FEMINISM IN THE NOVELS OF

SHOBHA DE

Shobha De, a super model, celebrity, journalist, the best selling author and one of the famous feminist writers of today has shattered patriarchal hegemony in her novels spread in Indian society fed on well-known injunctions of the Manusmriti. Women are treated as subaltern and mere ‘man’s shadow- self’. They are considered the otherness of man and not one with men or individuals. However, the role of women in society has been changing with each decade of a century, always with a good deal of social conflict and ideological struggle. These have left a great influence on sexual mores and social codes of the prevalent society which in turn is well embodied by Shobha De in her characters. She voices against the malicious culture and strongly detects the marginalization of women. Shobha De has raised sexuality as a weapon and as a problem for the women in the traditional Indian society. She feels that most of the problems of women are sex-oriented and sex-centered in the male dominated society. Her women characters are free from the chains of husband and society. They are reactionary and rebel, ‘a new woman’ and ‘a liberated human being’. She does not believe in describing her women characters as love – slaves, bitches or mere helpmates at home. In her novels she presumably mirrors her own feminist and sexiest mind set. A broader evaluation of her works reveals her protest against the good old image of woman as ‘an appendage’ or ‘an auxiliary’. Shobha de strives to undo this titled and distorted image of woman, who cries for freedom and equality which still goes unheard in the patriarchal world. From this perspective, the women in her works are more powerful than men. Women are essentially represented sexually liberated and free thinking and have become known as the ‘New Women’ in later twentieth - century fiction. But even more remarkable is the strength of her
characters in the very culture that has judged her. The problem of search for identity is very much related to the problem of existence. It has been a popular theme with the women writers of Indian fiction in English. They have tried to depict this theme in their works in one way or the other. On the one hand we have early novelists like Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sahgal dealing with the theme of crises of identity, while on the other, we have novelists like Manju Kapoor, Bharati Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De and Namita Gokhale presenting the bold female characters that assert their identity through protest and defiance and deconstruct femininity.

Shobha De has tried her best to expose the moral breakdown of modern society in which a hapless and forsaken woman longs for fulfillment and wants to fly in the sky unfettered. So her females deconstruct femininity and go through the upheavals of life on physical and emotional levels to finally achieve some measure of freedom from social bondage. Her various books, novels, non-fictional works (Surviving Men, Speed-post and Spouse), her autobiography (Selective Memory), all highlight, her attempts to find ways by which women can survive and cope in a world that’s cruel to them. Her novels deal with men and women belonging to the upper class or middle class- their obsessions, disappointments and insecurities. She wants equal opportunities for women. In the Indian set up a woman is expected to enact the role of an obedient daughter, a dutiful and a devoted wife and finally a sacrificing mother. At no time during her life, she is treated as a person; she is always considered to be an appendage to some men. But Shobha De in her major novels like Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights, Sisters, Second Thoughts, shows the principle of the social mobility working behind the class or cultural changes in women who try to exert for their place in the society they live in. She clarifies however that her brand of feminism
is not about women getting up and fighting for their rights, but is more sly and subversive. Her women move out of their middle class origins and join the upper class. They are women of substance, self-substance, self-sufficient and having free spirit. In De’s self-help book for Indian women, *Surviving Men: The Smart Woman’s Guide to Staying on Top*, she gives similar advice and suggests that in order to “train a man to any level of competence, women should use: a). food, b). sex, c). food & sex” (163).

In 1927, an article entitled *Feminist - New Style* in Harper’s Magazine declared the newly-evolved modern woman a composite figure, a boyish girl who combines the flapper’s physical freedom, sexuality and stamina with feminist self-assertiveness and traditional domestic femininity, a woman who can happily combine pleasure, career and marriage. “To the advanced young man of the time, this new woman seems the perfect companion—fearless, bright and eager to participate in work, in play, in marital sex” (Schneider 148). Shobha De shapes her women in the above frame.

*Socialite Evenings*, the maiden novel of Shobha De is about the journey of the prominent Bombay socialite Karuna, from a gauche middle class girl to a self-sufficient woman. This novel was published in 1989. This novel gives us the picture of the marginalization of the Indian women at the hands of their husbands. Kate in Jane Wagner’s – *The Search for Signs* says:

I am sick of being the victim
of trends, I reflect
but don’t even understand.(53)

Through these lines it is clear that Kate becomes painfully aware of her position in the system whose trends incarcerate her. But Karuna in *Socialite Evenings*
is a different woman. She is all agog to break-out of such thralldom which “compels her to assume the status of the other” (Beauvoir 85). Throughout the novel Karuna figures as a woman who asserts her feminine psyche through protest and defiance. She figures as a woman, not victim. Karuna has a quest to find about herself which springs from her discontent with her own life which doesn’t come upto her expectations.

In this novel, one can easily witness that Karuna’s life is divided into three phases: - The quest to know about herself, which started towards the end of the first phase, is stopped abruptly with her marriage. It is under control in the second phase and springs up in the third phase (life after the separation from husband) more powerfully image of her disgustingly self-assured and self-sufficient.

Karuna, the heroine of the novel was born in a middle class family at ‘Satara’ village situated in Maharashtra. Her birth was not cause of the happiness of her parents because after getting two daughters, Swati and Alka they were desiring for a son as it is common in our India, we hope for a son. After sometimes Karuna with her family shifted to Bombay. There she met Anjali, a super model and wife of a wealthy playboy Abe. She offered modelling to Karuna. Karuna discussed this offer with her mother but she strictly denied this career to Karuna by saying “Father will be very upset if he hears about this woman. Have you taken his permission before agreeing to model for her?”(7)

The fear of Karuna’s mother is very obvious because in a patriarchal male-dominated society, it is the father who chooses the profession of their children. When the children do something appreciable the credit goes to the father but when they do something mischievous, only the mothers are responsible. Mothers play a very significant role in a child’s life but it stops when a child grows up and wants to take
up a decision related to his profession. In short, important decisions are taken by others not by the mothers.

Karuna from her school life wanted to do something different. She was stylish and attractive. She too like Anjali desired to be a wealthy person in her life: “How desperately I wanted to be in that charmed circle of rich girls who had everything” (12).

Karuna without getting the permission of her parents performed in many ad-films and stepped towards her new life with the help of Anjali. But no one easily understood that her father wanted to control all his daughters in the same way. He never talked to them directly and tried to know about their likes and dislikes. In the male oriented society fathers crush girls’ sense of individuality in order to impose their male authority on them. Their earlier lives exploited by their fathers or father figures, make them react irrationally and violently. But when their sense of survival takes a responsible turn, they begin to revise their opinion about this relationship. After sometimes Karuna’s parents accepted her profession. Further her stay in the U.S. gave her a feeling of superiority and made her assertive. Karuna and Anjali both were suffocated in their early life due to their father’s dominating nature. Anjali explained: “Basically, I wanted to get out of the closed, boring, middle class environment of my family. I wasn’t interested in studies. I wanted to be on my own, independent. Too see the world, meet people, buy lovely clothes and perfumes” (6).

In this male dominated society no one cares about the dreams of a female whether it is a father or husband. Women have to suppress their ambitions inside them. In her married life too Karuna was not happy. Her marriage is a failure since it is loveless and joyless. There is no understanding between the husband and wife. She feels that she has married “the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time”
Her husband is just the average Indian husband, “Unexcited, uninspiring, untutored”(94). He was not made for introspection. The average Indian woman’s conjugal life is to her “an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left” (95) and “marriage” is like a skin allergy, and irritant. Karuna’s husband is unable to look deep into the biological need of Karuna’s female self. There was no meaningful conversation between the husband and wife. She detested the stand-offish and callous attitude of the husbands who often kept themselves busy in drab, monotonous activities like reading the business pages of *The Times of India*. But despite these laxities, a husband was above all, a sheltering tree, a rock to the wife. They were not wholly bad or evil and the wife as a woman was only a peripheral being. Karuna said:

> We were reduced to being marginal people. Everything that mattered to us was trivialized. The message was ‘You don’t really count, except in the context of my priorities’. It was taken for granted that our needs were secondary to theirs. And that in some way we ought to be grateful for having a roof over our head and four square meals a day. (101)

Karuna toed the track of an ideal housewife conforming to the demands of tradition. She was a conservative Hindu housewife, wrapped in yards and yards of sari. She dutifully obeyed her husband’s order and fulfilled his demands. The house was neat and tidy and everything was kept in order. Whenever Karuna expressed her resentment he asked: “Do you have better alternatives, wifey” (125). The role of a wife restricts a woman’s self development. Karuna tried harder to save her marriage:

> The more my marriage deadened the harder I tried to convince myself that I was happy enough as I was. I began to see myself as a drifter, letting life happen to me. If the husband was unhappy I’d try not to argue, only do things the way he wanted. (143)
Anjali threw off the traditional conventions of moral values and seductively rose to the social status of the upper classes. She enacted a marriage of choice with a Muslim, Abe. But she was not happy in her married life because Abe was “an experienced rake with a wild reputation” (6). De reflects what Betty Friedan says, on fateful life of housewives:

It is urgent to understand how the very condition of being a housewife can create a sense of emptiness, non existence, nothingness in women.

There are aspects of the housewife role that make it almost impossible for women of adult intelligence to retain a sense of human identity.

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In bad conditions Karuna wanted to help Anjali with her daughter Mimi (Mumtaz). About her condition Karuna said to her that, “Women worked, women married, women divorced and women remained single” (94). Karuna’s views about marriage had changed now. According to her marriage is not everything. “Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It’s just something to get used to” (98-99).

Anjali did not want to remain single in her life. She was very much interested in second marriage and tried to get attached emotionally with other men but she made a fool of herself. All the men loved her physically and tried to fulfil their physical desires with Anjali. It proves that men do not have any emotional attachment with women; they only try to play with women’s emotions. At last she succeeded in her marriage with Kumar, who was rich but he was homosexual. Eventually Anjali took to inhabiting a traditional woman- space: religion. Anjali informed Karuna that she pared her nails because her husband did not like her long nails. Thus, she had conformed to the husband’s wishes.
Karuna too discarded the dogmatic rules of a hackneyed and worn-out tradition for sustaining and cherishing her extra-marital relationship with Krish. Even she did not hesitate to restrain her husband from a week long sexual orgy with Krish in Rome. A woman in Indian society marries not just the man but also his family and subsequently loses her identity in marriage, relinquishes her freedom and sets about pleasing everybody. But the new generation of women with their new- found release from matrimonial bondage adopts different perspectives, and revolt against the old order. De’s women are such liberated individuals in search of a niche in their lives through escapades and sexcapades. Karuna fails to get emotional support from her husband and tires to get it in Krish. Somehow, she realizes that it is not the support of males but she herself, is also capable of surviving in this patriarchal world.

In India the institution of marriage has very traditional setup which subjugates and torture women. Through suppression and dominance it makes division between husband and wife rather than bringing true union of two hearts. It defines position of husband and wife in the family. Traditionally a husband commands his wife and subordinates her desire. Marriage leads woman to “aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose” (Dodiya 134). Husband demands complete selfless surrender to him. Thus she being a property of her husband loses her personality, qualities and dreams. She is not given any “room of her own”.

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees… she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and
not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential. He is the subject, he is the absolute, and she is the other. (Beauvoir 8)

Though a wife is considered as life partner, she is always ignored and neglected by her husband in reality. Thus, like a caged bird, she has to live in a suffocating atmosphere and “her wounded psyche is caged by the male dominant culture” (Kumar 153) without any option. In no circumstance she will be allowed to have extra marital affair which is considered as social taboo and immoral though husband had full right to it.

Shobha De’s character - Karuna is not a traditional housewife but a challenging character not to yield to male egoistic behaviour. In fact, “De reshapes her women characters as aggressive blasters of the male ego and male hierarchy” (Ningthoujam 15). When her husband comes to know the affair of Karuna with Krish he says: “I’ve thought over the whole thing carefully. I would’ve thrown you right now- but I am prepared to give you one more chance. I’m not a mean man”(292).

This act of forgiveness, on the part of her husband is an act of his male ego, his assertion of superiority. What right has he to say that ‘I am not a mean man’ when he himself has denied his wife the conjugal bliss of a marital life by often keeping himself at a distance from her? In what way is he fair, which he in the course of his tirade admits to be? He is unable to look deep into the biological need of his wife’s female self. If Karuna had any affair with Krish, it was only a means to fulfill her psychological and emotional need. In Snapshot Rashmi is convinced from her own experience: - “Men lead pretty, self obsessed lives” she asks: - “But was any man [worth a woman’s love]” (224). In G. B. Shaw’s Arms and the Man” Sergius also says: “How unworthy even the best is of a girl’s pure passion!” (124). Now frailty’s
name is no longer a woman. Emilia says in *Othello* “It is their husband’s faults if wives do fall, say that they slack their duties”. (Shakespeare 334).

Such an involvement on the part of Karuna may also be a strategic escape from the claustrophobia and cloistered milieu of her marital life where they lived as two separate islands: “It wasn’t that I never tried, but there was no question that my husband and I inhabited different planets”(99).

The modern New Woman Karuna, independent in all respects, is a respectable, conservative Hindu housewife, wrapped in yards and yards of sari. The role of a wife restricts a woman’s self-development. Rosemarie Tong maintains: “Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to in order to survive psychologically. Virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing”(200).

Shobha De views woman not only as submissive creature but also as the embodiment of power. In Karuna this power (Shakti) syndrome assumes a positive figure but in Winnie it is a negative force, the destructive image, the image of Kali. As Karuna’s husband says about Winnie: “She is a very strange and powerful woman. I feel ashamed to admit this, but I am scared of her. I can’t do anything because I know she will destroy me. She has that power”(422).

The psychology proved that men are egoistic because they do not like those women who are self dependent and capable to take their own decisions. Karuna says:-

*Men just feel terribly threatened by self sufficient women. They prefer girls like me-dependent dolls*” (101). Karuna learns from Ritu, another freedom loving and bold character in the novel that “Men, like dogs, could be conditioned through rewards and punishment” (131). Ritu is also the part of male domination. She is a practical lady. Ritu explains this egoistic nature of man by saying: “Every wife who likes good
things knows how to get them. ... I let him think he is superior”(130). Ritu is also Shobha De’s modern woman, who is fully aware about her needs. She says: “I look after his mother, his home, and his needs. Why shouldn’t I expect something in return? If I didn’t fulfil him in bed he’d look elsewhere. May be go to a prostitute” (130).

It means Ritu is bold and intelligent who knows very well how to deal with men. But a woman can never go far away from the emotions which are in her heart. So in the same manner Ritu was little involved with Karan but Karan helped her to take her up. S.S.Kanade says: “De is quite sympathetic towards women characters. Hence, woman is the central consciousness of her novel”(136). The females in Shobha De’s novels are very revolutionary. They always try to be on the top of the society and in the family but in most of the novels they remain alone with their unfulfilled dreams. They pass their remaining life in search of their Astitva. Then how can we say that in modern world women are free from all the bondages.

Karuna detests her husband’s duplicity and flattering nature. He who had earlier rebuked and reproached her for having an illegal child is now satisfying her female ego by sly and base flattery, by saying that it was their legitimate child. But this is too late for Karuna, for she has already undergone the protracted pangs of an abortion. Hence, her demolition of the male ego: “You are even more of a worm than I thought. You deserve Winnie. I hope she’s got a wax doll of yours. I will send her some extra pins to stick into it.”(423)

Shobha De knows very well the psychology of men. So the purpose of her first novel is to show the conditions of women, their revolution and the modern attitude of women in present time. Karuna’s marriage with the emotionless wealthy man, merely for money and status is finally broken. After three years of romance, she realizes the
bitter truth of male mentality of Krish who refuses to wed her. She realizes the truth that her affair with Krish for a hope of colourful life for full of passion and freedom is nothing else but ‘a mere sex game’. She is already a divorcee. Thus she is liberated from both her husband and lover and becomes independent. Now Karuna comes out as a new woman. She firmly says:

I feel all closed up and insulated. I need little time. I am discovering myself. I enjoyed this little patch of independence. I am reconnecting with my parents – they need me. I am enjoying their presence. Don’t rush me please. (408-09)

In fact, she is so determined to resort her freedom that she doesn’t even pay heed to the warning of her mother regarding problems of women leading a single life in patriarchal society. Her mother alerts her:

A woman cannot live alone. It is not safe. We are here today, but who knows about tomorrow? A woman needs a man’s protection. Society can be very cruel. ...a woman’s real place is in her husband’s house-not in her parents’. (440-41)

Now Karuna is not interested in remarriage. About this Karuna questions her mother:

But, mother why does security rest with a man? I feel confident now that I can look after myself. I am earning as much money as any man; I have a roof over my head. I don’t really have any responsibilities. I am at peace with myself; I am not answerable to anyone. … I can’t make any “sacrifices” not now. (441-42)

Karuna is sensible enough and well aware of difficulties of running a single life in this society. Yet, her present happiness and bitter marital experience makes her so firm that she is not more interested to be trapped in another marriage with anyone.
She doesn’t find any similarity between her concept of marriage and the social view of marriage. She has her own views of marriage. To her marriage means a life “full of laughter and conversation. One in which the two of us were perfectly in tune. Speaking the same language, thinking the same thought, enjoying the same thing”(99). But, it is a dream in this society which can never come true.

When her marital views are shattered with her divorce from her husband and after disillusionment from Krish, she loses her faith in the institution of marriage. That is why she towards the end of the novel firmly says to Ranbir, a reporter in Washington Times, “Single is good for me”(489). She easily says “no” to the marriage proposal offered to her by Girish, the famous art film maker, in spite of their common interests she expresses her feeling: “I don’t feel like complicating my life getting into second marriage. I like and respect Girish. We share a lot of common interests ... I can’t make any sacrifice – now” (442).

Thus, through her denial of another marriage, Karuna reveals her protest against the traditional social system and emerges as a “rebellious” modern Indian girl who is conscious about her freedom and right. She is no more weak and docile but dynamic and determined woman. She is now totally changed and experienced woman. Taking up a non-conformist stance, she adopts a radical feminist point of view all agog to “destroy the sex/gender system- the real source of women’s oppression and to create a new society in which men and women are equals at every level of existence”( Millett 62).

Shobha De deconstructs the idea of feminism in portraying her women characters with non-traditional image. These modern women manipulate every opportunity to realize their dreams. For them “marriage is considered a game for security and convenience” (Ningthoujam 55). To fulfil her desire, Karuna rejects her
affectionate fiancé because of his poor background and marries a rich person whom she never loves from her heart. She was not serious about her future marital bliss. Rather she was more serious about her material and outward happiness. She consciously marries her husband for money to become a socialite without thinking for a moment of her conjugal happiness. As in another novel *Second Thoughts* of Shobha De we have Maya who is more interested in Bombay than in Ranjan. She marries Ranjan without thinking for a moment of her conjugal happiness.

At the end of the journey of her life she realizes that her marriage with her boring and uninspiring husband was a great blunder of her life. Then she decides to write her memoirs. Karuna’s act of writing her life, to write and represent it on her own terms, emphasizing and narrating her experiences, is the inauguration of her individual rebellion against patriarchy.

In conclusion it can be said that Shobha De in *Socialite Evenings* has presented her protagonist, Karuna as self confident and potential woman, who strives to get total freedom from man and to deconstruct the social concept of women. She shows her faith in the power of women and in this way deconstruct the old idea of feminism. Karuna represents her new women who are full of confidence and look forward hopefully for a satisfied free life. She represents the middle class urban married women who are conscious of their legal, social and conjugal rights.

Similarly, Shobha De’s second novel *Starry Nights* (1991), is a story of Aasha Rani, a fifteen years old girl who comes to Bombay from Madras with her amma to become a film star. It is also the story of Malini and Rita. Malini is a traditional wife existing on one extreme of femininity who wants to possess her husband forever. Rita is the wife of Kailash; a rich film maker, who is equally faithful to Rita. Through these women characters Shobha De makes an effort to show the double standard of
our society. In this novel, De moves far away from depicting characters in the tradition of Indian womanhood.

Whole novel shows the life of Aasha Rani which is full of struggle. She is the illegitimate child of a film producer, the owner of the biggest and the most successful studio of Madras. Though he is having a family of his own, a wife and three sons, he whisks Aasha Rani’s mother away and keeps her in a separate bungalow. Appa, her father, loses interest in her amma after a few years and his wife also humiliates her. She is left with no money and is forced to sell her jewellery and clothes. It is then that her mother starts selling herself for the sake of her children. So, from her childhood she suffers the agony of unsuccessful relationship of her parents. The girls with their unaffectionate, un-understanding mother find themselves deprived of emotional security in childhood. In order to survive, her mother pushes her into the under-world of blue films. “Amma please don’t, I am so scared. That horrible man. How can I take off my clothes in front of all these strangers?” (89-90). Amma scolds her: “Don’t be stupid. These films will not be shown in the theatres. Nobody will know you have done them. There’s lot of money involved. I have committed on your behalf”(89). She persuades her by saying: “Think of it like going to the doctor’s. Don’t you allow him examine your body? These people are the same. They see bodies all the time. It does not make any difference”(90). Finally, her amma makes her submit to her wishes as she wants to buy a pressure cooker and pay the fees of her younger sister Sudha. For her own survival her mother crosses all the limits of being humane to her daughters. It seems that long back she has ceased to be a mother.

That is Aasha Rani’s first lesson in exploitation in the unfriendly world and the way to deal with this world is shown to her by her own scheming mother who for the sake of money, forces her into the orgy of blue films. There is no ending then; she
reaches the stardom only after being sexually exploited by producers, distributors, heroes, and other film people. Carrying the heavy burden of neglected childhood, she carves for toys, as she once tells Kishenbhai, the producer of her first film: “You don’t know about my childhood. …I never had anything to play with – no toys, nothing” (6). Due to the lack of emotional support Aasha grows with a disgusted feeling of hatred for men. Her sense of vengeance is also due to her own exploitation by the male world: “….Aasha Rani’s thinly disguised hatred for men. Perhaps it had something to do with appa and the way he’d mistreated her mother, or may be she felt soiled, used, exploited by them” (13). This hidden hatred compels her to use men as they use her. She tells Kishenbhai: “All of you are just the same, but wait, I will show you. I will do to men what they try to do with me. I will screw you all. Beat you at your own game!” (13).

