Shashi Deshpande :-

This chapter deals with the various themes in the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande. The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence and The Binding Vine. Shashi Deshpande has been writing since 1970. Her chief thematic concern is women’s struggle in the middle class society. Other themes are frustration, guilt, fear, loss, loneliness and death. Her themes on human relationship, especially within the family bond, express her valuable and authentic experience and her understanding of the complexity of this relationship. Shashi Deshpande’s writings Laxmi Holmstrom observes:

I learnt about language, craftsmanship is so important in writing, and you only learn by doing it. And the story was the perfect from, because one had to be brief.¹

Deshpande has a distinct tradition of her own that rooted in social and cultural contexts. There is an awareness to question traditional images by way of probing into the meaning of the experience and sometimes with a moment of rebellion. But still there is no question of traditional concepts where in an attempt at totally breaking away from society and its norms is seen in her novels.

The Dark Holds No Terrors:

In The Dark Holds No Terrors, Deshpande attempts to analyze man woman relationship within the family. Theme is woman’s predicament. The story is narrated through a male character. The narrator is a family friend of a newly married couple. The author herself says what the story tells about:

Temperamental and situational contrasts between married couples a successful lady doctor and a frustrated lecturer devoted to his teaching. Owing to their contrastive jobs
and situations, they cannot pull on well, and things get out of control when a magazine interviewer humiliates the husband for his inability to bear the financial burden of the family.  

Consequently the husband turns a sadist. The wife, unable to cope up with him, seeks help from the family friend who is greatly responsible for their marriage. The friend, an elderly person, suggests divorce. But she decides not to break a way for the sake of children and ultimately chooses to suffer. She wants the friend just to tell him her story and lessen the burden of grief. This is the woman’s predicament, full of grief. The story may be viewed through another angle: the theme of endurance. Goutham Buddha preached enlightenment through suffering. Buddha’s philosophy is living through suffering. This idea is elaborately discussed in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The lady doctor in the end decides to live through suffering by seeking solace in her profession.

The desire for isolation is another theme in the novel. Mother’s isolation is throughout her life even though she lives all the while in the family. She quarreled with her in laws and was responsible for the rift between her husband and herself. The loss of son is a great failure in her life. She developed hatred towards the daughter, which she carried to the grave. She never disclosed her illness and died of cancer in the stomach. Saru’s feeling of homelessness is on affirmation of her sense of isolation. Saru is emotionally bonded with her family. She loves her parents very much in spite of her mother’s heartlessness. She also disliked mother because she was hurt by her mother’s behavior. Instead of solving the problems in a harmonious way, she escaped from her mother. Her idea of solution is escapism. She is forced to think that any attempt to reach out to another
human being is futile and that man is born to be lonely and alone. Her helplessness makes her to think thus:

To be alone: never a stretching hand? Never a comforting touch? Is it all a fraud then, the eternal cries of ……my husband, my wife, my children, parents? Are all human relationships doomed to be a failure? 3

For fifteen years she is isolated from her parents but longed for them every day. Saru and her mother are two strong characters. They could sustain suffering. Silence is another theme of the novel, silence leads to ignorance. Ignorance is compared to darkness and Saru is afraid to plunge into this darkness. She maintained silence when Dhruva drowned. Her mother’s rejection towards her leads her to become silent towards parents and she succeeded in maintaining silence for fifteen years with Manu. There is silence between father and mother they maintain distance. Mother is silent about her illness till the end. Saru did not try to understand her mother’s feelings and her nature. It is the mother who feels defeated in life and likens herself to Duryodhana. She made father to read a part of Mahabharata over and again.

Duryodhana finds he is almost the only one of them left; he leaves the battlefield and goes into a lake. He waits there for the Pandavas to come and kill him….. Yes that’s what all of us have to face at the end. That are alone we have to be alone. 4

When father narrates this incident, suddenly Saru sees a vision and thought that mother may also have felt the same way after listening to the story of Duryodhana that even if life is an illusion, it is the only reality we know and therefore, one has to go on as if it is the real, knowing all the while it is only an illusion. Human beings and human relations may fail but
your own self will not. Saru is of the opinion: “We have to go on trying. If we can’t believe in ourselves, we are sunk.”

The recurrent themes explored through Deshpande’s novels are responsibility, motherhood, mother daughter relationships, isolation and the need for physical, emotional space, the awareness of them, possibility of unified, monolithic identity and fixed narrative position. Most importantly there is move towards self knowledge, which involves a long and painful process of introspection and analysis. This can also be tied to Radhakrishnans concept of the postcolonial hybrid self as being excruciatingly produced through multiple traces for example, Saru comments about her brother: “Poor little seared boy, who never grew up to know The Dark Holds No Terrors. That the terrors are inside us all the times.”

Through these recurring themes, Deshpande creates spaces from and into which silenced voices can emerge. Her texts reveal patriarchy’s attempts to marginalize and efface its women, whether educated or not Deshpande’s skilled delineation of working class women, and reconstructions of the lives of house wives of past generations though problematic in terms of the politics of representation, give voice to a suppressed, silent, often brutally treated group a ‘subaltern’ class, as it were. In her novels, we get the theme of poverty, stricken, hardworking, sincere and silent women of India. Who live like animals, embrace intolerable suffering for survival, and yet hope.

For a better future their issues only to be crest fallen at the end. Nothing happens in their life but series of disappointments along with humiliation, torture and repeated displacement. Besides the rural mass, there are middle class women in the innumerable towns and cities of India who are often unable to enjoy the legal status conferred on them. Women are now treated on equal terms by law as far as inheritance of property and
opportunities of jobs are concerned. But on the social level, these women who have been struggling since ages to assert themselves are still being heckled by their male counterparts and forced to remain silent. The voice of this newly emerged class of women, who have the same education as the men are having are sometimes given the opportunity of supporting themselves financially, is heard in the writing of Shashi Deshpande. A voice of protest against the marginalized condition of women as a class is also audible in her works. The bold heroines, having moral courage necessary for self assertion replace the meek and submissive heroines who were accepted as the standard women characters.

