CHAPTER 4

REFLECTION OF NEW WOMANHOOD IN HIMANSHI SHELAT

4.1 Himanshi Shelat: Life and Works

Shelat has carved a niche in the field of Gujarati literature through her novels and short stories. Due to blind acceptance of Suresh Joshi’s stories, the short story genre seemed an artificial construction. But with the arrival of Shelat’s stories we found stories which were away from artificiality and enclosed the element of dexterity which the reader could relate to. After 1975-80, the post modern literature reflected a different frame. This is very much due to Shelat’s stories. Shelat leads amongst the post-modern span of short stories and other writers. Her stories came with a new freshness. Her stories depicted the day to day problems of life, especially of the down trodden class. Her short stories have gained the benefit of her knowledge in English literature. After 1955 the genre of short stories witnessed a transition and this was reflected in Shelat’s stories. She had even known the limitations which hampered the growth of short stories through her deep analysis, and thus she made a new start in the short story.

Himanshi Shelat was born in Surat, on 8th January, 1947. Her mother’s name is Sudhaben and father’s name is Indulal. Her grandfather Kalidas Shelat was the founder and editor of the publication ‘Pratap’. The family had an influence of journalism and literature, which can be witnessed in Shelat. With dedicated disposition of parents, the sophistication of her grandfather are well nurtured in Shelat. Her grandfather was deeply concerned for her education and cultivated interest for reading in her since childhood. The rich culture of the family also had an influence on Shelat. The house was full of books around her and thus she became more interested in books rather than the outer world. Shelat and her brother would sit together and delve deep into the wonderful world of books. During her schooling she scored
less in Maths and Science due to her attachment with literature and languages from the beginning. Thus, domestic atmosphere and refinements of literature nurtured in her a story writer of great ability.

Works


Short Novel: - *Kyarima Akashpushp ane Kala Patangiya*.

Memoir: - *Platform No. 4* (1998)


Critic: - *Parvastavvd*

Awards: - Shelat has been awarded with various honors like, Gujarat Sahitya Academy, Delhi Sahitya Academy, and Gujarati Sahitya Parishad etc. She is awarded by the Dhumketu Award also. She has refrained from accepting the awards in any form since many years for personal reasons.

4.1.1 Education and Profession

After schooling Shelat completed her B. A. with English as the main subject. In 1966 she completed her Masters. Her deep understanding and flair for literature got her a job as an English Professor in M.T. B. Arts College, Surat. The job of teaching and liking for literature of her preferred domain nurtured Shelat’s creativity and inclination towards writing. In 1981-82, she completed her Ph. D. under the guidance of Shri H. P. Trivedi on the novels of V.S. Naipaul. She would be easily moved at the sorrow of people around her. So she began social service and took retirement from her job as a professor after three and a half decades.

Shelat was a good painter too. She drew beautiful pictures since her childhood. Her ambition was to get admission to Fine Arts Faculty of M.S.University, Baroda. But her grandfather insisted her to think over her decision by telling her that, drawing won’t be a favorable career for her. Drawing was okay as a hobby but for a career it will harm her. Thereafter, after deep thought Shelat left the field of drawing and selected the field of literature. Due to her interest in reading she studied Gujarati and even read world famous
writers and their literary compositions. To build up her own creative character she has acknowledged the influence of Jayant Dalvi, Manu Bhandari and Katherine Mansfield. Apart from these creative writers, she is deeply impressed by Ashapurna Devi, Mahashweta Devi and Phanishwarnath Renu's best pieces of Indian literature. In the field of novels; she has preferred Jane Austin and George Eliot’s literary pieces and learnt a lot from them. The natural landscapes portrayed in Western writers like Hawkins, Hardy and Naples have attracted her. Especially the lively and pictorial backdrop constructed in Naples stories has never been found in Gujarati novels. Her creative personality was firmly molded by a close study of these gems of literature.

The creative artists associated with literature are always sensitive. An individual as well as the problems of society and difficulties one faces create more agony in the writer than any common man. This agony flourishes their word power and creativity. Shelat is also very sensitive towards these things in human life. To see men and women down trodden by the deficiencies of life around her, the needy children begging on railway platforms or the prostitute bargaining her body for existence in the red-light area, all these moved Shelat very much. She is tearful at their plight. But it does not end on this. Shelat tries to help them out in every possible way to get them out of their miserable state. Due to this deep sensitivity in her heart, her words sparkle on the affected people’s vitality. It is her habit to listen to such persons and try to help them by hook or crook. Due to this human sensitivity her vigor-vitality has become more and more sensitive and this makes her writings more explicit. Shelat believes that a good writer never thinks about male or female. No difference like male or female can be accepted. The creative vitality is always beyond such difference. Thus she is a writer who loves literature and life. She gives more importance to life than art. In the worship of life and literature, life only must be selected is her thinking. This is the influence of Mahashweta Devi’s approach on her.

4.1.2 Marriage

Shelat had her strong views about marriage and so she never had any hurry for it. A man who truly understands her and gives her a feeling of companionship was her image for a husband. Thus with this thought and views on marriage she finally got married to Vinod Meghani on 4th October, 1995. She sought a friend and got one in the form of a husband. To continue with her social services at Nandigram she took retirement from her job. She came in
touch with Vinod Meghani (son of Zaverchand Meghani) during this social work. After many meetings, at last due to equality in their thoughts she finally decided to marry him and settled in Abrama. Shelat’s views on her marriage are,

“Had I not married I would have lost lot of things in life, but talking about myself on this, I had decided that I would never marry for the sake of marriage. I had decided that, I would never go for marriage fearing my single status or thinking that I need someone’s support in my life. I would never compromise in that way. The whole world is married so I too should be a part of it was never me. I worship life. I hold it in high esteem with full vigor. Therefore I would prefer marrying the person who is attached with my vitality. I would prefer to live with such a person.” (Abhiyan 14)

4.1.3 Thoughts about Short story

Shelat had her own beliefs about the short story in the age of art for art and its technique. She had begun writing short stories with these beliefs. On giving her opinion on the type of story to be created, she says,

“It had to be understood that the story had to be written for the reader. Because it is a big exercise to read and if the reader loses interest in the story it is big loss to the story and its writer. The senses should reach by melting the soul; they should feel connected with the language and the characters. If this happens then the readers would identify themselves with the language and the characters. It was such a hard task to write a story.”(Shabdashrusti 286)

When questioned on how does she write a story? Shelat replies, “First I come across the characters. There would be no exception in this. Through the characters the seed for the story is sown, for e.g. I came across the main character of ‘Thekanu’ in a street in Surat. I saw a man sitting outside an old house. He was staring blankly and had a chit on his shirt with his name and address. He was aged and not at all interested in the busy life around him. He had madness but without fanaticism. He was looking at the world in a philanthropic
mood. The story was well knitted. ‘Pachad rahi gayelu ek ghar’ – a home left behind, struck me on seeing a boy brushing his teeth behind a bungalow. If I come across interesting characters the story starts weaving in my mind and sometimes an emotion is enough to rouse it, for stories like Badatarana Bij and Ekant. It happens sometimes that the story gets the different form compared to the thoughts in the mind. Sometimes it clicks and sometimes it does not. If a story gets a weak response it irritates me but this rarely happens.” (Vartasandarbh 189-190)

4.2 Characteristics of New Woman in “Andhari Galima Safed Tapka” (Frozen Whites in a Dark Alley) and “E Loko” (Those People).

This collection is the 3rd edition of “Andhari Galima Safed Tapka” (Frozen Whites in a Dark Alley) written by Himanshi Shelat. The translated version Frozen Whites in a Dark Alley was translated by Vinod Meghani.

1) A New Woman makes her decisions on her marriage/divorce/relationships, rather than being dictated by others and is least concerned of the remarks from the society around her.

The story “Swarnafal” (Golden Fruit) begins with Sumitra taken aback and sitting on the chair in a shocked state. Sumitra recalls all the incidences which had occurred in the past few days. Incidences like Vatsala trying to hide the grey hair on her head. Vatsala’s desperate effort to remove the dark circles under her eyes. Vatsala being very choosy during the selection of frames for her eye specs. Vatsala refraining herself from sweets & oily food to reduce her weight. Vatsala who would take lot of time dressing up and wearing her sari. All this shocked Sumitra. She is unable to accept that her sister is going to get married at the age of 43. But when Chandravadan Jagirdar tells her about the marriage, she cannot believe her ears.

Sumitra questions Vatsala that why is she doing all this at the age of 43. Rather than telling her the reality Vatsala replies – “Just to break the monotony of life perhaps. Wanted to feel different” (FWDA: 2). Due to this Sumitra is shocked and unable to accept the fact that Vatsala is getting married at this age. Sumitra questions Vatsala,
“At this age how would you fit in a stranger’s world? Grown up children, a large house; do you think you will be able to adjust?” (FWDA: 3) to this Vatsala says, “A stranger’s world? Isn’t it my home too, now? I do not feel anything strange about it. And the children have come of age, almost. Nearing adulthood they are. In a few years they will marry. Chandravadan will then be alone.” (FWDA: 3)

Sumitra fights with her monologue – She is worried about Chandravadan’s loneliness and fears but does not feel that her elder sister too would be lonely. But Vatsala does not care for her.

The story continues with the monologue of Sumitra who keeps on talking to herself. She is jealous of Vatsala. She feels why she herself did not do this. Had I met Chandravadan first then I would be in Vatsala’s place. Vatsala leaves the house and goes to the hall where the wedding is planned. Sumitra feels drowned in the valley of pain. As if she is thrown away to the deepest part of the valley. And all of a sudden something grabs her hand and saves her. She is relieved and then thinks,

“…Perhaps Vatsala at her age will not be able to adjust with anyone else…She will certainly not be able to! … Having spent many years with Vatsala, Sumitra knew her well: A stubborn crybaby Vatsala has always been! Infatuated Chandravadan would not know that as yet.” (FWDA: 8)

Sumitra starts thinking evil of her own sister. She wishes that Vatsala should not be able to adjust and should come back to her. She even imagines that Vatsala has come back and Sumitra consoles her saying,

“…Vatsala, do not go back to him. Let him wallow in his wealth and luxury. We lack nothing. From the beginning I had told you not to….without knowing him well.” (FWDA: 9)

The story Swarnafal (Golden Fruit) speaks mostly through the monologue of Sumitra. Sumitra is very possessive about her sister. The news of Vatsala’s marriage shatters her dreams of being with her sister forever. Shelat describes Sumitra’s internal turmoil in a
simple way through her internal monologue. Swarnafal thus ends on the evil thought of Sumitra that Vatsala is back as she was not able to adjust with her married life and the new surroundings. Here we can see the difference in both the real sisters. Sumitra is envious of her own sister and wishes that the marriage is not successful. On the other hand Vatsala is calm and has no qualms of getting married at this age. She is a New Woman who has made a choice for herself at an age where society would object to her desires. She has a clear perception of what she desires. She has taken this decision at this age shows her courage and conviction for herself. She can face any odds for the marriage and try to make it successful. A New Woman in the true sense who asserts herself and makes her identity as the wife of Jagirdar at the age of 43.

