CHAPTER IV
VICIOUS AND JANUS-FACED WOMAN

Man has his will – but woman has her way. Oliver Wendell Homes

As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion. (Proverbs 11: 22)

The Holy Bible, “a faithful biography of humanity”, proves its truthfulness by portraying the lives of women frankly whether they were “queens or commoners, chaste or bad”, successful or unsuccessful, wise or foolish and virtuous or vicious. Apart from comprising the enduring and everlasting accounts of women, which are remarkable and exceptional for their unblemished and admirable characteristic traits, the Bible also puts on view the profiles of nefarious femme fatales who are also unforgettable by their negative and harmful characteristic traits. In any age virtues and vices co-exist, the lives of the vice also teach and preach not to embrace evil. These vicious women, failures in their conjugal relationships, teach what women are not supposed to do in their marriage and how to confront the challenging situations of life, in order to avoid the tragic and catastrophic mistakes.

Though, building a home acceptable to God is the most valuable of a woman’s earthly accomplishments, these women do not value to
safeguard and uphold their families thereby, they are a failure in
donning their roles as wives. The Bible projects a stockpile of women
characters, who with no fear of the Lord in their hearts, invited evil
and stood as negative models for the generations to come by their
disobedient, deceitful, dangerous, cautionary lives in breaking their
families and thus titled as “vicious” women of the Bible. The
teachings of the Bible are varied which candidly presents the wise
and foolish women, who held responsible for their accomplishments
and setbacks and the choice lies in women to opt for a better path.
“Vice is a practice or a habit considered immoral, depraved, and/or
degrading in the associated society....the word ‘Vice’ comes from the
Latin word *vitium*, meaning ‘failing or defect’. Vice is the opposite of
Virtue”.

It is also said about vice as follows:

The term vice is also popularly applied to various bad habits ... sexual promiscuity, gambling and other reckless misbehaviour, as well as personal corruption, such as cheating, lying, and small-minded self-indulgence.

All the vicious women selected for the study can be categorised under certain titles like “First Bad Girl”, “Bad for a Moment” and “Bad to the Bone”. These titles show that all women are not completely bad to the core, but they exhibited bad or vicious traits in them. In spite of possessing certain good qualities they are categorised under the bad, only owing to the Biblical saying that “…a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (I Corinthians 5:6). As petite
leaven spoils the entire leaven, so is some vice will spoil the entire virtue. So also certain vicious characters in the women culled for the study, ruined their family lives and ultimately devastated their families. The characters chosen for the present study are Eve, Jezebel from the Old Testament and Sapphira from the New Testament. The study proceeds with the character of Eve, “the woman of unique distinction”.

The story of Eve is a “legend wrapped around fundamental spiritual truths”.

The story of Eve, the crowning act of stupendous and astounding creation of God, occupies the primordial position in “the eternal feminine” recorded in the Holy Writ. The deft and beautiful work of the Omnipotence drew to a close with her creation. She was called the first ‘Woman’, as taken out of man and later on Eve, “because she was the mother of all living”. (Gen 3:20) The meaning of Eve is “life or life giving”. The story of Eve is recorded in the first three chapters of the first book of the Bible. Certain inferences can be drawn from the brief description of Eve’s biography from which every present day woman can take lessons.

Adam was directly made from the dust of the ground but Eve was made from the rib of Adam by the divine and holy hands of God. About Eve, the sixteenth-century Welsh poet, George Herbert
remarks, “The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust double refined”. ¹¹

Though Eve, the first woman to live upon the earth was made holy by God, she could not live up to the expectations of God. She lost her holiness and made her husband loose his, by her disobedience in eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. In so doing they lost their unity with the holy God. She is the sole cause for loosing their capability of communion and fellowship with heavenly God.

Eve was the first wife united with her husband, Adam and theirs was the first marriage. The first woman to be called a wife was made as a helpmeet to her husband. As it was not good for him to be alone, he needed a companion to support him physically, intellectually and above all spiritually. Her position or status is not a slave but a helper or equal of her husband. As Antonie Godey, an editor of Theological Magazine, aptly mentions the sadness of man until the creation of woman as, “And man the hermit sighed till the woman smiled”.¹² Thus her duty is to bring happiness into his life. But Eve brought curse not bliss into the life of her husband. She acted not as a helper but as a destroyer ruining the prospects of her husband and herself.

Shaped directly by the perfect God, certainly she should have been the most beautiful woman on the face of the earth, which is
evident from the spontaneous expression of Adam’s feelings in the form of a poem, when he first saw the charming figure, Eve:

This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man. (Genesis 2:23)

Milton praises the beauty of Eve in one of the loftiest passages as:

O fairest of creation, last and best,  
Of all God’s works, ...  
Holy, Divine, Good, Amiable or Sweet.  

There is no surprise that she has been given the attribute that, “Heaven’s best, last gift”. She had the outer beauty, which is deceitful and vain. If only she had the inner beauty emerging from the fear of the Lord, she would not have trodden the wrong path of listening to the serpent and would not have been deceived by Satan.