**Roots and Shadows:**

The theme of the novel is the family bond. In life, sometimes a necessity arises when one goes in search of one’s roots for solace. In times of crisis, Deshpande wants to highlight the idea that nothing exists in isolation but everything is interlinked. In order to show the interconnectedness, the author. In the chapter first quotes a part of the American Indian chief Seattle’s speech in 1854: “All things are connected. Yes, they are which is why no one can be completely free. Freedom has to be relative.” The roots are interconnected even though it spreads far and wide that also explains in the words of old uncle, a cousin of Indu’s grandfather. “The world is made up of interdependent parts.” There are about twenty people living in the old house. Anantkaka the eldest son of Indu’s grandfather now owns the house. He has three brothers Govind, Madhav and Vinayak. Govind is Indu’s father. He has two sisters Narmada and Sunanda. Anant’s Children are Hemant, Sumant, Shard and Padmini, his father was a landlord but after his death no one showed interest in lands except Anant. His minimum education is insufficient because people deceived him easily.
He is honest and mild person grandfather’s younger sister whom everyone called Akka lives with them, she and Narmada are childless widows. Sunanda Atya’s husband either has a stable job or a house of his own. Madhav and Vinayak have jobs in Bombay; their visit to the old house is only during functions and festivities. An elderly person whom everyone called old uncle lives in the old house. A retired teacher took to drinking habits and lost his health and wealth, his grandson Naren is well educated, Akka dominated the house. She cleverly made everyone to stay together. The major theme of the novel is the predicament of woman. It may be said that the novel is feministic; she tries to explore the range of one’s own sensibility without the influence of any narrow masculine pattern and to feel entirely confident in one’s own judgment and values. The predicament of Indu portrays the inner conflict of a woman to express her to discover the real self, through her inner and in instinctive potential for creative writing. 

Shashi Deshpande in one of her articles tells how the character Indu dominated the writer herself. She planned the novel to be detective but Indu asserted her identity and came out of the whodunit framework, she writes:

Indu had become part of me, of my life.
And then a curious triumph as well…. She
sprang out of the claustrophobic world with

courage I admired.  

The ‘new woman’ struggle to break away from the shackles of tradition and there is conflict between tradition versus modernity in this sense her feministic views may be called as traditional feminism as she is mainly concerned with Indian woman is the middle class Brahmin setup the western concept of feminism is not suitable to the Indian context because the predicament and the solution may vary depending on the social, economic and geographical conditions of each country. Indian is deep rooted in the Vedic philosophy and the traditional Hindu culture and rituals strongly upheld the customs to the question of women Indian woman in old days followed men blindly in subjugation. Shashi Deshpande is critical about foe
customs which seem to be ridiculous like, women circumambulating the Tulsi plant to enhance the life span of their husbands or not uttering, husband’s name for fear of lessening his days of living. Another theme in the novel is the theme of marriage, Indu loves integrity. She married Jayant because she loved him very much. But marriage was not all that rosy even in modern times as compared to the old traditional way. She learns the tactics of happy marriage when she says:

I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see. To say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear I hide my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage.\(^\text{10}\)

Narmada Atya’s marriage was a disaster, her in-laws ill treated her after her husbands’ death and so her father brought her home. Indu questions her once about her desires in life and Atya bitterly replies, wish put a person in a room this size, she had brought her hands together. “And for sometime he’ll scream and shout and rage andborn his head against the wall then he gets use to it”\(^\text{11}\) the tyrant Akka had miserable married life. She was just twelve and the man passed thirty. Her husband tortured her immensely later he had a stroke and was bedridden for two years. Akka nursed him day and night. Marriage for her was a nightmare but she endured everything. The endurance later turned to domination in her brother’s family. Padmini who is about to get married is indifferent to marriage, her marriage negotiation did not click fast as there was a flow in her horoscope for some others rejected her with reaction as to dark, too old fashioned to modern, too tall and too short and when everything was all right there was demand for huge dowry. She at last decided to marry a person of Akka’s choice. The person did not matter because the important thing was to get a security.
Ujawala Patil analyzing the theme of marriage in *Roots and Shadows* says:

For Shashi Deshpande women marriage is a serious conflict situation meaning and meaningless refers to this event in their lives and confrontation is between traditional sexual expectations and demands of the self. They suffer, question and look for answers.\(^1\)

Then lastly self discovery is another theme of the novel in spite of her commitment to the family. Indu towards the end of the novel is changed person. She not only looks at the family from a new perspective but also from her own self. She realizes that she is no better than other women in the family. The novel is on one level, a spiritual evolution of the central character who has wrongly made others and herself believe that her life is radically different but it is not so she acts as judge for herself as well as others, her education wide vision of life and her quality of assertiveness made her different from other women in the family

*That Long Silence*:

Keki Daruwalla commenting on the theme of the novel says:

The book is about a dark patch in a family’s life, with Mohan facing charges of corrupt practice wanting to lie low in a Dadar hideout. Ruminant in tone, the post come alive. A crisis on the job and the matrimonial fronts starts brewing. Both nostalgic and the unbearable pressures of the current predicament take the narrator Jaya, back to the post ancestral ghosts hang over the pages. Old relatives pad through the narrative such a strong finely etched entity in its own right.\(^2\)
Jaya seems to have a limited thinking power like the little sparrow, for her life is nothing but her family. Even when she wishes for a disaster, she does not mean that it should come to her but to happen at a distance, she wants to erase the unending monotony. It is the human tendency or psychology that man is never satisfied with what he has and always long for the opposite. Jaya’s seventeen years of marriage comprises of nothing but monotonous daily chores and the endless waiting. Waiting for everything waiting for husband, children, a change and even a disaster.

The theme of the novel is self discovery of the protagonist Jaya. There is the desire to retreat into madness mentioned earlier of three women in the novel. These women are closely related to Jaya, Kusum is known to be the other self of Jaya. Kusum and Jaya spent their childhood together in Ambegaon. Kusum’s madness gives an assurance to Jaya that she is sane. When Kusum died Jaya feels at last she thinks that after hearing Mohan’s case, she too may become mad. The novel may also be considered as the autobiography of the narrator Jaya, with the feminist approach more prominent not ignoring the domestic concerns of the middle-class, Indian family of the social life add favor to the novel. Jaya wants to come out of her monotonous life and longs for a disaster. The disaster at last knocked at her door, swept her clean off the floor that her life is in jeopardy Jaya is sensitive woman from childhood, the elders drilled into her head that a girl or a woman is incapable of getting angry. Her father, brothers and then her husband expected her to be a recipient into aggressive. Jaya’s Ajji often criticized Jaya for being too inquisitive. She said: “Look at you for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that?”

The theme may also be interpreted from a different angle. The catastrophe in Jaya’s life is a blessing in disguise. The disaster helps her in
realizing the ‘power of woman’ in her. Her stagnated mind becomes active. She remembers the day she began writing. She wrote short stories, initially her interest in journalism increased when Mohan also encouraged her. She became a feminist columnist her ‘Sita’ column become a regular feature, slowly her writing stagnated. It becomes stereotyped. Mohan also starts disliking her autobiographical writing and so she stopped writings she wants to change her way of writing. Kamat, her neighbor, helps her in pointing out her drawbacks in writing.