Samay (At Ten-Thirty) is the story of a divorced woman who lives alone. People think of her as “available”. She has to face the questions of people around her. Questions like “aren’t you scared being alone in the apartment? Don’t you feel that you should get married again?” (FWDA: 69) She has adjusted herself very well after the divorce with Narendra. She had not kept even a single memory of Narendra in the house. But only the time of 10:30 daily disturbed her. She is happy being single but not “AVAILABLE”. This is the quality of a New Woman in her character. She has accepted the divorce with courage and made a new beginning too. People pity her and come at odd hours to give her company. She has to bear with it. The people around her come and make her feel odd by saying that that they have to give her company. But she never yearns for company. She is happy living her life. Shailesh from the office made a demand of going to see a drama with her. Her mother keeps on forcing her to get married and bear children. She tries to take her mind away from the 10:30 am time. And one fine day she was successful but on thinking about it she felt that she missed something, as 10:30 was the time when she & Narendra used to go together on the scooter to work like Jayant and Nandini who are their neighbors. Thus we can see the belief of the society towards women who are single and divorced. Even today women who live alone or who are divorced are never in the good books of people around them. They are always thought of as available by the men around them. But today the scenario is different than it was in the past. Today the women have learnt to take the bold step of being single. Even divorced women prefer to have their own freedom rather than being with the in laws or parents. This shows the trait of a New Woman who yearns for her own space and wants to have the steering of their life in their own hands rather than being under someone. Even though her parents force her to get married again, she doesn’t feel like it. They keep on
telling her that how can one live alone. But she is content with her life as a single person. She doesn’t feel the way others exaggerate her condition and pity her. Thus we can find a New Woman in her who is least concerned of people’s remarks on her status or her life.

The story “Badatarana Bij” (On a Rainy Day) is narrated by Vrunda, the main heroine of the story. She has two brothers –Bharat and Nayan. She is the third child in the family. Once she comes across a photo of a beautiful woman. She asks her mother about the photo. Her mother reveals to her that she is Pushpa, the woman your father wanted to marry. He loved her very much but could not get married to her because of his grandfather who strongly opposed the marriage. Ba then reveals the reality of her married life by stating that,

“I had known about it and had told your father in no uncertain terms that I didn’t want to bear the children of a man who was not interested in me, that I did not want to carry his weight.” (FWDA: 127-128)

Thus in Ba we see a New Woman who takes decisions.

Mahabhaga in Muktimantra (The Mantra of Freedom) is deeply attached to Abhidharma. Both are very close to each other – their hearts have touched each other; they have a good equation of pure friendship. Mahabhaga can be called a New Woman because she is friends with a married man, Abhidharma. She has a friendship which is pure without any selfish interests. She is free and single and never keeps Abhidharma in any bondage just because he is deeply attached to her.

2) A New Woman is courageous enough to question and has a voice of her own.

Ajanyo (A Stranger) is the story of Avni. She is married to Kartik who has gone blank due to some incident into his life. Avni is the only person in their joint family to notice all the changes taking place in Kartik’s life. He blankly stares at everything with blank eyes. He wants to say something but is unable to speak up. And one day he screams, “Don’t insult me, please! ... I simply cannot live without you, Sulu… Look Sulu, listen to me… We... (FWDA: 42) He screamed this and then the yelling evaporated in his breath. All are at the service of Kartik. He is taken care by all. Nobody feels or thinks about Avni. Avni has just
one question – “She only wanted to know who was Sulu” (FWDA: 47) She feels as if Kartik is a total stranger to her. She is more hurt when her mother and brother come to her and tell her –

“My girl, handle Kartikbhai gently. I need to tell this to you because you are rather impulsive by nature. A little tolerance won’t hurt you. Avoid retorting, and behave as if nothing untoward has happened. Mental disorders are furtive as thieves. Don’t risk digging into the past even after he gets better…” (FWDA: 44)

Avni kept on thinking how did her mother know about Sulu. She feels that all are against her as all advice her to keep mum. After few days Kartik is better and on noticing the change in his behavior Avni is relieved. He even presses her hand with love when she was making his bed ready. Both were very close to each other. She did not feel that he is a stranger. At that moment the thought of asking him about Sulu stuck Avni. She thinks what if I just ask a simple question. Asking a question will not be digging into the past. She prepares to question Kartik about it and freezes. This shows in her the quality of a New Woman where she questions her man. This is totally against the societal norms in our tradition. But the moment Kartik slept on the bed, he again became a stranger to her. This story portrays the misery & frustration of a woman who is held responsible for the plight of her husband. She tries to reconcile with her fate. But is greatly disturbed as there is no one in the family to support her and understand what she is going through. Now and again the New Woman in her peeps out and tries to take a stand for herself. She cannot share her pain with her in-laws or her own parents, because all want her to reconcile with the situations and be quiet. There are many incidences where women face this kind of situation and are silenced by the family. But a New Woman is courageous enough to question and voices her opinions without any fear.

“Jivanma rahi gayeli kshano” (The Unlived Moments) is the story of Reva who has never enjoyed her childhood. She could never play in peace with Kamdi and Shanti. She is fascinated by the box with which Tini plays. Tini does not allow anyone to touch it. Due to this she was reluctant to go for the marriage with her mother Maya. But Maya cajoled her and took her. Before leaving the house she instructed her: “Aunty please look after my box. Don’t allow anyone to touch it.” (EL: 96) Reva is keen to have a look at the box than anyone else. She opens the box with great awe. She is thrilled on seeing the paraphernalia of the
kitchen. The cups and saucers impressed her. She imagined herself becoming tiny and moving inside the box and asking herself “Reva o Reva…what will you eat? Do you want to have something hot?” (EL: 100) While she was examining the box and its beauty she remembered an incident of her childhood where she remembers the get together of her sister’s in laws. It was lunch time in her family. All are seated for lunch and Ba is serving hot chapattis. One of the guests has already finished 11 chapattis. Reva goes near to her mother and tells her: This is the 11th chapatti, he will get diarrhea. Her mother gets angry and tells her: You are mad only. We should never count how much the males eat. If they are hungrier they may eat more. (EL: 98) Reva wonders that why does mother count how many chapattis we females will have? The small child like a New Woman has raised a question which shows the picture of Indian families. The females always eat after the males have finished. There is no guarantee that there will be enough food left for the females. This was the scenario before many years, but there are some castes in the society that still follow these practices.

“Koi bijo manas” (The Other Man) is a story of a 7 year girl who is brutally raped and murdered later by the rapists. The parents Santram and Pushpi are highly disturbed. Santram’s head starts reeling as he imagines Shaku trying to get out of the hands of the rapists. He cannot sleep as this incident haunts him as soon as he closes his eyes. When one of the villagers Dinanath comes & informs him that “they were two persons” (EL: 14) on hearing this, the angry father in him leaps and thrashes those two mercilessly. Dinanath tells him that one man was Kalu Batli and the other one was Chaman. All this thrashing goes on in his imagination. He feels suffocated. His family members ask him to go and tell the names of the rapists to the police. To this Santram reacts by saying that

“What go and give their names? Who knows if he wants to take revenge from them and is giving their names to deceive us?” (EL: 15)

Pushpi tells them –

“Let us complaint. We can make all the witnesses understand to help us. Today it was Shaku. Tomorrow it could be some other girl. Don’t you read the newspapers?” (EL: 15)
Santram tells her to keep quiet and sit in the house. He asks her to stay away. Pushpi reacts and says “But without courage....” (EL: 16) Santram reacts and says – “Keep your courage with you don’t think that you will be spared. Today its Shaku tomorrow it can be you. Just because you have started studying don’t think you will be left. These people have no respect for anybody; they can go to any extent. Shaku has gone now what you want to do of us?” (EL: 16)

Pushpi possesses the trait of a New Woman. She has started educating herself. At the same time she is capable enough to take decisions and show courage. Her demonstration of courage shows her quality of raising her voice against injustice done to her daughter despite the consequences. Pushpi insists of telling all this to the press reporters. She persistently says–

“I will tell everything. They killed Shaku. They put her in a terrible state. I will also be present when the press reporters come.” (EL: 17).

A New Woman is always courageous to fight against all odds like Pushpi who wants to be a shield for her daughter and give her justice.

In “Barmasi” (Periwinkle Flowers) after the death of a woman in her locality the heroine decides that this place is not worth living. She even comments that this is not acceptable. Thus the heroine is a New Woman who can raise her opinion and argue over it logically.

3) A New Woman is sensitive to the environment around her.

Another quality of the heroine in “Barmasi” (Periwinkle flowers) is that she is very sensitive towards the environment around her, be it plants, animals or humans. There is a periwinkle plant in her garden which has grown on its own. It is full of blossoms throughout the year. The heroine when she says that it has grown on its own, it suggests that a woman has to grow on her own. She feels oneness with that self-grown plant. The blossoms denote
liveliness. But now as they are going to shift their house to another place she is worried for the plant. The reason for leaving this house is the area is not safe and good. But she is grieved as she looks at the plant and thinks that now without any care and water it will wither away. This makes her poignant.

4) **New Woman is creative and very much inclined to arts.**

The heroine in the story “Barmasi” (Periwinkle Flowers) is the mother of 2 children and lives with her husband and children in a backward area. The area is full of people who drink, gamble and fight. Due to this reason they were able to get the house at a very low price. The daughter Ketki is interested in drama and even comes late due to her practice. Thus we find Shelat’s characters who are writers, dancers, actors etc. Thus she can be called a New Woman because she is active at her creative front along with her education. She comes late often because of her drama practice. The mother is worried as the locality where they live is not a safe place but they are compelled to be there for a temporary time due to financial constraints. Creativity of this kind instills a sense of satisfaction in the New Woman and she feels relaxed and rejuvenated during these hours compared to her routine hours of work at home or at her job.

“Shri A Kumar/Amar” is the story of simpleton Manjri who is married to Amar. She is very much interested in music & painting. She had been famous for her work before marriage. She is good at acting also and is going to work in a documentary film. She is independent enough and earns from the exhibitions of her paintings. The husband opposes this but Manjri, a New Woman is determined to pursue with her creativity and silently but with firmness works on her paintings. Similarly we find Taru in Prempadarth who loves poetry and reading. Her husband’s friend Chirantan daily read poetry and both of them discussed it also. Taru is a New Woman who is inclined towards poetry and even though she is a house wife she is involved in this creative form of art which appeals her heart.

5) **A New Woman is eager to explore the world around her by travelling and visiting new places.**

The protagonist in “Andhari Galima Safed Tapka” (Frozen Whites in a Dark Alley) is on a tour to Nepal. She is on an exploring venture; this depicts the quality of a New Woman who wants to explore the world around. Through this the New Woman finds a sense
of satisfaction of having explored the globe and learns about the various cultures, arts, languages etc. The New Woman is not afraid of being alone during these ventures as she knows how to take care of herself and handle tough situations if the need arises.

6) A New Woman seeks companionship & understanding in her relationship.