As was Adam sinless, since he was directly created by the holy God, so was Eve, who was also made by the Holy God from the holy creation. Created in the image of God, in the holiness and righteousness, they enjoyed the fellowship of the holy God in the Garden of Eden. But when once they committed sin, they could not stand in the presence of God. Thus she was created sinless but it
was she who had brought sin into the world. As such this first and only woman born without sin became the first sinner in the world and bore children in sin. (Psalms 51:5)

After the creation process when Eve paid heed to the subtle suggestions of Satan to eat the forbidden fruit to become God like, she felt that she was not doing wrong. She selected the path of evil against the divine will of God. As she was the first person on the earth to be assailed by Satan, she could not resist the wiles of Satan and finally succumbed. Not consulting with her husband she takes an independent decision, which resulted in the ruin of her family and the entire human race. She ate the fruit and gave some to Adam who also ate. As Edith Deen, the best selling author aptly gives the reason why Adam ate the fruit following the evil path of his wife:

In this act we have an excellent example of woman’s impulsiveness and man’s inclination to follow woman wherever she leads, even into sin.15

The temptation was threefold, “good for food” pertaining to bodily appetite, “pleasant to the eyes” affecting sensuous nature, “desired to make one wise” relating to spiritual life. (Genesis 3:1-6) Though it was Eve, who committed sin, but being the head of the family Adam is held responsible for the sin. That is why the scriptures proclaim that “…by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin;” (Romans 5:12)
Eve begotten two sons Cain and Abel, who when grew up, took up the works of tilling the ground and keeping the sheep respectively. In the process of time, both of them offered their gifts of labour to God. Cain offered the fruit of the ground and Abel the firstlings of his flock. God accepted Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s offering because the former is the best and the latter is the part of the whole. Consequently Cain became envious of his brother and slew him in the ground. Abel was the first martyr and Cain, the first murderer. Eve was the first mother to have a son who was a murderer. Thus the first sinner gave birth to a first murderer.

Eve had no contentment and so allowed Satan to beguile her. She doubted God’s words and trusted Satan’s. Audaciously she takes a decision on her own exhibiting her disobedience to God and Adam, which resulted in death. Both of them had good commitment for each other, had companionship leading to complete oneness but for wrong things.

Having stepped into disobedience, she drew Adam also away from God. She had failed in her role and became a destroyer. When they were questioned by God, instead of asking for forgiveness, they blamed others. Lack of repentance in their lives was the first failure. The first home was built in disobedience and so it was destroyed by anger, envy and murder. The result was, they had lost both of their
sons on the same day, one was killed and the other was cursed to be a vagabond. To quote the words of Mrs N.D. Daniel, a famous family counsellor about the failure of Eve as:

As a foolish woman, she plucked her home down with her own hands. 16

She became the root cause of destruction instead of bringing blessing upon her family. She stands as an example of a tragic figure and the entire human race also reaped the fruit of her action.

Another character in whom the quantum of viciousness is more than goodness is Jezebel who is considered to be “the most evil woman in the Bible”. 17 Misguided by her passions she brings calamity in her marital life.

In her evil power over her husband, Jezebel might be compared to Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth.18

Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, wife of King Ahab of Israel, inherited the evil power and deeds from her father, who was a priest-king and worshipper of Baal. She was exalted in her position with kingly heritage as the daughter of a king, wife of a king and mother of kings but her life befell to be a signal of social menace by her
dangerous and disastrous actions which proved herself neither as a good wife nor as a good mother.

Jezebel means, “Chaste, free from carnal connection”. But the life of Jezebel, with all the tawdry arts of a wanton woman, reveals that she was a voluptuary and the most licentious woman and as such, her name was inappropriately belied on her. Tina Pippin, a biblical scholar quotes the opinion of Southern Women in the United States on Jezebel that she is “…wicked; scheming; cheap harlot; either promiscuous or complete whore; female form of gigolo; …gave her husband bad advice; evil and treacherous; …one who seduces men and leads them to destruction…”

Jezebel brought with her, the debasing and idolatrous cult of Baal into the kingdom of Israel. Even after her marriage she kept on worshipping the gods of her land, Baal and his wife Ashera. She brought even heathen customs into the land of Yahweh God, which were revolting and terribly cruel. She became the enemy of the one God, Yahweh, the God of holiness, law and order, and she struggled to show the superiority of her gods and as such lost her senses to comprehend the value of spiritual victory, which ultimately lead to the destruction of her family.
Captivated by Jezebel, Ahab left the living God and followed the ways of his wife and worshipped Baal along with her. This became a great sin in the sight of the Lord, which is obvious from the Bible:

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him....he took to wife Jezebel...and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. (I Kings 16:30-31)

Thus she made her husband and the people of Israel to transgress the Commandments of the Lord, thus leading them towards idolatry. As she was an ardent idolater, she was totally against Jehovah and so by instigating and motivating the people to worship Baal she wanted to abolish the worship of Jehovah totally. She even “cut off the prophets of the Lord”. (I Kings 18:4) Thus she became a despot of the nation of her husband and turned out to be the sole reason for the degradation in the spiritual and moral values in His people.