In her struggle for survival, Aasha Rani comes in contact with Seth Amirchand, a member of the Legislative Assembly who keeps his “God father image” and calls himself a protector of the weak. Aasha Rani knows that pleasing Sethji means her successful film career for nobody in film world would survive without the blessing and patronage of a rich politician with shady dealings. She does not accept the money he offers to her for her services. She has by now mastered the art and is playing cunning games with Sethji to please him. She tells Sethji’s man: “Please tell Sethji, I consider it’s my duty to please him. It gives me pleasure to see him happy.” (105). With Sethji’s help she becomes a superstar and her career soars to the top.

At this stage, she falls in love with Akshay Arora who being married to Malini, uses her to retain his stardom. He realizes that “this was the only one surefire way for him to hold on to his niche at the top and it involved Aasha Rani” (66). But Akshay’s wife Malini hates Aasha for disturbing their married life with the help of her
friend Rita, she rebukes Aasha Rani. Malini screamed, “SEX! That is all you have
SEX! That is what women like you use. Cheap bitches, part your legs and let any
man in. SEX, SEX, dirty filthy sex, Perverts! You must be a pervert” (83). Aasha,
confident of her love, makes her realize that she herself is responsible to break the
bond between her and Akshay for she does not greet him properly when he comes
back home and does not give proper celebration in the bed. Malini thinks “Men are
all the same animals and we women such fools” (84). Be it Malini or Rita, each
partner in marriage is denied full individuality. Rita says:

Most women hate their husbands – it’s a fact. They hate marriage.
That’s also a fact. But what else they can do? What is the choice? The
only way to make a marriage work is through sex – and most women
hate that too. But the day a man feels that his woman has lost interest
in sex, and therefore in him, the relationship is finished and he starts
looking elsewhere. Aasha Rani and her kind are always waiting. (84-
85)

What Rita tells about the plight of married woman in India is also a matter of
deep concern for the feminists of today: “we demand communication, attention,
pampering. Arrey baba, forget it. We should be happy if they don’t beat us, burn us,
torture us, insult us, and discard us. That is all” (200). Praful Bidwai, a columnist of
repute, writes, “Marriage involves a terrible seductionism. It can encompass and
envelop the complexity of most relationships only by simplifying them grotesquely”
(22).

Akshay’s wife Malini was well educated and a ghazal singer but she quit her
career only to make Akshay happy: “My husband means more to me than a career. I
believe a wife’s place is in the home, not in recording studio. Akshay is an old fashioned man. I will never displease him’’(67).

Shobha De wants to show the inequality between man and woman in our society. She says that when man marries he doesn’t have to make sacrifices but a woman sacrifices in many ways. She has to abandon her career. Akshay wants full faithfulness of his wife, while he is not faithful towards her.

Aasha Rani has to suffer a lot due to her relationship with Akshay. Things become so bad that when she goes uninvited to the mahurat of Akshay’s film, she is not only humiliated but also beaten by Akshay. Still she cannot turn away from him. The feeling of victory of love makes her so crazy that she decides to leave her career to become his wife, the mother of his children. For Akshay’s love, Aasha for the first time rebels against the overpowering mother when she calls her for an explanation, Aasha bursts out:

Money, money, money. That’s all you think of well, I am fed up of being your money machine. I have done enough for everybody- you, Sudha and other – now, I want to live for myself and enjoy my life.

(183-84)

Akshay, a typical representative of the society, has no courage to take a bold step. He keeps enjoying both worlds. In order to get rid of Aasha, Akshay exposes her past and gives all the information about her blue film days to the Showbiz magazine. At this point, Sethji comes to help her and sends her to Dubai for change. After coming back from Dubai, she reaches Madras and finds her father very sick; but she neither feels any emotions for him nor goes to see him; “But why should I go to see him? I haven’t seen him in years. Since I was a child, he hasn’t bothered about any of us either. Now that he is dying, why does he care whether we see him or not?
De’s women are not emotional fools. They do not take care of a person who does not take care of them. Aasha is also one of them.

Aasha’s desire for Akshay puts her in humiliating situations. Being frustrated and disappointed in her desire for fulfillment in love, she finds herself indulging in a lesbian relationship with Linda, a film magazine journalist. She says to Aasha, “Let me do to you what no man could have done. . . . This is love-making, not what those bastards do to our bodies” (137). Here surrendering of ego is important, the implication being it is easier to surrender before one’s own sex than to the male who always rules, exploits and dominates the female. And herein comes another facet of lesbian behaviour, independence from the male which is an important principle of feminism or Women’s liberation movement. One of the subjects in the Hite survey says “Sex with a man is often the beginning of a political education. Sex with a woman means independence from man” (qtd. in Pandeya 206). In spite of such physical intimacy, Linda does not hesitate to use her pen against Aasha Rani. She is guided by selfishness, professional gain and other considerations rather than human relationship.

Abhijit’s interest in her in spite of his beautiful fiancée Nikita whom he marries later on fills Aasha Rani with further remorse. She tells Abhijit, “you are not making love to me! You are screwing my own image my screen image. Get out of here, Abhijit. Go back to your wife and make a man of yourself” (167).

Aasha goes to Wellington where she meets Jamie (Jay) Phillips and accepts his proposal to marry him. Far from the world of cinema she leads a family life with a farmer. Her life is filled with love and satisfaction. With the birth of her daughter, Sasha, she finds her life complete and tries to forget her past. On Jay’s strong persuasion that she needs to go back to India Aasha Rani returns to her home country.
Her arrival in Bombay brings back all the old memories. Her mother makes a strong suggestion that she should need to stay in India in case she wants to resume her acting in films. Jay now decides to return to New Zealand along with Sasha. At the same time, he makes her realize that she has to find her own identity now: “You were hiding in New Zealand. Now your exile is over. You are no longer afraid of yourself. This is where you belong” (290). Her father, too, wishes her to reopen his studio and revive his banner.

Sudha enters into the film world with Aasha’s exile and soon replaces her. She behaves like a mature businesswoman right from the beginning. Amma has lost her dictator’s image and totally depends upon the mercy of Sudha who rather behaves like her mother. She is portrayed as scheming and smart and knows how to deal with the world. She does not allow her mother to use her as she had used her elder sister. Amma is given a fixed allowance by her. She also stays in her separate bungalow away from her mother. She is a modern woman, since she is not bothered about the morals relating to marriage and stays with Amar, her co-star. Amma remarks: “They simply stay together. Shamelessly” (254). After becoming a superstar, Sudha abandons her parents as she tells Aasha: “Don’t talk to me about that man or amma, I hate them both” (285). She learns rapidly how to survive in the film world and as a superstar, she plays her part quite successfully as she says in her interviews: “I am where I am because I deserve to be here; Rivals? What rivals? My only competition is me. Heroes need me more than I need them” (286-87). Sudha, who has now developed a hostile attitude towards her elder sister, Aasha, invites her to her place and tells lie about Jay’s affair with her. She feels betrayed. Moreover, when she calls Jay, she comes to know from Sasha about his affair with her nanny. She feels
shattered; “whichever way one looked at it, there was always a man in the picture. A man using, abusing and finally discarding a woman” (268).

Aasha Rani feels afraid of failure both in her married life and in her career as a movie star. She even asks her father why men behave that way and why he has behaved so badly with her mother. It is then that he advises her to have control over financial matters:

Men are cruel, very cruel. There is no justice in this world. And no equality between men and women. Don’t believe that a marriage alters that balance. Sometimes it only makes it worse. Power lies with the purse—remember that. Whoever controls that, controls the relationship. (331)

Aasha Rani goes back to Wellington, where she comes to know that her marriage is over. An incomplete childhood with a single parent, poverty, starvation, her mother’s cruelty in making her a film star, the devilish attitude of the people of the stardom to bruise and batter her femininity, the jealousy and unkindness of her sister Sudha, the collapse of her marital life and separation from her own child—she stoically endures a series of shocks one after another. But she emerges as a strong woman in the end fighting bravely against her guilty conscience and wounded psyche. During her period as a film star, she comes under so many difficulties, yet she never leaves the film world. She is bold and capable of surviving in degrading moral values of life. She suffers humiliation as far as her social, economic and cultural life is concerned but she also finds herself capable of struggling, compromising and realizing her existence. Even in the end of the novel Aasha dreams to rule over the film world through Sasha: “Oh yes, Sasha would be tomorrow’s Lover Girl” (401). Thus the novel ends on an optimistic note. In this novel, Shobha De discusses love
and sex frankly. Shobha De in her bold and transparent language portrays the intensity of grief of a tormented, discarded and anguished soul. She establishes her writing as a further extension of feminism and a protest against the established patriarchal order of society. This novel is not a treatise on sex, or a mere pornography but it depicts the modern woman’s search for identity in a male oriented society.

*Sisters* (1992), Shobha De’s third novel is characterized by similar themes of self-assertion and empathy for the city women. The present novel focuses on the corporate world, unlike her previous novel *Starry Nights* that deals with the film world and its glamour. It focuses as much on the seamy side of the business life as on the inner turmoil of the protagonist. It is the story of two beautiful, modern, bold and intelligent half sisters having an industrialist father, Seth Hiralal. Mallika Hiralal has to abandon her studies in U.S.A. and return to Bombay to attend the funeral of her parents who have died in an air-crash. Very soon, she is exposed to the duplicity of her father as she discovers that she has a half-sister Alisha Mehta born of a mistress four months after her. She feels betrayed. Now, when she thinks of her father: “Her father, always distant, now seemed a total stranger. A stranger who’s led a sneaky double life” (20). In her hour of loneliness, Mikki tries to befriend Alisha, the only relative she has now but is sharply snubbed. Mikki, after her parents’ death, feels lonely. The existence of Alisha gives her a sense of solace. Further, her faith in human values prompts her to establish relationship with Alisha.

Now Mikki decides to take charge of her father’s industries which are verging on collapse. It is too much burden for a girl like Mikki, whose twentieth birthday was just three months away. Ramanbhai her father’s confidant and employee says:

Mallika Hiralal, I’m privileged to inform you that starting tomorrow, you –yes you- are the head of Hiralal Industries! And now, hold your
head high and face the world. Let everybody here know that henceforth they will be dealing with you. (15).

Her desire to excel and prove herself capable of doing real business gives her the courage to address the meeting boldly:

She’d found some hitherto unknown strength as she held forth confidently and firmly, outlining her resolve to head her father’s empire and steer his companies towards the path of even greater success” (29).

Mikki trusts Raman Kaka. She has faith upon him because she thinks that he is an old employee of them and he has also played a good role for their success. Shanay alerts her by telling her that this old man is cheating you as there are major irregularities in several departments and Ramanbhai is responsible for all this. She also notices that Raman Kaka is hiding some things from her, and also perceives some kind of discouragement on his part when he remarks: “Trust me, I will guard your interests like a father. But you will make things difficult for yourself if you do things without consulting me” (49). Mikki, on the other hand is bold enough. She tells him very frankly: “My genes are the same as my father’s even if my gender is not. I’m determined not to let the companies go by default. I will learn whatever I have to and I will hire whoever I think fit” (49).

Anjanaben (Shanay’s mother) is a very clever minded lady. She wants Shanay to marry Mallika and gets hold over Hiralal’s empire. According to her, Mallika is a foolish girl with no business sense and Shanay should take advantage of her innocence. She again says to her husband; “The girl is like a small mouse with vultures all around just waiting to pounce on her” (44). After rejecting Shanay, Mikki gets engaged to Navin, who has been a good friend of Mikki.
Mikki is a practical woman when Amy asks her about this she remarks: “Love? Why should I love him? I am looking for a husband, marriage . . . not an affair”(100). Her only intention is that Navin, “may help me with Hiralal Industries” (101). However she feels disappointed when Navin does not propose to her directly rather sends the proposal through Anjanaben. Like a modern woman, she believes in making her decisions herself and materializing them too, and that’s what she tells Navin also: “... I am disappointed that a modern man like, you should need an intermediary to fix your deals” (103). To save the industries from going bankrupt, Mikki decides to borrow from her fiancé. But it takes her no time to realize that Navin is putty in his mother’s hands. She feels insulted there. She calls off her engagement with him as she cannot marry a man with no self-respect and identity. Now there is no one to whom she can move and should believe in. There are problems everywhere in business and in personal life.

Binny Malhotra takes advantage of the situation and lures away Mikki by giving costly presents and promising financial help. Amy, her mother’s friend, also suggests her:

The quickest way to shoot to the top is to tie up with Malhotra. And I am being very practical when I tell you this- what’s the worst thing that could happen in that alliance? A disastrous marriage can always be put behind you, darling. These days divorce is not what it used to be (135).

She, somehow, gets the point and agrees to marry him. But Shanay does not agree with her. He replies- “Oh Mikki, why did you have to make such a big sacrifice” (144). At this Mikki burst out and said “Sacrifice! How can you use such a word, Shanay. I’ll be proud to marry Binny and become Mrs. Malhotra”(144). She
also tells Raman Kaka, who is also against this marriage that: The decision is mine and I strongly believe it’s in everybody’s interests” (145). Despite being warned, Mikki marries Binny. In his company she feels a sense of security:

She felt liberated, uninhabited and aroused to the point of primitive abandon. If this was what her man wanted, if this was what made him happy, should give it to him. She would give him every bit of herself, her body, her mind and her soul. She was in love with him. And he was finally hers. (175)

It is this total submission, a characteristic of the traditional woman, which adds to the superiority of man and consequent exploitation of women. Binny shows his true colours after marriage. Mikki finds out that he is already having a family and he is a father of two children. But he never married with that mistress because she wasn’t classy enough for him. He uses Mikki and makes it very clear that “Mikki should accept Urmi in their life” (200). Binny’s blunt reply is a commentary of women’s position, which the novelist exposes. As a representative of the oppressive system Binny says:

In our family women are trained to obey their husbands...you will never I repeat, never, question me or complain. You have nothing to complain about – got that? Your life is perfect. You have everything-everything. Where I go, what I do, when and with whom, is my business.” (187)

The process of dehumanization of Mikki begins, when all her property is transferred to Binny. Besides, she is denied motherhood for she has to keep always fit for him. Mikki’s situation in the novel throws light on the harsh realities of the patriarchal society. It also hints at the growing awareness among the women who
begin to rise from the eternal slumber and call shots. Mikki’s continual protest with
Binny results from her innate desire for freedom. Mikki does not like the inhuman
subordination of the woman for her materialistic pleasures without freedom of the
“self” mean nothing. In fact, Shobha De’s women long for personal freedom, and
when they are denied this, they turn rebellious. They express their anger by resorting
to what might be termed as unethical acts that is breaking the marriage oaths on
indulging in extra-marital affairs and promiscuity. It is this theme of self assertion
which is central to all the novels of Shobha De.

Her dream to enjoy, the fruit of marital life is shattered when Binny,
suspecting her chastity, turns her out of his house. Here Shobha De wants to show
that this is the destiny of Indian women. Although Binny is already married yet he
abuses Mikki on seeing her with Lucio, a friend from crash course in gourmet
cooking, experimenting in the kitchen. He doesn’t give any attention to her words.
He uses Mikki for his purpose while Mikki truly loves him. However, Mikki comes
back to her parents’ place and decides to take Alisha’s help. Her life experiences give
her an insight into her being as a woman and an individual.

On the other hand when Alisha admits her mother to the hospital she comes
into contact with Dr. Kurien and feels attracted towards him. She falls in love with
him and makes sexual relationship with him. But when she comes to know that he has
a family and he loves his wife and children very much, she feels frustrated. She
imitates her sister and finds a sense of satisfaction when Mikki is in trouble; she traps
Navin “because Mikki had had him” (195). She misses no opportunity to insult her
sister. Mikki asks Alisha: why are you so angry with me? What have I ever done to
you? We are sisters nothing can change that, don’t you see? (42) Alisha’s hatred for
Mikki is based on her sense of being neglected by her father. When Leelaben, Alisha’s mother tries to stop her she is tempted to strike her. She cries:

Stop it, Mummy, stop it! I can’t bear your stupid attitude. What’s the point in crying? Will it get us out of this lousy place? No, why waste your tears like this? I’m sick of you. Sick of our life. You sit there boozing, feeling sorry for yourself. But what about me? You may feel your life is over… but mine is just beginning. (60)

Shobha De wants to show the feelings of an illegitimate daughter. Although she is not responsible for her being born illegitimately but she has to face the bitterness of the society. She is a victim of her own illusions. In fact, she needs her sister more than Mikki does.

Although both the sisters attempt to find fulfillment in their life, both the sisters are different from each other. Mikki’s encounter with different men helps her grow into an independent minded woman, while Alisha, failing to get any hint from her experience, becomes an introvert. Alisha tries to commit suicide when she comes to know that Navin is going back to Mikki and Dr. Kurien whom she loved was already married and having children. But she is luckily survived by the treatment of Dr. Kurien and Mikki, who gives blood for her. Mikki realizes it all her fault as she should never have allowed Navin back into her life. But he caught her at the wrong time when she was feeling weak, low and frustrated. She takes charge of Alisha’s life. This incident brings them closer and they stay together. Now, Binny is dead in a road accident. At this, Mikki feels very sad. She again becomes the owner of her property as well as the property of her late husband. At last Raman Kaka is also exposed for his conspiracy in killing Seth Hiralal.
Shobha De wants to show that this world is no world for lonely women like Mikki and Alisha. They suffer throughout their life without any fault of their own. They are cheated by so many persons whom they call their own. Mikki was far too young to be saddled with so much tragedy, so much responsibility. Her handling of Hiralal Industries after her father’s death is remarkable and praiseworthy. It is very difficult work for a young fragile woman like Mikki to handle the business empire and become a business tycoon. She not only accepts the challenge but also succeeds. She does not take any advice of anybody in doing this, not even of Ramanbhai who was a close confidant of her father. Against the conventional attitude of males it is a tough task for a woman to be the boss in such a big business empire.

_Sisters_ shows how women are victims of male-passions. Seth Hiralal, a married man, had raped his watchman’s wife who died in forced abortion. Alisha is his daughter from his keep Leelaben. Binny has a mistress and children but he marries Mikki and forces her to go for abortion. Dr. Kurien loves Alisha but cannot accept her as he is having his own family.

Shobha De has shown the real conditions of these two women Mallika and Alisha who have struggled in their life without any crime. It means although destiny effects on the life of everyone may be they are men or women but it is more horrible for women than men because they are emotional and they have hearts full of mercy. In a patriarchal male-dominated society it is usually the man who exercises all power and it is under his guidance and directions that a woman is expected to act and follow. De’s women follow a completely opposite life-style. They show sufficient will power to challenge, defy and retaliate whenever they get a feeling of being subdued by men.

Mikki suffers terribly at every moment of her life. She lost her parents when she was only twenty years old and now before her twenty third birthday she is a
widow. But she faces every situation bravely and strongly. In spite of Binny’s cruelty she obeys him and loves him. When Binny’s secretary informs her that Mr. Malhotra is dead with Umri and children and he also asks if she wants to absent herself at funeral Mikki replies: “Absent myself? What nonsense! He was my husband. As his widow, I would like to oversee all arrangements for the funeral” (275).

Both the women finally realize that there is no future for them in playing the weak female and always looking for man’s support. They have experienced enough cheating in their youth as to have learnt the futility of seeking friendship with men. They decide to meet every challenge with their joint effort. These are women who despite the hurdles in their way resolve to be independent and they achieve their purpose sooner or later. This image of the new woman, surmounting all obstacles in her way keeps emerging in De’s novels. Both the sisters go through the ordeal of self – assertion and they realize their freedom – a freedom to live a life of their choice.

Strange obsession (1992) is a masterpiece by Shobha De. The story of the novel has been chosen by the reputed school of Oriental and African studies of London as course material. It is a rebellious novel highlighting lesbian relationship.

Society, with its culture and taboos, has always put restrictions on woman’s freedom, ways and sexuality. Objection on her sexual desire is the code, she is taught from her childhood. Her sexuality provides her a meaning recognition only by giving delight and satisfaction to the males. She is made to fulfil his needs and longings. She is never permitted to find other ways for sexual fulfillment. The society with its present cultural system criticizes a woman if she goes beyond the principles of passivity and docility, and suspects her virtue if she denies. There may be so many reasons behind a woman loving a woman. As Simone-de-Beauvoir describes: “Disappointed in man, she may seek in woman a lover to replace the male who has
betrayed her” (438). She may even turn into a lesbian due to there impose codes of conduct and behavioural pattern. She rather wants to conform to here own desires and want to maintain her own independent identity.

On the other hand women have to be of a particular shape, size, age and appearance in order to be desired. Besides her behaviour patterns - temptation, passivity, are must for the stereotypically satisfying sexual act. These already formed images of sexuality exclude a large group of women since they do not own the required standard of appealing. It results in self-hatred and dislike for their own bodies. And therefore, these physical failings and behavioural weaknesses of women may lead to their liking each other. Simone De- Beauvoir explains:

When alone she does not succeed in really creating her double, if she caresses her own bosom, she still does not know how her breasts seem to a strange hand, nor how they are felt to react under a strange hand; a man can reveal to her the existence of her flesh for herself-that is to say, as she herself perceives it, but not what it is to others. It is only when her fingers trace the body of a woman whose fingers in turn trace her body that the miracle of the mirror is accomplished... Says Colette in Ces Plaisirs: ‘The close resemblance gives certitude of pleasure. The lover takes delight in being sure of caressing a body the secrets of which she knows, and whose preferences her own body indicates to her.’ (436).

Loving another woman not only proves and satisfies one’s own sexuality, but also that of the other woman, by the very act of loving. This means that she has to learn to like not only her own vagina, but someone else’s too. Thus, one of the prime attainments of the women’s movement has been its acknowledgement and acceptance
of sexual relationship between women. The phrase most commonly used by feminists to express this process is ‘coming out’, which means disclosing prior concealed and unknown identities, our real or true selves. Time and again, men insult a woman when they do not succeed in belittling her intellectual capabilities. Historically, women have been considered as commodity. Though some laws have changed theoretically little else has altered. The behaviours essentially required in the act of chasing and getting hold of a man creates a competition among women leading to surpass and overcome one another. The responsibility is placed completely on the woman with little thought given to the doubted infidelity of the man. A lesbian denies taking part in the game of competition for man, since she discards compulsory heterosexuality. She confronts her own sexuality and challenges the norms imposed and expected from her by culture or society. The society forces her to play the roles assigned to her. The very aspect of her existence does this whether willingly or unwillingly.

