The women protagonists, Sarla Devi and Simrit in *Get Ready for Battle* and *The Day in Shadow*, find themselves in a great dilemma so as to face the harsh, bitter, repulsive and un-accommodative realities of life. So much so that they find themselves inadequate to get adjusted with their situations, and therefore, they become compulsive idealists.

Sarla Devi of *Get Ready for Battle* is a middle-aged woman. She is the wife of a business shark. She is separated from her husband GulzariLal for well over a decade. Ironically, their marriage has been by choice. Sarla Devi finds herself unable to get adjusted with GulzariLal’s scheme of things. GulzariLal is exclusively materialistic. It is noticed right from the beginning that there is temperamental incompatibility between the two. But in clear terms the novelist does not reveal the exact reasons of Sarla Devi’s separation from her husband, but as the story develops one discovers that a clash between the two has separated them. Another possible reason of her separation seems to be GulzariLal’s clandestine alliance with Kusum, the widow of Mr. Mehra. Obviously, this is something very harsh for an Indian woman to bear.
In fact, Jhabvala has very aptly depicted the man-woman relationship in Indian cultural context. In this connection, Raji Narasimhan has a feeling that “Jhabvala writes about India; of course, but that it is a foreigner’s perspective and the voice has unmistakable foreign inflexions which have come to be overlooked in misplaced magnanimity towards Indo-English” (1976 : 138).

Raji Narasimhan seems to be incorrect in her estimate of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. Though Jhabvala is a European, she has lived in India and the novel reflects her close experiences of Indian life. She is rightly viewed as “insider outsider” (Shahane: 1976 : 188).

From the Indian artistic viewpoint, Jhabvala has portrayed the psychology of Sarla Devi so aptly and deeply that her being an Indian is strongly attested. Sarla Devi is legally wedded to GulzariLal and is the mother of Vishnu. She cannot adjust herself with the life style of GulzariLal, her husband and hence she is alienated from him. Unlike Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* and Dimple in *Wife*, Sarla Devi has not formed an ideal notion of her life with her husband. At the very outset of the novel, GulzariLal is portrayed as living a very luxurious life where hosting parties and spending money recklessly are common.
features. In contrast, the life of Sarla Devi has been portrayed down to earth as simple. Sarla Devi’s living is depicted thus:

There was a tin trunk in which Sarla Devi kept her belongings and a tiny table with a plaster image and an incense holder and a rosary in it. On the wall hung a picture of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy mother put against the wall reveals her strong idealistic dispositions (23).

Excessive attachment to any idealism at the cost of the normal living pattern certainly amounts to neurosis. The blind adherence to ideological creed with a resultant drain on normal behavioural pattern, in fact, reflects the neurotic condition of Sarla Devi. Her illusory ideals and her blind persuasion of them make her unfit as a wife in Indian cultural context. Her abhorrence of materialistic concerns of her husband Gulzari Lal does not appear to her as normal living behaviour, and hence, she renounces her husband. In fact, her abhorrence to materialism is so bitter that whoever knowingly tended to show material inclinations is rejected and denounced by her. She dislikes even her own son, Vishnu. Materialistic outfits antagonize Sarla Devi. So Vishnu and Mala live with Gulzari Lal and Sarla Devi lives with her brother Brij Mohan whose financial condition is not very sound. It
appears from the behaviour of Sarla Devi that she has fostered strong dislike for the luxuries of life. In an encounter with her son, Vishnu, she reprimands him most attackingly for smoking, she says, “It is bad for you to smoke” (Ibid).

Sarla Devi disapproves not only this, but the entire pattern of life that Vishnu follows. She says: “Your whole life is bad” (Ibid). She dislikes him all the more because she perceives in him the shadow of Gulzari Lal who is materialistic, Sarla Devi cries: “You are becoming like your father, in everything you are like him. You care for nothing but money and clothes and business – oh, Vishnu – Vishnu” (Ibid). Simplicity of Sarla Devi is in contrast with the luxury of Gulzari Lal. Simple, virtuous life seems to be inborn quality of Sarla Devi.

Surprisingly enough, Vishnu understands that her mother is not normal. Therefore, he does not take her suggestions seriously. This makes Sarla Devi angry: “No it is no laughing matter for you everything now a days is a joke. That is not the way to live” (Ibid). Sarla Devi wants Vishnu to become idealistic and renounce wealth and luxury. But Vishnu supposing that his mother is not normal, neglects whatever is uttered by his mother. He takes it too casually. This angers
Sarla Devi. Everything of Sarla Devi is unrealistic and untenable. Vishnu replies to his mother, “You are like Gautama”, he said, “He is always trying to lead me into a better purer life” (Ibid). Sarla Devi feels quite disappointed as she thinks she has failed in changing the mind of Vishnu “Everything I tried to teach you, everything I showed you, you have forgotten” (4). Vishnu does not listen to his mother because he knows renouncing wealth is after all not practicable. His mother finds it very difficult to influence Vishnu. She thinks that the ambience of Vishnu is quite hostile. The mother of Vishnu eventually forgets how to behave with the people and how to control her speech. Her neurotic tendencies have disposed her to antagonize the people around her with her over-idealistic talks. Vishnu is displeased to listen to his mother talking against Mala. He thinks that it is this aggressiveness on the part of his mother that has enraged Mala also. Vishnu replies, “I think she does not like you very much either” (Ibid). Sarla Devi tries to defend herself by saying that she does not like talking about saris and other womanly matters. She says: “Of course, not, I can’t sit and talk with her about her saris and her embroidery” (21). This shows that Sarla Devi is not a normal woman as a normal woman would talk of
saris and other things concerned with her aesthetic behaviour. Sarla Devi considers ideal matters as much more important than the mundane day-to-day talks. She is obsessed with idealism, which unfortunately, goes unacknowledged. When she finds that Vishnu does not support and endorse her psychological aberrations, she does not help pouring venom on Vishnu also. She remarks: “But it is your fault you have just let her live the life she is used to and never shown her that there is anything else” (24). And when Vishnu suggests that he is thinking of starting a manufacturing business, her mother feels all about her and flatly replies: “I don’t want anything from you. Nothing nothing” (25).

In fact, when the mother finds that she is not able to control her son, she feels hurt. Her pride is hurt. A normal mother would never do so. The fact is that whoever rejected her and her ideologies, tended to aggravate her neurotic tendencies. She reached by disowning and condemning him whether the person concerned may be a husband or a son. This may be explained through the theory of basic anxiety. The theory is based on the premise that a person suffering from basic anxiety considers the world and environment around her or him as
hostile, and hence, he or she tends to disclaim her or his associations with the ambience. Thus, this basic anxiety makes the victim deviate from the normal pattern of behaviour, which is known as neurosis. Sarla Devi had deviated from the normal pattern of living as a wife and as a mother; she had become over possessive and over-idealistic due to her neurosis.