For Jezebel it appeared an easy task to dominate her husband who was spineless. She utilised the power of Ahab at her best for her dangerous and deceitful designs. The whole of the nation of Israel fell the victims of idolatry, was a clear sign of her domination over her husband. She could control not just his life but also his nation as a whole. Thus her evil and cruel plans were thrived because Ahab was made a puppet under the influence of this domineering wife.
The Bible clearly mentions how he had been influenced by his wife’s manipulation and domination as:

But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. (I Kings 21:25)

Ahab’s envious eyes fell on the vineyard of Naboth, which adjoined his palace and he desired to procure it. But Naboth refused to part with the inheritance of the family. Ahab was distressed but this despicable woman plans an evil scheme to secure the land of Naboth. She launches a treacherous plot of killing Naboth judiciously without staining her hands. This treacherous schemer considered that the law was framed by the king’s word and his subjects should follow his word without any choice. She sent two sealed letters in Ahab’s name and stamped with royal seal to the elders of the city of Naboth. Her wicked plot was to, “Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people; and set two men ...before him, to bear witness against him, saying, ‘Thou didst blaspheme God and the king’. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die”. (I Kings 21:9-10)

The king was a marionette in her hands and the kingdom was ruled by her only. So the elders followed the instructions of their queen and stoned innocent Naboth to death and the vineyard was confiscated by the king. And God sent Elijah, His prophet to
pronounce the fearful doom awaiting the inefficient king and his vice wife saying, “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood; even thine...The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel”. (I Kings 21: 19 & 23)

Thus a hazardous punishment of dishonoured death awaited the family of Ahab because of the evil deeds of his wife. In spite of the foretelling of the prophet Elijah, Jezebel was not stricken with fear. She was not timid. She believed in her own might and trusted the power of evil. Shortly afterwards in a war with the Syrian king, Ahab was wounded severely in his chariot and died. When the blood-soaked chariot was washed in the spring passing through Naboth’s vineyard, the dogs licked the bloody water of the chariot. And after about ten years, Jehu headed a revolt against the house of Ahab, and saw Jezebel sitting at the palace window and ordered her eunuchs to throw her down. They tossed her down. As she fell the walls were sprinkled with blood and except the head and hands of this royal woman, her body was eaten away by the palace dogs. She died a horrible death. Jehu also ordered all the members of this royal family to be murdered. Thus the prophecy of Elijah came true in her life.

Thus the one and only woman, Jezebel, happened to be the root cause for the destruction of all the members of her family, faced the tragic end because of her evil deeds. Jezebel had the commitment
but it was a **wrong commitment.** Thus this complex, carnal and
controlling figure “serves as an archetypal bitch-witch-queen”,
stands as an outstanding bad example for the women of the present
day not to follow her path and invite troubles and destruction.
“Jezebel is remembered as an outstanding example of what woman
ought not to be”. 22

Sapphira is another character, who deserves sufficient attention
by exhibiting certain vicious traits which ultimately lead for her
failure in her role as a wife and brings destruction to her family.

As is the story of Adam and Eve to the Old Creation, so is the
story of Ananias and Sapphira to the New Creation, the newly
formed Christian church. In both the narratives, the unsuccessful
role of wife is apparently visible by the acts of disobedience in the
former and deceitfulness in the latter. Meyer, a theologian, very aptly
puts it, “this act was the first open venture of deliberate wickedness”
and the punishment was “an awe-inspiring act of divine church
discipline”. 23

Sapphira is a Hebrew name signifying the bright blue precious
stone, “sapphire” meaning “beautiful or pleasant”. 24 An American
philosopher, Ralph Emerson remarks that a beautiful woman is “a
practical poet, taming her savage mate, planting tenderness, hope
and eloquence in all whom she approaches”. 25 But Sapphira could
not live up to her name and consequently brought destruction on
her family. As her name denotes, she has only external beauty and
charm, which is fleeting and deceitful, and exclusive of the fear of the Lord, she is devoid of the internal beauty, beauty of character and the knowledge of God, which lead to the collapse of her family. Through the brief recorded biography of her life, Sapphira gives an insight into her deceit, greed, dishonesty, hypocrisy, untruthfulness because of lack of fear of God. The Bible records the story of Sapphira and her husband, Ananias in the book of Acts 5: 1-10.

As members of the newly formed Christian community, Ananias and Sapphira were given the privilege of sharing the fellowship of God’s children. They professed their faith in God and without true conversion they associated themselves with the faithful and imitated other disciples and pretended to offer their entire property to the common need of the members of the church. They desired to be stamped as believers without true conversion in their hearts. Their spiritual foundation was not strong. They didn’t have commitment towards their faith. Their actions expose their hypocrisy by saying that they have certain moral beliefs but behaving in a way betraying their faith. More than her husband she coveted discipleship of God.

With the knowledge of his wife only, Ananias planned to sell his possession. No one imposed on them to sell and surrender theirs. Both of them, being the affluent ones, in order to be thought selfless and to impress others, planned to dispose their possessions but pretended to surrender their complete property. She aspired for
honour and respect among the believers. She wants to be considered equal with others though she had **no real devotion towards God.**

After selling the land Ananias and Sapphira, with one accord keeping aside a part of the price brought certain amount to Peter, one of the Disciples of Christ. It was not considered wrong on their part if they had not sold and brought the price amount because no one had demanded and it was purely a voluntary commitment. But they had surrendered only a part claiming that it had been the whole, where their **dishonesty, deceitfulness and lying** involved revealing their sinful nature.

Everything was done with the knowledge of his wife. She had her **role in disposal.** This was a strong indictment on the part of his wife because, **instead of admonishing** her husband for going astray from the will of God, **she agreed for the wrong doing** being controlled by the **carnal desires.** They accomplished their deceit by means of deliberate lying. They acted as hypocrites. But the Bible is candid in imposing punishment to the hypocrites. Prostitutes may enter the kingdom of God but not hypocrites. (Mathew 21:31)

When Ananias lied to the men of God, within no time he paid the penalty of his lying. He fell and died instantly. Three hours later, Sapphira not knowing what had happened entered and confirmed her husband’s words, instantly she also dropped dead. Thus both of them agreed to deceive the Holy Spirit God and thus **reaped the**
crop of their sowing. Together they had concocted a lie for their safety. The upshot was that they faced sudden death and destruction, which was the signal proof of the severe and swift judgement of God’s anger.