Kamat exists in the novel as a shadowy figure. He is an advertiser and lives alone above the apartment of Kulkarni’s at Dadar, by chance Jaya meets him. They both maintain a cordial relationship. He is a widower with a son who lives abroad Jaya is more free and uninhibited with him than she is with her husband Kamat understands Jaya’s weakness in her writing and guides her in the proper perspective. He tells her that she speaks angrily about woman’s predicament, but writers of it without the emotion since she believes that woman cannot be angry. Kamat had said,

All this anger…. Why don’t you use it here? He points to the story she had given Him to read, why don’t you use that anger in your Story….There isn’t even a personal view a personal vision. I’ll tell you what’s really wrong with your story. It’s too restrained. 

Kamat is intelligent, he is sympathetic towards Jaya. He is a true friend to her but Jaya betrays him. When Jaya went to meet him one day in his room, he was dead she is the first person to see him dead. She quietly comes out of his house and hurries off to church gate house Jaya is scared of a scandal. Jaya gives up her writing career and her friendship with Kamat for the sake of her family. Though she is educated and imbibed modern thoughts
of the west, the deep rooted traditional upbringing never allows her to go astray. She readily protests the docile nature of Sita, Draupadi, Savitri and other mythological women, but believed a pair of bullocks yoked together and so decides to go in the same direction lest there is pain. So Jaya moulds herself as per the wishes of her husband. Jaya’s childhood is spent in an extended family of grandmother uncle’s aunts in laws, neighbors and domestic help all as well as nurture. Jaya plays out duties in stoical angry silence Deshpande explain that silence is necessary to maintain a balance in marriage. A woman is taught many tricks to get in a relationship and silence is one of them. When a woman at last dares to break the silence, disasters occur. Many women have died maintaining silence to themselves like Kusum, Vimala and Aai, Mohan’s mother. Jaya is lucky to get time to introspect herself and the cruel process begins she realizes the futility of the busy and luxurious life and her role in it.

When Jaya is facing identity crisis, Mohan is frustrated with the loss of his identity; he is an engineer, working busily from ten am. to five p.m. he is suddenly being deprived of his routine, he misses his files, his telephone, and his appointments and seemed to be no one at all. Mohan’s nature is dominating. He decides all the matter of the house and for assurance he would ask Jaya. Jaya, who had learnt the tricks by now, could read Mohan’s mind and is always ready with the answer, which Mohan anticipates. Mohan’s silence in the novel is not projected in tensely because Deshpande is mainly concentrating on her women Characters. Mohan has never shared his secrets with Jaya. He is very assertive in his behavior. He has a weakness although. When the bribery case is made public, he becomes panicky and puts the blame on Jaya and children that he did it for their sake. Like Jaya, Mohan also struggles to express himself and to maintain a hopefully long silence regarding his business malpractice. Jaya knows that her husband has
cheated his authorities. Shama Futehally, a critic, comments on society. She says:

This is never called cheating. It is called being practical or being realistic, or just accepting favors, nothing else… in any case it is accepted that without such practices no business can succeed ‘these days’, and then how would a man fulfill his duty to his wife and children.\(^\text{16}\)

The images used by Deshpande are adequate and appropriate to the theme of the novel. Two recurrent images in the novel perform a crucial role. The married couple is likened to ‘a pair of bullocks used together’ and the husband is said to be ‘a sheltering tree’. The protagonist rejects the image of traditional women Sita, Savita, Draupadi and instead prefers the image of a pair of bullock’s which clearly explains that a slight movement towards the opposite side can cause tremendous pain. The fragility of marriage and also the suffering involved are more important in the context.

**The Binding Vine:**

The central theme of the novel is love, which is *The Binding Vine* of life; Shashi Deshpande is not talking of sex or lust. For her, “sex is only a temporary answer”\(^\text{17}\) She is concerned with human relationships such as affection, compassion, and the behavior which concentrates on pure thought, she is highly influenced by Jane Austen and her writing that she has tried *The Binding Vine* is Jane Austen way. Tripati Says:

This type of concentration on human relationship is found in pure novels as those by Jane Austen. So, technically speaking, the novel *The Binding Vine* can be called pure novel.\(^\text{18}\)
Amrut Ormin younger brother once asked her whether women always want to be dominated. Urmi make him understand that human relationship stand on the firm base of love. She says:

No human being wants to be dominated. The most important need is to love. From the moment of our births, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor but love makes you vulnerable.\textsuperscript{19}

Another theme of the novel has a multiplicity of complex theme the predominant theme is the agony of Urmi caused by the death of her one-year-old daughter Anu due to meningitis. The first part of the novel deals with this situation. The agony logs dormant in Urmi in the novel as she preoccupies herself with other relationship, but not one moment can she forget her daughter and when left alone the pain surges up. Urmi reads the poems of Mira intensely, can a truth reveals itself. Mira suffers the violation of rape, and her aggressor is her own husband. Urmi’s agony is associated with the agonies of Mira and Shakutai-Kalpanas’s mother.

Another theme of this novel is fear psychosis. This is predominant in women. They have the fear of getting hurt as they think themselves to be weak physically and mentally. Urmi is the new woman Deshpande wants to project to the world. She is brave, rational and has the ability to tackle any situations that come her way. Urmi has gained a lot of experience from life. Fear did not leave her but has become a party of her life; fear lurked in her heart when she comes to know that she is being segregated from parents, especially her mother. The difficulty she faced coping with her grandparents is intense. Fear engulfed her when Kishor on the night of their wedding spoke of marriage as trap. Urmi had returned to her house hearing this on her
wedding night and then went back to her husband the next day. Anu’s death creates a sense of fear in Urmi the fear of death.

Vanaa is afraid of her husband. She doesn’t want him to be displeased for anything. She obeys him to a very great extent because in the Indian tradition the girl-child is taught to be submissive to the husband. Husband being the bread winner, the wife’s duty is to look after him and the children. Urmi lose Kishore very much. His job in the navy is an obstacle for her she wants him to stay with her always like Vana’s husband. Urmi always got what she desired. She did not bargain for anything less. She is overconfident that Kishore loves her very much. She is taken at his behavior on the first day of their marriage, for him marriage is a forced binding whereas for Urmi it is a binding of love she wants to tell him. “Don’t leave me and go. Each time you leave me the parting is like death.”