“Prempadarth” (A Woman in Love) is a story of Taru. She is married to a well settled man. The husband’s mentality was that women should be tamed without any difficulty, women are happy with luxuries around. So he thought if you could keep a woman in luxuries, she would always remain yours. Taru was little bit stubborn when they got married. But after the birth of Kanan and Kedar she drastically changed. This adjustment according to her husband is the result of his taming her and giving her a luxurious life. In simple lines Shelat has ironically portrayed this. She has brought out the mentality of men in our society. The way some men perceive woman as a mere commodity and puff their egos over her is described in this story. Their life continues at its pace and follows a smooth path until a friend of the husband named Chirantan enters their life. Chirantan is considered a failure by the society. He has no interest in work, is unmarried as he is poor and does not aim to have anything from life. He has wasted his life lazing around. The husband becomes suspicious of Taru after Chirantan’s arrival. He is angry with Taru for not keeping any distance with Chirantan. He allows them to go out together just to see if Taru agrees or not. When Taru agrees he is startled and waits for Chirantan to go. And one fine day Chirantan goes away. The husband starts examining if Taru has become silent? Is she sad? Does she work properly? But he does not notice any change. This puffs his self-ego. He tells himself how would a careless man like Chirantan take care of Taru? How could I think all this? I am really ashamed. He then pities Chirantan that – he did not gain anything from life. I asked him to get married, but how?

“Chirantan had nothing that would please a woman, not even a desire to possess. Had wasted his entire life in drifting around. How could anyone help? ... (FWDA: 21)

At night when the husband is deep in sleep, Taru slowly takes away her hand from his body. On doing this Taru is relieved. She feels a longing for Chirantan in the dark night. The fragrance of the Madhumalti (Rangoon creepers) and Ratrani (Night blossom jasmine) intermingled with Chirantan’s fragrance had touched her heart. She is no more in
the bedroom. She is in the verandah with Chirantan sitting in front of her. She is desperate to feel the warmth of his breath. She keeps on going closer to him. Chirantan extends his hands to bring her closer. And Taru is lost in the deep oneness with him. Taru is fond of reading and discusses things with Chirantan. She has found a new joy in her life wherein she is relaxed and happy. Taru is such a New Woman who has her own image of a lover wherein Chirantan is fitted and she falls in love with him. For her it never matters whether he is a rich man or a pauper. The beauty of his heart touches Taru and both deeply fall in love by breaking the shackles of society. She never got this companionship and understanding from her husband even after years of marriage. The story is sarcasm for such men who feel that money, qualification and luxuries are sufficient to win a woman’s heart.

7) A New Woman sticks to her commitments; be it her marriage, work or anything where she has committed.

“Sanmohan” (Infatuation) is the story of Abha who is married to Anirudh. Anirudh is a successful person. He is very rich and Abha has no dearth for luxuries. She had to go to the parties with him at different places and accompany him on his foreign visits because he is into the modeling business. Everyone around envies Abha as Anirudh is a smart and handsome model. But no one knows the bitter truth of their life. It is as displayed by Shelat in a way that you are just left guessing about it. After a visit to the nature club with Ritu where Abha holds a snake and feels its tongue on her hand. Abha feels fascinated by it. Later that evening Abha and Anirudh go to a party. As usual Anirudh grabs the attention and Abha is left all alone. All women come and tell her how lucky she is to have Anirudh as her husband. Home back in the night Abha goes close to him. Anirudh smiles at her and caresses her cheeks. Abha was overwhelmed with tears - for what she did not want to think. At that moment all she wanted was Anirudh. With trembling hands she touched his shoulders. His bare shoulder felt silky like the touch of the snake’s tongue at the nature club. She desperately stretched out her hands to him but it was just in the air. Anirudh’s hand did not reach her as he had slept. Abha had water and began reading. Thus we can guess that he was frigid or just not capable of fulfilling her sexual desires. Abha’s moves were always in vain. Thus the story ends on a note where we are just left with guesses about the mysteries of Abha’s life. But it can be seen that despite of everything Abha stays committed to her marriage like a New Woman who always fulfills her commitments and never steps back from
She has diverted herself in fulfilling her passion rather than being unhappy and negative about Anirudh.

“Shri A Kumar/Amar” is the story of simpleton Manjri who is married to Amar. She is very much interested in music & painting. She had been famous for her work before marriage. A. Kumar comes to her in the absence of Amar and prepares her to work in his documentary film. Manjri refuses at first but after too much of persistence from A. Kumar she agrees to it. By bad luck it happens that A. Kumar turns out to be a fraud. He even takes Rs. 200 from Manjri on the pretext of having lost his bag’s keys. When Amar comes he scolds Manjri and tells her that she is very innocent, a simpleton and any one can easily fool her. Amar is angry at this and tells her that she should have used it elsewhere. He tells her “you start talking of your identity, independence, and the blah-blah! You think it’s below your dignity to seek advice!” (FWDA: 160) She even answers him back and takes a stand for herself. This annoys the husband more.

Amar tells her – “Manjari, you don’t understand how many people deceive you, take advantage of you; they… they…” (FWDA: 160) And then Manjri looks into Amar’s eyes and asks – “Is that so? You say people deceive me and take advantage of me; whom do you include in ‘people’?”. (FWDA: 160) This gives a jerk to Amar as he feels that may be Manjri knows everything about Anupama. So Manjri can be called a New Woman who despite of everything in her life maintains her relationship with understanding and commitment and even takes care of her own identity, her independence. She tries to earn by her exhibits so that she is not dependent on Amar and keeps silence despite of all odds by maintaining her dignity.

8) A New Woman is independent in every way and shapes her own identity.

Shri A Kumar/Amar is the story of simpleton Manjri who is married to Amar. She is very much interested in music & painting. She had been famous for her work before marriage. A. Kumar comes to her in the absence of Amar and prepares her to work in his documentary film. Manjri refuses at first but after too much of persistence from A. Kumar she agrees to it. By bad luck it happens that A. Kumar turns out to be a fraud. He even takes Rs. 200 from Manjri on the pretext of having lost his bag’s keys. When Amar comes he scolds Manjri and tells her that she is very innocent, a simpleton and any one can easily fool
her. He even questions her of the reason to give Rs. 200? To this Manjri replies – “The money I gave him was from the sale of my painting in the exhibition last year…” (FWDA: 159) This shows her as a New Woman who takes charge of her money which she had earned from the exhibition. Amar is angrier at this and tells her that she should have used it elsewhere. He tells her “you start talking of your identity, independence, and the blah-blah! You think it’s below your dignity to seek advice!” (FWDA: 160) She even answers him back and takes a stand for herself. This annoys the husband more.

So the husband has a problem with his wife being independent but Manjri as a New Woman sticks to her stand and does what is necessary for her identity. Amar tells her – “Manjari, you don’t understand how many people deceive you, take advantage of you; they… they…” (FWDA: 160) And then Manjri looks into Amar’s eyes and asks – “Is that so? You say people deceive me and take advantage of me; whom do you include in ‘people’?” (FWDA: 160) This gives a jerk to Amar as he feels that may be Manjri knows everything about Anupama. So Manjri can be called a New Woman who despite of everything in her life maintains her relationship with understanding and commitment and even takes care of her own identity, her independence. She tries to earn by her exhibits so that she is not dependent on Amar and keeps silence despite of all odds by maintaining her dignity.

In the story “Jvanika” (The Curtain) Darshna’s sister Chaula comes to stay with her for few days as she has her exams. Chaula is a New Woman who is concerned for her future. To get secured in future, she educates herself and even plans to work. On Chaula’s arrival, Darshna is puzzled at her behavior with Sohan. Chaula is very free minded and behaves very freely with Sohan. This gives rise to different thoughts in Darshna’s mind. Chaula is shaping her own identity by educating herself and seeking financial independence.

“Khakhar ni Khiskoli” (Good things are appreciated by those who have experienced it) is the story of Madhvi who is married to Akshay. Madhvi’s friend Charu visits her one day. Charu is a working woman who is always busy in her writing, interviews and photo sessions. She has come to Madhvi’s city for her work assignment. Charu is highly intelligent and praised by one and all. This makes Madhvi jealous of her. The day when Charu is going to join them for dinner, Madhvi displays all her valuable and special belongings and decorates the house. She does this to show off. She has always been jealous
of Charu since the beginning. So at the dinner she plans to take revenge as she has Akshay.
Charu arrives late by 45 minutes for the dinner. She starts her talks as soon as she enters the
house. After some time she apologizes to Akshay for being late. That’s all. She is not at all
impressed by Akshay like Minu, Gita and others. This shocks Madhvi. The title of the story
Khakhar ni Khiskoli is used for Charu. It means good things can be appreciated by those who
have experienced it. Charu is engrossed in eating and talking about other friends and life. She
is least bothered about Akshay and the children. This disturbs Madhvi. She is on the verge of
crying. She just cannot understand that why Charu never took notice of Akshay who had
impressed her other friends. So she calls her a Khakhar ni Khiskoli who could not appreciate
or get impressed by Akshay as she has not experienced life with him. But actually the reason
is Charu is so much involved in her work that she has no time to think of any other thing.
Charu is a self independent New Woman who does not need a man to support or to impress
others. She is very happy being a working woman. She enjoys her life despite of being single.
But Madhvi despite of having a wonderful husband is not happy now as she wants to impress
Charu through her husband. This is the irony of her life that despite of having everything she
is not happy.

9) A New Woman never dwells on petty things and reflects over herself to have a broad
understanding of things around her.

“Jvanika” (The Curtain) is the story of Darshna and Sohan who are living
happily together. They are enjoying the bliss of married life. Darshna’s sister Chaula comes
to stay with her for few days as she has her exams. On Chaula’s arrival, Darshna is puzzled at
her behavior with Sohan. Chaula is very free minded and behaves very freely with Sohan.
This gives rise to different thoughts in Darshna’s mind. Thus in Darshna we witness a
mixture of the New Woman and old woman. On seeing Chaula leaning over Sohan from
behind to read the news paper, Darshna tells her that we even have another paper to read. The
day when she has to go to the hospital to attend to one of her friend, she finds Chaula dressed
in purple. Darshna becomes a possessive old woman and thinks that it would have been better
if she had not worn this color today. Even after coming home when Darshna rings the bell,
“she wondered what she would have seen within had the door been transparent…”
(FWDA: 92) But the door is opened immediately by Chaula which makes her realize that
there is nothing wrong going on in her absence between Chaula and Sohan. Thus she is in a
transitional phase when she behaves differently and takes control of her thoughts. Darshna is
a woman who could not fulfill her aspirations so on seeing her sister Chaula who is very free, she finds herself lacking. This feeling arouses a fear of being deprived of Sohan. She feels insecure. This happens as she is not a working woman. Her mind starts weaving many castles in the air related to their relation. Even when Sohan tells her about Chaula’s plight at her father’s place, she doesn’t utter a word. To that Sohan gets irritated and tells her, “I feel she needs help. And who else but you can help?”(FWDA: 95) Sohan even tells her that Chaula is not ready for marriage and wishes to take up a job. Darshna feels hurt as Chaula has shared these things with Sohan rather than sharing them with her own sister. Thus Jvanika- the title of the story means a curtain. So the act of opening and putting the curtain is described. She postpones taking any decision in the favor of Chaula. So we can say that she has closed the curtain for that particular topic at the moment. Instead she opens the curtain all at once, and tells herself to look outside the window, at the open sky rather than focusing on Chaula and Sohan. She as a New Woman yearns to come out of these petty things. So despite of being New Woman in some matters she is old at times. But still she understands that this thinking of her is not right. So time and again she reflects over herself and controls her thoughts.