Shobha De in her revolutionary novel discusses the obsession of a lesbian called Minx or it seems to be a psychological documentation of sexual obsession of mysterious woman Meenakshi, who is also known as Minx. Her father was in a powerful position in police—an Inspector General. Her mother’s sickness and later institutionalization and her loneliness makes her psychologically sick. As she is thoroughly deprived of womanliness, she behaves like a male. The story unfolds when Amrita, an aspiring model, comes to Bombay from Delhi and meets Minx, a modern high flown lady, free from all taboos and values. Amrita is a beautiful, innocent and modern woman. She is independent and confident, “...a very responsible young lady” (1). She is always positive in her attitude because her family supports her. Very soon Amrita’s good looks bring her plenty of modelling assignments and take her to the top
as ‘Super Model’ of the Nineties’. In Bombay, when she first encounters with Minx: “Meenakshi stared into the most beautiful eyes she had ever seen and forgot what she wanted to say”(8). Minx has fallen in love with Amrita. But Amrita is quite unaware of her polluted thoughts and plans. Being a daughter of I. G. she is always conscious of exploiting the power and position of her father. Minx’s strange behaviour is beyond her understanding. Like her boyfriend she sometimes sends gifts and flowers to Amrita, with a small message written on it, ‘To your eyes’. Minx becomes overprotective towards Amrita and sometimes waits for her arrival at her door. On seeing that Amrita asks her why she comes to her room. Minx answers:

Why I came to your room. I wanted to see how you lived. Where you lived. What your bed looked like. The basin in which you brushed your teeth. The loo in which you peed. The shower under which you showered. Everything. ... I am not going to hurt or harm you. I only want to be your friend. That’s all. Allow me to do that and there won’t be any trouble. Or any surprises, promise. (32)

Minx is so crazy for Amrita that she steals her bra and panties. Amrita asks her coldly, you also steal some of my things. Minx replies her without any hesitation, of course I do. She reaches into her trouser pocket and whips out a slim package. She gives it to Amrita and says wear them and think of me. At this Amrita bursts out: “I don’t want to be your friend. Why can’t you accept that? (32)

Karan, the photographer in the ad-agency tells her about Minx and her strange adoration for beautiful models. Amrita becomes frightened and asks about her abnormal behaviour. Minx tells her:

Abnormal? What are you talking about? You think I am a bloody lesbian, don’t you? Well, guess what? You are wrong. And so are all
of them, who’ve been telling you that. I am not a dyke. I am not kinky and I am certainly not crazy. Don’t ask me to explain it to you – but I am in love with you. I love you. I adore you. It is not sexual. I don’t wish to go to bed with you. All I want is to be around you. That’s all.

(32-33)

Minx becomes over protective towards Amrita, almost takes charge of her life. Out of jealousy Minx segregates her from other models and even young men who are attracted towards her. “You don’t get it, do you? I love you. I have to protect you” (51). Her possessiveness for Amrita makes her violent and she goes to the extent of killing people. Out of her intense sexual feeling, Minx speaks: “Amrita, you have become a part of me. You live right here in my body. I can feel your presence inside me all the time”(33). Minx wants to please Amrita and makes many efforts to make her happy. She fixes air-conditioner in her room. But Amrita does not like her presence it makes her sick:

Why? Why does it make you sick? Why should it? Because I belong to the same sex? Is that my only sin? You find it sickening to accept my love… but what about the animal Rover’s love? That’s Ok, you enjoy that. How come? And don’t tell me because they are men. And it’s normal. Bullshit! There is nothing abnormal about my feelings for you.

It is your problem that you have hang-ups. And, like I told you, I don’t expect you to return my love, just accept it.(62)

In this moment Minx looks like a strange lover, ready to kill herself for Amrita. Minx will die if Amrita leaves her. It is the tragic condition of Amrita because now she neither can leave her nor accept her in her life. So she requests Minx:
Please, Minx. I can’t handle any more of this. Why can’t you understand that I have a life of my own … friends of my own … a family of my own. I have a right to all that. You cannot force me to accept you… or your so called love.(63)

Minx tries to gain her sympathy by telling her all false stories about her childhood.

Minx undergoes surgery to remove her breasts just to please Amrita.

Two weeks ago I decided to chop them off. Believe me, baby, it was not easy. I was scared. I could tell no one, consult no one. But each time I was nervous and tense about the step I was going to take, I thought of you and the expression in your eyes. And then I knew I had to do it. And I knew you would like what I had done. Like me, also.

(135)

So deep is her desire and so strong her obsession that she is ready to do anything for her. Amrita feels pity and is drawn close to her. Minx enjoys sexual encounter with Amrita. But just after this experience, Amrita becomes conscious of her guilt. Again she asks Minx: “Will you be able to fill my womb with a child?”(160).

Amrita’s mother arranges her meeting with Rakesh, a businessman residing in America. Amrita fears that Minx could harm her someday. The few moments she spends with great confidence in his presence and knows that he would make a wonderful husband. Through the portrayal of Amrita, Shobha De advocates stability and security afforded to young girls in the age old institution of marriage. Minx plays her tricks to separate Rakesh and Amrita and sets the hut on fire. They sustain burn injuries. Minx is serious in hospital while Rakesh and Amrita recoup. Minx’s father tells Amrita about the disturbed state of Minx that:
My daughter is the severely disturbed child of a disturbed mother. She suffers from delusions, she tells lies, she makes up stories. The number of schools she has been expelled from have their own tales to tell.

(297)

The news of Meenakshi Iyenger’s death sets Amrita free from the fear she still carried inside her. Minx turns into a lesbian due to her hatred for her father. She gets no motherly love. All love and care she gets is from her father. During her adolescent years, she feels attracted to her father, the desire that could not be manifested due to social and moral codes. She is able to get what she wants but here she fails. She thus becomes a sexual competitor of her own mother. But the wish remains in her subconscious and she starts hating her father in particular and men in general and turns into a lesbian. Simone-De-Beauvoir distinguishes lesbians into two types: “The ‘masculine’ who wish to imitate male and the ‘feminine’, who are afraid of the male” (427-28). Minx comes into first type. She behaves in a masculine manner. Her decision to go for a sex change operation shows her desperation to act virile. She forces Amrita into a lesbian relationship with her. Lesbianism can be considered normal provided if both the partners are willing as in Socialite Evenings, Kumar Bhandari and Murthy are gay and in Starry Nights Aasha Rani and Linda enjoy lesbian relationship. But both share a fulfilling relationship contrary to one, which Minx wants to share with Amrita. As such, this relationship fails to satisfy her emotionally and she is always afraid of losing Amrita. De has preferred to give the novel a radically feminist turn, giving freedom and victory to Amrita.

Minx’s lesbianism is a revolt against society and norms laid down to underrate women. By belonging to Amrita, protecting and helping her, she poses a great threat to male dominance and disrupts patriarchal oppression while Amrita, too,
discards social taboos related to sexual behaviour and does not hesitate to sleep with Rover, the fashion designer. She acts like a liberated woman when the question of her marriage arises and her past with Minx seems to threaten her future. She refuses to hide anything from the man whom she wishes to marry. She dares to stay all alone in a city like Mumbai, far from home, to pursue her career. When Kanan advises her to tell everything to her parents about Minx, she boldly denies him saying that she shall handle it. Thus, she becomes a self-actualized person by successfully overcoming all the hurdles of her life. Both Minx and Amrita represent the different type of modern urban set-up. They present a very advanced class of women.

In sharp contrast to the previous novel is the fifth novel of Shobha De, *Sultry Days* (1994), a story of a teenage girl, Nisha Verma, who is also the narrator of the story. Nisha meets Deb or God on a sultry rainy day in Bombay. He is her senior in college. She is attracted towards him, because of the power he has over others and is a mixture of opposites. His appearance is dirty and shabby. He is a man of loose morals. His attitude towards girls is also scandalous —“use them and leave them” (8). Nisha hates this attitude of him. “I hated God when he said stuff like that. It was his explanation for everything. Any woman who didn’t instantly fall into one of his slots was frustrated and in need of a screw” (19). Despite his bad habits and dirty looks, ‘God’s hands and fingernails are surprisingly, neat and clean’ and is the master of foreign languages such as German, French and Spanish. He is the son of a communist and himself a communist, gets arrested while taking out Morchas. In the school, he also read Chaucer and Karl Marx. Earlier, he got a scholarship to Columbia University but could not go because his father refused to pay the airfare.

Nisha comes to know that God belongs to a rather poor family subsisting just above the poverty line whereas she comes from an affluent background. Her father
works in a multinational company. Shobha De is perhaps attempting to emphasize the fact that emotions like love know no barriers of class and caste. Her description of members of one class merging into the other class with great success is a truthful portrayal of metropolitan social life and cultural cross fertilization. However, the novelist can not restrain from writing about the problematic lives of Indian women residing in metropolis.

Nisha loves God and for her, he comes first though all her friends move away from her because of him. God also offers her to leave his company if it’s creating problem for her. But Nisha denies, for she finds character in him what others lacked. She joins an ad-agency after college. God often visits her in the office, always to ask for money. Nisha, by buying gifts for God, feels the satisfaction of being an earner, of being independent, the privilege of males in our society.

God does not have any reverence for his own parents. He hates rich people. His inordinate ambition leads him into the unreal world of pseudo, art for hire and compromised journalism. Now God starts sinking in the estimate of Nisha. To her God had at one time symbolized ‘commitment but gradually he loses all shreds of self-respect. As for Nisha, here is a very ordinary course of life wherein she tries to make her mark through sheer hard work and application. Although herself a member, yet she always remains at the periphery of affluent and glamour life. In other words, she is quite unlike the other women of Shobha De, who, live the life of glamour and sex.

Their careers take off with dizzy speed. God’s sole purpose is to acquire money and power while Nisha desires everything in life to be achieved through hard labour. As the years go by, God is corrupted by the good things of life that money can buy and becomes the chief confidant of a corrupt businessman-politician called
Yashwanthbhai. He has started working on profiles of rich people, which helps him make enough money. This surprises Nisha, who knows very well that God is the one who does not like these rich people:

I am surprised at you, Deb. These were the people you used to detest at one time. Didn’t your father organize a lock-out at the Lala’s factories three years ago? And now you are accepting all sorts of invitations. …I don’t know. You have changed. You are becoming like everybody else. No wonder you don’t have the time to play the flute. (160-61)

Nisha does not approve of God’s ‘new’ way of life. She finds it hard to hang around with God of today, when, what she really liked was God of yesterday. Nisha tries hard to be his conscience, telling and reminding him, his long forgotten commitments. But the occasional meeting between them sometimes turns in unhappy and unpleasant meeting. After one such ‘meeting’ God calls her ‘Jhooti bitch’. Being angry with this phrase she calls him as ‘capitalist Kutta’. It is actually the point when Nisha has completely seen through his so-called ‘commitments’. Although Nisha does not have any pronounced commitments of her own yet her constant companionship reveals the gulf between herself and God’s pseudo – commitments. Nisha begins to discover her own ideals and commitments whereas God starts moving away from the ones he cherished in the beginning and which attracted Nisha towards him. Now, Nisha begins to discover her own commitments.

Meanwhile Nisha comes to know about her father’s affair with a divorcee who works in his office. Her mother tells her of the affair. Her mother is fully aware of the fact that everybody in the party knows of the affair, still Nisha finds her mother’s attitude very brave in the Party. “My mother went through the evening gracefully, and
I felt very proud of her” (92). Her mother by now comes in contact with Mrs. Pratimaben, the wife of a busy businessman who calls herself the saviour of the lost souls. When Mrs. Pratimaben plans to start her boutique with Nisha’s mother as the manager, her father objects to join the boutique since the company wives do not work, they are simply meant to organize dinner parties and stay at home. But Nisha’s mother protests him and tries to do things, which are not approved by her husband. She stops wearing chiffons, and also going to her hair dresser for her weekly facials and hair set. She finally realizes her strength and comes out to confront her husband for the very first time in her life.

I am sick, do you hear, sick of living this false life. Varnishing my nails, setting my hair, wearing these silly saris and smiling through your office parties pretend nothing is wrong with my life. Well- it’s my turn now. And you can listen to me for a change. I will go along with Pratimaben with anything I choose to do. She is my friend. She encourages me. She appreciates me. She makes me feel like someone. So you can go to hell with your lectures and your Sindhi girlfriends- you don’t deserve me...whether you like it or not, henceforth I will make the decisions about my life. And the first one is that I’m talking a job. (242)

Nisha decides to live life in her own way. Her commitment towards the end of the novel emerges as a commitment to a cause. She emerges as a strong, determined and fearless woman who is ready to face any danger that may come her way. She exposes Yashwanthbhai through her write-ups. God also tells her: “Nisha... you have now become the city’s nasha (353). Actually Nisha’s rise has to be seen in the
context of the degeneration of God’s character. God no longer has a strong hold over her. She is now independent. It is through Deb that Nisha discovers herself.

In Shobha De’s novels a victimized woman is presented as facing life confidently. *Sultry Days* infers that a woman with a fully integrated personality, can solve many problems in her life and she needs not be a victim, a fact manifested through the powerfully drawn character of Nisha. The novel presents before us the glittering aspects of the so called high class society. For a moment the reader is blinded by the glitter and charm. But gradually the hollowness, the artificiality and the inner fragmentation of such a falsified life strikes them with cathartic revelation. For example, while hollowness of the class difference is shattered consistently, the folly of accepting the slavish subjectivity of women to male dominance is brought out, at the same time the feminine consciousness with its sustaining and pathological impact on family, community and society is proved time again. Kaplan stresses this fact in the following words which may be suitably applicable to *Sultry Days*:

The psychic fragmentation expressed through female characters in women’s writings is seen as the most important sign of their sexual subordination more interesting and ultimately more meaningful than their social oppression. (Gayle 152).

In the novel Shobha De has presented a group of modern women, who make interesting case studies. Equally interesting is the novelist’s treatment of the position of women and their attitude to matrimony. For instance, Pramila, a non-conformist lady from, Nagpur, suffers from a big-city hang-up! Married to a mechanical engineer, she has everything a woman could ask for- “a husband with a ‘solid’ job, security, lovely children, a moped of her own and all the time in the world to pursue her interests”(262). Yet she feels bored and suffocated. She has talent of writing
poems. This puts ideas in her head and suddenly, without informing anyone she goes to Bombay to be regarded as “woman of substance” (267). She divorces her husband and starts writing poems. Later, she realizes it difficult to manage small children with a job, so she sends back one of her daughters to their father. In this world of glamour a stage comes when she over - reaches herself, she miscalculates that Yashwanthbhai, an underworld don is in her power. This results in a traumatic experience. Yashwanthbhai, being very powerful person, successfully intimidates her. Ultimately, Yashwanthbhai and his people see to it that she is accepted in society as nothing better than a divorced woman of bad character or even a border line whore. To become rich, famous and powerful person she discards her family life and comes to face the stress and strain of the high society of Mumbai. She is bold, daring and a woman of great stamina but becomes a victim of Yashwanthbhai’s lust. In the novel Lotika also faces the same fate. There is another woman Karen who is married to Roy, who has an affair with ‘M’ (Maitreyee). The two of them led separate lives, putting in joint appearances only on the opening nights of his plays or at ‘important’ social events in the city.

Manju, another emancipated woman in the novel, “cares for just two things in the world- her job and her bank account” (193). “She married to an effeminate executive who had been a lobby manager at the hotel but had to switch jobs once it becomes clear that the wife was slated for the big time and not he” (192). Vicky was just the sort of milksop someone like Manju needed. Manju says: “You know how I hate entering the kitchen. I can’t make a cup of tea… forget that, yaar, I don’t even know how to light the bloody gas” (192).

Some other female characters may also be referred to briefly. Aarti, an account executive, is another bold woman in the novel who smokes charms holding
the cigarette awkwardly between her fingers and blowing smoke out of her nostrils. Bindiya, a married lady who comes to Bombay from Calcutta, discards the monotonous, outdated lifestyle she has been forced to live with. She is having an affair with her cousin’s husband. In Calcutta her mother-in-law kept an eye on her, but in Bombay she found freedom: “While Bindiya had successfully ‘found herself’, everybody wrongly assumed that her dumb husband (who was known around town either, by his initials, M. B. or as Mr. Bindiya) had lost himself for good”. (210)

Then there is Shona, the model from London, shot to the top of the heap in no time at all. Her face is everywhere. Tanya is a talented but unknown singer. She has been born Lalita, but has decided to change her name when she turns eighteen. Her new play back career, keeps her busy.

The end of the novel however, is depressing for them as each one assumes that life without a man is meaningless. Female subjectivity is one of the most regressive elements in a social set-up. The women long for love, dependency and the material and emotional comfort of a fixed class identity. At the same time there is an ardent desire to be autonomous, so she is torn between the two and suffers quietly the ‘constraints of bourgeois feminity’ and oscillates between reason and desire, autonomy and dependent security, psychic and social identity. As Nisha says: “If man can pursue career ruthlessly, so can we, women declared at seminars and workshops for senior managers. . . . The poor husbands were caught entirely unprepared”(195).

Again in her sixth novel Snapshots (1995), De draws a very realistic image of the upper class metropolitan women and their unconventional life-style. The six school friends Swati, Reema, Surekha, Aparna, Rashmi, and Noor have drifted apart after finishing school. Snapshots centre around the reunion of these school friends
many years later in life. The conventional woman is a model of physical exploitation
but De’s women, in this novel, are the masters of their destiny.

Swati, now living in London, proposes to arrange a get-together with all the
friends, which is her project to come up with a “bold, meaty serial on the existing
world of the Nineties’ Indian urban woman” (306). She leaves her college studies to
join drama school in England. Yet she remains in the memories of her friends
throughout. Although all her friends have been hurt or have suffered at the hands of
Swati at one time or the other, yet they could not escape the magnetism that draws
them to her. Swati, now a divorcee and powerful among the six women, is an
embodiment of scheming, smart, modern woman of today.

Swati is the only child of her parents and is always left alone to deal with her
problems as her parents are busy in their own social life. She is now the most striking
woman who never feels a need for anyone’s support. She is financially and socially
powerful woman, who dominates males and females alike. Swati’s life is an unending
saga of sexual encounters. She is very out-spoken she claims, “We rejoice in our
sexuality. We do not suppress it, we don’t dismiss it. Sex does not threaten us”(227-
26). By using her body as the main bait, she manages to become a popular figure in
the London high society. She does not hesitate to seduce Rohit, Aparna’s husband,
just to take revenge.

Swati’s target hadn’t been Aparna’s man-it had always been and still
was Aparna herself. The smart, cool and efficient, together Aparna.
The woman Swati secretly longed to be, but never could become. (278-
79)

But Swati is clever enough to maintain the facade of being her friend. Swati marries a
British but he divorces her for being “too self absorbed” (260). For her, marriage
never meant much. She says “We loved each other dearly but we led strictly individual lives” (261). In this novel Shobha De has made her female characters more powerful than their male counterparts. The portrait of Swati is a further illustration of the new woman’s self-confidence in exploring her potentialities. Throughout the novel, Swati is shown as a liberated woman.

Shobha De devotes a chapter each to describe the friends individually and thus gets ample opportunity of indulging in psychoanalytical details commenting not only on the Indian women of the nineties but also on how they perceive the coetaneous Indian male with his dominating chauvinistic attitude. Reema marries Ravi, a wealthy man who provides her with all material comforts of life but starving her for his much craved company. She has only one daughter and she has refused to become a child producing machine. Reema leads a lonely life bringing up her daughter Shonali.

Every man behaved similarly, Reema had concluded. Her husband was no better. And these days their love-making had to be squeezed in between her watching The Bold and Beautiful and his business calls.

During the cricket season, she recalled at least three sexual encounters accomplished to the drone of Test Match commentary with her husband pausing mid-thrust to applaud a stylish sixer.(129)

Reema uses her husband for her material luxuries and enjoys a promiscuous relationship with her brother-in-law, Randhir and suffers from no ‘guilty’ feelings. She uses her sexuality to control two men in her life. The patriarchal enclosure of matrimony has failed to trap her instead marriage has granted greater power to her. She negates the concept of marriage that presents the picture of man’s power and woman’s powerlessness. The prospect of Randhir walking out of the relationship does not bother her: “if I stop meeting Randhir, I’ll probably take up some other
hobby”(161). All the friends agree when Reema says- “Imagine not any other body, any other feeling, and any other sensation. Forever sounds terrible. Like eating dal-chaval day in and day out”(209). During her school going years, she had conceived her boy – friend Raju’s child. She suggests her friend Surekha, “Men like their comforts. And men are spoilt lazy babies. Feed them well. Fuck them regularly and sit tight. That’s the way to keep them. Control them. The rest is easy “(208).

The next friend Surekha had an arranged marriage with Harsh at the age of nineteen. She is part of a traditional household, which is controlled by her stern mother-in-law. She says: “I am an ordinary woman, who cares whether I’m happy or not?”(119). This truth reflects the psychological separation of Indian women. Surekha pretends to be very concerned about her mother-in-law but the hard truth behind this praiseworthy act is her lesbian interest in her school friend Dolly. Dolly doesn’t feel any jealousy from Surekha’s husband. For them, he is the man who bore their expenses. She manages to keep her husband happy and yet, insures a space of her own. Surekha’s relation with Dolly shows her hunger for loving relationship. Her married life though smooth, could not give her the emotional support she requires. Her mother-in-law’s strict attitude keeps her cold. Harsh never thinks of his wife’s desires. As such she moves away from him and finds solace in Dolly’s company.