In this abominable act, Sapphira has her own share and her own role. Instead of reproving her husband while doing wrong things, she supported him. She has oneness with her husband but for wrong things. She had no real devotion and so conquered by hypocrisy. She had conspired with her husband to lie and faced the result. It was in her hands to direct and guide her husband not to follow the evil path and eventually invited the wrath of God. Thus she could not play her role successfully and so became a failure leading to the destruction of her family.

About the role of all the women selected, in taking drastic decisions and influencing their husbands to choose the wrong paths at the cost of their lives and resulting in adverse effects, Lockyer remarks:

...Sapphira was the instigator of the deceptive transaction, costing the life of Ananias and herself. As Eve tempted Adam into sin, and Jezebel caused Ahab to perpetrate his terrible crimes against ancient Israel, so Sapphira tempted her weak husband to sin to his ruin. 26
May be bad for a moment or bad to the core women had their own role in the family set up to build or break their families. As the coin holds two faces, the women also possess certain virtuous traits but their vicious traits outnumber their good characters resulting in matrimonial disharmony. Not all the traits, as they are, may not be apparent in the women characters selected for the study, but for sure, certain characteristic traits are noticeable which make the women failure in their conjugal lives, as such, an attempt is made to trace the vicious traits in the women characters of certain novels of selected novelists.

These women selected cannot be broadly termed as *vicious* as their predicaments are the by-products of unavoidable circumstances and as a consequence they come to terms to lives and lead it on their own accord. But a close analysis of these factors in the light of biblical norms would give an impression that their temperaments and attitudes resulted in demolishing their domestic apparatus and harmony, precisely breaking the house on reasons whatsoever, is against the will of God, whose main purpose in instituting a family is that both the husband and the wife should live happily and blissfully.

The intention of the study is not to hurt the feministic feelings by stamping the characters as *vicious*. The very intention of the word *vicious* in the present thesis is attributed only for deviation from *virtuous* women characters. It is considered or viewed that no woman
will intentionally come out of the framework of the family. But the study is purely viewed from the biblical perception, as it is a study of woman from the biblical perspective. The present study is to discuss the problems faced by certain characters in the selected novels of Indian fiction. The other problems that are faced by women which are not discussed in the novels are to be viewed from a different perspective, by taking the individual case studies and duly relating them to the biblical viewpoint.

The protagonist Maya in Shobha De’s Second Thoughts depicts similar characteristic traits as Eve in the Bible. Like Eve, she is also very pretty. She is a young middle class Bengali girl, who is very attractive with her “skin tone – a warm, rich golden brown ...gleaming jet black hair and large, dark eyes to advantage”. (P 6) She marries Ranjan, a foreign-returned bank employee who is also handsome, in an arranged matrimonial alliance. She feels excited with her marriage with a Bombay based person, which is lucid from the novel:

Maya found herself falling inexorably in love with this Bombay. Marrying Ranjan would make her a part of it immediately. If she were lucky enough ... Maya knew she’d be bonded with Bombay forever. (P16)

Maya, with lots of dreams and desires in her heart, marries Mr. Ranjan Malik. She desires to be a part of Bombay and a part of her
husband’s life. Ranjan has lived overseas but very much conservative in his attitudes. Ranjan is of the opinion that a woman should take care of the things at home, which he expresses with Maya saying, “I believe it is a woman’s duty to run a good home”. (P14) “A good wife has to learn to adjust and sacrifice”. (P175) “Housewives don’t have extra time – there’s so much to be done around the home”. (P197) All these expressions indicate the expectations of her husband.

Though she is given all the comforts by her husband, she is not satisfied. She feels discouraged and disappointed about trivial things in life. After her marriage, everything is well and sound according to worldly standards. She lives in a decent house with all material comforts. As he is a bank employee she never faces financial problems and in a way they are economically sound. But in her, Eve like nature sprouts up as expressed by G. D. Barche in his article Maya: Another Eve in Second Thoughts:

And yet she is not satisfied. She has no contentment. Like Eve she turns rebellious and finally allows even the marital bond to blow up....Maya finds herself placed in her Eden Garden.28

Like Eve, Maya is also not experienced or trained. As Eve was seduced by Satan, even Maya has fallen as a victim of the tempter Nikhil, a college going neighbour, who is “good-looking, confident ...flirtatious, lazy, spoilt and quiet, quite irresistible”. (P45) She is
fascinated by his appearance, “….nice hands, nice eyes, nice smile”. Like Eve, she has been deceived by Nikhil.

She feels isolated and discouraged when her husband imposes lot of restrictions on her. She marries Ranjan with a hope of leading a very joyful life in Bombay. But her desires, dreams and aspirations are crushed by the end of first year itself and she understands that it is a monotonous affair with him. She is also tempted by Nikhil because according to K. K. Sinha, she wants to escape the dry life imposed by her husband:

To escape from the drudgery perpetrated by a cold, unfeeling and suspicious husband, Maya develops a liaison with Nikhil in order to keep her individuality intact and restore equanimity to her yearning soul.29

Ranjan is plain and pious like Adam but a parasite on his mother, Maya is innocent and inexperienced like Eve where as Nikhil is tactful and experienced like Satan. As Eve listened to the voice of Satan and invited destruction into her family, Maya also follows Nikhil and leads an immoral life inviting destruction in her family.