10) New Woman is a guide for her daughter through her experiences of her life.

The story “Badatarana Bij” (On a Rainy Day) is narrated by Vrunda, the main heroine of the story. She has two brothers –Bharat and Nayan. She is the third child in the family. Once she comes across a photo of a beautiful woman. She asks her mother about the photo. Her mother reveals to her that she is Pushpa, the woman your father wanted to marry. He loved her very much but could not get married to her because of his grandfather who strongly opposed the marriage. Ba then reveals the reality of her married life by stating that,

“I had known about it and had told your father in no uncertain terms that I didn’t want to bear the children of a man who was not interested in me, that I did not want to carry his weight.” (FWDA: 127-128)

The mother tells this to her daughter. She lives this life with her husband and mothers his children and fulfills all the duties required by her. But still she had a spark of a New Woman wherein she teaches her daughter that the man should be genuinely interested in you for her marriage. She could not dare to break free from the shackles of her life. Thus she is a new mother who guides her daughter by her own experience of life and wishes the best for the daughter.
11) A New Woman yearns for a new life of her choice, where she seeks fulfillment of her long-lost desires.

“Kharidi” (The Shopping hour) is the story of a prostitute who dreams of belonging to the elite class. It happened after the day when women from the elite class came to them for statistical data. Chameli was impressed by one woman who had worn a brown color crisp sari. Since that day she had desired to have one. Banwari her customer and a dealer of saris always brought saris which were very thin. They all were revealing ones and gaudy colors. But this sari that the woman had worn was something which would help her change the eyes of people around her. It was the day for shopping. She removed the envelope in which she had saved money for it. She went without make up. Neither Banwari nor Satrup preferred to see her without make up. This is the irony of a woman’s life. She always seeks acceptance from everyone around her especially her partner. For the prostitute these 2 men are her customers only but still she tries to live as per their likes and dislikes. But she as a New Woman had a desire to be like that woman and change her situation. As simple as that woman. “That woman had just put a small bindi on her face and no makeup at all. Just a fresh face washed in water”. (EL: 75) The woman who met the prostitute has stirred desires in her to live a decent life. But as always it is a very difficult situation. As the world sees her as a prostitute only. It is very tough to come out of this situation as society rarely gives a fair chance to such persons. She thinks that after dressing up like that woman she will go to meet Mona her daughter. But during shopping she comes across men who try to touch her and satisfy their lust. She is aghast at the ways the men pretend of not seeing her and touching her private parts. She buys the sari which she desires. But after the incident at the market she has lost all charm for the sari. She put it in the pile of saris gifted by Banwari and started applying makeup standing before Satrup’s mirror. It’s ironical for women like her that despite of trying to live a sophisticated life the society offers no help. The men in the society look at her with lustful eyes from which she wants to set herself free from this hell and build a world of her own desires like a New Woman.

“Kimmat” (The Price) is the story of Mohana- a prostitute. A film maker has contacted her and thus she a New Woman starts weaving dreams of being an actress and coming out of her life as a prostitute. They approach Savitabai and tell her about the offer and take photographs of Mohana. She starts building castles in the air. In her imagination she
visualizes that everyone is looking at her. She who is never noticed by any one will now be a big figure in the film industry. She is now worried of her looks. She thinks that now I will tell Savitabai to get fresh vegetables daily for me. She should provide me curd if not milk. Now I must get a regular massage and facial done. She plans to wear a green sari when the film makers come. But the blouse does not fit well. She even plans to get new ones once everything is finalized. The day on which the meeting was scheduled had changed the look of the brothel house. Everything was new from the curtains to the crockery. Savitabai had cleared all the unnecessary things and dumped them under the cot. Mohana wanted to go to the parlor and ready herself. But Savitabai refuses telling her that it will be late if she goes out. So unwillingly she starts getting ready before her mirror full of stains. She applies an imported lipstick given by her friend Kali. She takes too long in wearing her sari as it was very thin and silky. She is ready since two hours and there is no sign of the filmmakers. All are disturbed in the house. Her companions named Reshma & Salma are jealous of her. Everybody is talking behind her back out of envy. Everyone is waiting for the filmmakers to come. And then a white car comes and halts outside the brothel house. All are silent. The filmmakers come and give her all instructions regarding work. They tell her not to have tantrums, act as per the instructions of the scene etc. Mohana nods her head and agrees. But she was not satisfied and wanted to know what kind of role she had to play? So she whispers in Savitabai’s ears and asks about it. Savitabai tells them, “Mohana is interested to know about her role...then turning to Mohana she says, don’t be afraid, and ask whatever you want to ask.” (EL: 85) Mohana is curious to know about her role and yearns for a new life of her choice by making her career as an actress.

“Jivanma rahi gayeli kshano” (The Unlived Moments) is the story of Reva who has never enjoyed her childhood. She could never play in peace with Kamdi and Shanti. She is fascinated by the box with which Tini plays. Tini does not allow anyone to touch it. Due to this she was reluctant to go for the marriage with her mother Maya. But Maya cajoled her and took her. Before leaving the house she instructed her: “Aunty please look after my box. Don’t allow anyone to touch it.” (EL: 96) Reva is keen to have a look at the box than anyone else. She opens the box with great awe. She is thrilled on seeing the paraphernalia of the kitchen. The cups and saucers impressed her. She imagined herself becoming tiny and moving inside the box and asking herself “Reva o Reva...what will you eat? Do you want to have something hot?”(EL: 100) While she was examining the box and its beauty she remembered an incident of her childhood where she remembers the get together of her
sister’s in laws. It was lunch time in her family. All are seated for lunch and Ba is serving hot chapattis. One of the guests has already finished 11 chapattis. Reva goes near to her mother and tells her: This is the 11th chapatti, he will get diarrhea. Her mother gets angry and tells her: 
*You are mad only. We should never count how much the males eat. If they are hungrier they may eat more.* (EL: 98) Reva wonders that why does mother count how many chapattis we females will have? The small child raised a question which shows the picture of Indian families. The females always eat after the males have finished. There is no guarantee that there will be enough food left for the females. This was the scenario before many years, but there are some castes in the society that still follow these practices. Reva remembers that how she would get low on seeing the pile of vessels ready for her to be scoured. Her hunger would die on seeing them. She remembers that just because I felt uneasy and lazy to do work after a heavy meal, I never had enough food. I always ate less so that I could work when everyone in the house rested. There was never any playtime for her. She never had that leisure in her life, and when the leisure came she lost her taste for everything due to health issues. She was caressing the golden paper which was spread in the box. She now is trying to fulfill her desires like a New Woman who always strives to accomplish whatever goals or desires they have. She thinks to herself that I will ask Maya to get me the same box like the one which Tini has. It is never too late to pursue your dreams, desires or ambitions. Today we see many women who are in pursuit of their long-lost desires because of their family, health or any other reasons. But a New Woman never gives up on her desires, dreams and aspirations instead she fulfills them whenever she gets a chance.

12) **New Woman remains single as per her choice and is independent.**

The daughter Vrunda a New Woman, in *Badatarana Bij* (On a Rainy Day) is bitter towards the social conventions that do not allow her mother for not breaking her marriage and for giving birth to her. Vrunda feels that her brothers were not that unwanted as she is. Her mother was not ready to give birth to the third unwanted child but it happened and she could not stop herself nor do anything about it. But one incident in her life makes her feel that her mother really loved her. It was when her mother had wiped her wet head when she got wet in the rain. The touch of the mother’s hands on her head had warmth which gave her happiness. She could never forget the smell of the jasmine oil and her mother. So despite of all the bitterness when she gets the news of her mother’s death she is not moved much. The person gives her the exact message telling her of the death of her mother and even
emphasizing the words, “They were waiting for Vrunda.”(FWDA: 130) On hearing this Vrunda feels that since when did Ba look forward to her arrival? This shows her bitterness towards her mother for bringing her into the world despite of not wanting her. She goes to her brother’s house. On seeing Ba lying lifeless she is blank. She looks at the peaceful face of her mother. She thinks that even though my birth was not an event which my mother wanted but I cannot forget that day when she had dried my wet head with so much love. So I cannot deny the fact that Ba had given me immense joy in those short moments of my life. Thus on thinking about that incident she flung herself around her mother and wept like a small child. Vrunda feels that even though I was unwanted Ba gave me tons of happiness in that one single incidence in her life. Ba had not pretended to love me but she genuinely loved me in that one incident of her life. Thus Vrunda is a New Woman who is single and lives on her terms by working. She is not dependent on her family. But she is capable enough of being alone and making a living. She has even forgiven Ba for everything and without any bitterness fulfilled all her obligations during the funeral.

“Muktimantra” (The Mantra of Freedom) is the story of Abhidharma. He is married to Muktavali. Abhidharma is deeply attached to Mahabhaga. Both are very close to each other – their hearts have touched each other; they have a good equation of pure friendship. Once he goes to meet Mahabhaga and gets late for dinner. Muktavali is enraged and directly approaches Mahabhaga. She tells him,

“Under the pretext of work Abhidharma has spent the whole day with you. He told me that he will be home by evening. He didn’t come. Nor did he send a message. My food was wasted. Abhidharma is not a kind of person who will wait till dinner anywhere. But you are the reason behind it. How else would this secret get opened before me?” (EL: 49)

Mahabhaga keeps her calm and pays no heed to Muktavali’s anger. Muktavali gets angrier and keeps on blaming Abhidharma. Mahabhaga tells her – “Does he take permission for each and every thing?” (EL: 50) Muktavali says – “He is not that type of person that he will take my permission. You know him better as you are his friend. You ask him.” (EL: 50)

Mahabhaga remained silent. She wanted to tell her –
“You are stuck to him, like a shadow, more than a shadow. He keeps you with him everywhere he goes. Never goes alone as if he is not able to go without your support. His eyes constantly keep searching you and even then see your height of dissatisfaction.” (EL: 50)

When Abhidharma tries to clarify Muktavali tells him –

“I don’t trust you at all. I can’t bear this any longer. Any woman can win over you so easily. I have to be careful always…no peace at all.” (EL: 51)

After this incident Mahabhaga left the town and came back after 7 long years. Mahabhaga can be called a New Woman because she is friends with a married man, Abhidharma. She has a friendship which is pure without any selfish interests. She does not have jealousy of any kind. She is free and single and never keeps Abhidharma in any bondage just because he is deeply attached to her. In these 7 years, she has kept no contacts with Abhidharma, never even enquired about them. But it was crystal clear in her mind that the first thing that she had to do was to meet him. She is highly elated at the thought of meeting him after so many years.

In this story we see a contrast in both the women. Muktavali is jealous, wicked and possessive whereas Mahabhaga is compassionate and has great understanding and love for others. She wants to be free like a New Woman and does not want any bondage that ties her identity. She loves to be independent but that does not make her careless in any way towards the ones she loves. Thus she is a New Woman who is deeply in love with her man and would try everything to help him at any cost.