Sensing his detachment she is afraid to speak out silence distancing them. A fear engulfed her. The fear she experienced on the day of grandfather’s death. They heard a noise “A wind of irregular, rhythmic heavy sound from the passage.”

She turned cold with fear. Though fear syndrome is present in Urmi she also has the ability to overcome the fear as she is rational thicken similarly, she accepts the death of Anu as inevitability but takes her own time to overcome it. Though Anu has gone, she has her son Kartik. She realizes that however painful the experience may be, one can never give up. As Urmila says: “We struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this stronger world we find ourselves in only when we love do we find this anchor.” She knows present always changes. Anything which we do or talk now becomes the post the moment it is done or spoken as Urmi says: “I can see no road that can take us back.”

Another theme of the novel Deshpande traced- the theme of survival and sanity in the psycho-emotion world of the Indian women. The theme of
survival may not be applicable to everyone. Sulu commits suicide. This is an extreme step taken by Sulu when life loses its importance. Mira would have struggled to survive if she did not die in her delivery. Akka, Urmi, Vanaa and Shakutai relented to the situation because they want to survive. The urge to live is greater than anything else in the world. Akka and Vanaa, though modern educated are not fully happy in their marriage, they cannot view their opinions. Urmi’s at times is upset with her husband’s absence and her mother Inn’s behavior Shakutai though burdened with grief maintained her sanity in her survival.

Urmi’s opinion about marriage is not different from the traditional concept. She agrees that marriage means security for women which keep them away from other men. But Urmi herself is not happy with Kishore’s withdrawing nature. The reason may be they did not spend much time together or else Kishore had the same stubbornness like his mother Mira not to reveal his self. Urmi, a broadminded rebellious woman is unable to bear the separation of her husband for long. She thinks of starting a relationship with Dr. Bhaskar. Dr. Bhaskar is Vanaa’s colleague. Their friendship went to the extent of Dr. Bhaskar proposing to her even after knowing her marital status. Her relationship caused tension in Vanna and Inn but luckily for Urmi, her tradition belief spares her from the disaster it is also her love for Kishore that she rejects Dr. Bhaskar. Deshpande’s protagonists are modern, independent straight forward individuals but morality plays strong hold. They caring to the traditional concepts which they realize is good and soft Urmi regains her sanity and dares not overstep the boundary chalked out in the system of marriage. Furthermore Urmi recollects that they had dreamt many things for her daughter Anu’s death is terrible loss for her, Indira. A critic comments on Urmi’s behavior on the death of her daughter. She says:
Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she hold on to it as she believes that to let go of that pain, to let it become a thing of line past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu every small incident to flood her with longing and a sense of loss.\textsuperscript{24}

Shakutai also had woven many dreams for her daughter Kalpana and she also suffers live Urmi, in a way Urmi is not burdened with the terrible sorrow like that of Shakutai. Kalpana is neither alive nor dead. She consoles herself that she has a son though Anu’s is gone. The pain remains forever, life a burden in the heart but then one can never give up living at times Urmi desperately banged her held against the wall. Life bears a healing and reviving touch to get on with the business of living, even if it comprises a daily routine that takes care of a hundred trifling matters, bringing an order and rhythm into the living.

The theme of survival is so strong that even Mira, who scorns life for her inability to fulfill her desires, says: “Just as the utter futility of living over whelms me, I am terrified by the thought of dying of ceasing to be.”\textsuperscript{25} Similarly Shakutai’s life seems to be futile, Anu’s unsuccessful marriage, even though she has three children out of this wedlock her husband sought the relationship of another woman. Her dream of leading a good life, a neat house, and school going children goes for cooking life of drudgery the hand to mouth struggle, when everything is tolerated, the terrible rape of Kalpana leaves her shattered. The vulnerability of the girl child in this cruel world of men is exhibited. Not content with so much suffering, she has to face the death of her dear sister Sulu. For one whole day and night Shakutai lamented for her, the next day however she regains her stance and disk seen working in the kitchen. The dead must go but the living has to continue to survive till their turn.
Analyzing the selected four novels of Shashi Deshpande *Roots and Shadow*, *That Long Silence*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *The Binding Vine*, in this chapter, it is observed that there is a gradual growth in Shashi Deshpande’s writing skill. In the early phase, there is a wavering between domestic and detective novel. The novels in the chapter are purely domestic novels there is a development in the thematic style. In *Roots and shadows* and *That Long Silence*, the protagonist suffers from identity crisis. There is an inner conflict in the minds of the protagonists, Indu in *Roots and Shadow* and Jaya in *That Long Silence*. Towards the end of these novels there is a change in the behavior of both Indu and Jaya there is reconciliation, self-revelation and an onward movement with confidence. In *The Binding Vine*, a little outside the domestic sphere. The character pushing back her personal crisis, tries to fight for other woman. Character is seen taking interest in happenings outside the house. The emotions the feeling expressed earlier only to the family members, are now extended to others. Urmi’s pain for other women in society is greater than her family.

The theme of man-woman relationship is extended to other human relationship such as mother–daughter and between woman and the other. Trapped animal slowly fades in the middle phase. The straightforward narration is adopted. Nowhere the author has diverted herself or given importance to man in her novels, her main concern is always woman. Her women are now lancing at crisis. Urmi did not expect a drastic movement but in her own individual capacity helps other woman to become aware of their rights. Another angle of suffering in marriage is death intensely. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the sadist behavior of husband due to jealousy is the prominent theme where as in *The Binding Vine*, rape in marriage, a delicate issue, which no woman wants to discuss in public is revealed through the character of Mira.
Shobha De:-

Shobha De is one of the leading women novelists in English. Her primary concern as a writer is to expose the various hurdles and problems which an average Indian woman has to face under a patriarchal domination. Almost all her novels center round the theme of gender discrimination, female sensibility a women’s plight and predicament and above all her silent suffering without any rhyme or reason. Her extraordinary language, style, her newness of words and her realistic portrayal of the pathetic plight of the women are worth noticing. In order to suit the sentiments of the characters she has beautifully selected some words and phrases which are highly suggestive. She thinks that the main purpose of art is to present the realistic approach of life.