In case of Sarla Devi, a very simple matter like following her own ideals detachment create great hurdle in getting adjusted with her husband and her son. Her incapacity to digest normal routine behaviour of either women or men becomes the great cause of her anxiety and this anxiety leads Sarla Devi to neurosis.

Being materialist on the part of Gulzarilal cannot be taken as very serious fault in general terms. But, so far as Sarla Devi is concerned, this becomes the reason of her separation from GulzariLal. Apparently, it is a simple matter, but in the inner world of Sarla Devi, it creates hostility against GulzariLal and she begins to dislike GulzariLal and, in addition, her son Vishnu who follows the pattern of his father.
Sarla Devi’s estrangement from her husband renders Gulzari Lal quite helpless, emotionally and psychologically. Gulzari Lal is a grandfather and at this stage of life, one needs a support of someone very near to him. But Sarla Devi as his wife fails to fulfill this requirement of her husband, and hence, there was an estrangement between the two. In The Day in Shadow, Simrit does not fulfill the sexual urges of her husband. Even when the husband has urgency. On the contrary, she urges upon her husband to live as brother and sister. The result is that her husband divorces her. Simrit fails to adjust herself with the circumstances and so does Sarla Devi. Sarla Devi compels Gulzari Lal to pick up a widow as his beloved. The widow Mrs. Mehra is known as Kusum. Kusum is very practical, accommodating and loving. She knows how to win the hearts of the people. She is a normal woman, she knows how to captivate others with her politeness and humbleness. She addresses Gulzari Lal as “chu chu”(45). Sarla Devi is defiant, aggressive. Kusum is an alien for Vishnu, Mala, and Priti (small daughter of Vishnu). Sarla Devi is a blood relation to them. But in times of crisis and disappointment they
turn to Kusum for solace and do not support Sarla Devi. Even GulzariLal understands that Kusum is needed in his family:

Poor Mala is a child in these matters. She misses a mother or mother-in-law. Remember, she comes from a large family and is not used to being alone. She needs you. You must come everyday (44).

Kusum steals a march on Sarla Devi. She looks after the household of GulzariLal. GulzariLal has a social status which he tried to maintain, but beneath that appearance, he has lust for flesh, money and comfort. It is probably the morality of the affluent, which leads to the disintegration of the family. Kusum has excellent skills to accommodate. She very effectively influences the entire house. Kusum is successful because she shares with GulzariLal the ideology and temperament. She so naturally mixes in the homely atmosphere of GulzariLal that she becomes part and parcel of his house. GulzariLal does not feel anything wrong in having a mistress in his house. Kusum takes minutest care of GulzariLal in health, food, drinks. She even shares his bed and this continues for a pretty long time. GulzariLal gets accustomed to her company:
For eight years now she had been always there she would have his bath ready for him, serve him with drinks, massage his legs, and at the same time she entertained him….She was always lively and entertaining (28).

But Sarla Devi fails to adjust herself to the harsh realities of life. She does not know how to compromise with the situations. In the novel as in life, there are those who remain outsiders because they cannot accommodate themselves to the world of realities. Sarla Devi remains an outsider not only to Gulzari Lal but also to Vishnu, Mala and Brij Mohan and even to the members of Bundi Basti.

Sarla Devi works for the welfare of the people of Bundi Basti. She thinks that she is doing a social work and the social work is always ideal. She is obsessed with this idealism. Her obsession is so profound that she happily gives up her own family. This is a very clear case of deviation from the normal pattern of behaviour. Sarla Devi engages herself in social service which provides her sense of significance and personal satisfaction. This is how she deviates from normal routine behaviour of a married woman. This also shows Sarla Devi’s self sacrifice though outside her home. Her neurosis neither permits her to
remain normal in Gulzarilal’s house, nor is she able to save the people of Bundi Basti.

Sarla Devi lacks self-confidence and the skill of persuasion. She does not know how to outwit her husband Gulzarilal in order to retain the land for the people of Bundi Basti. She does not know even the channels, which should be approached for safeguarding the interests of poor people of Bundi Basti. Frustrated, she goes to Gulzarilal for securing his permission not to interfere in the life of the people of Bundi Basti. Sarla Devi says: “They have lived there for fourteen years and now the municipality wants to acquire that land and turn them away”. Gulzarilal contrived to look interested and concerned: “You know the Commissioner” (46). Sarla Devi continues, “You know so many people, it is just in your line. You can help them” (Ibid). Gulzarilal appears more tactful and practical in these matters. Therefore, he knows how to manipulate the situation. He justifies the displacement of slum dwellers because “it is a question of overall development ” (47).

Being a neurotic, Sarla Devi is non-compromising because once she compromised; there would be non-glorification of the self which
would not be acceptable to her. Therefore, firstly she shows her confidence “I will do what I can” (48). But very soon, her split self sues for mercy, “I count on your help in this” (Ibid).

It is very surprising that Sarla Devi seeks help from a person who always behaves like a colonizer and for that reason she disassociates herself from him perhaps, she knows GulzariLal’s ways cannot be mended, even then she expects him to help her. GulzariLal exploits this moment, as always, for his personal benefit. He knows his alignment with Kusum can be legalized if Sarla Devi gives her consent. Therefore, he very cleverly impresses upon Sarla Devi to sign the divorce documents. GulzariLal is very tactful to influence Sarla Devi with his decision by showing how helpless he was without her consent.

“We have a Hindu Code till now, he began his main topic. ‘I want Vishnu to go away. Somewhere on his own, away from you, where he can start again from the beginning all by himself’.

‘It is no longer necessary to remain married. If the marriage is unsuccessful’. ‘Why are you saying all this now? It is ten years since we have finished being married, and I need no law to come and tell me what I am ‘yes, yes,’ he said in some exasperation, that is all very fine, but you always forget that you are living in a society’. ‘I forget! Who is it that cares only
for himself, who never thinks of the millions who have nothing and live in hovels on handful of rice (5).

As a neurotic Sarla Devi harbors imaginary pictures and strives to live up to them and all her efforts are directed towards actualizing a false image, forsaking the real self. That is why, before signing the divorce papers, Sarla Devi, instead of discussing with GulzariLal, the more vital question of her life regarding her divorce; pleads with him for saving the poor. Sarla Devi here seems to be more concerned with imaginary ideals than real ones. The reality is that she needs to patch up her strained relation with her husband but as a neurotic she gives more weightage to the welfare of the people than to her own problems. Having stayed away from her husband for nearly eight years, she has turned her attention to social work. She considers imaginary as real. She thinks that her destiny lies in advocating the cause of the downtrodden. She strives for promoting the cause of the poor slum-dwellers for their permanent settlement on the land they have legally occupied in Bundi Basti colony.