As a dutiful son, after the demise of his father, Ranjan opts to return to India and remains by his widowed mother’s side. He adores her and she adores him. Her God like love towards her son is visible
as every night she makes an enquiry about his health and gives instructions. (P144 & P158) But she stays away from their family giving liberty to them. As God has given free will to Adam and Eve, Mrs Malik also gives freedom to them and does not poke her nose in their affairs and leaves them to take care of themselves without her interference.

Maya also has only external beauty like Eve. If she has internal beauty she will not have lent her ears to Nikhil and will not have done things, which are not pleasing to her husband. Like Eve she takes freedom and takes decisions on her own without consulting her husband. Always Ranjan praises her mother saying, “She is a good house keeper and home-maker”. (P92) And also he insists his wife to learn from her mother saying, “Take my mother’s example”. (P128 & P197) He also insists that his mother should be taken into confidence. When she expresses her aspiration to go out and work Ranjan refuses by saying, “But, Mummy won’t like it...ask my mother to accompany you”. (P37 & P39) But Maya never wants to take her suggestions and similar to Eve, she doubts the words of her mother-in-law.

When Ranjan advises her not to talk with sales men who are dangerous, she complains that she is feeling lonely and needs some one to talk to all day. Ranjan feels that she disturbs the peace at home and she doesn’t really feel the responsibility at home and she
is also not taking care of things at home, otherwise she will not get such sentiments. This is perceptible from the following lines:

As a married woman, you have to learn to deal with responsibilities. (P38)

A man comes home to relax after slogging all day. He looks forward to... soothing conversation. (P41)

Wives should realize that when a man comes home dead tired; he needs a little peace in the house. (P55)

When Maya expresses her wish to go out along with some “office wives”, (P76) he expresses his fear that they will have bad influence on her. But unlike Proverbs 31 Woman, Maya throws herself into confrontation with her husband, which is clear from the reproach of her husband, “...you have a very bad habit of arguing. I am your husband”. (P77) Ranjan expects that his wife should know how to deal with finances and so he insists, “A housewife must know how to manage the things at home even the finances”. (P 85) But unlike Proverbs 31 Woman, she never feels that she has her role in finances.

Ranjan’s mother actually opted for a girl for her son from Calcutta and not from Bombay thinking that “Their morals are not good. They have lost their cultural identity....Such girls do not make good wives. Not at all”. (P163 & P164) But this Calcutta girl, with her extra marital relationship with Nikhil, also proves that she has no
morals. In contrast to Proverb 31 Woman, her husband never trusts her. Disparate from Ruth, the virtuous woman of the Bible, Maya is not happy with her mother-in-law. She does not like her husband spending time with her. When Ranjan reprimands her to follow his mother’s example, she gets irritated and develops negative feeling towards her.

But towards the end of the novel her dream world shatters with the marriage of Nikhil and she realizes how to survive the sultriness of Bombay along with the sultriness of her marriage. Thus with all the similar traits Maya’s character can be compared to Eve’s character where almost all the traits which are apparent in her character are visible in Maya’s character also.

In Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* the life of the protagonist, Karuna, displays many characteristic traits similar to Eve, Sapphira and Jezebel. Karuna has been influenced by Anjali, a prominent Bombay socialite, who turns out to be a dire role model for Karuna. She is fascinated by Anjali’s dressing, speech and appearance, independent life, on the whole by her *memsaaby*’s image. She desires to be a model, to be some one in the world and to be a famous star like Anjali. Karuna realises that her idea of life is akin to Anjali’s. Like Anjali she is also not interested in studies and wants to get out of the closed boring middle class environment of her family and wants to be on her own, independent. (P12) She is also
discontent “hungering for things she didn’t have”. (P15) Hence Karuna’s character can be compared to the character of Eve who also wants to be independent taking freedom and decisions on her own without contentment. This is obvious from the protagonist’s saying from the novel:

All I did was fret and hunger for things that I didn’t have: a holiday bungalow in the hills, a personal ayah of my very own who’d call me ‘Baba’ (not ‘Baby’) and carry my imported school-bag, a uniformed hamaal to fetch me hot lunch in the dining hall and lay it all out on an embroidered table mat with knives, forks and dessert spoons, fragrant shampoos to wash my hair with…. (P15)

And her desire for the worldly luxuries can be compared to the character of Sapphira who exhibited her carnal desire of keeping back the money. Being a sassy kid, Karuna craved for things she does not possess. Though half of her classmates belong to the same category, she desires to be part of the other luckier half. Anjali’s influence is ubiquitous on her because she says, “No wonder Anjali seemed heaven-sent: she offered me the opportunity to be everything I ever wanted to be”. (P15)

Her father being a strict disciplinarian imposes some traditional restrictions on his daughters keeping in view that, “A person must have discipline and regular habits”.(P18) He expresses his
disapproval when Karuna along with her friend Charlie are stamped as “bad girls” and “were given blue cards and kicked out of the class for misconduct”. (P17) But she is not bothered of her father’s reaction and which is evident from her expression from the novel:

    Poor man couldn’t figure out how or why the youngest of his three daughters was giving him, and by extension the family, such a tough time. Contrasting me with his other daughters who were passive and obedient, rarely raising their eyes to meet his, made his bewilderment complete. (P17)