Socialite Evenings:

Commenting on the theme of the novel Socialite Evenings, an Indian critic, Urbashi Barat Writes: “Perhaps the most ubiquitous and enduring theme in the novel is the search for identity and selfhood.” It appears that Mrs. Barat is tremendously influenced by a sense of the concept of the ‘Sisterhood’ which the modern feministic have been propagating. She has a kind of sympathetic attitude towards the writer, Shobha De, because the later is also a woman. Here it would be worthwhile to bring into discussion the arguments advanced by a noted Indian critic Dr. S.P. Swain, who does not find any set pattern of theme in the novels of Shobha De. What he finds is that her novels are:

Pulp-fiction, which sell well and read well but they fails to meet the esthetics of feminism. Shobha De’s novels may simply be called as vamp feministic an idea of an experimenter in feminism she has a long way to go in order to carve out a niche for herself as a genuine feminist novelist, for what she most exhibits in her novels is gross pornography.
But this comment of Dr. Swain does not appear logical and reasonable. It would be a wind of injustice and partiality inspired by male chauvinism. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that Dr. Swain calls the novel pornography, because perhaps a lot of promiscuity on the part of women and sexual cohabitations and physical features of male and female have been described in the novel. But this does not go to make the novel pornography. Had this been the parameters of a pornographic literature, the novels of D.H. Lawrence, Nargis Dalal, and that of others would have never been labeled as prestigious works of art of these writers. In D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* there are many references to bulged out female breasts, hips and even to passionate kisses. Despite all these *Sons and Lovers* is one of the greatest classic literatures in the world. Therefore the obscene references may not and should not be the grounds on which a novel should be called pornography. The remarks of Dr. S.P. Swain may appear to be more appropriate in this respect which goes like this:

Her novels portray her feelings of alienation from the traditional fictional craft of other women writers especially her predecessors. They are pieces of self dramatization. They symbolize a woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-differentiation from her male counter parts as well as an urgent sense of her need for a female audience coupled with her dread for the orthodox and traditional male readers. Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* fails to offer a viable strategy to the readers for socialization through it may to some degree offer some panacea to the sex-starved unsociable.²⁸

Even the comment of the critic like Dr. A.G. Khan is not acceptable and tenable. Dr. A.G. Khan commenting on the contents of the novels of
Shobha De, Views: “Her (Shobha De) entire acrobatics is an attempt to reduce “Fiction to Fuction.””

Precisely spearheading the theme of the novel of Shobha De are that sexual urge is a natural phenomena and it cannot be regulated and controlled by social customs and established conventions of the world. Sexual instincts are equally powerful in males and females. And Shobha De thinks probably that it is quite absurd to restrain a woman from indulging in sex not as much as a man is allowed to sexual urges are biological human instincts which cannot be suppressed irrespective of whether it concerns a male or a female, supervision may be disasters. Even the great writer Shakespeare has endorsed this view through his play Measure for Measure. Therefore the view of Neelam Tikkha on the theme of Shobha De’s novel appears appropriate, she writes: “Love, desire and romance as experienced by the woman in the socialite society is a recurring theme is Shobha De’s novels.”

One may rightly agree with Alladi Uma when she says that Shobha De shows overriding concerns for sex:

Why do all her books start with ‘S’, if not to stress her over (w)riting concern for sex? Hopefully, her small betrayal to sex in collection of stories will give way to more serious concerns of the woman’s body in the future.

In the light of this statement, if the novel is read, it will appear, the main theme of Socialite Evenings veers round sex and betrayal in sexual matters, commenting on the theme and content of Socialite Evenings, Dodiya writes:

Socialite Evenings, the first novel of Shobha De, is about the journey of a prominent Bombay Socialite Karuna from a gauche middle class girl to a self sufficient woman. Making a feminist approach, S.P. Swain analyses the novel which gives us the
picture of a marginalization of the Indian women at the hands of their husbands. Subhash Chandra discusses *Socialite Evenings* as a novel that presents the institutions of family and marriage existing in the wealthy class of the Indian society, according to him, this portrayal is authentic, being an inside story, because the narrator (the writer) herself belongs to this class. Pramod Nayar, on the other hand considers *Socialite Evenings* as a romantic tale, suffused with feminist traits Urbashi Barat is of the view that the most ubiquitous and enduring theme in the novel is the search for identity and selfhood. She analyses in detail *Socialite Evenings* as a version of Kunstlerroman. 32

It is apparent from the aforesaid statement that the main theme of the novel is a struggle of a woman to create her own niche in the male dominated society. Shobha De also has registered her protest against the traditional opinion about woman, love and romance through her protagonist Karuna in the novel, she tends to say that there is a need to redefine women, love, romance and sexuality and deconstruct the traditional paradigms. This may be considered as one of the major themes in her novel. The novel also carries the theme of women’s struggle against their objectification and materialization in the male dominated society. De’s protagonists are not meek and submissive for example Karuna and Anjali in *Socialite Evenings*. They are human beings and as such must be treated as objects or materials. They must be given the right to exist on their own right further it appears that De is very dissatisfied with the institution of marriage in society; marriage is a necessary evil in the eyes of De. In this respect she comes closer to Bernard Shaw who also detested the institution of marriage.
De’s protagonist thinks that marriage is a contrivance to legalize sexual activity. But Shobha De raises her eyebrows over the issue of obtaining social sanctions for indulging in sexuality. She probably believes in the idea that sex should be uninhibited and free from all restriction with impunity. The Characters of Shobha De, Karuna, Anjali, and Ritu indulge in sex with various male counter parts and Shobha De tends to sanction all winds of pre-marital and extra-marital relationship of women. She thinks that sex is tabooed and inhibited simply to victimize woman in society. All the major women characters in Socialite Evenings subscribe to this attitude. The middle class society in India particularly adhere much to the idea of tabooed sex that is why Karuna and Anjali wanted to transgress the middle class label on them and wanted to join the so called elite class where they through their sexual escapades and crevice would be easily sanctioned. They through the glamour and pompousness of high class society would camouflage their sexual overtones.

**Starry Nights:**

Like Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights also has the theme of liberated woman. It depicts the modern woman’s struggle and search for identity. Aasha Rani, a woman of bewitching beauty. Sweet heart of the millions is the central character in this novel. She comes from the south Indian middle class surrounding but the moment she steps in the tinsel town of Mumbai, she becomes a liberated woman who lives for her own pleasures and knows no moral codes and value system, while she is a top star in film industry. She has an affair with Akshay Arora, in spite of the fact, that he is a married man. This period of her affair with Akshay is the worst and the most disappointing period in her life because she is beaten by Akshay many times and also humiliated by his wife Malini. It is ironical that while she can have sex with Akshay at will, she can’t have marriage with him. So after her betrayal by Akshay Arora, Aasha Rani suffers of boredom and loneliness she wanted to
lead a normal life which was possible only outside the world of films. She longs for marriage. It is at this stage, Abhijit Mehra, enters in her life. He is very much impressed by her beauty and therefore proposes her but she rejects his offer because she knows that he can’t offer her true love and happiness. Thus Abhijit Aasha Rani Affair is also futile because like Akshay, Abhijit is a married person. As a typical modern liberated woman she tells him that he better find love in his wife.