It is ironical that the property agent who manages to get the orders for their eviction is feared and respected by them (slum-
dwellers). The property agent’s main motive is to prevent the fall in the price of land next to the colony by getting the slum-dwellers evicted from it. What appears more pathetic is that her idealistic social work goes unacknowledged and unrewarded. The slum-dwellers strike a deal with Gulzari Lal behind the back and they accept some money to vacate the land.

Gulzari Lal is not at all interested in the welfare of the slum-dwellers. Economic considerations alone guide his actions. Their eviction is expected to restore the exorbitant price of the land adjacent to the colony and prevent a possible fall in the price. Sarla Devi fails to motivate the slum-dwellers. Here, failure may be attributed to her neurotic tendency because she has a tendency to live in the imaginary world which is expected to be complete. Protected and safeguarded from any harm, she fails to handle the situation in a more practical manner. The motives and personal interests of the builders are not understood by Sarla Devi. She fails finally even in her personal married life. She experiences only troubles, problems and sense of domination shown by Gulzari Lal. Sarla Devi did not show her concern for her reconciliation with Gulzari Lal. A normal married woman
would not do so. Sarla Devi signs the divorce papers without any consideration. Her brother Brij Mohan, however, tries to prevent rupture between Gulzari Lal and Sarla Devi. He urges upon Gulzari Lal to reconsider the idea of divorce. He says: “A woman from a family like ours cannot be so easily divorced” (68). The technique and skill of Jhabvala in the portrayal of women’s psyche in the context of Indian culture and Indian social milieu has thus been praised by Arjun Kumar:

Mrs. Jhabvala, being an outsider, has studied the characteristic Indian traits from the viewpoint of a culturally advanced on-looker. This expresses partly why she feels sometimes so terribly upset about social manners and even the postulates of Indian life (2001 : 70).

Jhabvala, as an exponent of contemporary Indian scene, depicts the spiritual aspects of Indian life and presents the religious ethos of Indian life.

In the novel, Gulzari Lal cannot be persuaded to change his mind. However, Kusum succeeds in changing the mind-set of Brij Mohan. Sarla Devi lacks all this skill, and surprisingly, she lives within an imaginary idea of divorce. She wants others to join her in this
venture and when she finds that others are hindering her, she does not help wreaking vengeance upon the person. She thinks that she can coerce the people into submission.

Sarla Devi is a total misfit in the family ambience and relation and also in the society. She is so because she has deviated from normal behaviour. Sarla Devi’s behaviour shows how much tact she requires for facing the realities. She is not realistic and practical in her approach. What is evident here is that Sarla Devi loses control over herself and almost quarrels as --

Mala wriggled her arms to try and free herself, but Sarla Devi’s grip were remarkably fierce. Mala cried, ‘let me go!’ and tears of fury welled from her eyes.

‘But I will never allow you to make my son like that?’ and in her agitates on Sarla Devi shook Mala’s arms up and down and Mala twisted here and there shouting; ‘Don’t touch me!’

The servants came running. They stood round and implored ‘Bibiji!’ and Priti cried. ‘Don’t touch my Mama!’ and tugged at Sarla Devi’s sari (90).

A neurotic Sarla Devi wants Mala to follow what she says. Whatever seems to her is true and correct. She considers her stand as ideal. She also thinks that the case of Bundi Basti is as great as that of Mahabharata. She considers her son Vishnu to be as great as legendary
Arjuna. She urges upon him to fight the battle with her. She provokes her son to fight against injustice.

Oh Vishnu, Vishnu why are you like that? You are like my son. You are as beautiful as Krishna and as strong as Arjun. But your conduct is that of little merchant’s son (89).

She goes on to inspire him “You must stand up my son, fight; you must fling yourself into the world” (91). Now she herself may be a sky gazer with a heart overflowing with sympathy for the poor, but her son, Vishnu in reality is only little merchant’s son. “But she unaware of the implications compares him with Krishna and Arjun on the ground that ‘he is her son’. This inadequacy of assessment and description of her own son’s qualities is all the more odd because she compares the cause of Bundi Basti people with that of the Pandavas of the Mahabharat” (Ibid).

It is often said that Mrs. Jhabvala is very critical of Indian society and she laughs at Indian mode of life. But according to Arjun Kumar, this view is not tenable. He says:
The primary concerns of Mrs. Jhabvala are the manners of white – collared people who experience mental agony in their pursuit of modernism as it involves alienation from their familial and cultural roots. She focuses incongruities for intensifying awareness, and not for attacking or providing carping criticism of Indian mode of life, or even for creating ideological statement (2001: 70).

Sarla Devi considers the imaginary ideal as real. Her actions do not conform to accepted pattern of behaviour as fixed for a wife. Even Kusum does not consider her as ordinary woman. Kusum says: “I know she has no use for the ties by which other women, ordinary woman, are found” (128). Further, Mala, too, considers that Sarla Devi is a mad-woman. She says: “She is a mad woman!” Are you listening to me? It is dangerous to let such women into the house! Listen to me!” (92).

Sarla Devi is a product of the modern cultural crisis, which is an outcome of a gradual disintegration of traditional connections, and customs. Cultural crisis takes place because of man’s materialistic pulls, which render him devoid of spiritualism. GulzariLal’s perpetual and vigorous pursuit of wealth tends to make him forget the basic principle of Indian ethics of surrendering one’s libido for the good of the society. He forsakes his wife because he has got weakness for ladies.
He finds Kusum more enticing and entertaining. His wife, Sarla Devi, on the other hand, does not know how to adjust with the realities. She prefers to estrange herself from her husband.

Sarla Devi retaliates her neglect by her husband not by destroying either herself or her husband. She is the kind of woman who wants to maintain her individuality. She thinks that her idealism of working for the welfare of the unprivileged is the only way through which she can maintain her individuality and existence in the society. She does not regret the fact that her concern for the slum-dwellers goes unacknowledged. During one of the visits of Sarla Devi to the slum area, the slum-dwellers do not consider her any better than any other social worker. For example, Ramchandra’s wife says about Sarla Devi: “She is one of the social workers; and the way she suggested that for all the good they did they could stay where they come from” (111).