Her parents also censure of her contacts with Anjali. But against the wish of her parents, she continues her contacts with Anjali and above all opts for a career in modelling showing disobedience to her parents like Eve. Her father rebukes her, which is evident from the following lines:

    Father flashed the newspaper in front of me. ‘When did you do this? How dare you? Do you want to disgrace us completely? This is not something girls from respectable families do. How did this photograph get here?’.... ‘Disgraceful! Cheap! Filthy! No Brahmin girl has ever stooped so low. Tell me – how did this photograph get here?’ (P24)
But instead of conceding and changing her mind, Karuna is rebellious and goes ahead with her ambitious assignment in the absence of her father until she accomplishes a name as a celebrated model. Like Sapphira, Karuna is also displaying her worldly desires with discontentment and cheating her own father for satisfying her materialistic desires. But father insists that the profession of modelling is for people with loose character. (P24) But she heeds no ear or attention to his counsel. She is an audacious and unconventional woman. She visits abroad to enjoy freedom on her own. The quest for liberation is lucid when she says:

On my own, free of family influences and pressures...prepared to discover the world on my own terms.... This was going to be my Brave New World trip. I was going to find out about myself. America was supposed to be my experiment with adulthood. (P50 & P51)

After returning from abroad, she breaks off her engagement with Bunty because she feels hat her married life may not be a happy one with an ordinary person like him. Thus akin to the nature of Jezebel, Karuna does whatever that she wants to do without any restraint and control. Her individual decision taking is similar to the character of Eve, who also took decisions on her own free will.
When Karuna gets married to a rich businessman, the family accepts him because of his social status. He is of “Good family”. They are “Prominent people. Comfortable life”. (P63) Her parents feel that hers is a comfortable life but she feels that it is a “pretty, terrific marriage”. (P63) Karuna gradually understands the lacunae of her husband. Her enthusiasm in marriage fades to nothing by the end of first year of her marriage. It turns out to be a loveless affair because of her cold-hearted husband. She marries him for the sake of status and wealth. The outburst of Karuna elucidates it:

   My marriage went sour because I’d married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time....He was just an average Indian husband – unexciting, uninspired and untutored. (P65)
   Our love-making was a listless affair. (P67)

She feels that her life is not the total write-off. She decides to stop pretending that everything is fine. She is not happy and feels trapped in a listless marriage. She is not feeling that it is unconventional but at the same time she develops an aversion for it. (P82) In this state of mental disturbance as Eve was seduced by Satan, Karuna is also enticed by Krish, her husband’s friend and initiates a torrid affair with him. She cannot help control her relation with Krish because he has absolute control over her emotional life. Her attraction and desire for him is beyond imagination. Her
husband comes to know the affair and gives her a chance to change her mind, which is evident from his expression from the novel:

You've been a good wife. I don't really have any major complaints against you. I'm prepared to cancel this one black mark on your performance record and start with a clean slate....you are human, you have sinned, but I must be generous and forgive you. (P184)

Karuna accepts to stay with him but when he comes to know about her pregnancy he doubts the paternity of the child and sues for divorce. Breaking the holy bond of matrimony, she divorces her husband hoping to marry Krish. But Krish reveals his real personality and rejects to tie the wedding knot. She decides to lead a single life and also aborts the unwanted pregnancy thinking that a child is a life long responsibility. Like Eve she is intrepid enough to face the approaching events.

Karuna leads a carefree life and her husband proposes to come back to him. But she refuses to join him because of the only reason that she has to forgo her freedom. She is the master of her self. Even she refuses the marriage proposal of Girish Sridhar, the famous art film maker. Towards the end of the novel, Karuna meets Ranbir Roy, a reporter in the Washington Times and she strikes up a relationship with him but refuses to marry. She carves out her own
niche in the professionally competitive world of advertising with unrestrained freedom and new found happiness. But her financial independence turns out to be her added advantage to flirt without any control.

Once when she notices that the poor man’s torn and soiled shirt, she sends him one of the husband’s discarded shirts. Another day she sends some leftovers to the labourers. Like Proverbs 31 Woman, she extends her hand to the poor and the needy. But she is snubbed by her mother-in-law for her deeds. Though some virtuous traits of the women of the Bible are noticed in her, as the bad ones out number the good ones she proves to be failure in her marital relationship as per the biblical saying, “...a little leaven leavens the whole lump”.

Other important character in *Socialite Evenings*, who also exhibits certain characteristic traits of Biblical women, is Anjali. Anjali cares about only wealth and status. She marries Abe for convenience. Abe, a womaniser, always displaces his wife to share his bed with a party guest. Knowing before hand of Abe’s reputation with women, she marries him for the sake of his affluence and position and never feels jealous of women who share her place in his bed. Like her husband, she also has her own set of lovers and in her sexual behaviour she displays recklessness. Like Jezebel Anjali demonstrates loose morals. Even she is not worried to sue divorce from her husband because, “In their circle, nearly everyone was thrice married and divorce was common place”. (P41) The proposal of
divorce itself is much against the concept of marriage in the Holy Bible.