Charu in Khakhar ni Khiskoli (Good things are appreciated by those who have experienced it) is the friend of Madhvi who is married to Akshay. Charu is a working woman who is always busy in her writing, interviews and photo sessions. She has come to Madhvi’s city for her work assignment. Charu is highly intelligent and praised by one and all. This makes Madhvi jealous of her. But now after her marriage to Akshay she feels that I have Akshay —my wonderful husband and Charu is still unmarried at this age. She imagines showing off her luxuries and above all Akshay in the presence of Charu. The day when Charu
is going to join them for dinner, Madhvi displays all her valuable and special belongings and
decorates the house. She does this to show off. She has always been jealous of Charu since
the beginning. So at the dinner she plans to take revenge as she has Akshay. Charu arrives
late by 45 minutes for the dinner. She starts her talks as soon as she enters the house. After
some time she apologizes to Akshay for being late. That’s all. She is not at all impressed by
Akshay like Minu, Gita and others. This shocks Madhvi. The title of the story Khakhar ni
Khiskoli is used for Charu. It means good things can be appreciated by those who have
experienced it. Charu is engrossed in eating and talking about other friends and life. She is
least bothered about Akshay and the children. This disturbs Madhvi. She is on the verge of
crying. She just cannot understand that why Charu never took notice of Akshay who had
impressed her other friends. So she calls her a Khakhar ni Khiskoli who could not appreciate
or get impressed by Akshay as she has not experienced life with him. But actually the reason
is Charu is so much involved in her work that she has no time to think of any other thing.
Charu is a self independent New Woman who does not need a man to support or to impress
others. She is very happy being a working woman. She enjoys her life despite of being single.
But Madhvi despite of having a wonderful husband is not happy now as she wants to impress
Charu through her husband. This is the irony of her life that despite of having everything she
is not happy. Whereas Charu despite of being single is happy in life through her work. She is
not jealous of women around her, as she is satisfied with her own status.

13) A New Woman forgives others and does not nurture bitterness.

The daughter Vrunda a New Woman, in Badatarana Bij (On a Rainy Day) is
bitter towards the social conventions that do not allow her mother for not breaking her
marriage and for giving birth to her. Vrunda feels that her brothers were not that unwanted as
she is. Her mother was not ready to give birth to the third unwanted child but it happened and
she could not stop herself nor do anything about it. But one incident in her life makes her feel
that her mother really loved her. It was when her mother had wiped her wet head when she
got wet in the rain. The touch of the mother’s hands on her head had warmth which gave her
happiness. She could never forget the smell of the jasmine oil and her mother. So despite of
all the bitterness when she gets the news of her mother’s death she is not moved much. The
person gives her the exact message telling her of the death of her mother and even
emphasizing the words, “They were waiting for Vrunda.”(FWDA: 130) On hearing this
Vrunda feels that since when did Ba look forward to her arrival? This shows her bitterness
towards her mother for bringing her into the world despite of not wanting her. She goes to her brother’s house. On seeing Ba lying lifeless she is blank. She looks at the peaceful face of her mother. She thinks that even though my birth was not an event which my mother wanted but I cannot forget that day when she had dried my wet head with so much love. So I cannot deny the fact that Ba had given me immense joy in those short moments of my life. Thus on thinking about that incident she flung herself around her mother and wept like a small child. Vrunda feels that even though I was unwanted Ba had given me tons of happiness in that one single incidence in her life. Ba had not pretended to love me but she genuinely loved me in that one incident of her life. Thus Vrunda has forgiven Ba for everything – a trait of a New Woman wherein she let goes the mistakes of others and forgives them without nurturing any kind of bitterness. A New Woman does not keep any grudges towards the person while forgiving. In the end Vrunda without any bitterness fulfilled all her obligations during the funeral.

14) A New Woman is very much aware about herself, her thoughts and things going on around her.

“Kal sudhi to” (Only Till Yesterday) is the story of Ba who has been the centre of attraction all her life. But one day paralysis strikes her and she is bedridden. It is really a tragic situation wherein a woman who was always sought for by all is lying in a paralyzed state in one room. She who had been working continuously for hours without getting tired is now tired of being in the bed but cannot help it. The people in the family had all left her in her room where she lied in the bed the whole day. They all took care of her but now she was no more the centre of attraction in the family. Now she was confined to her room where all came when they were free. Her husband tells her to come out of the trivial things of the life around her. At certain point of time detachment has to come for every person. He tells her to be detached. Paralysis should not be to the body but to the soul. On hearing these words she looks out of the window and feels that this is not the thing my husband should tell me. I should realize it on my own. She is a New Woman who reflects over this situation. A New Woman is always considerate towards the feelings of others and tries to correct herself when at fault. The family had decided to celebrate Mandar’s birthday. She had begun to give all instructions regarding the preparations. But all told her to keep away from this stress and rest. The day arrived. She is very eager to see the preparations. She is an old woman when she tries to find faults. She is old when she feels that nothing is possible without me. But on
hearing the praises of all around for the function she realizes that she is no more the same. But the moment she realizes that she is wrong she becomes a New Woman. Because a New Woman has self realization and thus through it she changes herself. She wants to go to the room. She escapes from this situation and withdraws herself from all. She thinks, “It would be good if she could take a snooze.”(FWDA: 117) Here sleep means to get out of the outer world and go deep into the inner world. Thus a New Woman is a person who reflects on herself and even analyses her faults. Thus the mother in law is depicted as an old woman when she has to handle her daughter in laws. But she is also projected as a New Woman when she reflects over herself and becomes self aware. But paralysis of her body leaves her ignored by all. Thus she withdraws to ‘her room’. She wants her space where she can reflect on herself and be her own. Thus the story ends with Ba going to the room and realizing that now it is time for detachment from all these trivialities of life and focus on herself.

15) A New Woman loves openness, freedom, space, nature etc.

In Kal Sudhi To (Only Till Yesterday) the family had decided to celebrate Mandar’s birthday. She had begun to give all instructions regarding the preparations. But all told her to keep away from this stress and rest. The day arrived. She is very eager to see the preparations. She is an old woman when she tries to find faults. She is old when she feels that nothing is possible without me. But on hearing the praises of all around for the function she realizes that she is no more the same. She wants to go to the room. She escapes from this situation and withdraws herself from all. She thinks, “It would be good if she could take a snooze.”(FWDA: 117) Here sleep means to get out of the outer world and go deep into the inner world. Thus she reflects on herself and even analyses her faults. Thus the mother in law is depicted as an old woman when she has to handle her daughter in laws. The paralysis of her body leaves her ignored by all. Thus she withdraws to ‘her room’. A New Woman also yearns for her space. She wants her space where she can reflect on herself and be her own. Thus the story ends with Ba going to the room and realizing that now it is time for detachment from all these trivialities of life and focus on herself.

Jvanika (The Curtain) is the story of Darshna and Sohan who are living happily together. They are enjoying the bliss of married life. It was a routine for Darshna to open the curtain of her window. She did not open it all at once but let in the light slowly into the room
and observed the shapes which emerged in the light. These moments were her most cherished possession. This act of Darshna depicts her as a New Woman who likes to open the curtain. Thus she loves openness, and likes to delve into the outer world.

16) A New Woman is never jealous of other women but is compassionate with a deep understanding towards all.

Mahabhaga in Muktimantra (The Mantra of Freedom) is friends with a married man, Abhidharma. She has a friendship which is pure without any selfish interests. She does not have jealousy of any kind. She is free and single and never keeps Abhidharma in any bondage just because he is deeply attached to her. In these 7 years, she has kept no contacts with Abhidharma, never even enquired about them. But it was crystal clear in her mind that the first thing that she had to do was to meet him. She is highly elated at the thought of meeting him after so many years. She imagines Abhidharma sitting out of the house at this hour. She is very eager for the door to open. As the door opens Muktavali is before him. She is blank with no expressions. She hold’s Mahabhaga’s hands and to this Mahabhaga is surprised. She knows that she is despised by Muktavali. But still she never reacts furiously to her. She is open minded and accepts the reality that Abhidharma and Muktavali are husband and wife and howsoever she loves him or he loves her, she will always be the OTHER WOMAN.

Mahabhaga’s eyes search for Abhidharma. She is relieved to see the bangles in Muktavali’s hands – a sign that Abhidharma is fine and alive. But there is no sign of him in the house. Muktavali notices the desperateness in Mahabhaga’s eyes. She asks her – “Are you looking for Abhidharma? He is here, come to the left.” (EL: 51) Mahabhaga looks in that direction but does not find him there. Muktavali says – “Did you not recognize him? He is here, see he has recognized you.” (EL:52) On the window sill in a big shiny cage there was a green parrot. Mahabhaga’s head started rolling, she asked - “When? When did this happen?” (EL: 52) Muktavali told her,

“He created a big fuss after you left. He kept talking about emotional attachments and similar interest, people of same profession and of friendship. I was fed up. I thought that maybe he will get some other woman or some other woman would win him. Where would I go at this
age? How long could I be after him and ask him to be careful all the time?
So better to…..” (EL: 52)

In the cage silver bowls were placed before Abhidharma. They contained fruits, satins, cushions, and a delicate swing. The parrot was silently swapping its wings and looking at Mahabhaga. Mahabhaga had turned into a stone on seeing the plight of Abhidharma. She is in a great shock. But Muktavali remains untouched and keeps on playing with the parrot and has a triumphant smile over her face. She tells Mahabhaga –

“Perhaps you never knew about this power which I possessed. But I was never a show off. Abhidharma also did not know of it. So only, when the need arose I had to use them.” (EL: 52-53)

Muktavali’s babbling wicked smile with the parrot made Mahabhaga feel as if she is warning her –

“Whether you are Mahamaya or Mahashakti, my man is only mine and in my control. I will take care of him by caging him but never allow you to win over him.” (EL: 53)

With tearful eyes Mahabhaga left the place. She goes to her room and opens her belongings. Among her paraphernalia is a cage; on it was a black golden thread. This was the cage from which she had released a parrot years before. She had converted him into a complete man. Her only condition was –

“to live freely and avoid putting me in the bondage of your love, because if I get hooked up, my powers will be in vain.” (EL: 53-54)

In this story we see a contrast in both the women. Muktavali is jealous, wicked and possessive whereas Mahabhaga is not jealous of her but is compassionate and has great understanding and love for others. She wants to be free like a New Woman and does not want any bondage that ties her identity. She loves to be independent but that does not make her careless in any way towards the ones she loves.
“Saro Dahado” (The Auspicious Day) is about Sharda who has a shattered relationship with Kailash. It portrays the situation of girls who cannot get married due to some or the other reasons. The story begins with the incident of a riot which takes place in the city. It happened on the day when Bhanu and Shanti had gone for a movie. Shanti was petrified when Bhanu closed her eyes so that she does not witness the event before them. It was a rape taking place which despite of being avoided by Bhanu was seen by Shanti. She saw the clothes of women being flung in the air. The screams of the women roared in the sky. They reached home very late. Kaki had gathered the whole neighborhood and was wailing. They could not sleep that night. The next morning Kaki hid the newspaper so that they would not read the newspaper. But Bhanu had seen it and showed it to her. After that incident Bhanu and Shanti went back to their home. And after the day of that incident Sharda met Bhanu and Shanti at Amba’s engagement. Amba is the daughter of Manekfoi. All had gathered at Manekfoi’s place. Every now and then Amba would keep on smiling for no reason to draw our attention towards her so that someone from us would question her about her in laws and her fiancé. Manekfoi kept on telling mother that had we found a good match for Sharda also then we would have got them married together. Mother could not say a word to her. I was getting irritated at this but could not answer back to Manekfoi. This incident tells us about the status of a girl who does not get married due to different reasons. She is made to feel like a culprit. Bhanu and Shanti made a thorough inquiry about Amba’s fiancé and his family. Sharda was not an extrovert like them to make an inquiry, so people thought that she was jealous of Amba. But it was not the case.