You are not making love to me! You are screwing my image my screen image. Get out of here Abhijit. Go back to your wife and make a man of yourself. It is all over between us I never want to see you again...

‘Go home, Abhijit. I have my own life to lead………’ 33

Then Aasha Rani’s lesbian experience with a journalist friend, Linda is not just a form of deviant behavior but it is something more because sex with woman implies independence from man. In this respect Linda advises Aasha Rani:

I am a survivor, yaar …… In this bad mash city and this bad mash business, you have to be me. You are a real bachchi manna’s girl, you should be on your own live life for yourself be like me ……….. Free! 34

In lesbian relationship there is mutuality as Simone De Beauvoir observes:

Between women love is contemplative; caresses are intended less to gain possession of the other than gradually to recreate the self through her; separateness is abolished, there is no struggle no victory, no defeat, in exact reciprocity each is at once subject and subject sovereign and slave; duality becomes mutuality.35
Aasha Rani feels pleasant and happy in the arms of Linda. In fact, lesbianism poses a great threat to hetero sexuality which is revealed in the words of Linda, who says to Aasha Rani:

Let me do to you what no man could have done…… stay with me, you will forget men, you will forget everything you have known before. This is love, understand? This is love meaning not what those bastards do to your bodies.  

After the act, Aasha Rani also frankly admits the superiority of lesbian pleasure to heterosexual: “yes, she thought, this is what it should be tender, beautiful and erotic. In a way it could never be with a man.”  

“A woman prefers lesbian relationship because it is much easier to give emotionally to a woman, to surrender ego ……” Here surrounding of ego is important. Its implication is that it is easier to surrender before one’s own sex than to the counterpart who always rules, exploits and dominates the female. Lesbian relationship promotes complete freedom from the male which is again an important principle of women’s Liberation movement.

In Starry Nights, Shobha De also reinforces her plea for liberation through the example of Sudha, Aasha Rani’s sister. After Aasha Rani Departure to New Zealand and her marriage to a foreigner, her mother feels hatred for her. As deprived of money she thinks to use her younger daughter as a source of income. Consequently with the help of Kishenbhai Sudha Rani is tempted, flattered and pushed into the film industry. Her tremendous success in the world of cinema transforms her completely she stops supporting her mother and also hates her sister Aasha Rani. Her remark in her interview to the journalist Linda shows how jealous she is of Aasha Rani. “Beachari Akka, I can understand how she must be feeling now, I am the star and she is nobody poor thing…..”  

Sudha lives with Amar, a hero without
marriage in a grand bungalow at Vile Parle. Here co-habitation and not marriage seems to be the watch word for her. Besides, she is more strategic and calculating than Aasha Rani. The following words of her mother to Aasha Rani clearly reveal that Sudha is a woman of inordinate ambition who aspires to be a star bigger than Aasha Rani:

Look at your sister she is hard – hearted and vicious. She has turned on her own Amma, not realizing that whatever I did, I did for her she wanted to be a big star. She wanted to beat you. That was her ambition from the very beginning, that is what she told me when she came to Bombay, Amma, make me a top heroine. I want to be bigger than Akka. I want to be the best. I want people to forget her. I am better than her. I can prove it.  

Like Aasha Rani she is a modern, bold and capable enough to survive in the declining moral values of life. The novelist describes aptly how Sudha is liberated a proud of her achievement:

I am where I am because I deserve to be here; rival? What rivals. My only competition is me; heroes need me more than I need them; ‘strip? What for? The whole country goes crazy when I show just my ankle marriage? I don’t need it. The poor man would die of an inferiority complex; polities and I don’t together, you seem a one point programmer ends with me.

Further, when Sudha Rani is on top of her film career, she borrows money heavily from the underworld Don. With a promise to offer him a great share of the profits, to launch a film with Amar. Unfortunately the film
over not’s the original budget four times over. So again she borrows some more cash after. Mortgaging everything she owned. Finally the film is released five months behind schedule. But it turned out to be a big bit. Out of greed for money she neglects to keep her promise. Though she is advised by her mother, Amar and Kishenbhai, she refuses to surrender she emphatically says:

It is all my money. The film is mine, the idea is mine, the story is mine, I have acted in it, and credit goes to me, why should I part with more? I look the risk. I gambled. Now I will decide what to do with the money I have earned.  

This incident indicates the fact that she is independent in every way. Aasha Rani comes back to India from New Zealand and meets her sister Sudha who after an attack on her by her enemies, is struggling for life. Sudha is full of repentance. She relates her present suffering to the sin committed by her. It is during Aasha’s absence Sudha has bagged some big roles and tired to defame her sister. But Aasha Rani consoles her telling her to stay together, reopen their father’s studio and work together. Her confidence about their success is clearly reflected in her talk to Sudha,

The two of us together will reopen Appa’s studio. Our studio, we will make films, good films, and we will survive. Not just survive but prosper …. We are going to succeed and never look back. 

Thus the experience of Aasha Rani, Sudha and the others clearly show that it is due to male hegemony their attempts to achieve liberation have been self destructive. In spite of this the novel ends on an optimistic note. It symbolizes a new beginning once again. Aasha Rani’s suffering due to exploitation by men and her dissertation her husband Jay. Don’t suppress her
desire and prevents her from living a life of her own. In spite of a number of horrible experiences of sexual exploitation and humiliations she is not discouraged and disheartened she rises like a phoenix to be an emancipated woman again. Finally Aasha Rani overcomes all the cruel realities of life and joins her family at Madras. Now she has her own identity, a new existence. She feels the sense of belonging and has an opportunity to do something creative in her life. Instead of escaping from the responsibilities of life or bearing down due to the problems, she struggle, survives and achieves success. Now it is Sasha, Aasha Rani’s daughter who has to continue the shoe, the struggle and survival of a woman against the male dominated society. Aasha Rani thinks rightly.

