
Nila is an expatriate with a difference. Nostalgia does not bring in the need to return to her country. In fact, when Nila does return to Calcutta once, there is nothing to tie her down, no sense of belonging and Identity. She goes back to Paris. Strangely enough, Nila is able to achieve self-reliance, self-esteem, and a sense of Identity because she lives in Paris. Elaine Showalter talks of the three phases of the emergence and growth of feminine tradition, that is, the phases of limitation, protest and self-discovery. Taslima Nasrin’s work *French Lover* is related to all three phases. In her novel, there is a striving on the part of the female protagonist towards arriving at a more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them. Through the different portrait of Indian woman and examples of Indian marriages in her novel, Taslima Nasrin has tried to focus on the subservient status assigned to women and the need for those women to fight against the traditional expectations of society to become independent. Nila has the strength to endure sexist oppression. She is brave enough to question the most basic assumptions about femininity. She attempts to seek freedom from conventional roles, societal structures and phallocracy. Taslima Nasrin writes about the experiences, sufferings and humiliation, love and joy, strength and resilience of her character.
Thus in Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover*, Nila focuses on the awareness created in her when she realizes the wrongs she has suffered after being trampled upon by phallocracy. The next chapter which is the conclusion is an effort to place all the reading so far to fall in with the line earlier emphasized that female identity is a process.