Most of the slum-dwellers do not support Sarla Devi in her fight against the capitalists. It was so because Sarla Devi does not know how to manipulate in order to live in the society. She fails to talk with the officers for non-transference of the piece of land of Bundi-Basti. She does not have confidence in herself for mobilizing the high profile
officers. She seeks the help of Mrs. Bhatnagar to prevent the displacement of the slum-dwellers but she convinces the greedy traders and Sarla Devi fails to accomplish her task. The point is that how a woman who is unable to accommodate with her husband could survive outside her home where people are so cunning and undependable. Sarla Devi fails because she considers that she can survive in her imaginary dream world with her high sounding and abstract ideological tenets.

A group of critics have attacked Jhabvala for generalizing woman’s predicaments through her scanty experience of Indian life. But Jhabvala rebuts the charges by saying, “It came about instinctively. I was enraptured. I felt I understood India so well. I loved everything” (New York Times, 11th July 1973). It is a fact that Jhabvala excels in her portrayal of the people and their issues. One of such problems is the problem of marital discord, which is portrayed superbly, and her characters pass through crisis after crisis. They are in a quest of better life-partner. But Sarla Devi does not try to find the partner, she rather tends to concentrate upon social reform as reaction against her neglect by her husband.
There are other characters like Tara and her daughter for whose suffering Sarla Devi quarrels with her brother. The following conversation exemplifies Sarla Devi’s dedication for the poor: “I don’t want her, Brij Mohan cried. Take her away!” (190)

Sarla Devi said, “She can stay with me” (Ibid). The old woman lost no time in hurrying away. Tara looks sullen and stored straight in front of her, with her jams working over her betel leaf. Brij Mohan continues his sitting on the mat:

“If you are so fond of her, then take her with you upstairs”. “After all this time you can’t suddenly say to the girl to get out. I am finished with you. She is not an old pair of shoes to be thrown away” (190).

Sarla Devi identifies herself as intimately as possible with suffering humanity. She can only do so through a voluntary embracing of privation:

Sarla Devi walked for a long time… the sun beat down on her and the glare of it pierced her eyes. Dust and stones from the unpaved road got into her sandals, and she had to stop time to time to take them out… It was an effort for her to walk on again, but she always made it. She walked on the bank of the river, then under the bridge and along the walls of the Fort. Sometimes she stumbled with tiredness and heat, but she willed herself on. Her very exhaustion was a triumph for her; it brought her closer, she felt, to all the poor with whom she so much longed to identify herself (113).
Sarla Devi’s efforts on behalf of the poor are doomed to end in defeat, but her identification with them is total. She strikes “a discordant note” (176) in the elegant drawing room of her social equal Mrs. Bhatnagar because she is physically indistinguishable from the pariahs of society. On her way to Bundi Basti, “No one paid any attention to her; she was just one older woman, in the plain cotton sari worn by the poor” (113).

Humiliation and invective are her portion, as they are of the deprived sections. Her brother calls her a mad woman, her daughter-in-law accuses her of extreme self-centeredness and even the prostitute Tara hurls insult at her and abuses her. Ruth Jhabvala seems to suggest that the moment a woman asserts her individuality in India, she has to confront a social milieu conditioned by the Shastras – a code of laws in which a woman’s role is defined only in terms of her relationship with males. In the Indian society which is mostly patriarchal and male dominated any excessive role played by women is not tolerated in such traditional-bound social structure. Therefore, Sarla Devi has to pass through all odds of society. All sections of society look askance at a woman who believes in choosing the kind of
life she wants to live. Sarla Devi wears her crown of thorns gladly, for it is only in this way that she can alleviate the guilt that she carries on behalf of her fellow men. Ruth Jhabvala’s concept of Sarla Devi’s character is a highly complex one. It embodies, simultaneously, the Indian woman’s movement away from an unthinking acceptance of the Shastra – a landmark in the growth of feminine consciousness in Ruth Jhabvala’s novels – and a supremely individualistic embracing of an ideal culled from older scriptures, walking back from Bundi Basti where “nothing had been achieved” (168), weary and footsore, Sarla Devi sits down to rest on the bank of the river and undergoes her first transcendental experience:

The water stretched as far as the horizon where it merged with the sky and lay all still in a shimmer of heat. There were only sun, river, and sky, and Sarla Devi felt flooded with peace. The burden that lay on her heart had lifted and all the poverty and misery of the world had melted from her. She felt so pure, so blissful that tears came into her eyes; her body felt light as a straw blown on mind. If only it could be so always, if only she could be thus free for ever: free from her own body and from the sense or that of others. All her life she had wanted to be free and alone, like this, thinking nothing and being nothing, only a disembodied state of acceptance… (168-69).
The above passage reveals spiritual touches. It also shows that Sarla Devi possesses spiritual dimension to her personality. It shows sense of sublimity. She experiences peace and total contentment.

The concept of a state of sublime bliss being arrived at through detachment and inner calm appears in many Sanskrit texts, among them are the Vedanta and the Bhagavad-Gita. The fact Jhabvala is familiar with this concept and has read some of these texts is apparent from the epigraphs of her novels and her comments on the nature of Hinduism in “Moonlight, Jasmine and Rickets.” A fundamental and all pervasive ideal of life, this concept has a pan-Indian relevance and has been used extensively by Indian writers as a motif, both in the regional languages and in English. Ruth Jhabvala’s delineation of Sarla Devi, however, “goes beyond this ideal whose traditional ways of life symbolize the tortoise within the shell, the lotus leaf on the pond and the flame that is still and unwavering” (Mukherjee : 1971 : 102). It denotes a state of being that is disengaged with surrounding life. To Ruth Jhabvala, with her Western bias, such an ideal is hardly a worthy one in the face of India’s massive problems. Sarla Devi’s idealism is not practicable in Indian situation. She lives in a very hostile surrounding.
She has to fight against everything. She becomes a fighter because her neurotic condition does not allow her to compromise with the situations. She has the only option to become an idealist. Her idealism is born of an attitude of revenge and is necessitated by an inner compulsion to escape. The idealism and desire escape from the hostility of existing situations deviated Sarla Devi to the spiritual experience. One cannot deny this aspect of Sarla Devi’s personality because after all she is an Indian woman and by temperament she is the woman of detachment. Indian people are God-fearing and religious minded.