Not only the Holy Bible but also Hindu religious system and Indian traditions and customs proclaim that marriage is a permanent bond. Instead of admonishing her husband she divorces her husband, giving no value to the bond of marriage. Like Jezebel she is also not valuing the traditions or religious texts. After divorcing she wants to marry a government official and instigates him to have physical relationship even before marriage. But when he corrects her way of dressing, she feels that he is curbing her freedom and expresses her reluctance to marry him. Again she makes love with Pierrie, a much younger fellow, one of the teachers at Alliance where she is learning French. Even before he ties the wedding knot they go to Agra to enjoy. Thus Anjali exhibits her amorous nature without any restrain. When Karuna expresses her agony about her cold-hearted husband Anjali advises her to develop an affair with someone to escape the boredom with her husband. Not like Elizabeth, who gave wise counsel to Mary, the mother of Jesus, Anjali gives foolish guidance to Karuna.

Anjali’s unlimited flirting is displayed when again she is in love with a boy, Karan who is of the age of her daughter Mimi. But he is not so innocent boy and proves his superiority over her, which results in her breaking their relationship. Like Eve, she disobeys her father and marries Abe, a mussulman, and dadaji gets heart attack
and when she divorces him he gets his final attack. Indirectly she is responsible for her father’s death. Her mother does not like to bear with Anjali any more because she is a divorced and debauched daughter and it is their misfortune to have such a daughter. A divorced daughter looses respect even at her parents’ house.

Later again Anjali marries Kumar Bhandari, a businessman. But he turns out to be a homo. So again Anjali is a failure in her marriage. She, without any hope in her husband, turns into a religious minded devotee enjoying luxuries with good financial security. But her evil deeds have their toll on Mimi, her daughter, who becomes a drug addict. Similar to Jezebel, Anjali feels that whatever that she does is right and so feels no regrets. Thus Anjali is a total failure as a wife as well as mother like Eve, Jezebel and Sapphira.

In Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, the central character Ammu displays certain qualities, which are almost similar to the character of Eve, Jezebel and Sapphira. Like Eve she is also a disobedient woman. She doesn’t mind for her father’s consent and marries an Assistant Manager from Assam. Like Eve she takes decisions on her own which prove to be disastrous for herself and her family. Akin to the character of Eve, she is also valiant enough to bravely confront the upcoming disastrous events.
When she spends the summer with a distant aunt in Calcutta, she attends a wedding reception. There she meets her future husband and gets attracted towards his “well built and pleasant-looking” (P39) personality. As Eve gets attracted by the beauty of the fruit of the forbidden tree and takes a decision to eat, she also decides to marry him in order to escape the uncongenial atmosphere at home. She craves for freedom, which is evident from the following lines:

All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother. (P38 & 39)

But after marriage she realises that her husband is not a suitable one and “not just a heavy drinker but a full-blown alcoholic”. (P40) She understands that her husband is a “wrong man” and hers is a wrong choice. (P38) So her first decision itself proves fatal to her life. Then she gives birth to twins, Rahel and Estha. When her husband neglects his work, she never admonishes him like Sapphira. His English Manager wants to sack him for his absence but gives a proposal to him to send his “extremely attractive wife” to his bungalow to be “looked after”. (P42) Thus the dream world of her happy married life is broken when he wants to send his wife to his boss to save his job position. With this extreme humiliation, she takes her second decision to leave her husband and comes back to
her parent’s house in Ayemenem with her two children and without any dreams left. This decision breaks her married life. She has decided to leave him because of mere unavoidable circumstances and to safeguard her chastity. But she fails in her duty to make her husband’s home a green Pasteur. As Professor Amranath Prasad aptly points out in his article, ‘Feminism and Gender Discrimination in The God of Small Things’, about the place and role of a woman saying:

In this field of love and mating, she plays a role so exceedingly significant that the very basis of creation and procreation will come to a standstill. It is here we find her in the role of a beloved, a wife and a mother. She forms the pivot and nucleus of family life. Without the presence of the women, home is not home but a dreary wilderness.32

Similar to Eve, Ammu also has external beauty but no inner beauty and wisdom to build her family. At her parents’ house, Ammu receives step motherly treatment as she is a divorcee. Her aunt Baby Kochamma subscribes “whole-heartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter …she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamm’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from a intercommunity love marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject”. (P45 &46)
The divorced parents will have their toll on their children. The children Rahel and Estha’s lives reveal the same from the words of Chacko, Ammu’s brother and Mammachi, Ammu’s mother, who are of the opinion that “what the children suffered from was far worse than inbreeding. She meant having parents who were divorced”. (P61) Even the maid servant Kochu Maria scolds them saying, “Tell your mother to take you to your father’s house... This is not your house”. (P83)

Ammu’s life comes to disillusionment because of the indifference of the family members towards her children and herself. As a result of this she “spent hours on the riverbank with her little plastic transistor.... She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims”. (P44) But the real tragedy occurs when Ammu meets Velutha, a Paravan, who is three years younger to her. Ammu gets drawn towards him. She develops an illicit sexual relationship with him thwarting the ethical boundaries of the family. Like Jezebel, Ammu also displays her loose morals. She is not a woman of strong character like the virtuous women of the Bible. If at all she is religious and devoted like the good women, she will not have yielded herself to Velutha and bring disgrace on herself and her family. That is the reason why about the character portrayal of Roy, R.S. Jain points out that, “Roy does not present her female characters as ideal ones”. 33