To avoid these thoughts in the minds of relatives around her, Sharda a New Woman had no jealousy for Amba. She went and sat close to Amba. Before the engagement Sharda and Shanti were at the service of all guests and were busy serving tea and snacks to them. Sharda went twice to check on Amba. She had transferred herself into a cake of makeup. The makeup had made white and pink spots over her face. But Sharda did not tell her anything. Had she told all would have thought that she is finding faults as she is jealous of Amba. But Bhanu could not resist himself and showed Amba a mirror. He told her to see herself in it. On seeing herself Amba started crying. Then finally with the help of Radha she managed to look better. Manekfoi asks Sharda to get ready for the engagement. Sharda is irritated inside and thinks, “It’s Amba’s engagement, why should I get ready? Do whatever you want to do with her, leave me alone”. (EL: 118) She is fed up by the glances of Manekfoi, who just wants to show that Sharda is unhappy as she is not getting engaged.
Khakhar ni Khiskoli (Good things are appreciated by those who experience it) is the story of Madhvi who is married to Akshay. Madhvi’s friend Charu visits her one day. Charu is a working woman who is always busy in her writing, interviews and photo sessions. She has come to Madhvi’s city for her work assignment. Charu is highly intelligent and praised by one and all. This makes Madhvi jealous of her. But now after her marriage to Akshay she feels that I have Akshay –my wonderful husband and Charu is still unmarried at this age. She imagines showing off her luxuries and above all Akshay in the presence of Charu. The day when Charu is going to join them for dinner, Madhvi displays all her valuable and special belongings and decorates the house. She does this to show off. She has always been jealous of Charu since the beginning. So at the dinner she plans to take revenge as she has Akshay. Charu arrives late by 45 minutes for the dinner. She starts her talks as soon as she enters the house. After some time she apologizes to Akshay for being late. That’s all. She is not at all impressed by Akshay like Minu, Gita and others. This shocks Madhvi. The title of the story Khakhar ni Khiskoli is used for Charu. It means good things can be appreciated by those who have experienced it. Charu is engrossed in eating and talking about other friends and life. She is least bothered about Akshay and the children. This disturbs Madhvi. She is on the verge of crying. She just cannot understand that why Charu never took notice of Akshay who had impressed her other friends. So she calls her a Khakhar ni Khiskoli who could not appreciate or get impressed by Akshay as she has not experienced life with him. But actually the reason is Charu is so much involved in her work that she has no time to think of any other thing. Charu is a self independent New Woman who does not need a man to support or to impress others. She is very happy being a working woman. She enjoys her life despite of being single. But Madhvi despite of having a wonderful husband is not happy now as she wants to impress Charu through her husband. This is the irony of her life that despite of having everything she is not happy. Whereas Charu despite of being single is happy in life through her work. She is not jealous of women around her, truly a New Woman. Women should not be jealous of women around them. Nor should they try to impress their friends by showing off their luxuries and husband. Marriage is not what makes you complete. Your outlook towards things, your positive attitude and your work gives you an impressive identity. Not your luxuries or your hero-like husband.

17) A New Woman tries to get justice for herself and others.
Shri A Kumar/Amar is the story of simpleton Manjri who is married to Amar. She is very much interested in music & painting. She had been famous for her work before marriage. A. Kumar comes to her in the absence of Amar and prepares her to work in his documentary film. Manjri refuses at first but after too much of persistence from A. Kumar she agrees to it. By bad luck it happens that A. Kumar turns out to be a fraud. He even takes Rs. 200 from Manjri on the pretext of having lost his bag’s keys. When Amar comes he scolds Manjri and tells her that she is very innocent, a simpleton and any one can easily fool her. He even questions her of the reason to give Rs. 200? To this Manjri replies – “The money I gave him was from the sale of my painting in the exhibition last year…” (FWDA: 159) Amar is angrier at this and tells her that she should have used it elsewhere. He tells her “you start talking of your identity, independence, and the blah-blah! You think it’s below your dignity to seek advice!” (FWDA: 160) She even answers him back and takes a stand for herself- a quality of a New Woman who tries to get herself justified by answering back. She does not succumb to his taunts and takes a stand for herself. This annoys the husband more.

Amar tells her – “Manjari, you don’t understand how many people deceive you, take advantage of you; they… they…” (FWDA: 160) And then Manjri looks into Amar’s eyes and asks – “Is that so? You say people deceive me and take advantage of me; whom do you include in ‘people’?” (FWDA: 160) This gives a jerk to Amar as he feels that may be Manjri knows everything about Anupama. So Manjri despite of everything in her life maintains her relationship with understanding and commitment and even takes care of her own identity, her independence.

Shaap (The Curse) is the story of Hansabai aka Mausi who runs a brothel. It is about a day when a Minister was going to pass from the street where the brothel was located. Due to it they were instructed to remain in for 2 hours. But were forced to remain confined for more than 6 hours. The narrator describes the locality in which the brothel is located. There are posters everywhere. Posters related to AIDS. People from NGOs come and give counseling related to AIDS. After that there are few persons who come there. So the women are short of income as there are few customers. With the arrival of the Nepali girls the value of other girls has gone down. Only Suzy and Sangita are in demand compared to the other girls. As there has been an Awareness drive for AIDS there is no business for these women. And to add to this it was the Minister for whom they all had to remain in for the whole day. So all together sit and watch a movie. It is a movie on a Sati. Mausi is very much interested in
such films. It was at her request this movie was being shown today. The Nepali girls could not understand Gujarati so they were giggling among themselves. Mausi silenced them and told them to watch it attentively so that they understand. Meanwhile in the movie the heroine is molested at the hands of a rowdy and she curses him. Hansabai is taken aback at the scene after the curse. The rowdy’s body is full of blisters and he is in tormenting pain. After the movie when Hansabai thinks of the curse which the heroine gives she is amused. It is because she has a long list of persons whom she can curse. Beginning from her father to the person who sold her at the brothel and many more. And on imagining their state she cannot help laughing. First it was just a laugh but then it turned into a huge laughter which emptied her mind and relaxed her. Despite of not having had enough food that day she slept peacefully as she was relaxed. Thus we can see the state of women whose exploitation begins right from their family. The women never became a prostitute by choice. It was the men in their lives who threw them in this hell. Mausi’s character has a spark of a New Woman within her of punishing all those who spoilt her life. She cannot do much for herself but at least she has a thought which resembles to the New Woman thinking. A New Woman always tries to get justice for herself and others. She tries to fight for her circumstances. Thus Mausi can be viewed in the light of a New Woman.
4.3 Variety of Issues

Shelat has written stories which comprise of a variety of issues related to the middle class.

4.3.1 Stories depicting pain

The middle class society is born out of the modernity of city life. The class of people who left villages and migrated to the cities for working in industry, business and government was known as middle class. It does not have the required facilities or the comfort of upper class families. The major problems of middle class families are economic constraints, breaking up of joint families, insecurity, loneliness, and depression. The present day man seems healthy from outside, but inside he is distressed, broken and with a very low spirit. The writer has very well portrayed this picture of the middle class man in her various story collections. For e.g. in the collection Frozen Whites in a Dark Alley (‘Andhari Galima Safed Tapka’) we come across a story ‘Mansukh’, where the character of the story Mansukh represents a hundreds of bread earners of middle class families under financial crisis. It depicts the situation how the craving for happiness gets shattered in the lives of middle class families. The idea of happiness itself seems deceptive in their lives full of tremendous struggle. The hero has no value in his joint family; he is going on with the drudgery of his work and his family. The members of his family do not pay heed to his words.

“He failed to reach anyone in the house. The words he uttered were so feeble that like specks of dust hovering in a sunbeam they floated about the air before falling into oblivion.” (FWDA: 118)

Everyone in the family is very much under the spell of Nanka- the younger brother of Mansukh. Nanka is building a shopping complex. The family feels that he will bring wealth and prosperity. So all hold him in great esteem and everything in the family goes on as per his desires. As Renu- Nanka’s wife is cunning all the work load of cooking and maintaining the house is on Bhanu- Mansukh’s wife. This causes stress in Mansukh’s marital life too. Even his mother is adamant to tell anything to Nanka. Whenever they have guests or if anything new is to be prepared, Bhanu is always in stress. To move out of all these situations, Mansukh manages to buy a flat for his family. He even gets one with the
help of a *panwala* who advices him to get separated from his family and live in peace with his own family. As per his advice Mansukh begins to build castles in the air regarding his own house. He dreams of having peace with his own family. He imagines Bhanu preparing delicacies for him in the kitchen of the new flat. But Wadekar his colleague advices him to remain in the joint family. He describes him the difficulties which a nuclear family has. Thus Mansukh’s dream is shattered. Now the only hope is his son Jayesh. Mansukh had great hopes on him. He thinks that after graduation, his son will take up a job and support him. But all hopes are shattered when he comes to know that his son has decided to join his uncle’s business. This shatters his dream of living in a separate family with the support of his son. The dream of an independent flat with his name plate was shattered. The statement at the end of the story, “*Mansukh sat in utter silence, his hands reaching out to wrench his nameplate from the apartment door…*” (FWDA:123) is in total match with Mansukh’s shattered mind. The son on whom he relied had decided to join his uncle in his business. This pain is unbearable for him.

As quoted by Manilal Patel over the story, “*Mansukh represents hundreds of ordinary middle class men who cannot fulfill their dreams or the dreams of their wives. They live in joint families unnoticed by all. They have no say in anything.*” Thus Shelat has artistically portrayed the character of Mansukh and his distress.

4.3.2 Stories on man woman relationship and family problems

The variety of relations between man and woman are often the themes of creative writers as well an interest of readers. We also find a variety of flavors in the relationships. The jealousy, enmity, hatred, ego, attractions between man and woman and the intimacy of the characters are very artistically portrayed by Shelat in her stories. Family which is the base of our Indian society as well as its problems has been depicted by Shelat. She has a god gifted talent of grooming a thought in a complete short story. The way the story maintains its flow is also appreciable.