Simrit in Sahgal’s *The Day in Shadow* falls in love with Som and marries him without her parents consent. When a girl marries against her parents wishes as a rebel, she expects her husband to be everything. She cannot expect any support from her parents even if her marriage fails. Simrit takes a bold step and breaks the traditional concept of an arranged marriage. She has resisted her parents wishes of getting her married to a man from a decent family. She has married Som with a lot of pride but all in vain. The reason is that Som is a male chauvinist. Simrit has not studied Som’s mind properly. It is said that
love marriages take place just out of infatuation. Simrit falling in love with Som may be her infatuation. Also, “[h]er Brahmin parents with their instinctive withdrawal from anything outside the fold had been frankly upset at her choice of a businessman husband, but her friends had not liked him either” (3). These lines indicate clearly that both her friends and parents disapproved the match. Simrit realizes later that she has made a poor choice. She chooses love marriage, but it turns out to be unsuccessful. It is unfortunate that such a couple wants a divorce.

The reason for the divorce, according to T. Ashoka Rani is as follows:

“Simrit and Som’s relationship is marked by lack of tenderness and warmth, communication and compatibility” (1997:74). It is believed that in love marriages, tenderness, warmth, communication and compatibility are of prime importance. If these qualities are not shared between the couple, then there is no meaning to a love marriage. One may find it difficult to find these qualities in arranged marriages. Thus Sahgal takes a stand that if the husband does not have these qualities, then it is better to divorce him rather than lead a life of compromise. Susheela P. Rajendra too expresses her view in a similar way: “[…] lack of proper companionship, communication and equality between

There is no warmth and tenderness between Som and Simrit. So, Simrit, like Sarla Devi, is also compelled to escape from the constraints of her life. The novel is mainly concerned with the depiction of lack of understanding and sympathy in marital life which causes negative impact on the mind of Simrit. She, like Sarla Devi, is unable to cope with the materialistic and mechanical attitude of her husband. She becomes neurotic because her ‘self’ is suppressed and her imaginary ideals about ideal relationship between husband and wife crumble into pieces. Som, her husband, treats her merely as a sexual object. He never prefers to exchange views with his wife. He allot her only secondary position. On the contrary, Simrit is very fond of refined talks and meaningful arguments which Som surely fails to comprehend. For him, what matters more is business alone. Dealings and flow of wealth is his breath of life. He comes down to any level to earn money. He provides us a typical prototype of modern civilization.
At times the reader is provoked to remember the one eyed ‘smyrna merchant’ in T.S. Eliot’s literary master piece, ‘The Waste Land’. Som is practically unknown of emotional life. He has no feelings, or heart-to-heart relations with anyone near to him. He finds it utterly confusing when Simrit asks him to spend more time with himself. Commenting on the character of Som, Rajeshwar says: “Anything that is not straightforward and intrinsically not useful is outside the scope of his comprehension and experience” (2001: 92).

Some critics have treated Som as villain, as he is found responsible for making his wife’s life miserable. But this treatment is not fair. Simrit is equally, rather more, responsible for the crisis that is precipitated in her life. The genesis of the problem with her can be traced back in her upbringing. Simrit has lived an artificial and snobbish life in Delhi as a child. She has believed in freedom at all levels. Her parents taught her the doctrine of peaceful existence. The author says:

From the high spot an immense valley of choices spread out before her gaze and she felt free at last to choose what her life would be – She was filled with sheer rightness of being alive and healthy at this particular time (236).
Simrit is not taught to adjust herself to the realities of life and what may be called vicissitudes of life. Her ‘scholarly father’ and ‘unworldly mother’ had a tendency to withdraw from “anything outside the orthodox Brahmanical fold” (3).

Consequently, Simrit could not develop a realistic perspective of life. Like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, her parents pamper Simrit. For Simrit, Som appears quite dashing and dazzling. She is charmed by the personality of Som. She thought his associations with her would make her life colourful and charming. To her, Som has everything, which her parents did not possess. She develops high expectations from him and enters into the marital fold. For some years, the life was happy and “they had got an easily enough on the surface, and that had created a sort of its own intensity, depth and devotion were never brought into play at all”(4).

But very soon Simrit is disillusioned with marriage. She finds that her husband does not love her as she wanted him to. Som is more practical and his materialistic concerns alone keep him awfully busy. Som does not find it useful to talk to her about her inner problems. What may be seen here is that only physical side of love does not
matter in married life. There should be a balance between what is known as spiritualism and physicality to keep marital life happy and harmonious. Simrit and Som reach a stage of saturation in love after which it must fall, if there is no spiritual dimension to it. The love between Som and Simrit is an imbalanced one. In D.H.Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, Paul’s relation with Miriam breaks off because it is too spiritual, and his relation with Clara breaks off because there is overindulgence in love which is merely physical. Therefore, there must be a balanced proportion of physical and spiritual love, if it has got to be enduring and long-lasting. The love between Som- Simrit is totally devoid of what may be termed as spirituality and relational harmony. The scholarly interests of Simrit and her penchant for intellectual life run counter to Som’s surfacial outlook. Som could never understand his wife and so he fails to appreciate her feelings. Som stays cut off from her. The reason for existence in the eyes of Som is money. Simrit recalls:

Money had been part of the texture of her relationship with Som, an emotional, forceful ingredient of it. Intimately tied to self-esteem. Money was, after all, a form of pride, even of villain(60).
Simrit, on the other hand, has a deep-seated dislike for the person who does not show any concern for her. She lives in a world of illusion of her own. She begins to make neurotic claims, i.e., she demands her husband to be over-careful about her. When her demands are not fulfilled, she becomes vindictive. She supposes that by being vindictive she may assert her personality upon others. Being vindictive is a contrivance to the neurotics to glorify one’s image. A neurotic does not realize that by doing so he or she is harboring illusions. He lives in the realm of fantasies. He should be as he has visualized himself to be. There are inner dictates that enumerate his standards for him. Simrit was never taught to face the realities of life. Her life in Delhi was quite artificial and the culture in which she was brought up appeared to her paradoxical. About Delhi – life Simrit appears to be a bit sceptic:

Delhi had been simply home, a place to bring up children. But apparently it was much more, the touchstone for whatever happened in India. Delhi could become the heart of her critics (12).
The opening chapter of the novel serves to introduce the readers with all the dramatic personae of the novel who meet at the get-together party at the Intercontinental Hotel. The very first sentence throws light on the flow and glitter of the Delhi–life:

The huge mirrors of the zodiac room at the intercontinental festooned in carved gilt reflected every one of consequences in the ministry of petroleum and a lot of other officials besides. And their wives and some of their daughters – the supple, fat stomached young, with their saris tied low showing their navels, their hair scourging long and loose or piled high in glossy architecture (13).

The artificial background of Delhi–life as reflected here prevents Simrit from developing into a more mature realistic and practical human being. The artificial nature of life in Delhi and hypocrisy of Hindu culture combine together to make Simrit hollow, empty and ambivalent. Simrit could not learn how to live realistically. Further, the crisis is deepened by her marriage to Som. Simrit has married him against the wishes of her parents and that of her friends.