Together they would conquer the world. Together her little daughter and she would carve themselves a niche. With no one tells them how to live life. No heart breaks, no disappointments. No on her own terms and she would bring her up as Amma never had Sasha had the making of a star. “An unforgettable star, the golden girl of the silver screen, oh yes, Sasha would be tomorrows lover Girl!” Thus, she dreams to make her daughter the golden girl of the screen and decides to play herself the role of a dutiful mother. Aasha Rani, the liberated new woman, becomes same and wise through her own poignant personal experiences in the Cosmo.

Sisters:

Shobha De’s third novel is Sisters. In this novel Shobha De deals with the themes of family career of self assertion. Sisters is the story of the two sister’s relations, Mikki and Alisha the young and beautiful daughters of Seth Hiralal are wealthy socialite women. They are driven by ambition and lust and are at war with each other. The novelist depicts them as the upper class business women of modern India. It is the prime fact that the novelist gives
the top most priority to family and this is crystal clear when she evinces her ideas about marriage which match to Robert Burns says:

Marriage is social institutions where in two individuals have to live together. There can’t be any inequality in this area. The partners depend upon each other in the same manner as the ‘bow’ and the ‘arrow’. If one of the partners dominates the other, it will not serve any purpose. If two persons with their distinct personalities wish to live a united life based on love, each of them must understand the other. Each individual must have the necessary knowledge. Courage and determination to face the turbulent waves of the sea of marriage, Staying married is hard work. There is a vast labor required to keep any home going. The woman is her home, busy about her tasks, washing the dishes, making the beds, doing one of the highest tasks to which human hands can set themselves and when her husband haps her they are achieving together an enduring relationship.45

But the turbulent waves of the sea of marriage of Mikki result into a fearsome cyclone in which her married life shatters the urban women’s dream of happy married life. Mikki is the protagonist who, after the mysterious death of her father in an air crash, returns to India from U.S.R. In her youth, the responsibility of her father’s business which was on the verge of bankruptcy falls on her shoulders. Shanay, Navin and Binny Malhotra suitors of Mikki, then were the big ‘Sharks’ ready to swallow her. In the hope to get moral support and also to save her father’s industries, Mikki, in the beginning agrees to marry Navin but in vain. As Navin is dependent on his mother and fails to respond Mikki the way she experts, she breaks her
engagement with Navin. But Binny Malhotra takes the advantage of this situating of crisis. In order to attract Mikki he offers her costly gifts and also promises financial help. He traps Mikki very shrewdly by establishing premarital sex relations with her. As a result she is compelled to marry him against her will. Thus it is Binny who gets both Mikki and all the property of her father. He does save her father’s industries but Mikki has to pay heavy price for it as after marriage Binny starts showing his true colors. He continuous his extramarital affairs and Mikki is reduced to a domestic doll. There is a great contrast between Mikki and Shobha De’s other women characters who try to escape themselves from the clutches of married life. Whereas Mikki herself gets trapped in marriage with Binny, she has no aversion to be wife. But what she does not like is the inhuman subordination and confining of woman into four walls of the house. Mikki thinks that it is her pride in being the wife of Binny. The narrator tells:

She felt liberated uninhibited and aroused to the point of primitive abandon. If this was what her man wanted if this was what made him happy, she would give it to him. She would give him every bit of herself, her body, her mind, her soul. She was in love with him and he was finally hears.46

Thus she completely surrenders and submits herself to Binny like a traditional woman further; the novelist exposes the helplessness of a typical traditional Indian woman in the words of Mikki when she says: “He is like a God to me I don’t care who he sleeps with. All I care is that I am his wife and that he comes home to me.”47 Thus total submission of Mikki on one hand and the established norms on the other are further responsible for her ‘oppression’ subjection and exploitation by Binny. Binny Malhotra is a true representative of patriarchal system. His attitude to Mikki is that of a dominant male and he treats her as his slave. He does not like his wife to be
an active partner both in life and business. He even does not like Mikki to come to the office or conduct business meetings. He says that what he needs is a wife:

    No that is not how it works in my family, our women stay at home and move sure the place is perfectly run. They fulfill their husbands every need and look good when their men get home in the evening no office going no business meeting.\(^48\)

Thus up sets Mikki completely but she can do nothing because she is well aware of her precious position. In reality her falls begins, when her all property is transferred to Binny. Her condition further deteriorates when her husband suspects her affair with Lucio and drives her out of his home. Even then Mikki does not protest and merely appeals to him and in her appeal too she does not appear as ultramodern or challenging woman. She appears to be more meek and submissive in her approach when she tells to her friend, Amy about her, helplessness:

    Amy ........ You are not going to believe this ....... but I don’t want to fix him. Trouble is, I love the man, call me a doormat, a slave, a victim, anything. But I feel hopeless and helpless. It is as if I have forgotten what pride is ........ or ever was. He con and does, trample all over Me.\(^49\)

Through this situation of Mikki the novelist throws right on the bitter realities of patriarchal society. The fall of Mikki is complete when finally her husband Binny Malhotra goes in for a divorce. Mikki faces a psychic conflict and is divided between a personal self and that of a social self. The novel shows how the women are victims of male passions. For example, Seth Hiralal, a married man, had raped his watchman’s wife Sapana who dies in an abortion. Alisha is his daughter from his mistress Leelaben. Binny Malhotra has a mistress and children even then he marries Mikki and forces
her to go ahead with an abortion otherwise he will divorce her. He wants to reduce Mikki to a more object of lust. Motherhood is an important stage in a women’s life. But it is denied to Mikki because she has to keep always fix for him. She tells her friend Amy: “He wants me to remain firm and tight for his pleasure.”

Again it is through Binny Malhotra that the novelist throws significant light on the subjugation and marginalization of women in general and Mikki in particular. He scornfully tells Mikki; though all these women belong to the urban world, they are subdued and hence can’t fight against being just sex objects.

Another important aspect of the novel is the underworld culture spreading fast in the corrupt business world of Mumbai. Ramanbhai, a true representative of this world, is a trusted employee of Seth, Hiralla. However after the death of Mikki’s father, it is he who constantly discourages and prevents Mikki from taking interest in business with an intension to grab all her property. He frightens and tries to reduce her to a puppet in his hand. He threatens Mikki:

> Had you been a sen, your father might have taken yourself if you into his confidence from a young age and guided you. Properly from the beginning but as a daughter, all he wanted for you was a good husband that is all …… my advice is leave these serious matters to me. I am there to handle them. Trust me. I will guard your interests like a father. But you will make things difficult for you do things without consulting me.