Ammu’s and Velutha’s illegal relationship continues for thirteen nights. As it is pointed out by G. D. Barche:
At least after the first night of their union, they should have thought over the social laws. Everywhere there is the principle of ‘borderline’ at which one has to stop or take review before crossing it. For instance, in *The Ramayan* Laxman draws a line for Seeta’s safety. She is asked not to cross it. Seeta crosses it and subsequently suffers…. Here they have continued the pattern for thirteen nights oblivious of all norms. 34

When the love-making is revealed to Baby Kochamma by Velutha’s father, Ammu is locked up in a room and punished because her mother feels “she had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees”. (P258) Thus the family has become the cause of ridicule. The outcome of this relation is that Velutha gets killed in police custody. Ammu sends Estha to his father and leaves for Alleppy in search of a job as someone’s secretary. But she dies there in a grimy room in a lodge. She dies at the early age of “thirty one, not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age”. (P161) When the church refuses to bury her body, Chacko hires a van to burn her body in the electric crematorium. (P162) The church refuses because of her immoral life as the Bible, for that matter any religious text, condemns vehemently illicit or illegal relationships, which are the causes of failures in the modern society.

Thus according to Barche:
Ammu takes three decisions and all fail fully and conclusively. The first breaks the dream of happy married life, the second ends her married life, while the third kills her life itself....Velutha and Ammu are greatly responsible for their tragedy. 35

She displays some virtues like patience, self-control and forgiveness. In spite of the vices of her husband she displays her patience like Hannah and Elisabeth. In the early days of her married life she is presented as a woman of strong character and rejects the proposal of her husband to molest her life by going to his boss. After her divorce when she faces sufferings after sufferings, she shows her great capacity to endure them. She never harbours any grudge against anyone in her heart. She loves her children and worries about their safety and so instructs them, “Promise me you’ll always love each other”. (P225) But as petit leaven spoils the whole lump here also her vicious traits dominate her good qualities thus, she becomes a failure in her role as a wife.

She doesn’t put her trust in God unlike Hannah and Elisabeth. She doesn’t believe that God would change the things and bring joy in her life. That’s why like Eve, she takes a decision on her own and sues for divorce and gets herself separated from her husband. According to the Bible love towards anything or anyone more than
God is considered idolatry. Like Jezebel she is also an idolater, as she loves Velutha more than God and the religious principles. That’s why after her first meeting with Velutha she doesn’t abstain herself from evil doing, in spite of the fact that instigating an illegal relationship is nothing but violating the law of the Bible or any religious scripture. Akin to the character of Jezebel she feels that whatever that she does is right. As Jezebel is responsible for the death of innocent Naabal, indirectly Ammu is responsible for the death of innocent Velutha. She is also a hypocrite like Sapphira because she also puts up a show of pious life in spite of her illicit relation with Velutha.

Marriage is a permanent bond but divorce breaks the biblical concept of marriage. Divorce is not the ultimate for the marital problems and is also against the commandment of the Bible. Being a Christian, Ammu must be familiar with the doctrine of Christian marriage, which gives no place for illegal relationship. But against the set guidelines of Christianity, she divorces her husband, though circumstances unavoidable, and goes for an illicit relationship. Her life has its own influence on her children as well, whose lives reveal her bad impact. Estha occupies very little space in the world. Slowly, over the years, Estha withdraws from the world. (P11& P12) As for Rahel, after the death of Ammu, she is drifted from school to school totally neglected by her uncle and grandma. They provide the care but withdraw concern. (P15) She grows up without anybody to
arrange a marriage. (P17) So as per her choice like her mother, she marries and leaves for America but hers is also a failure and so divorces him and returns home. (P20) Thus Ammu becomes a failure in her role as a mother as well.

The characters Karuna, Anjali, Ammu and Maya are very much prevalent in the modern world. Chastity and purity is a powerful virtue, which is a valid quality of any human. But the women selected do not care for their chastity and share beds with lovers. Their relationships become the cause of destruction of their families. They will not show commitment for the wedding vows, as they do not have any devotion towards marital bond. In one way they become the source of ruin of the family. In some cases these illegal relationships lead to divorce, which ultimately results in destruction of the family.

The present day women, on introspection, would find some of the vices practised by Eve & co. The conceptions of evil traits, in a way help them to safeguard their marital lives and pave the way for blessed lives. A careful exegesis of the most infamous women in scriptural history and the traits of biblical female sketches traced in the women of the selected novels bring deeper insights and reveal the fact that women have their authentic role in family structure and the lives of biblical stories are similar to the lives of women today. Looking at the vamps and tramps of the Bible, and their contemporary relevance of the eye-opening stories of the nefarious
sisters, women today pick up what not to do in their marriages and not to deviate from the perfect path, plan and purpose of the divine will of God for an unparalleled triumphant and flourishing conjugal life, unlike the femme fatales of the religious Scriptures.

The juxtaposition of the characters from the Bible and selected fiction is a decisively rewarding exercise. It vindicates the stand that the iota of evil committed by women then and now varies, but the decline of their lives is an outcome of lack of conviction in what is good and insincerity. Having made an attempt to debate on women characters both virtuous and vicious, the next chapter takes a relook at the significant issues put forth and draws some essential conclusions.
REFERENCES:


3. Ibid. 13.


11. Walsh, Sheila. *I'm Not Wonder Woman But God Made Me*


21. Ibid. 33.

22. Deen, Edith. All of The Women of The Bible. San Francisco:


The references from this novel are quoted from this edition and are shown in brackets with page numbers. All the subsequent textual references follow the same pattern.


35. Ibid. 108.