In this context, Shyam Asnani has rightly remarked:
Her Brahmin parents with their instinctive withdrawal from anything outside the world get upset at her choice of a businessman husband, but her friends do not like him either. They think him a bear, for people always dislike and distrust commercial flash and glare if they do not possess it themselves. A man has to be flashy on a big scale to be thought well of, and majestically vulgar to be admired, and Som does not belong to that category. But his flash is what has charmed her solitary, book-loving childhood. Som is colour and life and action (1973 : 60).

Simrit develops a perspective about her married life. She develops a feeling of being rejected and humiliated. She begins to act in a more unpredictable manner. Som is unable to know the real problem with Simrit. He says to his friend Vetter in the next room:

I’m worried about Simrit! She’s not herself. Has she had a medical check up?

Yes, yes lot. There’s absolutely nothing the matter with her physically. That’s what’s worrying me (77).

It has been rightly said that the neurotics have a tendency to live isolated because they don’t feel protected. Simrit, too, likes to live alone. She tells Vetter that she does not need anybody to spend more time with her. She was very complete with the children and her writing. But Simrit does not find reasons in it. She feels alienated from
her husband. Vetter tries to bring reconciliation between the husband and the wife. He tries to tempt her to have shopping-clothes, jewels anything; trips abroad, summer trip to Europe, but nothing moves her, nothing satisfies her. Simrit cries helplessly:

We cry about things we can’t change. She gets a single clear thought. Som and Vetter belong to a world that just goes on perfecting techniques, and cannot bear living in it any more. There must be other world (85).

The mental sickness of Simrit is beyond the grasp of Som. Simrit moves into her room and fully dressed on her bed, she tries to strengthen herself and says to herself:

Imagine instead the things that happen in this very city, some times just down to road. Imagine the vagrant children, the days without food, nights without shelter for people with no additional, outer threat over them, no fear of war. Why let imagination travel further than that to some woman with a child in her body getting Som’s and Vetter’s bomb, or whatever it was, and flying a part, leaving bits of child that could be exchanged for a whole new drawing room furniture and upholstery, silk and velvet cushions for gracious and civilized living. Children in their cradles should fear men like you (87).

But the main reason of her envy is that she desires the world to be more kind to her. “Surely there is such a world, she thinks, after all,
people once believed it was flat and it turned out otherwise. If its shape could turn out different, so can texture”(84). Som tries to console her. He explains to her that he is very much busy, and hence, he cannot attend to her. But Simrit does not listen. The feeling of being rejected and neglected haunts her all the time. She becomes vindictive. She stays separate. She behaves quite abnormally. She desires to cut relations in terms of sex from Som because he has not properly responded to her sex instinct. She develops the feeling of being rejected by him. She decides to punish Som by withdrawing sex from him. Simrit desires Som to just hold her hands and live like brother and sister. She wants him to be just like loving friends. Som is utterly confused. He tells her flatly that whatever she is trying to get it is quite beyond him. Som behaves as ever in domineering manner. His manly pride is hurt by the unusual demands Simrit has begun to make. He wants to rectify her. He scares Simrit by saying that he will be away to Madras for a week, and that would give her ample time to think over and decide what she wants to do. He asks her to get on with a normal life and finish this game once and for all. Som does not know that such an attempt to rectify her would ruin her forever. Som's
behaviour hurts Simrit’s neurotic pride which makes her utterly disappointed. Asnani has very rightly commented: “She feels forlorn non-pulsed, all her freshness, charm and gaiety lost. Society had actually died forever long before she was divorced” (1973 : 63).

Thus, Simrit’s married life fails to yield any pleasure to her. She wants Som to pamper her, which Som is incapable of doing. Her marital life with Som has proved to her a meaningless existence and wastage of her talents, because there is no compatibility between Simrit and Som. Simrit is a true example of the image of a ‘feminine mystique’, as defined by Betty Friedan:

There was a strange discrepancy between realities of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to confirm, the image that came to call the feminine mystique (1971 : 9).

Simrit had expected that her marriage with Som would fructify all her dreams, but nothing could happen. Her desires were repressed. Hence, she deviated from normal pattern of behaviour. Furthermore, she always remains worried about her decision to marry Som. In fact, after marriage, she had begun to repeat her alliance with Som,
resultantly Simrit was torn into conflicts and became a neurotic. Som hurts her neurotic pride by treating her as a possession and not as a person. Simrit’s cravings for a respectful life suffer a deep blow at the hands of Som. She finds Som quite unprotective and uncaring, so she begins to live a life of withdrawals and loneliness. Many critics have argued that this behaviour of Simrit encourages male chauvinism. But Urbashi Barat refutes such charge but she agrees with the view that –

Simrit’s responses are the subversive protest of the weak, the disinherited and the marginalized. Her personality has been shaped by her feminine experience in a patriarchal society, which as Karen Horney points out her feminine psychology, prevents her from achieving self-confidence, and inculcates in her a degree of dependence on love in relationship (2001 : 80).

She challenges the basic thing that marriage is a legalized protection i.e. device of sex-fulfillment and the sacred aspect of marriage is procreation. She stays away from Som, thus, propitiating him to understand the futility of marriage. Som, as a result, does not find any logic and meaning in continuing his living with Simrit. So, Simrit has never anticipated that her mild step to rectify her husband would ruin her married life forever. She could never think of the pros
and cons of her decision as she had never learnt how to face the realities.

Some of the critics have opined that Simrit loves freedom, and when it is refused to her, she rebels. Here, it may be said that the meaning of freedom is quite elusive. Precisely speaking, freedom is bondage. Simrit is constitutionally unable to grasp the meaning of freedom. She thinks of enjoying freedom of communication of ideals with her husband beyond the glandular sensations of sex. When she finds her husband does not respond to her properly, she is compelled to seek human communication or friendship outside the bond of marriage. Simrit reflects: “Sex was no more just sex than food was just food...And once past its immediacy, sex had it visions too – of tenderness of humour, of more than a physical act” (90).

Simrit thinks that freedom of communication is not there between her and her husband. She is ignored and isolated like a piece of furniture but used occasionally by Som whenever needed by him to satisfy his biological urges. Simrit’s ego is hurt and she feels denigrated and humiliated and for the restoration of her glorification of herself, she behaves abnormally. She allowed herself to be sexually assaulted
by Som. She willfully suppresses her own sense of pleasure. She surrenders herself totally to the sexual violence of her husband. The result is that she is impregnated time and again. She gives birth to babies not for their own sake but to fulfill her neurotic need. According to Rajeshwar, the provocation to her serves three purposes:

The babies serve three purposes simultaneously: They draw Som’s attention to her, they satisfy the creative wife in her, for she has been a writer of sorts but has given up writing on regular basis and they satisfy her ego in the sense that she sees them as an extension of herself (2001: 93).