Aparna, on the other hand, marries to Rohit, a flirt and extremely selfish person. Even after becoming a successful architect he seems less interested in having kids. Aparna, however, desires to be a mother. “I want kids, I like kids. I want to be a mother. I thought you wanted them too” (28). But Rohit’s one-man agenda never allows her to fulfil her basic need. Aparna’s adjustment to marriage is wholehearted. She forgives everything where Rohit is concerned:
He erred—she forgave. It was taken for granted that all differences were to be settled in just one way—his. And each time they fought, it was Aparna who was left feeling rotten and vaguely guilty as though the whole thing was somehow her fault; that it was her intensity that came in the way and spoilt everything; that it was she who expected too much; demanded too much; that men weren’t supposed to be a hundred per cent honest, or sincere; that it was unrealistic of her to hope for that with Rohit. (25-26)

As Karuna thinks in Socialite Evenings, Aparna also thinks about women:

They were partner–specific. Not men. Any woman would do when the good old hormones were on the boil. She wasn’t looking for a fuck. She didn’t need sex (no shortage in that department). She wanted laughter and touches. Small, intimate moments. What she wanted was a steady, warm, attentive companion. (34)

Her retaliation is not so radical since she loves him dearly. Therefore, the subjection and humiliation she faces at the hands of her husband despite being a serious carrier person does not compel her to leave him. Finally, she divorces Rohit when she catches Swati and Rohit at her home sitting cozily together in her absence. Aparna finds it hard to forget him. She misses Rohit very much. But she is betrayed by him so at the same time she considers husband an awful word. “It wasn’t just a man she missed—it was Rohit, her husband. She hated herself for continuing to think of him in those terms…husband, husband, husband. Awful word” (34). Aparna was blamed for it while Rohit walked out on her with a clean chit. The Rohit–Aparna relationship offers a smarting commentary on the Indian culture which is basically male dominated, in which the woman is expected to obey his commands and
surrender to his whims and fancies. Now Aparna has become “a corporate woman, an Indian corporate woman” (249). A business woman has come a long way from being a doting and devoted wife to an economically and sexually emancipated woman. She reaches the top rank of the corporate ladder. She starts an affair with Prem who is her employee.

Women in *Snapshots* live their lives to the fullest. For them men are secondary, their own selves are of primary importance. For them, “husband” is an “awful” word and “marriage the destiny traditionally offered by society” (Beauvoir 45). They cannot tolerate any action of men which degrades their worth or personality. They spurn the idea of being treated like the weak traditional housewives. It is very evident, after Aparna’s sad experience, when Aparna says about her affair with Prem “It’s a favourite male myth- another stupid stud fantasy, that’s all. The truth is women don’t need men at all - there are ways and ways of seeking satisfaction” (226).

The world of *Snapshots* is a world of women, where women begin to look at things from their own point of view. De has created such females who speak about different aspects of life, love and sex. De is successful in bringing the truth that middle class Indian women mostly are devoted to their lovers and they accept the physical pleasure from their male partners without guilt. In *Snapshots*, all the six friends disregard male power totally by negating the norms of conventional female codes of conduct given by patriarchy. Infact, they claim that the things men can do, woman can do better. Being strong intellectually and physically they hold the reins of power firmly in their hands. Shobha De very rarely allows her female characters to become powerless creatures. In this new image the new women have got extreme
independence in almost every field and one of the most striking and interesting freedoms they enjoy is sexual freedom.

Rashmi is an unwed mother. She is an actress and has an illegitimate son by the wealthy but miserly film maker Parminder (Pips). He has plenty of money but he never bothers to help her. However, undaunted by her suffering she gathers enough strength to bring up Pips Junior by herself- but in the process she becomes a whore. Rashmi’s endless succession of relationships gives her no satisfaction, nor security; in each one of them she is a loser. Indeed her insatiable thirst for sex is a kind of revenge; a compensation for her own weakness and an expression of her need to have the kind of power than man has. Rashmi comments: ”Mediocre women used sex as bait. Or food. It was the shrewd women ones who used their brains. And schemed throughout their lives to hold their men, keep them enslaved” (69). She at least, is happy for one thing that her son will escape that fate of the woman – thus reinforcing the age-old patriarchal belief in double standards. She has used men and in turn got used by them. She is an honest woman but she has found out that: “men didn’t like honest women. They preferred flirts and flatterers. Even manipulators. They felt more comfortable with them” (69).

Noor and Nawaz exemplify the dilemma faced by children of an unsettled and loveless marriage. Both her parents are always engrossed in their own extra – marital affairs. Noor does not dare to oppose her own brother Nawaz, who occasionally enters her bed. She is quiet, dreamy and submissive. After her accident with her boyfriend Amir while coming back from the college on his motorcycle, she had gone into coma. Later she had recovered physically, but mentally she has ceased to be the same Noor she used to be. Both her boyfriend and her brother have caused deep scars on her young mind. Noor is the only weak traditional woman represented in the novel who
suffers a lot. Her final release from her sufferings comes when she commits suicide at the end of the novel. Interpreted from the new woman’s point of view she is a pessimist and a weak woman far different for her friends who are daredevils and believe in new morality of sexual promiscuity.

By the end of their gathering at Reema’s place Swati is caught red-handed with her shrewdly hidden video-tape camera when she is about to leave. In the women characters of the novel, De projects the image of the highly self-confident, self-reliant and fearless modern woman. For De’s women, silence is not golden; they speak distinctly; use forbidden words and have gained the right to use the male sexual vocabulary. Women in *Snapshots* spurn the idea of being treated like the weak traditional housewives and live their lives to the fullest. They can not bear any action of men which degrades their worth. For them men are secondary, their own selves are of primary importance. The not so-pleasant sides of the lives of these women who live unconventional lives in consonance with the temper of the modern times particularly with the new trends of life of the sophisticated socialite women have been drawn by the novelist and other feminist writers.

The novel revolves around a psychoanalytical approach to women’s characters and emotions and reflects their sufferings due to social victimization. Men take advantage of the loneliness, ignorance and frustration of women, while women suffer from inner fragmentation in the absence of proper diversion. Social oppression leads to an identity crisis in women. The novelist infers that most marriages are made or unmade due to selfish motives. Ultimately she concludes that a society may be very progressive apparently but beneath the surface the woman’s status remains unchanged. The woman has to encounter solitude acerbity, frustration and alienation. She has to compromise at several levels. It is, therefore, essential that a woman should
be economically independent and also courageous enough to survive in the pressure of society. These women are strong, determined and have no hassles in behaving in any manner they like. They are more interested in materialistic gains and less about emotions. They can go to any extent to be successful in their fields. Though De often reflects on the plight of neglected wives, yet in this novel the married women enjoy an autonomy that can be matter of envy for many. De has deconstructed the conventional images of women and opposed the move to relegate woman’s experience and woman’s body language to the second rank.

In Shobha De’s *Second Thoughts* (1996), the conflict between tradition and modernity finds a prominent place in the portrayal of the character, Maya. The high society world, which is the familiar background of her earlier novels, has been replaced by the middle class society. Maya, who in spite of performing household duties devotedly, is not supposed to claim for equal rights as men. Sheila Ruth observes:-

The complement of his masculine character is settled on his sexual complement woman, ‘I am man, she is woman. I am strong; she is weak. I am tough; she is tender. I am self-sufficient; she is needful’ (62).

In scintillating language and bold style, the novelist manifests how in an effort to adjust and to compromise between opposite cultures specially in the matrimonial setup, the Indian woman faces inner fragmentation, psychic disorder, nervous breakdown and in some cases becomes a schizoid. This novel is a successful attempt to deconstruct the plight of the new woman who, being cornered in a maze of domestic chores and ignored presence, takes bold and unconventional steps to keep her identity, her individuality intact.
The story deals with a young middle-class Bengali girl, born and bred in Calcutta. Maya, an educated and freedom loving girl, who makes an arranged marriage with a foreign returned Bengali boy Ranjan, a bank executive. The reason for liking Ranjan is her desire to be a part of the Mumbai world which to her is like a dreamland of glamour and beauty. Maya is more interested in Mumbai than Ranjan just as in *Socialite Evenings* Karuna is more fascinated with the car behind the photograph of her husband than at the prospect of having married to her husband. “Marrying Ranjan would make her a part of it immediately. If she were lucky enough to become the other Mrs. Malik, Maya knew she’d be bonded with Bombay forever”(16). Ranjan is very conservative on the question of Maya’s career in textile designing he declares, “I am earning well enough to support a wife and family. I believe it is a woman’s duty to run a good home” (14).

In any Indian family, the husband’s comforts always come first. Everything else follows. A woman has to sacrifice her own dreams. Later, on their way home Maya says: “How could they tell me not to work after marriage? Do any educated, trained girls stay at home these days; I didn’t like that remark” (18). *Second Thoughts* is a realistic representation of the psyche of the traditional Indian men. Although they claim to be the proud products of the twenty-first century, but deep down they still cherish and nourish the age old norms and traditions. In that much familiar pattern, the status of Indian men and women has hardly undergone any change. As individuals, they may have progressed but in the institution of marriage, the man is still the lord and a woman has to abide by his whims and fancies whether she likes it or not. The middle class family of a girl is ready to bow down to whatever whims and demands the boy’s family makes so the marriage is decided.
Maya’s disillusionment begins after marriage when she lands in Bombay. She realizes that despite Ranjan’s stay abroad, he is very traditional and above all, an insensitive husband. He imposes restrictions on her. The agony of Maya, who feels trapped in matrimony, is the central theme of the novel. Maya is eager to catch the life-style of Mumbai but her husband turns out to be a cold Indian male who believes that by marrying the girl he had bestowed a favour upon her. He tries to be an opposite of Maya and hates whatever is liked by her – even flowers or simple outings. Maya wants to be a perfect wife but she finds situations uneasy as he always wants all her attention towards himself. His attitude is self-centered. She says to Ranjan:

The truth, dear Mr. Malik, is that you have me here as a fulltime, domestic servant without pay. Shall I tell your colleagues that? And also tell them that you have forbidden me from pursuing a career even a part time one. (217)

Maya is not free to live in the house as she would wish to. The STD facility on phone is locked for her. Even she is not free to go anywhere in the city. De captures the middle class psyche by exposing various facets of Ranjan- his attitude to hold on tight to the purse strings so as to control his woman, his lectures on wifely duties, and his complete control even on the use of the air conditioner. Maya knows that Ranjan can dare to do such things because he feels superior in some way to her and her background. Ranjan’s relationship with his mother is clear. He adores her and always gives examples of his mother to Maya and asks her to learn from his mother. He is a true son but not a husband. He does not share anything with Maya while he always gives his all report of the day to his mother. Due to his mother’s over-indulgence in their personal married life Ranjan is not able to relate with Maya. Ranjan’s mother
wisely makes selection of Maya as her daughter-in-law for she wants that a wife should act under the thumb of the husband. As she says:

   It is always wiser to get a girl from a socially inferior background. . . .

A wealthier wife spells doom. The husband loses all control over her and she ends up having the upper hand. Such a marriage can never work which is why we were so careful while selecting the right candidate for Ranjan.(325)

Maya’s longing for adventure and romance often suffers a setback. Ranjan’s responsibility towards Maya is nothing beyond providing her financial support, a house and four square meals a day. His complete indifference to Maya’s emotional desires hurts Maya immensely. He even refuses to share a single aspect of his life with her. So she feels miserable in his company. Although she is not tortured physically or in other way but she feels as she is losing her identity in his company. She says: “With him around, I seemed to hold my breath and walk around on tiptoes trying to appear as invisible as I possibly could” (129). Maya once asks him to take her out at least during the weekend. Ranjan replies: “Sometimes you talk like such a kid. Life isn’t picnic, you know. And you are not in Bombay on a holiday. As a married woman, you have to learn to deal with responsibilities” (37-38). Duty not only means to provide food, home and money, it also includes a certain amount of respect and affection for one’s spouse.

Under the same roof, they live as strangers as their sexual relationship is not normal. There is no sweet relationship between husband and wife. Once Ranjan returns from Calcutta after ten days, Maya shyly snuggles up to him and caresses him but to her shame and horror Ranjan jumps back and scolds her: “Stop behaving like a cheap woman. A prostitute, he had muttered before turning around and going to
sleep” (362). Sex is a complicated issue in their married life. Ranjan has a genuine lack of interest in Maya. Maya cannot share her feelings with anyone; she can not bear any child because of her husband’s lack of interest in physical –gratification and she has nothing creative to do in that city. She is in the miserable condition. In reality she is neglecting by her husband, in-laws and even by her own parents. She feels:

Nobody needed me, absolutely nobody. My parents no longer thought I belonged to them. My husband belonged to his mother. It was unlikely that I would bear children who would belong to me. And I did not have a single true friend to call my own. (372-73)

De shows the condition of most of the middle class women in India. She narrates the situation what Indian women have to face in which she has to suffer a lot. The hollowness of such marriages is evident even in the case of Maya’s parents, who hardly ever talk to each other and even their quarrels or heated arguments were out of question. Maya’s own case is far more pitiable: “Now here we were, locked together in a relationship that didn’t satisfy either of us” (352).

When Maya meets Nikhil, her college going neighbour who is cool and friendly, she feels that she has her own identity. Nikhil makes Maya feels that she has a right to exist. She enjoys his company. But her consciousness makes her feel ashamed. Her loyalty to Ranjan holds her back on a couple of occasion. Through Maya, De shows the attitude of middle class urban women. She takes the side of her husband. She thinks that Ranjan is not bad at all, he is her husband. De narrates in this episode a modern woman. Although Maya is loyal to Ranjan but she also wants to remain in Nikhil’s company as he brings a new meaning of existence for her. De wants to show that now woman has learnt to establish her identity. She can take any decision fearlessly and boldly.
Maya does not want to cheat her husband but only to enjoy her life in the open air with her own emotions and feelings. Nikhil enlivens her spirit and seems to understand her better than her husband, thus giving Maya a feeling of comfort which she had desperately looked for because her yearning for Ranjan’s love could not find the fulfillment she needed. Nikhil is the fourth floor neighbour’s son and junior to Maya by 5-6 years. When Maya is with Nikhil she does not care for anything. She wants to express her joy and happiness. When once Ranjan goes out of his business tour for ten days Maya feels free as a bird and allows her spirits to soar. She says: “His exit always generated a sense of exhilaration not because I did not want him around. But I felt free to breathe normally” (129). At this time Nikhil comes to Maya and asks her to go with him on riding. She agrees and enjoys a lot there. She says: “For the first time since my arrival in your city, I felt like laughing, singing, enjoying the salty sea are on my face. I looked at the sky and felt happy”(270). Maya’s friendship with Nikhil goes to the extent of physical intimacy. Their sexual union heals the wounds of Maya’s loveless marriage. A distressed woman is thus liable to seek out comfort from some other source. Maya is left with a deep sense of guilt. But she tries to overcome this guilt and resolves to live in the present. The initial guilt of allowing Nikhil to visit her later gives way and makes her confident to deal with either Ranjan or her mother-in-law if they happen to arrive. She thinks she should have made adjustments and compromises because marriages need a great deal of effort to run smoothly. Maya would recall her mother’s words: “The issue is, Maya, marriage involves sacrifices. And all the sacrificing has to be undertaken by the woman. The sooner you accept that, the happier you will be”(353).

With a little encouragement from Nikhil, now Maya is prepared to say good-bye to her present life with Ranjan without the slight regret. But the news of Nikhil’s
engagement with another girl left Maya shocked and stunned. When Maya wants to take bold decision, once again she is left all alone with her unsympathetic husband and mother-in-law. Maya also has the glimpses of modern woman in her. She has courage to take bold step, but the circumstances do not help her in her decision.

Nikhil seduced Maya and doesn’t come forward to marry her. It is at this juncture that Shobha De throws light on the reality of the people who fall in Nikhil’s category. He takes advantage of the limitations and weakness of lonely ladies and Maya is just an addition to his endless list. Shobha De wants to show what woman has to pay for marriage is often too high. Circumstances compel Maya to change her mind and in desperation she deceives Ranjan, otherwise she is not a woman of easy virtue. But ironically, at the end of the novel, we see that she has only deceived herself. Through Maya, Ms. De takes up the burning question of woman’s freedom in contemporary India where the protagonist finds herself in a complex human situation aggravated by social, historical and cultural changes. The Second Thoughts that arise in Maya’s mind could very well be the harbinger of the ‘first thoughts’ that could come to the mind of the new woman of the future, who has to take decision to assert her individuality and establish her identity. And on second thoughts, she learns to survive the sultriness of not only Bombay, but also of her marriage. With this novel, De’s critics will have to think twice before labeling her the evergreen ‘Queen of Pornography’.

The protagonists of De’s novels portray the tortured consciousness of the urban middle class woman, who, in quest of their identity undergoes a metamorphosis—from a silent sufferer to a hard-core rebel, breaking with the age-old restraining ethics of the male-dominated world. At times, the rebellion of the women take the extreme forms such as sexual promiscuity or extra-marital relations which
serve as a device for them to assert their “self”. De’s females have crossed the barrier of two thousand years old suppression and are on the verge of retaining their lost glory. However, after the age-old exploitation the sudden freedom sometimes can be misleading. Yet, today’s modern women are striving hard to achieve what they have ever wanted - freedom to be themselves. If Miras of yesteryears can leave their husbands to go after their devotion, their Krishnas, why can’t the woman of today live alone or seek divorce to pursue her dreams of physical and financial freedom!

History reveals that man, the controller of power, dominates over woman, the prototype of powerlessness. In Shobha De’s novels this standard equation has often been radically altered and women with increased awareness of gender roles and gender identity have emerged as serious contenders of power game. They participate actively in this game of power to manipulate, deconstruct and to create new traditions. Outspoken Shobha De rightly observes:

Eventually every relationship is a power struggle either on an overt or subliminal level. Control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries. Women’s destinies have been determined largely in that context alone. It is time they were made aware of their potential and power. Man will have to come to terms with woman power. (Shooting from the Hip 112-13)

In literature woman’s desire for economic self-sufficiency is either ostracized socially or ignored completely. But De’s women, realizing that female empowerment is a product of financial independence are very often career-minded personalities. Man’s insistence on economic control emerges from his knowledge of the best way to keep women slaves or paralyzed. De has granted financial freedom to her female creatures. They either earn individually or control the finances of their husbands and
battles to control power. The realization that their power is rooted in their sexuality, it has a potential and it is not a danger, has enabled them to challenge the traditional concept of morality.

Truly, man deems himself God and considers it woman’s obligation to give him all those pleasures that have been snatched from him by God because of her. Docile and mute women are safe and thus they are encouraged to lead a subordinate life. Knowledge and discretion, two significant components of power, rarely become attributes of women. Happy with their imbecility, they remain unconsciously in the periphery while men enthrone themselves in the centre. Further, a self-sufficient woman can never be pleasurable for a man because she can seldom act as a docile servant. Shobha De’s fiction does not reclaim lost treasures of tradition but to move ahead with the changed moods of society. In this respect, Shobha De as a feminist writer often presents an account of her own life’s experience, which enables her readers to be aware of the change in reality. No longer is woman a scrubbing maid and a docile bed-partner. She manipulates to live lavishly by controlling her husband’s sexual urges. The image of man that emerges from Shobha De’s novels is generally negative. A male character is almost invariable portrayed as seducer, exploiter, wife-beater, rapist, torturer, or a cruel and callous husband or a weak character.

Shobha De conforms to the vamp ideology of feminism in the sense that she shows how self-destructive the attempts to achieve liberation have been for her protagonists. It is precisely because of the inherent lopsidedness and orthodoxy of the patriarchal system that perpetuates male-hegemony. De admits of no redemptive formula for the ‘fallen women’ and no millennium for the liberated women. Her women characters who endeavour to liberate themselves often meet with disaster.
Before this happens, they send a whole host of taboos devised by patriarchal order cart wheeling. This is how we should appreciate the crusaders of a different kind like Anjali and Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* and Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights*. Shobha De sees through the male-operated conspiracy of silence that is the sorry lot of Indian women at large. Her women characters act according to the dictates to their own will and defy the farcical codes and phoney mores of the social system.

The bulk of Indian literature claims to be universal but its spirit is patriarchal. It seldom records a woman’s story in its entirety. Shobha De deconstructs the tradition and explores the experiences of women nearly on all her novels. Unlike R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya who have devoted themselves mostly to the portrayal of socio-political reality, Shobha De explores the inner and psychic reality. Her creative venture does not focus the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean but the remaining nine-tenths of it that lie below the surface. She prefers to delve deeper in a character or a scene, rather than going round about it. She prefers the private to the public world. She, as a self-realized and a bold person, writes incessantly projecting the concerns of her true self. She coolly retorts to the provoking reactions on her writings:

> I don’t align myself with anybody; I’m completely independent-as a writer. I don’t have to please anybody so I don’t suck up to anybody. I can do what I want to. I don’t have to care about offending anyone . . . I know what the real self is deep down and I never fool myself. That is my strength. (qtd. in Ashwina Vakil)

Even though there have been a number of presentations of women in the works of other women novelists, De’s image of the woman stands apart from the rest. De’s woman aspires for achieving equality with man in all spheres of life. De boldly
rejects all kinds of subterfuge and communicates the unprintable aspects of woman’s story. R.K. Singh rightly observes about Shobha De:

Women writers like Shobha De are more realistic and down to earth, perhaps more sophisticated in their stand to empowerment of women: they illumine the real human condition: they expose the way girls think and talk to each other when they are alone or in sexual encounters of any kind, and they depict careerist women who are more cautious in using man (as men use women). They assert their feminine desire and sexuality, gender awareness and self-definition, existence and destiny.

(60-61)
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CHAPTER- IV

Feminism in the Novels of Namita Gokhale
FEMINISM IN THE NOVELS OF

NAMITA GOKHALE

In an interview, Anita Desai said that “writing is an effort to discover, and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things” (The Times of India). What Desai said about her own writings applies more pertinently to the works of Namita Gokhale who depicts the Indian woman’s search for identity in a society still dominated by tradition, which tends to treat a woman as a subordinate to her lord and protector—be it the father, brother, husband or son. The Indian women depicted by contemporary women writers deconstruct these images and emerge as individuals challenging socio-cultural ethos. Today it is not easy to make a distinction between the sexes in terms of physical and emotional strength. Both sexes have to constantly prove themselves in this dynamic environment. Therefore, it is absurd for any kind of writing to be entrapped with male dominated issues. The changes being effected are leaving women gloriously free to live as uninhabited human beings.