In this corrupt business world money has become a god and presence human relations are like the clothes discarded. It is the world where women are taken as sex toys in the hands of men to play with. Hence, the novelist has used images of ‘Vultures’ and ‘Sharks’ for the corrupt people of the
business world and mouse and fish for the women victims. Here through these images Shobha De points out the predicament of Mikki in the words of Anjana Sen: “The girl is like a small mouse with vultures all around just waiting to pounce on her.” 

Another theme of this novel is sisterhood. De’s heroines undergo two changes: they start as confident women of caliber then turn into love sick helpless beings and then again change into confidant. Independent women of caliber plus great estimation of their relationship with their sister and great love for the sister. This happens because De also wants to introduce a feminist perspective and imported ideas like sisterhood. This she thinks can be done by merely granting sexual freedom to her women without bothering for the accompanying social and cultural changes. She wants to have it both ways; a romantic plot padded up with pornographic details and description of wealth and riches as well as to strike a posture of a woman novelist with gender perception receptive to alternatives like ‘sisterhood.’

Strange Obsession:

Strange Obsession is a masterpiece by Shobha De. It deals with the theme of women’s struggle to assert her identity in the man dominated society. It revolves around the lesbian relationship between the two women Meenakshi Iyengar called Minx and Amrita, the heroine of the novel is extremely beautiful and her ambition is like all beautiful girls, to become a successful model. In order to fulfill her aspiration she shifts from Delhi to Mumbai. The moment she steps into this metropolitan city she is caught into its mysterious way of living. Unfortunately one day Amrita comes in contact with minx, an extremely possessive woman. Minx is a seducer of beautiful women. Being a lesbian, her behavior seems mysterious. She belongs to high class family and is totally deprived of parental love, care, attention and affection. As her mother used to work as a social worker, she slowly
becomes victim of isolation. All love and care that she gets is from her father which ultimately becomes responsible in spoiling her. Soon she falls victim to sexual exploitation by her own father. Minx tells Amriata:

Listen …… my father …… yes ….. the same man who is so powerful, so respectful, so feared ….. is a beast. A beast of the worst wind. He ……. He …… raped me……. Yes…… that is what he did to me. I was thirteen years old. Just thirteen ……… he wasn’t drunk. He doesn’t touch the stuff. He was just horny, and frustrated ……… so frustrated. I was too scared to do anything ……… Say anything. I didn’t ask ……… But he told me about my mother……. That she refused to have sex with him. He told me ……. If your mother doesn’t, you have to. He told me ……. He told me to swear I would not tell anybody. It is our secret.  

He said again when this secret is disclosed to her mother, her father gets furious Minx continues:

He lunged at me, you told her our secret, He bellowed and starting raining blows on my back, I didn’t tell her, I didn’t. I screamed, with pain, ‘Liar’, he yelled and continued to hit me.

This is ill treatment and oppression by her own father develops nausea in her mind for her parents, family life and particularly for male members of the society. Consequently, she turns into an absolute invert a lesbian who develops relationship with her own sex. Lesbianism is another theme of this novel. According to Simone De Beauvoir Sex:
The lesbian in fact is distinguished by her refusal of the male and her liking for feminine flesh; but every adolescent female fears, pen, iteration and repulsion for the male body, on the other hand, the female body is for her as for the male, an object of desire.  

This novel treats very unusual and sensational topic i.e. lesbianism. It is a topic which is still taboo and not easy to discuss. It is a subject of great curiosity and debate in every society. The lesbian relationship between Amrita and Minx shows the emerging reality of the new modern woman who finds sexual satisfaction with persons of the same gender. A new moral code is thus distinctly emerging, as these women freely choose their partners whether they belong to the opposite sex or to the same sex Minx behavior towards Amrita is that of a protective lover and Amrita’s slipping into this strange relationship is just another manifestation of the new woman’s intriguing mentality, which undermines the traditional notion of social acceptability of marriage or legitimate sexual relationship among persons of opposite sex.

Even in an invent relationship women are not free to enjoy the identity because subject woman holds the object woman. She is tyrannical to the object woman. In this novel Minx performs the active role since she is maltreated and neglected by the society. As the novel progresses readers realize that Amrita becomes almost a slave in the hands of Minx. Sex is another theme of this novel Shobha De’s presentation of sex in her novels is very liberal and convincing. It should be viewed as an eye opener to the conservative Indian masses. Keeping sex under wraps would only breed more promiscuity. It is much better in being projected loud and clear so that
everyone becomes aware of its power, so that everyone is aware of its shortcoming if it is given a free play in the society. As women have secondary position in patriarchal society, they get reduced to the position of slaves. Men enjoy all rights and unlimited freedom and become responsible for marginalization of women. But though women are passive, dependent and helpless victims at the mercy of men, sometimes women themselves play an active role and subjugate their fellow: women. In this respect *Strange Obsession* has specimen of a woman who is the victimizer and another one is the victim. Minx plays the role of an oppressor, and oppresses. Amrita by making her compulsion to have relations with her, the rise of ‘feminism’ way back in 1960’s against the oppression and subordination of women does not work here. Shobha De exposes the fact and deconstructs the traditional concepts of love and sex.

Another important aspect that Shobha De highlights in this novel is the varied roles played by women, for instance, earlier the concept of woman was centered on only the stereotyped images of maternal caring and emotions. But now there is a considerable change in the situation. Woman is no longer just a mother bearing children in the situation. Woman is no longer just a mother bearing children and looking after them. Instead, she has started playing different roles and therefore, she is projected as a murderer and criminal, for example Minx in *Strange Obsession*, out of her strong obsession and desire for Amrita even murders Lola a competitor of Amrita in modeling. In fact, she is ready to do anything and will anyone, coming in her way to Amrita. Again when Amrita’s relation with Rover is revealed Minx, with her man, not only beats Rover but tries to kill him. In all her actions she appears like a despot. Finally she attempts to kill Amrita with her husband Rakesh and also tries to kill herself. The novel ends with the death of Minx. Shobha De has portrayed and presented a wide range of female characters in this novel.
In conclusion we may agree with what Amrnath Prasad says regarding Shobha De’s portrayal of women characters in *Strange Obsession*. He says:

It is no exaggeration to say that her extraordinary language style and her revolutionary theme of the secret depths of the human psyche, particularly of woman, have heralded a new conception in the realm of traditional thinking.\(^5^6\)

To sum up, the central theme of the novels of Shobha De is realistic picture of the plight and predicament of suffering women who have to bear the brunt of male domination. Her women characters are always seen searching for their individual identities in this callous and adverse society. But the beauty lies in it that these women characters seldom bow down before this hungry and monstrous world rather they show their inner abilities to fight against the oddities and absurdities.
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