Simrit has always profoundly desired the kindly attention of Som. Som would feel quite attached to her whenever she would become pregnant. This was a moment of intense pleasure for her:

Simrit did not specially want a boy or another baby. But pregnancy had accidentally spread a feast before them, a lavish flowering sensuality that took all the time in the world to fulfill it. It transformed Som, making him little afraid and beautifully unsure. After the baby came he would go back ....but while this lasted she made the most of it. She never told him she felt reckless, not fragile, during these months (25).

Som’s feeling for her is what she craved for. He turned to her and showered his love upon her, but she interpreted it only as instinctual urge on the part of Som, which for her tended to obliterate
her individuality. Hence, Simrit responded to his dispositions not indifferently and acrimoniously. Som’s relation with Simrit might be seen as equal to that between Catherine and Valmiki in Kamala Markandaya’s *Possession*. Valmiki does not enjoy freedom of communication with Catherine in the same way as he does it with the Swami. Catherine possesses Valmiki like an object. It is Catherine, who determines Valmiki’s likes, dislikes, and because it is so unnatural and unreal that finally antagonizes Valmiki. A.V. Krishna Rao has opined that: “Som, in Mrs. Sahgal’s novel, is the masculine edition of Catherine in his affluent arrogance, sexuality and utter lack of refinement” (1976 : 120).

Under the domineering influence of Catherine, Valmiki could not develop and articulate his artistic dispositions and creative urge. Hence, he broke away from her. Simrit’s intellectual dispositions do not get a proper ambience for prospering in the company of her husband, hence she feels alienated and rejected. She wants him to liberate himself from the clutches of mad pursuit of money and to share her feelings with him. She did not find a proper lover in her husband. She failed to find her childhood love in Som. Her repressed
feeling to get a lover in Som is not at all fulfilled. Marriage turns out to be an entirely different experience for her. She thinks Som is not at all fit for her. She perceives that Som’s power of wealth will overwhelm her; hence, she decides to break her relation with Som. A neurotic has a tendency to withdraw from the realities particularly when the realities do not appear glorifying the self of the neurotic. Simrit thinks that her ‘self’ is not being glorified within the bonds of the married life and that Som has neither respect nor has he any appreciation value for her intellectual and romantic bearings. For Simrit, as Laxmi Parsuram has observed:

Som is getting rich very fast and…. He has become less and less capable for contemplation (1970 : 156).

Can withdrawal of sex by Simrit to mend the ways of Som be a justified step? A normal human being would not dare do so. Many sociologists have suggested that marriage is a legalized sex. Avoiding sex in marital life would mean denying food to life or milk to a baby. For Simrit, however, avoiding of sex seems to be the only way to rectify her husband. That night Som compels her with his urgency; she
stays separate, excluded and rebellious. In fact, Simrit has developed a conception of sex, “Sex could be an argument or a problem shared” (90).

In addition to her abnormalities, Simrit’s romantic affair with a young boy makes the matter more crucially complex. She mixes memory of her adolescent romantic days with her married life. She often remembers, “It was a very romantic attachment. We held hands and kissed a bit – not much and rather chastely, and yearned a lot” (107). Simrit applies the parameters of the romantic love to the married life. She treats marriage as an extension of romantic love affair. By doing so she commits a blunder. In this way, she fails to see the reality. She continues to live in an illusory world as neurotics create an illusory world. She fails to understand that she could be a vital linking force between husband and wife. On the contrary, she feels that married life could be lived with intellectual and romantic yearning alone. This illusion shatters when she practically faces reality.

It must be pointed out here that sex in marriage has different meanings for men and women. In this connection, Rajeshwar has said:
Men and women are divided by desire discrepancy over sex. For men it is one act complete in itself. He desires it for the intimate pleasure it is capable of yielding. For women it is more of an act of intimacy and emotional gratification (2001:98).

Simrit has additional reasons to be sexually gratified independent of her husband. Psychological studies have proved that pregnancy, delivery and lactation yield tremendous amount of sexual satisfaction resulting in a dimming of desire for the act itself and Simrit has ‘hordes’ of children. Given the nature of Som one cannot attribute an awareness of this fine distinction in his and his wife’s attitudes towards sex. On the contrary, he has a greater need for sex. It is well known to psychology that people like Som, who have strong passions, as a rule have strong sexual drives. Som, as is usual with middle-aged men, also perhaps begins to suspect his sexual prows and thus needs the reassurance of his wife. “So he is insisting for sex in utter disregard of her feelings” (98).

Thus, the feelings of Simrit are hurt. Sex for Simrit is a contrivance of controlling the women. She does not want to be controlled. She decides to break away from her husband. On the other
hand, Simrit’s withdrawal of sex from him appears to be quite melodramatic. He retaliates by cutting her off from his life completely explaining that “when a woman freezes up every time her husband touches her its time to call it a day” (99).

The marriage is dissolved. Simrit had neurotically sought to dissolve it in order to gain freedom. But freedom, she is denied. Som imposed the ‘Consent Terms’ on her, which oblige her to pay heavy taxes. Thus, what Simrit gets in the name of freedom is victimization. Simrit is overburdened with financial liabilities, which tend to spoil the prospects of her freedom. Further, her desire to get freedom from male-domination ultimately proves to be a great disillusionment as another male, whose name is Raj, rescues her – Raj, a bachelor with Christian background is linked with Simrit for two qualities – justice and gentleness. He shows non-attachment and disinterested involvement in the problems of Simrit, which soon develops into a mental liking for each other. For him, Simrit is a woman of culture,

She could be that rarity, a woman with a profession, an independent person living her own life. She didn’t need a man for identity or status. There was an internally private rapture in making and shaping own life that few people recognized (140).
It is Simrit’s assertive nature that brings her closer to Raj. The sense of glorification of self of Simrit is fulfilled through her associations with Raj. Simrit’s turning to Raj is one more example of the woman’s continued greed for an equal relationship in which she can find both true love and herself. She breaks her seventeen–year–old marriage just to fulfill her neurotic pride. She is ready to undergo all kinds of trials and tribulations in order to safeguard her self. As a divorcee, she feels uprooted and abandoned. Suddenly she is deprived of the luxurious way of living. She has taken “All the living wealth (children) and had kept behind the crockery and furniture and jewels and silver. Som got all things, the cars and the bank accounts” (58).