The woman of today has the courage to express her essentially feminine sensibility, honestly and sincerely. There are certain questions the chief arguments of woman striving to have ‘a room of her own,’ the position of ‘the lonely woman’. “Is woman born or made?” She is striving for a gender justice. Is she a slave? The ‘women experience, ‘the space’ is expanding. The women writers are voicing the pangs, problems and fears of weaker sex. The inner psyche, the gloomy depression, the bruised and broken heart breaks the melancholy loneliness and isolation, the social boycott, the angry agitation, the struggle all have been loudly pronounced. The modern Indian woman has protested against the patriarchal masculine dominion. She is standing on a ‘burning lake’ like Satan of Paradise lost
exclaiming: “What though the field be lost, All is not lost”. (Milton 110). She moves out or rather is thrown out of her Eden Garden, her blissful ‘paradise’, her ‘home’ because she has tasted the mortal fruit, ‘the forbidden fruit of knowledge’ or wisdom. Yet she tries to build a Pandemonium of her own because she understands, “Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven”. (Milton 118) She emerges out of her trauma. She is free, liberated and assertive. Namita Gokhale’s novels show her deep concern for the emancipation of women. She wants them to become aware of their existence as individuals. Namita Gokhale has deconstructed femininity in nearly all her novels. Although, most of her women characters are portrayed as wives, daughters, sisters and mothers, her views regarding feminism find illustration through these characters.

Gokhale’s first novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* written in 1984 was highly acclaimed. It created a stir by its frankness in the early eighties, and pioneered the sexually frank genre which made Shobha De famous. This novel is a fine texture of quest for self-awareness and deconstructing femininity, especially regarding the characters of Paro and Priya, and for its fast moving narratives, controlled purpose, and a style of keen observation, arrival of new characters and quick changes of scenes in the story. The novel presents an agonizing search of a woman for her true-self in a society which is still largely traditional and swayed by cultural and societal prototypes. This novel is a compulsive reading which causes its readers to read it continuously in a sequence of time. It is the first Indian novel in English that accurately captures and depicts the speech of metropolitan, westernized Indians. It is a confessional record of the felt experiences of the narrator Priya. It begins as “a sort of confessional, a diary which eventually became this thing, this novel” (114).
As it portrays the world of modern women in metropolitan cities like Delhi and Bombay, it invites a feminist reading. The following dialogue between B.R. and Priya is worth citing in this context:

“Is it a love story?” he asked teasingly.

“No”, I (Priya) said.

“What is it about, then?”

“Passion, boredom, vanity and jealousy,” I said finally…. 

“Come, love, tell me what it’s really about” he said.

“Liberation,” I hazarded”. (135)

The book is mainly centered around Paro who has a rebellious attitude. Although she asserts her femininity, she does not behave in a masculine way at that time. She has her own vision of freedom. Through the character of Paro, Namita Gokhale has deconstructed the concept of femininity, which aimed at woman to be docile, submissive, modest, and chaste also. She has irresistible charms, is tall, and sexy, green-eyed, passionate, magical in her physical looks. She is attractive, distinctive and mesmerizing. She unashamedly uses her charm as a weapon to win favours from anyone with whom she comes in contact with. On the contrary, Priya is a conventional, traditional girl. She is kind, considerate and caring for others. Paro is presented as a proud, audacious and self-confident, ambitious woman “With an assured cat-like grace” (14). She is the daughter of a retired Brigadier and grows very soon into “so exotic creature” (13) endowed with ravishing sensual looks. She is the only child of middle-aged parents and became “a bother in their well-ordered lives” (31). While in boarding school she had a scandal with an art-teacher and was consequently expelled from the school. When she was in college, she met B.R. who fell for her “like a ton of bricks”(33). B.R., the owner of the company of famous Sita
Sewing Machines and associated with household goods, is a compulsive nymphomaniac. In his office, mostly all the girl employees, as Ivy, Mary and Priya herself, were in love with B.R. Paro’s presence in the office is always hateful for Ivy, Mary and Priya as her eyes marked them and their devotion to B.R. Priya devoted herself to him not only physically but also mentally. But a month later, he got married to Paro, which was a great shock for the girls of the office, especially for Priya as she mentioned: “A month later, he was, married to Paro. It took all of us at the office completely by surprise. I have never forgotten, not forgiven, a hurt. This book, too, is a vindication”(7).

In the book Priya and Paro have been developed as foils to each other. In fact, Paro is Priya’s alter ego. Priya is on her quest for self-identity and desires to have the reflection of Paro in her personality. She dreamt of grace, beauty and harmony. She tries to find fulfillment by adopting the Aristotelian morality of the golden mean, the well beaten path of a mediocre. She marries a person named, Suresh, without love, yet secretly admires and cherishes Paro’s unbridled buoyant eccentricity. As Priya, writes in the beginning of the novel that she was writing about Paro as “I saw myself in her” (5).

In the course of the novel, Priya is obsessed with Paro, and shares a kind of love hate relationship with her. She attended neither the wedding nor the reception therefore. But hearing about her beauty she attended the party in the office. Priya gives a self-confident behaviour and a bold picture of Paro at the marriage party of Paro and B.R., as she did not behave or look like a conventional bride:- “Hi, Daddyji; She said throatily, planting a kiss smack on Rai Bahadur’s forehead” (13). This behaviour of Paro at the very first meeting took Priya’s breath away. Paro was a different bride. Instead of covering her head with a pallav, she stood proud and led
the way with B.R. and his parents trailing after her, besides she was drinking gin, and even winked at B.R. mischievously. Thus Paro revolted against the accepted social norms and tried to get an individuality of her own. Paro’s way of dressing was also unconventional. Unlike a traditional Indian woman who draped a saree, she preferred wearing provocative dresses like “a black sequinned off shoulder Kurta, which left one shoulder completely bare, almost naked”(24). Paro was everything that middle-class girl like Priya wanted to become, thus she was taken as a role model. Priya followed Paro and took up smoking and visiting beauty parlours, but after marriage she had to face the objection of Suresh, her husband and she came back to her role as a domesticated Indian bride. “I realized that my only weapon in an indifferent world was Suresh, and I decided to groom him patiently until my ministrations bore dividends”(26).

But Paro came out of the traditional areas within which a woman is supposed to be confined and succeeded in carving a niche for her in a male dominated society. Thus she fulfilled the concept of a new woman and deconstructed the concept of a ‘bhartiya nari’.

Priya comes from a middle class back-ground. Her marriage with Suresh, a Delhi based lawyer, was arranged. His car in the photograph sent to her decided it for her, even before she met him. He had his own aspirations to keep him busy and had no time for Priya. Her love for B.R. remained unabated, thus she was doomed for a loveless sterile life with Suresh. In this way she tried to assert herself and to make herself complete by receiving love from B.R. what she is not getting from Suresh. That is why, somehow, she also becomes the example of deconstructed femininity. B.R. also reciprocated her love, because like his mother she was very
real. In this extramarital affair Priya received a lot of love and tenderness and is overwhelmed with gratitude.

In Bombay Priya got a chance to see Paro “leaning for support on the arm of a very handsome young man” (24). Later, Priya came to know that Paro had left her husband B.R and her lover was Bucky Bhandpur, a test-cricketer and scion of a princely family and she had a small son from Bucky. Paro was facing many legal problems, against her tenants, landlords, and her father’s will, her divorce etc. Hence she consulted Suresh. After some time when Priya got a chance to meet Paro she noticed: “Life has not tired her-she is undiminished, she has grown” (28). Paro handled a matter of accident so bravely and commandingly that Suresh was filled with admiration: “What a woman, he exclaimed, in sincere admiration” (30).

Paro told Priya about her past and her first sexual encounter with Marcus – her art master. She disclosed her feelings about her rape: “Funny thing is that I wasn’t raped, I loved every moment of it” (33). She was very ambitious. It was clear when she told Priya: “I was good. You know, I was the head girl in my final year. Man, I wanted to be P.M. of India, you know” (31). Further, she told about her marriage, that after her disgrace of her rape her daddy was glad to get Bubu as his son-in-law. “You know, I read somewhere that most women marry the best provider they can stomach. That wasn’t my scene at all”(33).

Paro married B.R. but the marriage was an unsuccessful one. Once she caught B.R., a hunter of beautiful women, with a girl in his bed room and this event changed the very course of her life. She became rebellious. She tells Priya, that “After that, I decided I would pay him back in his own coin. I mean….everyone was in love with me and who do you think could ever love that guy?”(58) This shows her grit and determination. Thus Paro is liberated from marriage and convention. She is
presented as “a real individual”. She has the courage of her convictions. She is not a kept woman. She is free. She becomes the ‘Symbol of and prototype of emancipation and individuality’. She would say theatrically and asserts: “I am myself and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person”(48). She is egocentric so much so that “She loved her body and cried like a baby at the slightest physical hurt”(34) and “she would talk on, compulsively, about herself, always herself” (31). Two other factors which made her what she was, are: her frightening irreverence, and her excessive greedy vitality. She was given to showmanship. The narrator pertinently tells us:

Her fatal flaw was vanity. She loved self-dramatization. I sometimes wondered what she would be like, alone in an empty room; whether she would simply go limp and collapse, or posture and practice for her next encounter.(34)

One evening when Priya and B.R. went for dinner in a restaurant they met Paro. Having returned to Delhi, Priya had to face many questions of Suresh regarding her meeting with B.R., as Paro already had told him everything. Being an understanding husband, Suresh didn’t over react but only tried to make Priya understand; “I trust you absolutely. But even then it is not good for women from good families to be talked about” (44-45). Priya and Suresh were leading a happy life and their happiness assumed a special shape, when they came to know about Priya’s pregnancy for distant relatives wrote to her again. It is the irony of this society that a woman gets importance and happiness only when she is pregnant, and is expected to deliver a boy. But their happiness was very short; Priya got a miscarriage and had to lose her child. The two factors which were chiefly responsible for Priya’s estrangements from her husband are: the miscarriage of her
child, and her husband’s knowledge of her relation with B.R. The bond between her and her husband having severed now they were “two separate people” who “shared only their silences”(90). Priya’s lonely masquerading passion served a deeper purpose in her life of self-discovery. She began to write her memoirs on papers, which consisted of her relationship with B.R., Paro and Suresh. She vomited all her present and past feelings to have a light heart and to discover her self-individuality. So her boredom and loneliness converted into a form of this book. But one day, Paro came to consult some case to Suresh, and searched for a towel and by chance she got those papers in a drawer and discovered the realities of Priya’s heart. She caused them Suresh to see, by which he realized his place and B.R’s place in the life of his wife. That was the end of the foundation of their marriage, which is ‘Belief’ for every couple. Initially, she couldn’t tolerate their comments and their intimacy, so she decided to leave the house. Priya decided to go to her bhaiya. Her quest for being a personality like Paro in B.R’s life, and her fate brought her away from the husband and home. She was completely broken hearted. It was very clear from this narration;

I didn’t eat for two days after that; I just lay in bed, doing nothing, waiting for the doorbell to ring. I was sure that somebody or something would miraculously intervene to save me from this living death. I was engulfed by insecurity and terror. (130)

She was so disturbed in her life that she tried to commit suicide twice but escaped and fate once again brought her to B.R. He told her about his remarriage to Maryann Rutherford. She was filled with remorse by thinking about her actual identity that “I am an Indian woman,… for me my husband is my God”(129). The next day Priya comes to know through magazine about Paro’s wedding with Laukas Leoras, a
homosexual Greek film director. Priya was surprised at Paro’s daring and unpredictable act of marriage. She telephoned Suresh to have a permission to go back to him. Suresh also wanted to give it a try again.

Once again Paro returned in the life of everyone like Bucky, Junior, Lenin and his pregnant wife etc. In this meeting B.R. and his wife were also there. In the presence of B.R. Paro ignored everyone and B.R. did not pay attention to his wife. Everyone was very much shocked at their behaviour and Lenin saw them in the bedroom. She told B.R:- “I feel like a cat on a hot tin roof; I’m in heat; I need a man! And Loukas, as we all know, is a woman” (145). On a slight objection by Lenin she replied boldly and frankly: “Why, can’t a woman feel horny?”(146). Priya took Paro for a drive, suddenly they met an accident in which Priya was safe but Paro was injured badly almost deadly. She had broken some teeth and jaw and Paro’s one leg was plastered. She could not tolerate such pitiable condition. Then she made her ultimate attempt of suicide by trying to cut her wrists with the fruit knife. Her life that of a fairy tale cannot be perpetuated forever. Disgusted and disillusioned she put an end to her life. A woman was always supposed to keep herself beautiful so that she could be a desirable object for her lord.

In the traditional patriarchal set up, women are desirable and beautiful only if they are mild, submissive, un-protesting and self-sacrificing. Child bearing and rearing and keeping house for her husband were the unquestionable tasks a woman had to perform. Failure in these leads to rebuke and even rejection. This was also due to clever manipulation of roles by males who ensured that women were kept in subordination. With the surge of feminism in the sixties emerged the “New Woman”, radically different from her predecessor, the traditional woman. This New Woman is resourceful, aggressive, confident, dynamic, and assured, re-defining
herself and her identity, and dealing with the world on her own terms. Namita Gokhale in her novels too has sketched women characters who present the concept of New Women. Paro denies authority, traditions, social codes and all those things which force a woman to live a life of subordination.

Paro is neither chaste nor submissive, and since deconstructionists allow all conventions to be arbitrary and not final, the concepts of femininity having been assigned by male dominated society, this concept can be deconstructed. In the character of Paro a new woman can be seen, as she has the conviction to defy all social and moral codes and live life on her own terms. She has a power to draw man with “the magnetisms of her moonlike body”(54). She can twist “everybody around her little finger”(61). In the wide orbit of Paro, not only B.R., but there is a long list of admirers; Bucky Bhandpur, test cricketer and a son of a princely family, Lenin, Marxist, son of a Cabinet Minister, the fat and sinister Shambhu Nath Mishra, the member of Congress party; Loukas Leoras, homosexual Greek film director, even very nearly, Suresh, a distinguished lawyer husband of the narrator. As a rebellious lady she uses her vital physical assets to entrap the men she comes in contact in her life and wrap them “as completely as a banana skin”(145). Even after her death her character compels the other characters to miss her and love her so much. There was a void in Priya’s life without her and she herself couldn’t imagine a world without Paro. Everyone was moved by her sudden death. Suresh answered Priya straightforwardly when Priya asked: “‘Suresh, where exactly was Paro’s body burnt?’ ‘In the raised pyre, the V.I.P one’, he replied matter-of-factly”(160).

Paro, the victim of circumstances becomes strong, dominating, un-subdued, irresistible enchantress casting her charms over all who come in her contact. Even in her death she is victorious-the same free, daring, going on her own way and
powerful. From the beginning to the end she is defiant, free and un-subdued before circumstances. Paro’s dominating personality, her free and frank confessions, her daring and bold behaviour and actions, her bewitching beauty and magnetism overpower even the narrator. Paro exercises an irresistible attraction for Priya. In the presence of Paro she feels herself dwarf. The thought that every male coming in her contact is in external bondage to Paro, hurts her. So consistent is Paro’s charm on her that she feels herself Paro, imitating her words and gestures unconsciously. Priya herself admits-

Gradually she (Paro) became an obsession for me. Subconsciously I would find myself mouthing her words; phrases that were not mine would spell unsuspecting from my lips; gestures that were hers would enact themselves involuntary mine. For example, I would throw back my head in a deep throaty laugh and my eyes would narrow in a pale shadow of her piercing gaze. (16)

Priya suffers from the intense desire to be as assertive and independent as Paro, the fine, polished and powerful lady who was not meant only to cook food and look after the family. She even joins as “encounter group” which proposes to give dramatic performances. In that play she is given the role of Clytemnestra which she delightfully accepts because in that role she completely feels herself fit and identifies herself with that woman. She tells Priya:

This Clytemnestra is a passionate and strong woman with this creepy husband. So she kills him, so her son kills her. It’s because of the social frame work. You know, all the fucking freedom of men, and none for women; so she has no other outlet for her frustrated intelligence. She’s a very enigmatic character just like me. (105)
She tells, Priya about her “search” most eloquently:

And so, one day I was all alone in the flat, I looked at myself in the mirror. ‘Who are you, Paro?’ I asked myself. And I knew I didn’t know. So I started looking for myself again, deciding to follow wherever my search took me. (103-04)

Paro identifies herself with Clytemnestra simply to realize her potential, her true self and sort out “all the contradictions in my own life” (105).

This is the feminist consciousness of Namita Gokhale. Paro is the prototype of her image of an emancipated woman manipulating the patriarchal rules to her advantage and asserting her individuality to wield power on men. Paro is a complete social comedy with its stunningly beautiful heroine trying to ride over society with the sheer power of her sexuality. Men run after her and she dominates and enslaves them. The following conversation between her and Priya when the latter asks her how she is surviving shows her self confidence as well as her attitude towards men:

‘Stocks, shares, family property – the occasional sale of some jewellery’. She replied airily. ‘And, of course Babu settled some property on me after our marriage. The rent is enough for my simple needs’.

‘But is that right? I mean, you left him, don’t you feel funny using his money?’ I would persist.

‘Look, sweetie’, she would say, her eyes darkening, ‘they made the rules.’ (35)

Paro knew the power that she wielded on men and went ahead to dominate them. One after another from the powerful circle fell victim to her charms. Paro tells Priya that she has cultivated her personality in such a manner that everyman feels a
sense of pride while serving her and that she does not require to say “Thank You.” It was just emotional blackmail I said:

‘Oh, No!’ “She replied ‘it is a part of being a beautiful woman. It’s a full time occupation.’ ‘And much harder work than it seems but nodding sagely it has its rewards I confess, I wished I was the kind of woman who could say things like that. (61)

Paro has been playing a self-assigned role throughout her life not uselessly. Her passion means to lead her to self-discovery. She herself says-“oh, I’m doing it in an attempt to, you know, find myself. I mean, I’ve spent the last umpteen years fucking the men in my life and getting fucked myself in the process”(103). Thus it is very clear that Paro has a different attitude to things and situations. She revolts against the moral and social codes which have the purpose of identification of a woman in the society. She rebels, rejects and seeks freedom from traditional norms and the way of life.

The new woman as portrayed by Namita Gokhale in the character of Paro has the grit to have a child whose father is unknown, leaves a husband and stays in an open adulterous relationship and then leaves her lover to stay with another man Lenin. Lenin is much younger to her. Feminine and societal norms thus stand flaunted. Paro may be called a loose woman by conventional standards but deconstruction does not permit this as there is no final meaning in anything. According to psychologists, the kind of unbridled sexual behaviour as displayed by Paro is a sign of wanting to castigate men folk. She wanted to pay back men in their own coin. No doubt she was victimized in her rape but she said that she loved every moment of it. Rape is a ghastly act, which destroys a person mentally as well as emotionally, but the fact that she enjoyed it, on the one hand shows that she is a
woman with loose morals who has no sense of shame in admitting that she enjoyed it. On the other hand, the fact that she enjoyed it shows that the notion of rape stands deconstructed. However, *Paro; Dreams of Passion*, does not attempt to turn the value-system of male-dominated society upside down. Though in this novel Namita Gokhale satirizes the preoccupation with women’s bodies as objects; but at the same time they celebrate those bodies.

Namita Gokhale, in her novels, has tried to illustrate how a woman can use her power to create a space for her existence. In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother (1994)*, Namita Gokhle creates a world which is dominated by women characters, where men play as supporters and performers of secondary roles. This novel was written in the year 1994, after a short break of her writings, and consists of superstition, religion, love, hatred and sex.

Gudiya, the protagonist and the narrator of the story tells it in the first person with frankness and candour and often in a brutally straightforward manner reflecting her insecurities as her life changes constantly. Gudiya is told that they were very rich once as her mother and grandmother were prostitutes but from those great heights of life Gudiya’s world plunges into the depth of almost complete penury. Gudiya’s pale-gold skin had been endowed to her by some Afghan forbear or phirangi customer of her mother’s, she often thought of the Englishman who might have been her father. She did not even know who her father was, and neither for a fact, did her mother or grandmother. Gudiya, her mother and grandmother fled from small town scandal and disgrace. As Gudiya’s mother later ran away with Riyasuddin Rizvi, a beggar, she has been left in the company of Ammi, her grandmother. On their arrival to Delhi, it seemed that all had been lost, but her grandmother kept a slab of green marble stolen from the building site, five rounded pebbles and flowers from a
Sahib’s green garden and then, she transformed the place beneath the holy peepal into a worshiping place and also added her sweet singing voice and at last she changed her identity.

Ammi tackled Sundar Pahalwan with ease, who claimed his territorial rights over the stretch of pavement which was being used by Ammi for her jhuggi. Ammi rebuked Sundar Pahalwan: “I am the widow of Brahmin, my husband was a priest, guard your tongue or else a virtuous woman’s curses may follow you!” (12). Sundar again came the following week to take his cash. But he was surprised to find Ammi singing a bhajan in front of “a statue of Durga astride a tiger under a glittering canopy”(12) with a band of worshippers assembled around the shrine. The result was that Sundar was completely overpowered by Ammi’s religious aura and realized that it would be mutually beneficial if he joined hands with her. Thus he shared in the prosperity of the temple from that day. It is clear that in order to attain sainthood, Ammi very cleverly manipulated the social machinery for her own profit.

Now she was the owner of the new shrine, so she changed her identity completely. As such, she abandoned her burqua and placed it in her trunk along-with sequined ghararas and beaded reticules. She never took to bhajan - singing but managed to give a new texture to her “honeyed voice”(12) as she uttered “Arre Rama, Rama Rama”,(12) without difficulty. Soon people passing by stopped there and offered coins to the deity. And it increased day by day. They had no neighbours there except Shambhu from the tea stall, and slumlord, Sundar Pahalwan.

Gudiya got admission in the St. Jude’s Academy for the socially handicapped, which was considered ‘as good as a mission school’. Shambhu was very eager and felt proud of increasing Gudiya’s knowledge but on the contrary her grandmother considered it a wastage of time and money, as a girl should be a good
cook and the ultimate goal of her life is to marry a respectable man. Magoo, one of the younger women in the site, was attracted towards Shambhu’s charms. But when her husband Saboo came to know their relationship, he hacked off her head with an axe and then smashed a rock upon Shambhu’s head and killed him too. He clarified reason of killing is his self-respect; “Once upon a time we were mighty warriors. Now they call us criminals. But we can still kill for our honour!” (19). It is a simple truth that if man is having an affair woman has to surrender all her weapons and tolerate her husband’s behaviour silently but if woman has an affair she will be killed by her husband or in other way she has to suffer whole life.

On the grave of Shambhu, Gudiya and her grandmother got thirty two gold sovereigns, heavy, shining and weighted with the power of wealth. Ammi handled men in such a tactful way that she soothed and calmed Saboo easily after he had murdered Shambu. Master at the art of survival she trusted some retribution had overtaken her when she found herself on the wrong side of law. Her finger prints were found on the axe with which Saboo killed Shambhu, so she was arrested. However, at least a hundred people rallied in support of the spiritual lady Ammi, while Ammi sat “silently with her prayer beads, her ferocious scowl igniting her whole being into a Kali like picture of wrath”(24-25).