Lot of has been said about love and still lot of remains unsaid. Love is the driving force of life and thus it becomes difficult to define it. Having a special person in our life may make us feel proud of possessing a person and being capable of gaining someone. But it is a
false pride. *Prempadarth* (A Woman in Love) is one such story which depicts the pride of a husband who feels he has gained his wife through all his materialistic pleasures. He feels pity for his friend Chirantan who is a failure in life and has no woman in his life. The hero feels that no woman can love Chirantan as he is unsuccessful and has no wealth. But that is not true as his wife Taru falls for Chirantan. The husband’s mentality was that women should be tamed without any difficulty, women are happy with luxuries around. So he thought if you could keep a woman in luxuries, she would always remain yours. Taru was little bit stubborn when they got married. But after the birth of Kanan and Kedar she drastically changed. This adjustment according to her husband is the result of his taming her and giving her a luxurious life. In simple lines Shelat has ironically portrayed this. She has brought out the mentality of men in our society. The way men perceive woman as a mere commodity and puff their egos over her is described in this story. The life continues at its pace and follows a smooth path until a friend of the husband named Chirantan enters their life. Chirantan is a failure to society. He has no interest in work, is unmarried as he is poor and does not aim to have anything from life. He has wasted his life lazing around. The husband becomes suspicious of Taru after Chirantan’s arrival. He is angry with Taru for not maintaining any distance with Chirantan. He allows them to go out together just to see if Taru agrees or not. When Taru agrees he is startled and waits for Chirantan to go. And one fine day Chirantan goes away. The husband starts examining if Taru has become silent? Is she sad? Does she do her work properly? But he does not notice any change. This puffs his self-ego. He tells himself how would a careless man like Chirantan take care of Taru? How could I think all this? I am really ashamed. He then pities Chirantan that – he did not gain anything from life. I asked him to get married, but how?

“Chirantan had nothing that would please a woman, not even a desire to possess. He wasted his entire life in drifting around. How could anyone help? ... (FWDA: 21)

At night when the husband is deep in sleep, Taru slowly takes away her hand from his body. On doing this Taru is relieved. She feels a longing for Chirantan in the dark night. The fragrance of the Rangoon creepers (*Madhumalti*) and Night blossom jasmine (*Ratrani*) intermingled with Chirantan’s fragrance had touched her heart. She is no more in the bedroom. She is in the verandah with Chirantan sitting in front of her. She is desperate to feel the warmth of his breath. She keeps on going closer to him. Chirantan extends his hands
to bring her closer. And Taru is lost in the deep oneness with him. The story is sarcasm for such men who feel that money, qualification and luxuries are sufficient to win a woman’s heart. And look at the irony of the situation that his wife broke this rule. She has fallen for a pauper despite of everything in life. And the hero takes pride in possessing her. Thus the substance of love is difficult to understand. It does not see the wealth and success of a person. Only the hearts have to mingle with each other and love blossoms on its own.

Love- its expectations and the pain along with it always keeps our hands empty. This is the theme of the story *Sanmohan* (Infatuation). *Sanmohan* is the story of Abha who is married to Anirudhh. Anirudhh is a successful person. He is very rich and Abha has no dearth for luxuries. She had to go to the parties with him at different places, foreign visits because he is into the modeling business. Everyone around envies Abha as Anirudhh is a smart and handsome model. But no one knows the bitter truth of their life. It is as displayed by Shelat in a way that you are just left guessing about it. After a visit to the nature club with Ritu where Abha holds a snake and feels its tongue on her hand. Abha feels fascinated by it. Then that evening Abha and Anirudhh go to a party. As usual Anirudhh grabs the attention and Abha is left all alone. All women come and tell her how lucky she is to have Anirudh as her husband. Home back in the night Abha goes close to him. Anirudh smiles at her and caresses her cheeks. Abha was overwhelmed with tears, for what she did not want to think. At that moment all she wanted was Anirudh. With trembling hands she touched his shoulders. His bare shoulder felt silky like the touch of the snake’s tongue at the nature club. She desperately stretched out her hands to him but it was just in the air. Anirudh’s hand did not reach her as he had slept. Abha had water and began reading. Thus we can guess that he was frigid or just not capable of fulfilling her sexual desires. Abha’s moves were always in vain. Thus the story ends on a note where we are just left with guesses about the mysteries of Abha’s life. The incident of visiting the nature club is significant because on holding the snake in her hand Abha feels a strong passion within her. This event is connected to Anirudhh. Ritu remarks about Anirudhh that, “*Aniruddha’s voice could cast a magic spell that he had the power to charm, that no matter where he went…* (FWDA: 38) Thus the attraction which had brought her close to Anirudhh has evaporated. He is unable to give her love or satisfy her. Despite of being together on the same bed they are miles apart from each other. Thus Shelat here has wonderfully depicted a simple issue into a touching story.

4.3.3 Stories on the enmity between two communities
The entry and settlement of the Muslim community in India, the diversity between the traditions and religion of the Hindus and Muslims has given way to some of the fights in our country. The Britishers also played a big role in arousing enmity between both the communities. This can be noticed in the partition phase of India and Pakistan. Even after so many years of freedom communal riots still take place at many places. None of the community gains through this. Even in Gujarat there are communal riots taking place. But the riots of 2002 created a big havoc. There were many deaths and the people had become very cold blooded. Many were subject to this cruelty of the rioters. The Death of a Man (Ek manas nu nrityu) is the story of a man who is confined to his home because of curfew in the city. The problems one faces during the curfew, the irresponsible behavior of the government and the pangs of a human being who wants to help the person in need is very well described by Shelat. The definition of a man is described in the introduction of the story,

“**Being human also includes stabbing and torching, hurling of acid-filled bottles, ravaging and rampaging, shedding blood; and those cheering this cataclysm with sky-piercing gleeful shrieks are also known as human beings**”. (FWDA: 49)

Due to the riots death has cast its shadow on the city. There are dead men all around. And passing by a dead body without even bothering to look at it poses a big question at humanity. The backdrop of the riots is very nicely pictured by the writer. The hero who is confined to the house of two rooms since three days is perplexed. He has a family of 7 members. The commotion created by his wife and children within the walls irritates him more. His wife complains about the insufficient stock in the house, the scarcity of medicines all these tempt him to go out of the house. But his family members don’t allow him to go out of the house. He keeps on looking out of the window and gazing at the street. On the road he sees huge stones and chappals. And all of a sudden he sees a man lying on the road. He assumes him to be dead. But the man moves his leg. The hero is now on the move thinking about the steps he can take to save this injured man. This creates tumult in his mind. He opens the latch of the main door and, “**Opening the door! Firing has not yet died down! Someone is killed, they say, and you can think of nothing but opening the door!”**” (FWDA: 53) His family members stop him from moving out of the house. The hero desperately thinks of ways to help the dying man but cannot do so as he is restricted from going out. His parents
tell him that as the situation is worst compared to the past riots he better remain inside. The next day there is a release of the curfew for two hours. He goes out to bring the list of things which they are lacking. The medicines of his parents also are to be brought. And when the hero leaves the house he thinks, “He longed to ask them what good would his going out do now; it might have made a difference yesterday…he could have gone out this quick and a life might have been saved… (FWDA: 54) The burning desire of helping the dying person is beautifully conveyed in the story. It shows us that humanity is alive even today in the hearts of people. Even though his hands are empty he is heavy with grief for the person he could not help. This compassion in the hero touches the readers.

4.3.4 Stories depicting other emotions

Stories related to momentary happiness are always written in the society. We all are aware of this momentary joy which keeps our hopes and dreams alive. The writer has written much about the life of man and woman but a neglected class in the society- eunuch is never discussed. But Shelat has designed a story Those People (E Loko) on the eunuchs in the short story collection E Loko. The eunuchs neither fall in the male class nor in the female class. The writer has portrayed their beliefs, the complexities of their life and the personal problems they face. The writer has focused on the frustration of their lives. Eunuchs go for baxish whenever there is an occasion in any family or society. They go there and demand money and clothes. Whenever they approach a family the reaction of the persons is not good towards them. They get irritated and angry. They are considered as outcasts of the society. Thus the eunuchs who are educated and want to work are also neglected by our society. And when they go for baxish they are disregarded by the society. Thus nor can they have a respectful life nor can live an earning by moving out in groups for baxish. They are the victims of the disdain of society. They live a pathetic life bearing everything inflicted by the society upon them. When they come to know about a wedding which is going to take place in a big bungalow, they all clad in heavy saris and make up reach to the destination. On seeing them one of the family member remarks,

“Why has this community come now? Call them a day before the marriage. They are concerned with their baxish only, so don’t stick to the date of marriage and finish off with them.” (EL: 35)
So a man dressed in silk asks them to come on 16th. Thus when the eunuchs go for \textit{baxish} on 16th, they are again insulted by the members of the family. At that time the members of the family even give their opinions over the eunuchs.

“\textit{Oh, come on, what else can they do? Do you think anyone would employ them if they wish to work? So we have to give them \textit{baxish}. Would you employ them for a job at your office?”}(EL: 36)

Thus we can see the double standards of the society towards the eunuchs. The society neither respects them nor tries to provide them the necessary income by employing them. Dhangauri and her gang hear the shouts of a man and woman who are fighting. The woman in a fierce temper openly tells before all about the relation of her husband with another woman. The man her husband asks her to keep silent. To that she reacts,

“\textit{You show me your powers...To me...How dare you? You hand packed! I know what type of man you are...I have seen your manhood, you eunuch!}

(\textit{EL: 39-40})

The man goes inside the house with the support of the family members. Prema, Dhangauri and Bhanumati are relieved. Thus they feel that now they will get their \textit{baxish} but they are scolded and sent away by the family members. Thus Shelat has written about the pitiful state of eunuchs in the society. Their grief is depicted through various dialogues in the story. The reaction of the society towards them is also shown. The story has become interesting due to the meticulous use of words and the minute observations in the life of the eunuchs.

Another complex study is that of human mind and its complexities, and the life of a woman. A human who looks healthy from the exteriors may be having a whirlpool of sorrow in the interiors. Thus a person gets hurt due to silly petty matters. These feelings are very well portrayed by Shelat in some stories. Sometimes a matter of pride also pushes a person into a valley of pain. The miraculous human mind and its complexities have been portrayed by Shelat in the story \textit{Only Till Yesterday} (\textit{Kal Sudhi}). This is the story of Ba who has been the centre of attraction all her life. But one day paralysis strikes her and she is bedridden. It is really a tragic situation wherein a woman who was always sought for by all is
lying in a paralyzed state in one room. She who had been working continuously for hours without getting tired is now tired of being in the bed but cannot help it. The people in the family had all left her in her room where she lied in the bed the whole day. They all took care of her but now she was no more the centre of attraction in the family. Now she was confined to her room where all came to meet her when they were free. Her husband tells her to come out of the trivial things of the life around her. At certain point of time detachment has to come for every person. He tells her to be detached. Paralysis should not be to the body but to the soul. On hearing these words she looks out of the window and feels that this is not the thing my husband should tell me. I should realize it on my own. She is a New Woman who reflects over this situation. The family had decided to celebrate Mandar’s birthday. She had begun to give all instructions regarding the preparations. But all told her to keep away from this stress and rest. The day arrived. She is very eager to see the preparations. Her daughters-in-law tell her,

“Ba, how about leaving everything – yes, everything – to us…Pray do not prompt us with the names of the invitees. Why don’t you just wait and watch? Why don’t you give us a chance, at least this once?” (FWDA: 115)