While Som rolled in wealth, Simrit lives in penury. Her sacrifice of wealth and prosperity is vindictive. Simrit turns to Raj for security, support, and companionship. In Raj she finds her intellectual partner. She shares an experience of intellectual equality. Raj has a liking to intellectualize on the most ordinary things. He develops interest in her because he is opposed to the oppression of the females and he
considers the divorce settlement as “the ultimate in outrage inflicted on an unresisting, unsuspecting victim” (37).

Urbashi Barat has pointed out the fact that despite his feminist conviction and his express concern for Simrit, Raj seems to stand for Connellan’s view that:

Men enjoy practical power, but accept it as if it were given to them by an external force, by nature or convention or even by women themselves, rather than an active social subordination of women going on here and now (1978: 81).

Simrit’s going to Raj and her association with him is similar to Sarojini’s going to the Swami for faith healing. Sarojini feels neglected and humiliated by her husband Dandekar in Kamala Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire*. Sarojini seeks glorification of the self, which she gets when she comes in contact with the Swami. Simrit is instigated by Raj to have confidence in herself. Raj fosters confidence in her and most often continues to encourage and console her. These things Simrit never received from her husband in the past. He suggests her not to worry much about the problem imposed upon her by her husband. Raj does everything that Simrit would like somebody to do for her. Simrit
associates with Raj most freely. She forgets the world she has left behind. But she is perpetually worried by the crippling consent terms. She appeals to Som through her lawyer Moolchand to reconsider the terms of divorce settlement, but this exercise goes in vain. Simrit accepts Raj and this acceptance is based on his endearing qualities of tender man, honesty and equality which she had vainly searched for in Som. Raj’s rich warm concern appeals to her and “he always did what he said he would do, the only stable element in the emotional debris of her new world” (16).

Raj provides to Simrit extreme kind of support. And finally, Simrit decides to marry him. Simrit, however, apprehends that her marriage with Raj would endanger her individuality and dignity. But she is hopeful that in the company of Raj she can live a truer life without any pretence and suppression of her desires:

The personal world of Raj and Simrit, grounded in sympathy and understanding, hence communication and friendship, rather than bestial sensuality and cruel insensitivity, seems to be the world that Nayantara not only wishes to depict but also prescribes as the only one and sensitive alternative to the mechanistic world of power, atrocities and greed (Asnani : 1987 : 130).
The action on the part of Raj fulfills the neurotic pride of Simrit and also contributes to glorifying the ‘self’ of Simrit. There are several instances to show that there is perfect equality and harmony between them. Very often Simrit takes a decision and imposes it upon Raj. Simrit turns down Raj’s proposal to have dinner in a hotel and “Raj accepts defeat” (14). At another time, Raj’s proposal to have coffee at a restaurant is declined and instead Simrit suggests going to her house. In every small matter also there is very smooth understanding between them. They are never found at dagger’s head. Raj concedes, “All right, let’s go. With you, I face a dead end of every turn, unlike Som. Who must have ridden roughshod and triumphant, did he?” (139). So even so far as going to Moolchand, her lawyer was concerned, it was Simrit’s own decision. Raj has recognized the independent spirit of Simrit. Raj always tries to provide her a kind of psychological support. His mentor Ramkrishna advises Simrit that “she should live as if the horror of the tax burden over her head does not exist at all?” (181). He suggests her to forget the ‘Consent Terms’:
Once though Indians had been slaves, they had lived as if they been free, heads held up, chest thrust out, invincible under Gandhi. And what price matters if it had lifted not even a spark, if it could never happen again? (205).

Simrit accepts Ramkrishna’s advice and the belief makes her exaggerate: “overflow, tell the world about the mild, sweet heart sending rapture of being alive” (Ibid). Commenting on Sahgal’s concern for portrayal of women’s psyche, Pratap Lahiri writes that Sahgal brings:

to the foreground the inner reality of an individual belonging to the female species, seeking to be free in Free India, from the cobwebs and tentacles of false social taboos and desiring to tentatively tear away from her household role, in order to search for a sexual freedom, self-respect and a satisfactory inner realization (2001 : 169).

Coupled with the advice of Ramakrishna, Simrit’s own decision to assert her ‘self’ provides a fresh occasion for her to re-examine her place in society and find herself in the process. Simrit finds her life disrupted and is entangled in her financial crisis. The heavy tax payments are an attempt to enslave her in every way, and divorce instead of being a new beginning is a confrontation with the age-old orthodox views regarding the status of women. All her attempts to
make others see the divorce settlement from her point of view fail because people do not see her as an individual seeking freedom and fulfillment. As long as divorce settlement provides for the future of their son, it seems to others to be a fair settlement. Moolchand, Som’s employee and Shah, a rich industrialist, interested and disinterested parties both see nothing wrong with it. Simrit likens her position to that of an overloaded donkey whose burden attracts no notice and draws forth no pity for “loads are for donkeys” (56). The divorce settlement is indirectly a continuation of their marriage, it pins her down to the role of a victim and attempts to crush her desire to be free in a positive way. Being a mischievous man Som has not left Simrit free. His divorce conditions are hanging on her head and Simrit though apparently free is practically haunted by the burden of Som’s heavy tax payment. This is how Simrit is not able to enjoy her freedom with Raj. Her body is only free but mind is burdened by the thought of tax payment. But Simrit overcomes this hurdle by mustering up courage and the first step she has to take is to face the situation squarely and it is the courage of this stand, which frees her from the bonds of the marriage as well as the divorce settlement. Out of this
struggle a new Simrit is born— a person who makes choices, takes
decision and becomes aware of herself as a graceful, dignified human
being. First, the mind, then the body open up to new responses and
life affirms itself in a new sense of fulfillment in her relationship with
Raj, which is an involving, and an equal one.

Thus, both, Sarla Devi and Simrit follow an exactly opposite
neurotic course. On being compelled to silently suffer the strains of
life, they do not bite upon their heart; but defy the social injunctions
but only to become compulsive idealists.

Sarla Devi’s concern for the poor is, therefore, unmatched but
her power and zeal for social work does not emanate from healthy
mind but it originates from a mind that is sick and neurotic. She goes
out of her husband’s house as she feels that her idealism is being
choked and suppressed. So, she forsakes her well-established family.

Therefore, she sets on an endless journey for the retrieval of
her glorified self. She comes to Bundi Basti, which she fails to
rehabilitate despite all her efforts and desire, and from there she goes
to reclaim Tara and her daughter who have been most unceremoniously driven away by her brother, Brij Mohan.

The novel ends on a note of desperate journey of Sarla Devi to bring back the destitute, Tara and her daughter. She thinks it is her duty to help them and only then, Sarla Devi could become free from all her moral and practical obligations.