Saboo’s violent remorse forced him to make an emotional long confession that her grandmother was a most holy woman. Ammi’s skill is further evident when a man from the Municipal Corporation arrived with the demolition order for the pucca cement structure which housed Ammi and Gudiya. Seeing the aura of a spiritual lady Ammi he fell at her feet begging her for forgiveness for his blasphemy. It was whispered that she was hundred years old, that she knew magical spells that could change the sex of an unborn child. The man who spat in the direction of the
temple was bitten by a scorpion. Shambhu the tea-stall owner, found a wallet full of cash in the bench outside his tea stall, where Ammi and Gudiya had their first cup of tea on setting foot in Delhi. Everyone knew that the will of the God was on their side. All people linked with Ammi and the temple felt overwhelmed and gave credit for their good fortune to Ammi.

Whomever Ammi showered her blessings and set her benign eyes on, prospered. Thus we see that Ammi despite her age and being a Muslim defies social codes and becomes a Hindu God mother under whom the temple thrived and progressed and gained in stature. Had it not been for Ammi’s tact, Gudiya and she would have starved, after Gudiya’s mother who was the only earning member in the family, had decamped with Riyasuddin Rizvi, a beggar. Thus the new women in Ammi had the skill and courage to survive by crossing religious boundaries. In this way religious boundaries stand deconstructed and so do the limits of woman’s power and constraints of age. Afterwards, Grandmother began to ignore Gudiya in the process of seeking spirituality:

My grandmother began to believe in God. She took to fasting four days a week. Even when she was not fasting, she would eat just fruits and nuts and sometimes a little yogurt. She took a vow of silence, and remained completely mute for a month, crouched silently in a corner of the temple, stubborn eyes resisting any question or answers or any kind of communication with anyone. (27)

Thus we see that Ammi at her age behaved as a religious woman. Though she was originally only playing a role for economic reasons. Besides Ammi shows her skills as a manager, as she administered the temple with an iron hand. Everything had to be perfect. The band of believers, who had surrendered
themselves to Ammi’s wisdom, had specific chores that constituted the daily life of the temple assigned to them. Phoolwati, the widow of Shambhu, began to handle the cash of the temple. Lila, an old lady, who was the centre of hatred to Phoolwati accepted the major burden of the temple workload with full devotion. Every morning Phoolwati “escorted an assortment of accident victims, convalescents, and chronic hypochondriacs” (47). Ammi had to resort to morning darshans. Legend spread that: Ammi could heal with a look. The more vigorously Ammi rebutted and disclaimed her healing powers the more the people believed they were in the right hands. Such were Ammi’s skills. Even Pandit Kailash Shastry, the scholarly person, well versed in rituals, met Ammi only once but held the view that Ammi was an extraordinary woman with remarkable siddhis. He believed that if the dust from her mind settled on an ordinary mortal like him, he would become a better and cleverer man. Ammi achieved this miracle by resorting to silence and vague generalizations. Only Lila, who was privy to Ammi’s long silence and had some knowledge of Hindu rituals, managed to retain communication with Ammi. Ammi elicited dog like devotion from Lila. By the passage of time Ammi became a saint and the embodiment of Shakti. Pandit Kailash Shastry was asked about the Kundli of Ammi, but he replied that great souls like Ammi had no past or future, so it would be sacrilege of his part to talk about her past, as she was a saint and the embodiment of Shakti.

With Phoolwati, Sundar Pahalwan and Pandit Shastry on her side, the temple prospered and Ammi achieved her desired objective, i.e. to turn the temple into a commercially viable venture. After having achieved her aim she increased her abstractions, silence, detachment and inexplicable remoteness thereby lending a mystical charm and aura to her personality. This may have been an astute way to
hide her own lack of knowledge of the Hinduism and to attract a large number of devotees to her, which further enhanced the popularity of the temple. Ammi knew that any slip on her part would destroy all that she had built. Ammi was fully aware that without Pundit and Sundar on her side it would be not easy for her to survive in this male dominated society. Ammi’s remarkable powers must have influenced them too thus they most certainly would have realized that being associated with her and the temple would be a profitable venture. Ammi had perceived this weakness of the Pandit only due to her deep insight into human nature as a result of her vast experience in dealing with humanity. Ammi single handedly turned a mere shrine into a thriving temple complex with twelve hundred yards of constructed land. Thus Ammi used her acquired virtue and silence to successfully manipulate a male dominated society.

On Ammi’s death there was a stampede. The police had to be called in to control the mob. It seemed these people had come not out of curiosity but genuine sorrow. Ammi’s death and burial were reported in the Evening News and a vernacular magazine sent a journalist and a photographer to cover the event. In order to increase the earnings of the temple Panditji declared her a saintly woman. Gudiya clarified about the death of her grandmother that:

The public, who were by now thronging the temple precincts,
informed that my grandmother had not died, which was something mere mortals did. She had attained maha-samadhi, by voluntarily relinquishing her consciousness to the larger universe. (74)

Since Ammi had attained maha - samadhi it was decided that she would be buried in the temple premises in a lotus position, as was usual in such a case. About Ammi, Phoolwati stated that she had lost her guru. The fanatic fervour of Lila’s
grief unnerved everyone. She broke away from the mob and rushed to the side of the pit in which Ammi was to be buried. Lila’s family made a half hearted attempt to persuade her but after she threw her gold chain and bangles into Ammi’s grave they lost interest in her. This is the experience of many old people in our society today. Lila, in a state of extreme shock remained immobile for the entire period of formal mourning. Ammi was buried as a saint and this added to the sanctity of the temple. With Ammi’s rise, all people connected with her also gained in status and wealth, such was the business acumen of Ammi.

Another woman character of the novel that exhibits the traits of a new woman and sets to deconstruct the traditional concept of femininity is Phoolwati. Phoolwati, the widow of the murdered tea-shop owner Shambhu, had a commanding personality and better business sense than her husband. She very shrewdly set-up another stall just outside the temple having items like incense, marigold garlands, coconuts and little brass amulets. She got some photographs of Ammi clicked and for just two rupees each coloured postcards of Ammi with Om printed on it were for sale outside the temple. Phoolwati’s farsightedness and business sense can also be seen by the fact that she managed to procure a loud-speaker to broadcast evening bhajans of Ammi. She had very intelligently taped audio-cassettes of Ammi’s bhajans which were played when Ammi was feeling eccentric and inward and refused to sing. Later, after the death of Ammi, these proved to be invaluable in keeping the regular congregation from falling. Again she displayed tremendous business acumen when the offerings of flowers and coconut that piled up in the temple were taken back to her shop and recycled them to the next batch of devotees, thus increasing her profit many folds. She even appropriated a basketful of coconuts, which were offered as oblations on the death of grandmother, to be sold as relics.
She negotiated a heavy discount with Shiv Mohan band for the ceremony of placing Ammi’s statue. It was equally due to her skills that the temple soon thrived.

In Phoolwati’s calm confidence there was something so unyielding that everyone fell in line with her certainly and did not question her further. She was loyal towards grandmother and temple as all aspects of temple administration, including funds were under her charge. She found Bhuroo, the leper establishing quite a following under the mango tree by playing his flute; she flew into panic and declared astutely that she herself would lead the evening bhajans. On her debut when she picked up the mike she was a star. “Her infectious smile, her energy, her spontaneity, all communicated themselves to her audience. The off scale notes did not seem to matter. It was a miracle of sorts”. (122)

Phoolwati very tactfully handled Sundar Pahalwan and Pandit Kailash Shastry. Her ingenuity and wit was abundantly apparent when she asked Panditji to dig up behind the peepal tree to recover the treasure, which Saboo had inadvertently dug up and which grandmother had hidden. She engineered a dream in which she said that Ammi told her that she wanted Sundar to build a shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva. She said this very convincingly in a waverly and garbled voice that resembled Ammi’s just to make him believe. She again stated that Ammi had ordered her to make Sundar start digging as soon as possible. It was the sense of adventure that drove her to the frenzied and incessant planning than the financial consideration. It was not without reason that Ammi called her an incarnation of Durga for she was not afraid of anything. Pandit Kailash Shastry told her that her Kundali was too strong to accommodate any man therefore she would not even have a son. Even when her husband Shambhu tried to beat her after getting drunk she beat him instead and taught him some manners. This marks the reversal of the patriarchal norm of
wife-beating. Shambhu’s murder does not evoke the traditional wailing from Phoolwati.

Sundar had become her ardent admirer and partner in her various enterprises. The peremptory way she dealt with Sundar was praiseworthy. She very boldly used the art of deceiving the deceiver and dictated her terms and conditions when Sundar proposed marriage to her. After Shambhu’s death she realized that to carry on her business, she must have a husband and that in a mercantile society marriage market was heavily biased in favour of men. A widowed woman running a tea-stall might have sent the signal that she was a weak woman who could be prevailed upon easily. So, she practically entered into a contract marriage with Sundar. Her first condition was that Sundar had to build a pucca house for her, the ownership of which would irrevocably be hers. Second, he had to allow her to continue her running her business as before. Third, he had to treat Gudiya as their adopted daughter. In this way she secured her future after marriage.

The demands placed by Phoolwati for marriage make it clear that she is in the true sense of the word a new woman, who knows what she is entering into and she does not let emotions dominate her judgment. The terms and conditions normally come from men, but Phoolwati reverses the norms of society. Thus we see that Namita Gokhale though not an avowed feminist does bring about a reversal of roles by displaying Phoolwati’s domineering stature. In their marital relationship Phoolwati dominates her husband. However one day Sundar in a bad mood snapped at Phoolwati but she did not protest. This way Namita Gokhale seems to suggest that all men tend to treat women as their belongings and all women accept this treatment as Phoolwati did, in spite of her fiercely independent nature.
At her early age of thirteen only, Gudiya got her womanhood. Her grandmother was very upset at that incidence and she started behaving with her in a strange manner. In fact, from that time the irrepressible Phoolwati became an unlikely guardian for Gudiya. Her dignity, perseverance, wisdom and goodness gave stability to Gudiya’s quest for self-identity as a woman. Truly, Gudiya regained all her mother’s and grandmother’s love in abundant measure in Phoolwati’s love and warm embraces. With the physical growth, Gudiya’s quest for her real-identity also developed. She wanted to change even her name as she was not at all a doll. She ultimately named herself as Pooja Abhimanyu Singh. After the death of grandmother it was Phoolwati who brought Gudiya with her old tin trunk. Gudiya felt herself very comfortable and secure with Phoolwati and also she had an improved and positive attitude for herself because Phoolwati provided every possible facility for her to improve her personality. This was also perhaps due to the fact that Phoolwati herself had no family and was childless and her instinct of motherhood was satisfied by looking after Gudiya. Roxanne, the principal of the missionary school, was the only good person Gudiya had encountered, she had encouraged Gudiya to trust in herself. But in her company too, Gudiya felt the absence of Phoolwati’s real love and warmth.

Once, Gudiya crept out of the hut and went to the edge of an unknown park. A handsome boy, but good for nothing, with white horse helped her to come out of that dusty park. By chance, Gudiya again got an opportunity to meet that very handsome boy with white horse and he hoisted up her beside him on the horse left her on the temple gate. This very handsome boy Kalki had stolen Gudiya’s heart. Pandit Kailash Shastry defined Kalki, the scourge of the Kalyug. One day, Kalki himself came to Phoolwati’s house and brought Gudiya to a marriage party as he
was in a band group. Gudiya instantly agreed to go, where Kalki established physical relations with her. Being an intelligent woman, Phoolwati understood the whole situation, when Gudiya returned late at night with her torn kurta. Gudiya got so infatuated by him that she got pregnant. She was also a member of the inner-circle of those who ran the temple. With an illegitimate child she could have damaged the respectability of everyone. At this point Phoolwati’s knowledge of how reputation and moral values operate in the mercantile society came to Gudiya’s rescue. Since it was considered essential that the unborn child must have the name of a father, Phoolwati, with the help of Sundar Pahalwan forced Kalki into marrying Gudiya. In order to save the child from the stigma of illegitimacy, they were engaged the next day in the temple compound. In the meanwhile Phoolwati also married Sundar Pahalwan, who proved himself a great husband.

After marriage Kalki’s behaviour had changed into subdued decorous. He was in the habit of borrowing money from her. Gudiya discovered about Kalki that he was an orphan and his parents had lived together without benefit of matrimony and that his mother had died. In spite of knowing everything about his life, Gudiya hoped that one day they would get some sort of harmony with each other. But she soon got tired and depressed by Kalki’s coarse nature. In the conjugal life of Gudiya, she is a sufferer of male-dominated society, where men shout, criticize, abuse, bully and hurt, and the women listen and tolerate his misconduct to make her marital life better. Gudiya wanted to revolt as she remarked, “but my spirit, by some inexplicable alchemy of nature, was restored. I resolved to find a way out of the intolerable situation”(217). Finally, he abandoned her and her daughter to make a life for himself in the world of films. Phoolwati brought Gudiya out of it but the damage had already been done and she was jilted by her husband.
Gudiya considered herself beautiful and the thought exhilarated her. She wanted to enter the world of glamour and marry the Prime Minister’s son and become the richest woman in the world. In her dissatisfaction with her environment and ambition to become rich and famous she becomes insecure and finally was left to lead her life alone. She is a rebel, but she does not have the patience to study how the social system works in order to manipulate it to her advantage. This was also because in her teens no one was there to guide her except grandmother who in her battle of survival in a society dominated by religious and gender biases distanced herself from the world as well as Gudiya. All these factors combined to shape Guidya’s destiny. Gudiya did not realize that in a male-dominated mercantile society, over ambitious women are destined to face doom unless they master the business laws which govern such a society. Her quest for self-identity is an unending process, which has both physical and emotional aspect. The search for identity of Gudiya, actually represents the reader’s search for awareness and possibilities to overcome sufferings in one’s life. After the departure of Kalki, she was on the stage of having a quest for her real and self-actualization. She remarked, “Why had I been so afraid of Kalki? Why had I let him beat and abuse me as I had done?” (224)

This novel gives the picture of the marginalization of Indian women at the hands of their husbands. In the case of Gudiya and Kalki, there is no understanding between the two. It seems that Gudiya has just a formal relationship with Kalki. Due to the cruel and egoistic attitude of Kalki, intimacy between the husband and wife is lacking. Kalki treats her as a matter, a mere object subjected to his own will. Besides being an obedient wife of Kalki, Gudiya has independent thoughts and she wants to choose her own ways of life.
Gudiya proves herself that she is a survivor and the novelist ends the story with an optimistic attitude of the protagonist. Even Gudiya is left by everyone as her grandmother, her mother, Sundar Pahalwan, Roxanne, her teacher and also her husband Kalki, but she realizes that: “the end of the world is nowhere in sight” (240). She thought:

When enough time passes, and the dust settles on those troubled memories, perhaps I shall be able to embellish them with a veil of fabulism and mystery. Rendering the past acceptable, if not accountable, is a talent I inherited from my Ammi. (239-40)

Like the other protagonists of Namita Gokhale’s novels, Gudiya also learns, not only to broaden her experiences, but also to protest powerfully. After the death of grandmother she loses all her near and dear ones, but she does not lose courage. For, her life is not a waste but it is a progression towards the higher consciousness. Finally, at the end of the novel Gudiya is able to find out her true self by her hard and cruel experiences. It is suitable to the other female characters also i.e. grandmother, Phoolwati etc. as Phoolwati also remains alone when Sunder Pahalwan died but she faces the hardship of life bravely. Grandmother, who besides being a prostitute initially and having no man to help her, is capable enough to survive in this highly competitive world and to reach to the heights of spirituality on the bases of her own ability and inner-self. Lord Krishna exhorts Arjun in the Bhagvada Gita:

Know then yourself, know your true self to be God and one with the self of all others; know your soul to be portion of God. Live in what you know; live in the self, live in your supreme spiritual nature, be united with God and Godlike.(qotd. in Aurobindo 101-02)
In the novel, the complexity of relationship between feminism, materialism and existentialism are revealed and also there is resolution of some difficulties, suffered by an individual female protagonist, which is somewhat, a tentative and unconvincing attempt. The novel is a fine example of the assertion and courage of women to exist in a hostile world which, at every step, tries to smother the identity of women. Joan Rockwell was right when he said: “fiction is not only a representation of social, but also a necessary functional part of social control, and also paradoxically, an important element in social change” (4).

Being a Kumauni by birth Namita Gokhale spent her early childhood in Nainital. Her personality as a woman or as a Kumauni Brahmin girl seems to be reflecting in most of her novels. In *A Himalayan Love Story (1996)*, the protagonist Parvati is a Brahmin girl of Himalayan area. This novel has been divided into two parts. The first part *Parvati: The Dance of The Honeybee* signifies Kumauni culture where the male bees are short-lived and never collect pollen and who have no other responsibilities in connection with providing for their children. Female bees do all the work of nest making and provisioning. The second part *Mukul: Dreams of Reason* is related to Mukul Nainwal and his reminiscences.

The story begins with the sense of emptiness, uncertainties, privations, agonies, cruelties and frustration in the life of Parvati from her childhood itself. Parvati’s mother had been married at the age of thirteen. Her father had been from a well-to-do family of Almorah. Very soon he spent all his money and property on gambling and other addictions. So when he needed money for his treatment of tuberculosis he failed to collect it and died without treatment. Now Parvati’s and her mother’s only living relative was her mother’s stepbrother, who was the principal of a school in Nainital and a humourless and mean man. He despised them and they
returned the feeling. Though he gave them no reason for hatred and had been unfailing in execution of his duties by providing them the house to live and also allow them to collect rent from the Kirana shop for their living. Parvati’s uncle Hirananda Joshi wanted her to get educated, but like the other protagonists of Namita Gokhale she is also a victim of narrow mentality of the society, regarding the existence of a woman. Her illiterate mother considered her education as wastage of money. Her attitude is evident from these lines by Parvati: “She would complain bitterly about the cost of books and uniforms, although the actual school fees were of course heavily subsidized”(6).

For her mother it would have been different had Parvati been a boy, as then she would be able to provide for her in old age. Her attitude towards her daughter shows to what extent daughters are considered as mere responsibilities that have to be borne. Perhaps Parvati’s mother was an optimistic one which is clear from her words:

Perhaps masterji is right Parvati, she said “your education might turn out to be of some use after all. Look at the post master’s daughter; She’ll get into service soon. You could become a teacher.(10)

This statement defines her quest for her self identity through her daughter. Hirananda Joshi did not take care of his step sister so the two of them were taking care of each other at the time of difficulty when a tiger was on prowl. The tiger can be taken as a symbol of danger posed by outside forces, against which women protected women. This is further substantiated by the vocation of bee-keeping, which the hill folk indulged in, in order to sustain themselves. In that process Parvati’s mother realized the importance of education for Parvati and Parvati got a lot of knowledge of female bees, social bees and solitary bees. The title of the very first section The Dance
of the Honey – Bee is loaded with multiple meanings. It is indicative of the freedom of sexual choice that Parvati’s mother yearns for. The author is able to draw a very interesting parallel between Parvati’s mother and the queen honey-bee in terms of sexual rendezvous. As narrated in the following lines:

Bees interested me, particularly the segregation of the sexes and the clear demarcation of their roles. I could make sense of it and relate it to my surroundings. Our Pahari men were always crowding around the local tea shops, playing cards or purposefully spitting out tobacco. They were the drones who gratefully left the labour to their women, the thin, hardy ghasyarans who balanced incredible heights of fodder and fuelwood on their heads. (10-11)

By force of circumstances, and to quench her physical thrust as well as to maintain a better life style her mother moved into a physical relationship with Shrikrishnji, their tenant, the kirana store owner. Like the honey bee, she also wants to explore her identity by the relentless use of Shrikrishnji’s masculinity, bereft of any love and attachment. Parvati’s mother was in fact a new woman, who had the gumption to have an illicit relationship, to satisfy her needs. Parvati was shocked when she watched them together:

They seemed very happy and intimate together. There was a lot of tickling and giggling and laughter. The shopkeeper extracted a liquor bottle from his coat pocked and glugged a good part of it down. Then, only half-jokingly, he offered it to mother. To my absolute horror, she took it, and, giggling like a school girl, actually put it to her lips and drank. (16)
With Shrikrishanjani in her life many changes took place in her mother’s attitude and in her looks. She discarded her usual frugality, her skin regained the sheen and wrinkles around her eyes vanished and her gait changed. As a widow her mother was struggling with her sexuality. What had been a beautiful part of married life was not present in her life now. Widowed women tend to become almost obsessed with thoughts of sex. Desperately missing a husband’s companionship, a woman feels certain emptiness and tends to indulge in self pity. Having no way out, the source of struggle is self pity. So Parvati’s mother failed to be happy in her life and to flow positive and cheerful attitude in her daughter’s life too. Further tyrannical cultural and society antiquated norms did decide Parvati’s destiny. As a child she was a victim of want and deprivation. Facing hardships in every way and being illiterate her mother neglected Parvati. Parvati had to do the chores which her mother herself did not do as she was a Brahmin and not a ghasyaran and her brother was an educated man, the Principal of a school. She however did not mind if her daughter did the same. In addition to this she watched her mother with Shrikrishnji in a very questionable position. All these factors pushed her further and further into schizophrenia. When Shrikrishnji went to Bombay sudden changes took place in her mother’s outer appearance. She seemed older and thinner:

My mother was looking feverish, she was coughing, there was a wheezy edge to her voice when she spoke. She looked nervous and unsure of herself… when the doctor returned from Haldwani it was diagnosed that she had tuberculosis. (20)

She had T.B. that indicated her departure from this world to another. Parvati like Gudiya was at the age of puberty when her life changed as a result of her mother’s death. Then Parvati moved to Nainital to her bachelor uncle’s cottage, who
merely took her as a responsibility he had to take care of. There she continued her studies. Parvati on the pretext of taking history tuitions had an affair with her tutor, Salman Siddiqui.

Here we find author Namita Gokhale deconstruct feminism – a man desires a woman for physical charm and a woman wants a man for financial and social security which has been effectively rebutted. Reversing the pattern, Parvati appreciates his sensuality “I first saw Salman and I was dazzled by his beauty” (23).