Even after these instructions Ba is eager to give many instructions but no one is free to come and listen to her. On the day of the party she is brought into the hall in her wheelchair. Everything around is beautiful and perfect. There is not a single loophole in anything. Utmost care has been taken in every preparation. The daughters-in-law are receiving praises from all the guests who have arrived for the party. Ba should be happy on hearing all this, but she is sad at her fading presence in the house. Till now she who had been the centre of attraction is now no more noticed. She soared in a world of praises from everywhere. But today she stands unnoticed. Thus the arrangements don’t give her any joy. They annoy her within. The last scene in the story is on Ba being taken back to her room in her wheelchair. She can hear the praises for Chetana and Raksha behind her. She wished that the wheel chair ran speedily into the room as she was unable to bear her zero presence in the party. She is jealous of them as she is not being praised anymore. In this distress, she thinks, “it would be good if she could take a snooze” (FWDA: 117) But her mind tells her that it is better to sleep forever now. Her ego which had been inflated by praises and flattery has been hurt. So she wants to fall asleep forever. The way life takes a drastic turn in this situation has distressed Ba and her emotions are well dealt by Shelat in this story.
Shelat’s short stories have made our literature rich and interesting. As a writer she has a peculiarities and limitations. To study the different stories various aspects like her beliefs, her topics, her central characters, the richness of her language, the flow of narration in the stories, title of the story, transition of events and the overall impression of the story have been taken into consideration. From her first short story collection, Interval (Antral) only she has very clearly stated her beliefs about the short story. This shows her clarity to the genre of short stories. She states,

“I was very much attracted to the world of short stories. It was challenging to narrate one incident with brevity in the form of a short story. Whether old or new, but I wanted to create short stories which always throbbed with emotions whenever anyone read it. I would not mind if I am not put into the category of modern writers, but the acute perception of the writer should pass on to the reader so that the reader understands the emotions which the writer wants to convey. This will make a reader to read the short stories. I would never prefer writing in a technique which the readers never understand. I don’t focus much on the technicalities of story writing. But prefer to make a story as per the perception of the reader.” (Preface Antral)

Shelat has beautifully felt the form and characters of her stories and elaborated them accordingly. Her first condition for writing the stories is that it should arouse an interest for reading in the reader. Her stories have had an excellent audience because she does not go as per the modern norms of writing stories, rather she focuses on the experience of the reader while reading the story. Formerly the readers got confused due to the artificial experiments in the short story under the disguise of modernity. But with the advent of Shelat’s stories readers have begun to enjoy and feel the liveliness of the short stories. Shelat has analyzed the pulse of the readers and thus created stories which have created significance in her life as well as the life of her readers. Thus stories which had lost its readers to modernity had been revived by Shelat’s writings. She has written without bothering about the modernity of the time and by keeping the reader at the centre.

The second condition for writing is that she always writes on diverse topics. This variety of topics always attracts readers to her literature. She finds the topics in the various
experiences of life around her. Every story has a new subject. The themes are attractively knitted on mystifying relations of human society and emotions. Her interest in human beings is at the root of this diversity. By coming in contact with a novelty of characters, their troubles in the life and their feelings attracted her to knit a story. When questioned about her themes, Shelat says,

“I get the characters first and then I began knitting the stories in my mind. For e.g. the story ‘Samevadi stri’ came to my mind when I was travelling in a train. At a station one woman climbed with a heavy bag of clothes, she was panting and looking for a seat. Thus I got the main character of Samevadi stri. Once in Surat when we went to the red light area to help them, one of the women with me had worn a cotton cream color Calcutti sari. One of the prostitutes inquired, ‘Achi he, kaha se li?’ This small incident gave rise to the short story Kharidi.” (Shabdashrushti 287)

In Shelat’s stories we come across different types of characters from a pauper to an upper class dignitary of the society. And sometimes you even find two different shades of a single personality in conflict with one another, thus leading to interesting situations which give rise to an interesting story. Shelat has also worked with the sex workers in Surat for a short time. She has also worked for the children at the railway platforms, remand homes, orphanages, and in slums. All these experiences provide her the raw material needed to write a story. The communal tensions, political pressures, the helplessness of ordinary man and the fruitless cry of all these touch Shelat to the deepest core. She is not a kind to sit silent after watching all this. The values which she talks about in her life are artistically molded in her short stories. Narrating various colorful dimensions of a woman’s feelings as well as her isolation at different levels has been portrayed very well in many of Shelat’s stories. She has written stories about a sacrificing woman, a woman who compromises with her life and women who are sufferers. At the same time she has very nicely captured the negative element with impartiality in the woman character of the short story.

According to Sharifaben, “Most of Shelat’s stories awaken emotions of women and focus on the problems of women. Stories like “Shaap, Kimmat, Kharidi and Barnu” portray the issues of sex workers in their life. They are subjected to hatred of the society.
These women who have been marginalized and neglected by the society are brought out with beautiful dialogues in the stories. Apart from this the distress of a mother whose son has been charged with rape has been presented touchingly. The son has been born after many prayers. And ultimately a son given by God finally ends his life by being caught in a crime like rape has been portrayed beautifully by Shelat. The grief of the mother Dhanvanti has been presented with heart touching dialogues.

Stories related to communal riots and the burning Gujarat during communal disharmony when portrayed by Shelat render a lacerating effect on the heart of a reader. The portrayal of a victimized woman in the riots touches the heart. Thus Shelat has explored the numerous facets of human life through her themes of short stories. The important ingredients of Shelat’s short stories are the beginning and end of the story, the transition of an event into a story, the selection of the central moment in the story, neat compilation and arrangement of the objects in the story, the narration of the story, conversations with dialogues within the story, the use of diction- speech and style and the selection of the title. The study of all these components can help us better to understand the peculiarities or skills of Shelat as a story writer along with her limitations. We know that a particular episode of a personal life is placed in the form of a short story. Thus selection of that particular episode is very crucial for the writer’s success. The moment at which the writer wants to reveal the story before the readers is important as a brief overview of the past has to be given to the readers. The writer sets a platform for the story to unveil itself. Thus as said ‘Well begun is half done’, a good start is a factor to be considered for the success of a story. Considering the introduction of all stories, it is true for Shelat. The introduction in Shelat’s story arouses a curiosity in the reader and thus held by the charm the reader is persuaded to read further. For e.g. in the story ‘Swarnafal’ (Golden Fruit), the man to whom Vatsala has decided to get married comes searching for her house. On his arrival only the sister Sumitra comes to know about the marriage which is going to take place. Thus this introduction of the story is dramatic and arouses curiosity in the reader. In ‘Badatarana Bij’ (On a Rainy Day) we find the protagonist lost in the monsoon of the past which revived the sweet bitter memories of mother. She is a single working woman who is independent financially. The rain today in the present makes her nostalgic of the past. In ‘Kimmat’ (The Price) the news of the sex worker Mohana getting an offer in a film is described. The pathetic state of mind of Mohana can be visualized by the reader when Mausi asks her to quote her price. All those who know Mohana are jealous of her but when she learns about her role she is shocked. Be it any incident Shelat has very well
given voice to the unsaid feelings through her use of artistic language which appeals the readers. In the story Relativity (Sthithyantar) the picture of the younger brother with a bag following the elder brother arouses pity for the younger brother in the readers. In the story ‘Nikal’ Shelat delves deep into the psyche of Dhanki and brings out her fears. Dhanki’s fear arouses curiosity in the readers.

“At night Dhanki was afraid for no reason. She would fear of something bad that would happen. As if she had an intuition of the upcoming dangers. Her fear and the dark night had no connection at all. Even during monsoon when she used to hear the croaking of the frog, she would be out of breath. She would wake up all of a sudden and look at mother. She would find mother snoring deep in sleep.” (EL: 62)

Thus most of Shelat’s stories have an attractive introduction. Like the introduction in her stories the end of the stories is also worth praising. The story The Witch’s Back (Chudelono Vanso) is a story about Bhanki, a woman who is a victim of the superstitions of the people in her village. People in her village consider her a witch. They all are eager to kill her by catching her. Bhanki tries to run away from the people. She is cock sure that Dattu would surely save her from this fiery and mindless mob. Dattu was the guy who was attracted to Bhanki. He always stared at her continuously but she never minded it. He used to drink a lot. The day when the villagers were mad with rage to finish her she directly runs to the place where she finds him drunk. She has the trust that he would take care of the mob because he liked her and this way he would protect her. She considers him a true and brave man. But the ending of the story unfolds ironically. The concluding lines,

“It is said that witches have eyes at the back also…but it is untrue. Otherwise Bhanki who is considered a witch by all could not see Dattu standing tall in the mob that was behind her.” (EL: 11)

The trust which she had on Dattu would have shattered on seeing him in the crowd. Thus these concluding lines reveal the ironic fact that Dattu who was obsessed with her simply had an obsession with her beauty. He was not at all bothered for her as a woman or as a human. Otherwise he would have stood by her in this tough time of her life. The hope and trust on him by Bhanki throughout the story is a shock for the readers as well. The ending of the story ‘Koi Bijo Manas’ (The Other Man) is also symbolic and gives a picture of our
society which is afraid to take a stand for the culprits of rape cases. Santram is very much disturbed and furious at the culprits who have raped and murdered his daughter. But on knowing that the culprit is Kalu Batli – a person who is known for his all kinds of notorious works, his decision of taking revenge cools down within him. Due to his fear of Kalu Batli who is a big shot, his wife Pushpi rebels against him and fights with him. But he remains unmoved by her. When the press comes to interview the family, Pushpi is determined to open her mouth and speak up for her dead child, but the women in her family forcibly shut her mouth with their hands and drag her inside the house. Pushpi is aghast at this. After the reporters leave their house, Santram is pondering over something and feels thirsty. He shouts for Pushpi to give him water. Pushpi comes out with water and spits and calls him ‘Baylo’. She is disturbed at the way he behaved when he had to take a stand and get justice for his daughter. Santram remains unmoved as if he has not heard anything. Thus the ending reflects over the helplessness and frustration of the poor lower class families who are powerless before rich and affluent people in the society. Pushpi has that courage to face the culprits and get them punished but Santram is worried about the future that will befall them after the punishment as they are big shots and he is a pauper.

‘Samay’ (At Ten-Thirty) is another story in which the heroine a divorcee lives alone. The house is a flat wherein she has erased all the memories of her husband. There is nothing left which would remind the heroine of her husband EXCEPT the time of 10.30 am daily. This was the time when she and her husband would go together for work on his scooter. Everyday this hour of 10.30 reminds her of Narendra. This is the hour of her grief.

Thus this moment of 10.30 hurts her and all the memories of the past flashback. She tries to escape from this moment but it is difficult. She is trapped in its memories.

Shelat’s stories named ‘Kimmat, Chhatrisma varse ghatanani pratiksha, Sthityantar, Swarnafal, Badatarana Bij, Vichhedni kshan, Vaman, Saja, Agantuk, Dah, Kahevani rahi gayeli vat, Ek Manas nu Mrityu and Prempadarth’ have an artistic ending which moves the readers heart and makes them brooding over the story. Thus her stories gain success with her situational flow which is vital for the theme and characters rather than being artificial.
4.4 References


(All the References from *Frozen Whites in a Dark Alley* are shortly referred as FWDA)


(All the References from *E Loko* are shortly referred as EL)