The author’s use of the word “beauty” clearly reflects the writer’s desire to appreciate the aesthetic and sensual aspect of unadulterated male beauty devoid of any social construction of ‘masculine charm’. Money and power make a man desirable, not his physical attributes. She refuses to assign the traditional role of a provider to Salman, and quite uncharacteristically views him solely as a sexual partner. Parvati aptly remarks:

Salman attacked my sari blouse and began pulling at the hooks with urgency so total that my blouse fell open almost of its own accord. By now my entire body was afire, all discretion had abandoned me. I clung desperately to him. The searing look in his eyes cleft all the way into my soul. (24)

The point that a very important attribute of ‘feminine sexuality; that is, unabashed adulation of sensuality is not a male prerogative alone, has been, successfully charted out here. It bears a close resemblance with a controversial scene in Women in Love, where women are seen appreciating the sensuality of a nude sculpture of a black man. This reversal of stereotype negates the so called biological programming and it deconstructs feminism. Parvati says that she never imagined that the human body could be an instrument of such delight.
According to Nancy Chodorow, “Heterosexual fantasy and desire also have an individual component, a private heterosexual eroticism that contrasts with specifies further, the cultural norm”. (772). This is called ‘personal myth’ by Ernst Kris. It is this ‘personal myth’ or ‘individual component’ that impels Parvati to lust for a young Muslim without being intimidated by the social constructs of feminine behaviour. Driven with desire, she loses her virginity to him without having any so called ennobling emotion of love or commitment to marriage. She does not feel the pangs of puritan guilt. Salman’s departure leaves no dents in her being. As Parvati aptly remarks: “I was stoic, even relieved, about his departure…. My encounters with Salman had quelled some silent hunger within me”(31).

Thus, the ‘predominance of ‘personal myth’ over ‘cultural norm’ in Parvati exhibits her sexually liberated self. She admits; “We were playing a shadow game, and the most precious ingredient of our passion was that both of us sensed that it was not permanent” (29).

After Salman’s departure she came to know of his affair with an Anglo-Indian nurse at the Ramsay hospital and he left for Bombay and then to America forever. However, Namita Gokhle’s statement that Parvati feels a “belated shame “and a sense of rejection after the departure of Salman is intriguing because the emotion of ‘shame’ and ‘rejection’ should be alien to a truly sexually liberated woman. Now she passed her life in a very light and happy mood. She met Lalit Joshi and Mukul Nainwal, the private students of Hiranand Joshi. “I enjoyed flirting with Mukul Nainwal. His absolute adoration and the transparent ploys he employed to be with me were balm to my soul”(31).

Hiranand Joshi decided to marry Parvati to Lalit and not Mukul who she was in love with. She was not in a position to oppose her uncle on his decision. The basic
requirement that Lalit was a Brahmin like her and their horoscopes matched was the main cause in fixing their marriage. She failed to get any physical and emotional gratification from her homosexual husband Lalit. Parvati lamented: “After the sexual bliss I had known with Salman, my wedding night with Lalit sent us both into the deepest depression” (32).

Lalit was equally subjugated due to the false cultural and social codes that define heterosexuals as ‘normal’, ‘common’ and ‘masculine’ and homosexuals as ‘pervert’ ‘effeminate’ and ‘abnormal’. No wonder, Lalit had to hide his homosexual orientation and was forced to marry a woman and consequently he ruined his life as well as Parvati’s. Parvati who had enjoyed a passionate physical relationship with Salman, found it all the more claustrophobic to live in a sexually starved marriage.

Had Parvati married according to her wishes, perhaps her fate may have been different. It is a curse of society that a majority of women do not have a say in the choice of their life partners. Their choices are made for them on the basis of religion and caste, irrespective of whether the groom is actually suitable on the basis of sexual preferences, or whether the couple is suited mentally, financially, emotionally or on the basis of educational backgrounds. All these have a great bearing on any relationship, and these have an unquestionable impact on marital relationships. The tragedy of Parvati becomes even graver, as Masterji was aware of Lalit’s secret vice, his homosexuality. In a letter to Mukul he wrote, “I am aware of, and can even condone, your secret vice, you were boys, Lalit and you, it was all a long time ago” (54).

Further, the arrival of their mutual friend accentuated the gulf between them. Mukul’s whole-hearted acceptance was a balm to Parvati’s wounds caused by Lalit’s rejection. We find the main characters trapped in a very intriguing situation. Lalit felt
jealous of Parvati, because Mukul (whom Lalit fantasies about) was attracted towards her, Parvati was horrified at his disclosure. Parvati narrated in the following lines:

If there was one moment in my life I consider axial, on which all its other movements and motions hinge, it was this one, when I encountered my husband, Lalit look at Mukul with hunger in his eyes.

(36)

The double marginalization of Parvati—marriage with a gay husband and the marital status that hampers her from reciprocating to the advances of Mukul—and the hapless situation of Lalit reveals that in the realm of sexuality there is a small common sphere where both man and woman are victims of patriarchy. The whole incident reveals multiple levels of sexual oppression and their inter-connections. At one level, there is a depiction of the plight of a married woman who has known the pleasure of physical intimacy and has to live in a state of sexual denial due to the unethical behavior of her gay husband. Despite the full awareness of his sexual orientation, he intentionally marries Parvati in order to protect his stereotyped image of normal, powerful and socially accepted heterosexual male. However, on the other level the reader is compelled to feel sympathetic towards Lalit who is also at the margin due to the hegemony of heterosexuals over homosexuals. This complex situation presents a very intricate overlapping of gay and gender politics. The positions of victims are interchangeable depending upon whether ‘queer’ or ‘feminist’ perspectives are applied.

Parvati has a couple of Paro like torrid affairs, is also married Paro-like, briefly and unhappily to a homosexual husband Lalit. All marriages face challenges of various proportions. In the society the homosexual issue may be an insurmountable challenge for the majority of husbands, wives, and families affected by it. The shame
that a heterosexual spouse of a homosexual feels is damaging emotionally and physically. Especially in a country like India where woman prefer to keep quiet rather than talk about the misery they are suffering from a known person who is a homosexual.

They both lived together just like strangers. However, it is quite paradoxical that at times it is these compulsions that force a woman to recognize her sexual desires all the more explicitly. In a true sense, a person who is interested in other things also is compelled to do always the same kind of work; this makes an adverse effect on his mentality. When the traditional panacea fails to cure the frustrations caused by sexual starvation, she realizes that the over-glorification of motherhood and tutored pleasure of managing the house and cooking are nothing but oppressive tools to regulate and control the all-consuming feminine sexuality. Speaking of the eclectic nature of the forces that try to curb the sexuality of a woman, Jeffrey Weeks aptly remarks in *Sexuality*:

> Female sexuality has been limited by economic and social dependence, by the power of men to define sexuality by the limitations of marriage, by the burdens of reproduction and by the endemic fact of male violence against women. At the same time, these contradictory definitions have as often provided the opportunity for women to define their own needs and desires (39).

Parvati turned towards cooking and indulged herself in preparing food. Cooking food and feeding the husband as a substitute for sex, and viewing the kitchen as a substitute for the bedroom and hence a tool for empowerment, find their manifestations in the works of many female writers, such as in *Difficult Daughters*: A novel by Manju Kapoor. In *Difficult Daughters* the first wife is forced to vacate the
bedroom for the second wife but refuses to leave her hold on the kitchen and tries to eliminate partially the second wife by not allowing her to cook for the husband and hence exert her right on him. So different ways of attaining empowerment through food are explored by many women writers and Namita Gokhale also tries to show the futile effort of Parvati to claim at least some part of her husband’s body (stomach) through cooking: It accorded her “some power over his corpulent body, some part in the dreamy dominion of her home” (39). Cooking as a metaphor for sexual acceptance finds its expression in the elaborate dinner prepared by Parvati:

> Sometimes when the fresh gajaras of fresh young chameli flowers in my hair, the warm summer smells of earth and water and night, aroused me to a fever of expectation and desire, but I did not give in, I cooked and smiled and wore my new frozen face to such perfection that I understood resignedly that it had been made to measure and that I was condemned to wear it for a very long time, perhaps forever. (38)

However Parvati got weary of leading a life of mere an incomplete and the traditional housewife, who would uphold moral values at the cost of strangulating her desires. As a result, the starved body and rejected soul get fulfillment in an incestuous relationship with her brother-in–law, which is illegal and neither acceptable nor expected from an Indian wife. Naturally his going away gave no pangs of dissatisfaction or guilt and this feeling was quite similar to the initial feelings she had felt after the departure of Salman. They both serve merely as an instrument (again, the male honey bee pattern can be traced) for sexual rejuvenation. This relationship with her brother-in-law, Raju, has given her a strange assurance and she has ‘learnt to love her husband. This cultivated habit of loving her husband is again a reflection of the conventional mindset of Indian society. The author beautifully portrays the dual
image of the patient wife and of the woman who defies the cultural code by delving into sensual pleasure. The socially accepted notion that a sexually passive woman is the ideal prototype of femininity breeds a lot of self-doubts and gives birth to identity crisis in both Parvati and her mother. Parvati finds duplicity in her mirror image and her mother has been seen as an ‘evil twin’ by her. These two conflicting forces tear her apart in opposite directions and create an identity crisis in Parvati. Apparently, these two contradictory spheres are unable to negotiate to bring reconciliation and the subsequent formation of a unique third space. Thus, Namita Gokhale is the champion of feminine sexuality.

Parvati did find the strength to stage an inner revolt, for she had physical relation with her brother-in-law Raju. Lalit died and Parvati lost her sanity, but not before she gave birth to Raju’s daughter Irai. The first part of the novel is narrated by Parvati and the rest is narrated by Mukul, who had settled in Hong Kong with a Burmese widow Adeliene and her daughter Marie. Then Mukul came to know that after the death of Lalit, Parvati was abandoned by everybody and was in a very miserable condition. Nobody bothered to have anything to do with her sufferings and pains, which is very common in male-dominated society. A widow and her child were financial burden on her in-laws and hence they also dispatched her to the asylum at Bareilly. In all, her condition was very pathetic as no one was there to look after a single woman after her husband's death. Her life seemed doomed to an eternity of unrelieved, silent suffering. In the novel Parvati suffers at the hands of her homosexual husband and society. Constant sexual denial and social indifference leads her ultimately to madness.

Thus we see that Namita Gokhale tries to show the struggle of women to break the culturally imposed identity by asserting their sexual needs. Namita Gokhale's
portrayal of the insanity of Parvati, the tragic end of her mother, Adelene's and Pasang Rampa's use of their sexual powers merely as a tool to find a provider and the exhibition of homosexuality as a means to put a heterosexual woman in the margin makes her fictional works a one-dimensional study of femininity and show that the pattern of male privilege has not been completely broken. Though the female desire is crucial to our social fabric, yet it is recast and reformulated by men, and the depiction of a truly sexually liberated woman is still a tantalizing dream.

*The Book of Shadows* (1999) is a fine texture of the felt experiences of loneliness and loss of identity of the protagonist, Rachita Tiwari. The heroine Rachita Tiwari is a young English lecturer in Jesus and Saint Mary College in Delhi. She is engaged with Anand who is the brother of another lecturer in Chemistry Department in the same college. Hanging himself with a rope attached to the ceiling fan of a room, Anand commits suicide and leaves a suicide note bidding good-bye to this cruel world. Rachita's best friend and Anand's sister takes revenge by throwing a beaker-full hydrochloric acid at her face, from behind surreptitiously, for she feels responsibility of Anand's suicide is on Rachita being his fiancee. Rachita says: "No regret at Anand’s Death - I hadn't killed him, of that I was sure - and not even anger at his sister's revenge" (20).

Rachita is severely injured by this acid attack so she is hospitalized with the help of the college staff. In course of time when she partly recovers and is discharged she moves from Delhi to Ranikhet, where her maternal uncle has a 100 years old house lying vacant. The suicide of Rachita's fiancé over her infidelity and subsequent revenge by his sister suddenly transforms Rachita from a smug, vain lecturer into a confused recluse. At the sight of Anand's suicide itself Rachita realizes:
Who was this swaying on a rope before me? This was not my lover, the stroker of my brow. It was an unbearable excess of all that was possible and bearable. There was defeat here, and a loss of dignity. This travesty of not life was not how death was to be faced: of this I was sure. (5)

As a result, scarred by her lover's suicide and with a permanent ill-figured face, she left that crowded relentless city and recuperates in remote house built by a missionary over a century ago, in the Himalayan foothills. She admitted: "It belongs to me, as I belong to this house" (3).

The disfiguring of the face signifies the identity crises that Rachita goes through after the acid attack. The novel begins with a very philosophical question regarding the real identity of the protagonist viz. Rachita when she asks: "Who am I?"(3), she further says:

We define ourselves by the people that we know, by the face we see in the mirror. In my case all the parameters have changed. I can feel the doors to self-knowledge banging shut upon me. Even the face I might meet in the mirror is no longer mine.(3)

Acid attacks have a catastrophic effect, not only on human flesh, they manifest themselves in a wide range of symptoms, including post-traumatic stress disorders like fear, anxiety, and behaviour problems. These problems include depression, anxiety, phobias, low self-esteem and difficulties with relationships. An acid attack drastically changes human life. In many cases survivors of an acid attack are forced to give up their education, their occupation and other important activities in their lives. This is because recovering from the trauma takes up most of their time and because
the disfigurement they have to bear debilitates and handicaps them in every conceivable way.

Women who have survived acid attacks have great difficulty in finding work and if unmarried, as many victims tend to be, they have very little chance of ever getting married. In case the acid victim survives, it will only be as a grotesque disfigured person, who lives with mangled flesh and suffers a fate worse than death. It punishes the victim more harshly than the perpetrator. (web)

Rachita herself says: "The avengers of my vanity have broken me, humbled me with these small depredations of skin and bone and tissue, leaving me less than I was"(7). Victims of acid attack are most often faced with social isolation that further damages their self-esteem, self-confidence and seriously undermines their professional and personal future. Now, Rachita tries to find herself. She also feels alienated in the process of finding out her self-identity. Initially she herself defines alienation in the class: "Alienation is a device to make the unfamiliar familiar,' I said, addressing a sea of guileless faces,' or to render the familiar unfamiliar"(4). Zenobia Desai, an intelligent student of the class also defines: "That the stamp of alienation is the loss of identity" (4).

Rachita suffers many stages of alienation i.e. the loss of identity like she suffers from normalessness, the lack of commitment and shared social prescriptions for behavior, cultural estrangement, the removal from the established values in the society and social isolation as well, which is a sense of loneliness in social relation. And she experiences all these incidences of her life due to her own fiancé. Due to the adverse circumstances of her life, she is able to define alienation very well:
Words like alienation belong to the context of psychopathology. All human beings harbour their particular and individual manifestations of the other. In the widest sense, every neurosis is the outcome of some form of alienation. (63)

Rachita passes her time by reading the old journals and books and diaries left by the former inmates in the house but sometimes she is upset and is sorrowful, confused and disenchanted from the natural beauty of Himalayas around. She lives there along with an ancient and mysterious manservant, Lohaniju, the care-taker of the house. To keep her sanity she performs the drill of painting and repainting her nails a bright red, at the same time careful not to look into the mirror. She feels: "Sanity is like nail polish, it chips easily, it has to be restored and renewed"(19). She usually reminds her past and can never sleep properly at night from that unbearable incidence of her life. She is afraid of both dreams of the night and realities of the day interlap. She finds solace in Lohaniju's company and in the interesting stories he narrates to her. Only a cat named Lady gives her company, the last link with the living world that keeps her from falling apart. Lohaniju only looks after her meals and other comforts in the house as and when required still she has no peace within or calm around, and a type of remorse has gripped her most of the time. Apart from Lady it is Lohaniju's comforting company that prevents her for going completely mad. In her situation it is not difficult to fall into physical and emotional despair, but she resolves not to let that happen to her.

Rachita has been happy in her childhood in the house in which she is recuperating, and she is determined to be that again to find inner happiness. She does not have any wrong intentions as she wants to forget Anand's wanton act of self destruction and restore her life to its course once again. Anand and her quarrels had
all been without reason and it was after one such quarrel that he committed suicide blaming her for his death. Rachita feels that he has been gracious enough to remove himself from the corrupted world to some nobler place, while she is left to live with tarnished emotions which may never totally heal.

Apart from physical injury, there is also internal struggle in her mind and she suffers from unlimited mental agony. People who are exposed to physical violence are driven into exile from their body. Rachita watches all her action closely:

I am keeping a close watch on my own sanity. I’m constantly alert to signs of collapse. Perhaps I have become too self-conscious in the process. I find I am scrutinizing myself all the time. (63)

Rachita comes to know about a witch whose husband ill-treated her. She is hated men so every man of the village well-treated her, after the incidence of her husband, when her eyes flashed fire and her husband stood transformed into a buffalo. In one point Rachita gets reflection of herself in that woman, as some in balance in strength, some distortion of gender. She suffers from multiple personality disorder. Rachita considers her body as the house she lives and the numerous dwellers of the house, whose life she chronicles, can in this sense be taken as the insecurities she is infested with as a result of the trauma of having her face injured. People who suffer from depression tend to fantasize and deny admitting reality. Rachita’s relationship to reality passes through three stages, her college time as a lecturer, her life in the house with its stories and finally, when she becomes successful in gaining her real identity.

Rachita feels horrified and suffers hallucination in the lonely house. She sees herself as a little girl behind a curtain of her parents’ bedroom. But at the same time she notices someone else watching them besides her. She does not know whose this presence is, but it has a calming, comforting effect. Rachita while hallucinating is
actually being comforted by her own soul, for the presence is her inner-self, her consciousness which is consoling and soothing her.

She sometimes experiences ghostly presence in the house which disturbs her solitary life: "Someone, something... this house-it has begun to speak to me. I do want to listen to its stories, they are malicious and convoluted"(61).

This novel consists of two parallel narratives one of Rachita Tiwari and the other by a ghost which has haunted the house for over a hundred years watching and chronicling its history. The ghost is the second narrator of the novel who is also, on the stage of discovering his own identity. Rumina Sethi remarks:

Rachita is the protagonist of Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows* a chronicle of displacement, strangeness and exile, of forbidden passions and family histories told in a sensual, descriptive style, which lends energy to her tense psychological drama with all its intimacy and haunting elusiveness. It is an original and ambitious piece of work and wide-ranging with a laudable cosmopolitan edge (web).

Different people stayed within her cottage at different times she becomes contemplative and focuses her attention on their activities. Rachita remarks: "I hide in corners. I lurk in shadows"(79).

There is the worthless fool, Captain Wolcott, and his tragically sensuous mistress, Dona Rosa. Rachita decides to watch or follow Dona Rosa's way of life because she was failure in her relationship with Anand. Rachita is afraid of male persons because it is easy to excite and incite them but after that woman gets trapped and she has to follow her partner throughout her life. The other occupants of the house are William Cockrell who built the house and his frail wife Fanny, the doomed lovers Marcus and Munro, who were disciples of Aleister Crowley, an infamous dabbler in
black magic; Father Benedictus, is the seeker of knowledge, and is at peace with himself and his God; and the all knowing sage crows. Above all is the disembodied resident of the house - ghost, who gives effortless utterances to thoughts compiled with great difficulty and understanding gleaned from the priest Father Benedictus. Only Father Benedictus who was an ex-military man and now an expert of theology could feel the presence of the ghost and the ghost learnt a lot from him. After a century of silence, something compels the ghost to speak. The ghost narrates his own identity in this world in the words of Father Benedictus:

    The body, like the clothes we wear, are only emblems of identity to mark the wearer as such-and-such; these outward accoutrements often serve to conceal more than they reveal. Much deceit and dissimulation hides behind the flowing robes of my cassock. I am, after all, a human, perhaps not a very wise one. Once, as a young man, when I was in the military, I fancied myself a soldier of the body, eager to combat evil with sword and gun. Of course, I discovered soon enough that the real evil lay within, but in those days when I first donned the tight-fitting uniform of the soldier, I can assure you that I felt quite differently. Quite assuredly, clothes make the body that constitutes the man, and you, dear spirit, are blessed beyond belief not to be burdened with these mill - stones.(131-132)

    The ghost speaks the word that injured woman Rachita, inhabiting the house will hear and the words, which will give her back to herself. Rachita now finds the human body "a gross and ineffectual machine"(158). For the human race it was “the body above all is the instrument of all suffering”(159). Rachita fails to come out of confusion instantly. She asks herself does she exist? Or has she ceased to exist at all?
One night a face without a face, a suggestion of a face, familiar yet mocking floats before her in her dreams. She becomes a neurotic wreck trying to ransack her mind in the early hours of the morning to figure out who it was. In the morning she avoids her face in the mirror as he normally did “….but there was a new dimension to my horror and repugnance, for it had struck me that the face I saw in my dreams last night was really my own”(24). It shows that the difficulties in her way merely strengthened her resolve. She is slowly but steadily regaining her lost identity, for previously she says, "My face had been banished from my memory"(21). The words spoken by the ghost helped Rachita to regain her lost identity, and hence she gave her back to herself. She remarks:

Proprioception is the science of the sense of self. My centre, my identity, my selfhood had for a while abandoned the confines of skin and bone, abandoned my cage and run away to cower in dusty corner of other abandoned memories and perceptions. Dona Rosa and the rest are not real, they do not belong any longer to this clear and unquestioning morning, and they are emanations of the past, insubstantial, evasive, and ambiguous. I am alive, a skin - encapsulated being who belongs inalienably the world of the living. I feel as though a scab has fallen from an old sore. In the shadow world between the living and the un-living, even sickness is an indication of a possible restoration to health. (213)

Now, Rachita starts analyzing the positive values of life. The loneliness of the house of shadows has given a lot of intellectual strength to her. Her past is over. What is to happen, happens. What was to happen had happened already. Now she concentrates on the future. She determines,
...I had the right to exist, as though I was a part of creation, of the
dawn chorus, of the healing sunlight that was showing up in shy
dappled patches in the garden. I was a glob of consciousness, of
reactions and conditioning, enveloped in skin (damaged skin, but
nevertheless). I was defined in time and space and dimension, I had the
right to exist. (213)

Rachita comes to terms with life as a continuous process of making and re-
making herself. Now she learns what she must hold on to and what she must discard.
When she starts moving towards a positive value of life with sufficient courage and
determination then only her importance is established. She now understands that:

It is not my body which has betrayed me; it is I who have betrayed this
body. My abandonment of courage has been no less treacherous than
Anand's. Courage is not simply a virtue - it is the testing point of all
virtues at the highest conflux of reality. I will not fail this test of
courage. I will venture unafraid into the future, with my body, with my
mind, with my spirit. (219)

At the end of the story, her student Zenobia comes to meet Rachita to the
house along with her boyfriend Pashu. They witnesses and perhaps are instrument of
Rachita's return to the sane world. Rachita becomes optimistic and accepts life and its
actions. She asks herself, why not to enjoy life as Zenobia does? This novel is about
people trying to flee from pain and ending in greater pain.

Namita Gokhale's new novel is an exploration of, and an attempt to
resolve pain, both in its physical and psychological manifestations, in
the gross and subtle forms. In the process, she seems to posit a new
Law of Conservation of Pain; it can neither be created nor destroyed, but only transformed from one form to another. (web)

It is believed that males are known for knowledge, power, consciousness, strong action, while females are considered for their feeling touch, weak action, domestic intimacy. Some of these characteristics are not absolutely correct in the case of Rachita. She is distinct from others. She is a woman of separate personality and identity and she must not be a 'man's shadow-self, 'an auxiliary' and ‘the unwanted and neglected other'. Viola Klein observes:

Being in the position of outsider, intruding into a finished system, and restricted by a century old history of submissions, which had bred in them a sense of inferiority women's chief claim in their struggle was as natural result, to prove that in all respects they were just as good as men. (34)

Through this novel Namita Gokhale seems to be celebrating womanhood, the strength and resilience that only a woman, who is an embodiment of Shakti, can display, for she says: "I have to erase this morbidity from my mind, I had to recondition myself" (30). Rachita had been able to exorcise the ghosts of her insecurities for her world had been "undermined; taken apart, reduced to anarchy and chaos; but then mysteriously, inexplicably, beatifically, it had regenerated into something more than the sum of its parts" (230). After the acid attack, she was suffering from identity crisis, but the woman being an embodiment of Shakti, bounces back slowly but surely. This is the strength of a new woman, who deconstructs the concept of womanhood who was conventionally known as a weaker sex. Rachita has the courage to come out of the catastrophe on her own and her determination to survive is immeasurable because unable to face shame and ostracism from society,
most women survivors of an acid attack commit suicide. Through the sense of self awareness of Rachita, the novel develops in a positive direction towards the existence of a woman in the world.

The development of Feminist thought has brought about a considerable change in our outlook towards women. A new perspective has dawned on the Indian social horizon with feminine psyche, trying to redefine the role of a woman in the society and also to re-assert her self-identity. The story presents Rachita's search for selfhood by asserting her femininity through self-discovery and self-realization. She herself says: "I think I know that I will remain"(232).

_Shakuntala: The Play of Memory_ (2005) has been described as the plight of the oppressed woman, by Manjulika Rahman. It is an original and heart-rending tale that brings back memories of the feminist 1960's. _Shakuntala_ enthralls in the vivid portrayal of the tragic life of a woman, whose dare to live life on her own terms is thwarted at every turn by circumstances and the age in which she lives. It is an engrossing diary of any and every woman in search of her identity in a man's world. Namita Gokhale studied the plays of Kalidas for writing this tragic novel based on Hindu mythology. The very name Shakuntala stands for despair, dejection and desperateness. She has to suffer the sanskaras of abandonment like her legendary namesake, the heroine of Kalidas's _Abhigyanam Shakuntalam_.

Shakuntala lost her father when she was only five years old. She did not have a healthy relationship with her mother as she thought her a trouble: "you wicked, heartless girl!" she shrieks, "Were you born only to trouble and torment me?" (6). She even discouraged her from learning the scriptures as it was forbidden for women when her brother's tutor taught him. On the contrary she only worried about the education of her son and ensured that he got the maximum opportunities.
Later, when her brother became a Guresvara, Shakuntala and her mother were both affected due to the absence of a man in the lives of them. Shakuntala was relieved to have Guresvara's tutor around as he was a man and she thought he would protect them from terrible things. But he turned out to have ulterior motives. He told her of the Gandharva marriage of Kalidasa's Shakuntala with King Dushyant. Hearing such stories Shakuntala thought herself:

…ready for love, eager for the exquisite sting of Kamadeva's arrows. King Dushyanta would surely arrive to claim me, his horses panting from the hunt. He would take me to distant lands beyond our unchanging hills. (24)

Shakuntala was restless to feel the freedom of birds and clouds. However her mother deterred her restlessness by reminding her that birds return to their nests at night but clouds must weep their tears unseen in distant lands. On starting her menstruation, Shakuntala was possessed with panic but instead of assuaging her fears and guiding her properly her mother blamed her for not having any decency as there was a holy man in the house, her visiting brother. As in A Himalayan Love Story the tragedy of being a woman dawned on Shakuntala also. She wanted to scream as to burst her lungs. The first time Shakuntala ran away from her home and found shelter in a cave with rock-demons who taught her a valuable lesson about the many faces of the mother goddess who takes many forms, but is always "Swamini, mistress of herself". Time passed and she was married to a mahasamant named Srijan, whose two wives had died without giving him any child. As a bride she had been instructed to look at the earth, to keep her gaze down and appear modest. Shakuntala realized the importance of guarding her virtue only after she got married when Srijan her husband
mastered her with courteous ease. Thus Namita Gokhale by emphasizing this seems to be advocating restraint in matters of pre-marital sex.

After getting married Shakuntala enjoyed her liberty as there was no one to restrict her. A liberated woman in Shakuntala desired to experience all the objects of the world freely without any boundations; she wished:

If I were a kite I could have fluttered in the wind and viewed all the lands below. I would have seen the sacred river that flows by out hills, until it meets the rocks, and the plains that stretch on and on until the end of the world. (38-39)

But Shakuntala was not happy as she was hungry for further experience. She felt dejected when she thought about the norms of society where men could travel and see the world, but it was inappropriate and unusual for women to do so. She questioned the inequality which prevailing in society. If she was a man's equal in bed, why could not she desire what men enjoyed? "The freedom to wander, to be elsewhere, to seek, and to perhaps find something"(48). Shakuntala was not an illiterate hill woman and she never bothered for ornaments and jewellery like other ordinary women. The only thing she was hungry for knowledge and to see the elephant which is the symbol of God Ganesha, the God of success and wisdom, the things she wanted to achieve in her life.

Thus we see that Shakuntala was no ordinary woman, she was only enchained by force of circumstances. Had she been born in another era and an enlightened society she would have probably beaten the constraints and shone as a learned woman. On their wedding night Srijan showed Shakuntala the star of Arundhati, which according to Hindu Mythology was the star of fidelity. This ritual proved the tyranny of one-sided chastity in which only a woman has to follow all the percepts
and remain faithful to her husband while a man is free to live his life as Srijan brought back a handmaiden named Kamalini from his travels. She felt betrayed and humiliated but she had to bear her misfortune silently as the hypocritical societal norms allowed him many women as he was a man. In the male dominated society a woman is expected to live happily her life with her husband, it matters little whether the woman is emotionally content or not. True to the code of Manu the society of her time, as in fact society till date, believes, in the words of the priest in the novel that:

Men are masters of women. Your father protects you in childhood, your husband protects you in youth, and your son protects you in old age, a woman is never fit for independence that is not the way of the world. You are fortunate to be a rich young woman, without cares or worries. Never forget your good fortune. It is not auspicious. (103-104)

Kamalini made Shakuntala feel uneasy and uncomfortable in her own house. Her marriage was disturbed with the intervention of the handmaiden and also because she could not be able to give an heir to her husband, for which he was eagerly waiting. Facing neglect from her husband Shakuntala assumed the identity of Yaduri, the fallen woman and eloped with Nearchus, a Greek traveller, she met by the Ganga. She felt ecstasy:

My life has changed; I felt that I cannot go back to where I have come from. Every limb in my body is alive and yet I am rested and satiated. Nothing has prepared me for this ecstasy. It defies my life and destiny, disengaging it from the wheel of duty and dharma and what should be, throwing it directly into my own hands. (110)

She further thought:
Two voices rise within. One is guiding me to return home, away from this violation, this absolute mockery of the matrimonial promises of love. The other buzzing about my ears like a bhramari, a lascivious bee, urges me to flee, run away as far as fast as I can, before Kamalini and the palanquin bearers, intruders from another life, come in search of me. (111)

Shakuntala and Nearchus travelled together to Kashi, and there Shakuntala surrendered to a world of pleasures. She accepted this man and enjoyed sex freely without considering her pregnancy. She was a new woman in every sense who had the courage to deconstruct feminism. The world excited her for adventures and she wanted to be a liberated woman. Nearchus had been to many places and countries of the world so he described his experiences to her: "...The world was a wild and wondrous place, and I was glad to be free and alone and traveling its surface with this Yavana who had seen and known so much"(134). But gradually she realized that her presence was a burden for Nearchus. She felt her existence in this world useless: "I am nobody: I am a body. A Traveler picked me up as he might pluck a fruit from a tree, and now he is impatient to throw the core away"(161). The attitude of men, who considered woman as possessions, to be used and discarded, was explicitly stated by Nearchus. He admitted that he had also forgotten many women though he had enjoyed sex with them. Now, tormented by his misconduct Shakuntala realized her folly: "Even in the moment of her disgrace, Kalidasa's Shakuntala had the sanctity of a secret marriage. But I had betrayed everything"(150). Shakuntala may have been condemned by the society and culture in which she lived, but the new woman in her remained determined as ever to live life and die on her own terms. A charging bull
attacked her and she surrendered herself. The world had abandoned her and perhaps it was time she abandoned it and now her feet were not weighted with silver anklets.

*Shakuntala* is the story of a woman whose desire to live on her own terms is thwarted at every step by circumstance and the age in which she lives. Namita Gokhale combines her extraordinary gift for storytelling with history, religion and philosophy to craft a timeless tale that transcends its ancient setting. Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, dynamic girl, willing to question the injustice done to her, transformed into a submissive weeping woman, who will put up with all that the patriarchal set up heaps on her head. The image of woman in modern literature differs, not only in her realization of her individual dignity and sense of equality with man, but also in her recognition of her physical as well as psychological needs. *Shakuntala* is a woman establishing her identity and her individuality. This new path of self-discovery is like the experience of chrysalis, emerging out of a cocoon but often branded in a male-dominated society. Somehow, she also suffers man's domination. This story is hauntingly told, the mystic tale from the medieval times and it throws open questions that are pertinent even to today's women.

*Priya In Incredible Indyaa* (2011) is a sequel addition to Paro’s liberal legacy and shares the same blithe, amusing world view that the first book i.e. *Paro: Dreams of Passion* has. Paro is now dead (in fact she died in the first book) and her obsessive observer, Priya Kaushal the mother of twins, is in her fifties. By now she has grown into a middle-aged woman, and her husband, Suresh, has bagged a minister of state portfolio. As we see Priya struggling with Delhi’s high society, her approaching menopause and finding a suitable wife each for her twins, who happen to be as alike as the proverbial sun and moon, we realize how much not only Priya, but India too has changed. We are thrown into the political cut and thrust of Delhi, full of
numerologists, fashionists, cricketers, power brokers, and extra-marital affairs, as seen by a very bored housewife. It is a world of lal batti cars, and Lutyens’ bungalows, where Priya deals with her two sons, their girlfriends as well as her husband and her suspicions about his affairs.

In the novel we find Paro, a powerful character no matter she has died now but still she reigns supreme in the heart of all who know her as Suresh, BR, Lenin and Bucky. Suresh says about Paro’s premature death: “Those whom the Gods love die young” (21). The protagonist Priya herself admires Paro:

It was Paro who showed me how the other side lived. Paro and BR, my boss, the sewing-machine magnate. Paro was BR’s wife. She was an amazon, an addiction. She was also selfish, cruel and consistently unkind. But something in Paro—her self possession, her sheer gall, sparked a matching resistance in me. She taught me that life’s rules can be bent by those who dare.(5-6)

Paro’s character was so impressive that Priya always wanted to be like her. Priya is excruciatingly aware that she could never be Paro. She at the same time laments: “Paro-sexy, beautiful, destructive. All that I’m not, then and now. Me- I’m just an ordinary housewife” (6).

In the beginning of the book we see Priya has flashback moments when she was twelve years old. In those days they were so poor that when her aunt brought imported cheese there was no bread in the house so they took it with stale chapatis: “one each for me, my mother, my aunt. Two for my brother, when he returned: he was a boy, the man of the house” (5). On another occasion we could see the same partition line between the two genders was drawn by the society’s low mentality. Priya remembered: “My widowed mother had never allowed me to even have a birthday
party, although Atul bhaiyya’s janamdin celebrations always deserved laddoos, once even a cake” (144).

In the male dominated society it is male who is considered the head of the house and can bask in his supremacy. It is he who has given all the importance neglecting the females. This partiality can be seen in every house of India. It is a boon to be born as a boy in male dominated society like India. Shruti writes:

I am scared to be a girl in the Indian society. Wherever I go, people are after my flesh, after my smile, my freedom, my existence itself. My question is what is my crime? Because I am born a female, why am I always on the paying and receiving side?(web)

Aniruddha, who was born of Paro’s rebellious affair with Bucky Bhandpur, is now turned a youth and is getting married. He is the second handsomest cricket hero in India. And the first reigning heart – throb of the game is stocky Gaurav Negi. Ani’s fiancée, supermodel Sujata Sethia (Suzi) is the elder daughter of arms dealer Manoviraj Sethia. In the wedding we are introduced to Poonam who is the Director in Sethia’s company and tries to be friendly to Priya. She is the mistress of Manoviraj Sethia. She dumps Mrs. Sethia and is trying to play hostess right under Mrs. Sethia’s nose.

We find very rich and high profile elite society in the ceremonies and the parties of the novel. In the marriage party of Ani a very stylish woman in purple backless choli lungs through the crowd of socialites and flings herself at Gaurav Negi. She is frank enough to let out an elegant whoop and lends him a kiss full on the lips. People around there observe the scene with polite detachment, as though this is normal behaviour for women guests at Indian weddings. In another celebration i.e. in Hen Night very frank and bold ladies are described. Hen Night is the function of
ladies only. About the function Poonam giggles: “it is going to be a daring evening. I’m not afraid of having fun! We have to show these men who’s on top, don’t we?” (167)

All the women were dressed up and raring to go in the function. Many of them were a bit drunk already. The atmosphere of the party was pervaded by drunkard women; who had glasses in their hands and the sound of CHEERS! was echoed there. A nude man appeared only a narrow gold cummerbund wrapped tight around his groin. He was confused and looked terrified. In Namita Gokhale’s world men seem afraid of women who deconstructed feminism as they all were whistling and cheering. Nobody looked surprised and shocked. On his refusing to dance in the party Poonam took the young man by the shoulders and shook him violently. She screamed: “Return the money! Cough up the ten thousand rupee advance I’ve paid you, saala! Now, this minute” (169).

Poonam’s father was a well-to-do Gujarati man and her mother a Punjabi lioness. She had an elder sister having a real sati savitri nature. But Poonam’s parents got divorced. Her elder sister was engaged with Harendra who fell in love with Poonam. Her parents never spoke to her afterwards because she moved to London with Harendra. But later she came to know that:

Harendra had a roving eye. He cheated on me. We got a divorce and I returned home to India. My mom-in-law was loaded. She gave me a golden handshake. Then I join Manoviraj Sethia’s company. And then, a repeat of the earlier script…as I said before, life is a bitch! (126)

Poonam is a new woman with modern thinking, glamorous and seductive. She is always telling the prices and the brands of all the accessories she uses. She is a very high profile woman. She loves her feet very much. She informed Priya:
What I wear on my feet is as important to me as sex. I have a Jean Paul Gaultier, and an Alberta Ferretti, and an Alberta Ferretti, and a Valentino’ she confided. ‘and of course some Manolo Blahnik and ferragamo shoes. And Preda, for daily wear’. (76)

Poonam tried to persuade Priya to accept Suki as her daughter-in-law: “We’re planning a Botox brunch next Sunday; Poonam called after me. Do come, it will be good for your marriage. And learn to keep your husband waiting sometimes”(86).

She had a lot of tricks to get hold on men. She disclosed “an empire waist and a bit of frilly-front boob show and poof! – the man is mine!”(77). According to her “men are such fools” (128). Priya too agreed about this and shook her head. Poonam said: “We women have to stick together. Men are such bastards and such liars… Never, never, but never believe anything a man tells you!”(124). Priya too herself believed this statement and never believed Suresh as her loyal life partner. By the end of the novel it was also proved that Suresh had a crush on Poonam when Priya received a packet in which a poem was written by Suresh to Poonam. It was a kind of love confession. As Priya had always doubted Suresh’s faithfulness she was mentally prepared for such kind of information about Suresh. She was devastated not so much from Suresh’s infidelity as from his writing a stupid poem for someone else, not for her. Many times Priya tried to talk to Suresh clearly: “I could confront him. Ask who she was. Suresh would present a convincing defense and leave me looking feeling, foolish” (42).

It is evident that in the modern era women should be prepared for such kind of infidelity from their husbands. So they can be able to endure such heartbreaking news. An ideal Indian housewife has to train herself not to fly into jealous rages. This is a
new modern era in which everyone wants full enjoyment as much as one can whether it is inside the house or outside the walls. Husband and wife both want to do what they like. If man can go outside the house in search of sex why can’t a woman? Namita Gokhale’s women also move out of the four walls and go to their lovers.

Priya herself is a woman full of desire. She does not hesitate to check into a hotel with her former lover, Paro’s first husband and the first love of Priya. She always called BR whenever she was in Mumbai and called that very day as “Independence Day!”(48). Forgetting everything she passed her one of the happiest moments in his company. She admitted:

All I can remember is that we were in my room, in a clinch, and then I was naked and he was too, and the ivory cane leaned against the mattress as I surrendered to love and sex and re-seduction. (47)

The loss of BR disturbed Priya a lot and she was in constant grief. “There is no one with whom I can share this loss. He is gone, this man who was once my boss” (173). Priya now understand that there is no plot in housewives’ tale.

The hidden harmony of a housewife’s tale is structured, day after day, by simply carrying on. In the storyboard, the drama and heroism lie in the everyday aggravations, the small triumphs of daily life. And the happy endings – they tiptoe in so stealthily that you may already have left the multiplex by the time they show up on the screen. (193)

Namita Gokhale’s women are no weak females weeping inside the house under the pillow. Priya is a modern woman who wants to lead life as she wants. She fulfills her desire for love in BR’s company which she was not getting from Suresh. In Gokhale’s women the very word ‘housewife’ creates anxiety. It does not make them happy. Priya feels the word ‘housewife’ as “something snapped inside me, the
‘Housewife’, like a taut too-tight bra-strap” (34). On the other side we see Priya as a dutiful wife and a loving mother who all the times worry about Lov and Kush. She considered: “It is my job to worry about them” (35). She is confidant of her sons. Lov told everything about Monalisa Das Mann and Kush felt relaxed when he opened his heart for his boyfriend Akshay in front of his mummy. As she replied: “I’d love to meet him” (186). Small appreciations from them make her happy easily: “that made my day. How we doting mothers just need a few kind words!” (41) Priya received one of the awards given to 8GR8 Indian women held by RSSMS for upholding and propagating the values of Hindu Culture.

Monalisa Das Mann is another powerful woman character in the novel. Lov was almost threatened by her. Lov liked the character of his mother but “Monalisa is the opposite. She’s too hyper, much too intelligent, too well read. It’s all that Virginia Woolf stuff she was brought up on. She really is extraordinary”(51). Monalisa was so beautiful and sharp that Lov felt himself belittled to be her husband. Lov admitted:

She is a looker. Very pretty, very intense-big and small at the same time. You know what I mean? Great tubes! So what is wrong? That’s what I ask myself, maa! what’s wrong? May be she’s just too bright for me. (51)

Monalisa was a modern girl who may smoke and drink and hang out with the guys, but somewhere she’s been conditioned to seek an Indian bridegroom. Provider, protector, sex supplier. She wanted to marry Lov and for this very reason she came to Delhi chasing Lov and till last she had never given up the idea. She wrote a book about Lov and her relationship and sent it to Priya.

Paromita was equally an emancipated and straightforward girl of Gokhale’s novel. She very boldly brought her marriage proposal for Lov by herself. On Priya’s
amazement she came to her and uttered: “I think I love him. And so I thought – why not take my own rishta to his family? And then, I am sort of traditional, so I thought why not go about it the old fashioned way?” (81)

Not only Paromita put her marriage proposal but she also succeeded in winning the heart of Priya. By profession she was a reporter and on her father’s death she performed all the responsibilities of a son. We can see that in this novel all the women folk are shown more powerful than males as Priya, Pooonam, Paromita, Geeta- a woman of power savvy politico, Monalisa, Banwari, Nnutasha, Suzi & Suki etc. Even in a protesting march it was the women who were leading. Men are generally weak and run away leaving all their responsibilities to females as Lenin, Lov, Suresh, Kush etc. At the broadest level, men and women are drawn to each other in a generic way, where each sex sees in the other a compliment of its own personality. Men are naturally pleased with the gracefulness, emotional sensitivity, quiet beauty and warm tenderness of women. Women are attracted by the courage, strength, energy and calm deliberation. Simultaneously, it is important to study the women’s characters portrayed by Namita Gokhale to evaluate the corpus of fictional ability of hers because she has realized with her female characters and unfolded their inner selves and feeling with masterly strokes.

When critics discussed her novels in various seminars, naturally they analyzed her art of narration, her understanding of human nature, her portrayal of contemporary society, her language, her literary background and her faith in the future. She has shown two ways to empower her women. One is through female bonding and another is by using her sexuality. She has tried her best not only to cause the people to realize the importance of looking at life from the point of view of a woman but also gives a
good exposure to the female side. Dr. Rashmi Gaur aptly remarks about Namita Gokhale:

…….. Namita Gokhale emerges as a committed feminist author. She has successfully portrayed the insensitive fatality of options, which the society has cringingly given to its women. Even though she is unable to develop a decisive stand on these issues, she has successfully recorded and documented the hopes and fears, the concerns and tensions of the contemporary educated woman and therein lies the success of the novel.(110)
**Works Cited**


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