Any discussion of gender and sexual relations would be incomplete without a study of adultery, a phenomenon as old as love and sexuality itself. In order to present a comprehensive study of this aspect of women's lives, especially considering the context of my readings, which present varied and in some cases, ordinarily unimaginable scenarios of women's reactions to adulterous situations including the unusual relationships that women develop within these situations, it is necessary that I present my analysis and interpretation of literary references and discussions concerning adultery and its traditionally accepted form of polygamy. This section has been divided into five parts, i) writings which project the married woman as the adulterer; ii) the pro-wife writings which focus on revealing the misery of the woman whose husband commits adultery; iii) the pro-'other woman' literature which reveals the plight of the mistress or the 'other woman' (as the case might be) in the adulterous relationship; iv) writings highlighting the bonds which women form as a result of adulterous relationships, these could be between two co-wives (in polygamous marriages) or between two generations of women, step daughter and mother-in-law; v) fiction which reads like a document of systematic destruction of one woman by the other, in other words literature where women who can't bear sharing their husbands or lovers and turn against other women, becoming their greatest enemies.

Before plunging deeper into a thorough discussion of these aspects, I would like to clarify that in this study, I have referred not just to marriage, but even to monogamous relationships other than marriage, and any breach of such romantic, love-relationships has been treated as adultery. Additionally, I have included polygamy within this chapter since I view polygamy as a form of adultery, where the co-wives become the 'other women' in their husbands' lives.

A significant aspect of the writings on adultery is that the same anthology which presents the suffering of the wife as presented also shows the other side of adultery and the condition of the other woman. For instance, collections such as Qasaaibaaraa contain the pro-wife and anti-'other woman' story, “Yeh Bhi Itihaas Hai”1 as well as the pro-'other woman' story, “Ek Aur Faltu Aurat.”

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1 Ajeet Cour, "Yeh Bhi Itihaas Hai,” in Qasaaibaaraa, (New Delhi: Kitaabghar Prakashan, 2002.)
Women as Adulterers

The first part of this section is the shortest in both length and in illustrations, as there are hardly any examples of women committing adultery, whereas almost every collection of stories, and most of the novels have descriptions of male adultery. This proves the writers' faith in women's sense of commitment to a relationship, and their attitude towards love, sex and marriage.

Raised within the traditions characterizing the Indian society, women normally take their marriage vows seriously. There are literary references to wives of sailors and merchant navy officers, who get to see their husbands once a year and sometimes, as rarely as once in three years and yet do not commit adultery or enter into affairs with other men. Stories like Mannu Bhandari's "Ghutan" and "Aate Jaate Yayavar" bring out the loneliness experienced by women and the distance which grows between them and their husbands due to their long and frequent separation. However, they still do not seek solace elsewhere and do not fall to the temptation of physical and emotional companionship with another man. Admittedly I accept that the lower rates of women committing adultery cannot be explained with the simplified reason that they are ethically more committed and devoted to a relationship. While this might be an important reason which keeps most women virtuous while more men commit adultery, one needs to look at the structure of the Indian family and society to see what else it is that prevents women from going on the path of infidelity.

Stories such as "Neeche ke Kapde" and "Agar Youn Hota" prove that women opt not to pursue adulterous relationships for the sake of their children. They might be attracted to a man other than their husband, they might even feel more compatible with another man, however, Indian women’s extreme preoccupation with their role as a mother which the society forces upon them keeps them tied to their marriage and away from adulterous bonds because they think that their defection from their marriage will affect their children and their future lives and happiness.

Apart from this focus on motherhood, I feel that Indian women do not get much of a chance to meet men anyway. In a society where mixed social gatherings take place only under the supervision of families and elders, where women are raised in such segregated atmospheres that even when they are in a mixed gender environment, such their work place, they even develop friendships with women rather than with men. In fact, women who do not go out of the house have even fewer avenues of meeting men, which is a prerequisite for developing adulterous relationships. Therefore, the few adulterous relationships that women have entered into in the literature under study have been with family members such as their brothers-in-law. In fact the

bhabhi-devar relationship has been seen as a site of dangerous liaisons, especially in the absence of the husband. In “Murabbonwali,” Pritam describes Raj Kaur’s husband having an affair with his sister-in-law.

Another important factor that deters women from committing adultery lies in the fact that society has double standards where male and female adultery is concerned. While male adultery is frowned upon and condemned, the general social attitude still tilts towards accepting it as a small lapse on the man’s part and the wronged wife is urged to forgive, forget and work towards a reconciliation. In Krishna Sobti’s Zindaginama, Ma Bibi’s husband lost his head over a prostitute and left her. Instead of asking her to forget him and move on with her life, the older women pacified her saying that he will eventually return to her. Thus the woman, who is deserted and abandoned by her husband for no fault of hers is expected to accept her errant husband whenever he tires of his latest fling and decides to return home to his wife.

On the other hand, if a woman commits adultery, she is severely punished, her family is humiliated, her husband would most likely physically beat her and abuse her and threaten to leave her. Her husband and in-laws might even completely cut her off from her children. The inherent social fixation with female chastity and the male anxiety concerning the paternity of children is a major factor that women’s sexuality and relationships are so carefully controlled and closely scrutinized. Hence, while actually committing adultery is a mistake for a man, for a woman, it is a sin to even imagine it. The fear of social ostracism, consideration for her family’s honour and reputation, economic dependency on her husband and fear of losing that financial support and most of all, the fear of losing one’s children are the major factors whose absence for men facilitates their chances of committing adultery and whose presence for women, prevents them from being adulterous. Mridula Garg’s story, “Agar Youn Hota,” describes the protagonist, who professes to love another man, expresses a desire to live with him, kisses him, and is on the verge of letting herself be swayed by her emotions, is suddenly brought back to reality when she spots the chemist’s store and remembers that she has to buy her daughter’s cough medicine. Hence considerations of family and children’s welfare make women put their own interests after their children’s and therefore they ignore their own needs and physical desires and continue in bad, incompatible, dull marriages just for the sake of their children.

Moreover, even if women do enter adulterous relations, they do so clandestinely, like in “Neeche ke Kapde,” no one other than the man and woman involved was aware of their affair. However, in the case of men, they try to be secretive about it but do not overly care if the affair


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becomes known because they have the sense of security that they will be easily forgiven by their wife and family and so it will not become a lasting social stigma. Further more, in case of polygamous marriages, the older wife is often given the task of finding a younger, more beautiful partner for their older husbands, hence the point of being secretive about the whole affair becomes moot.

Mridula Garg’s writing shows a marked preference for adulterous relationships, where women are the adulterers, therefore they are at the same time reversing the gender equation of sexuality and relationships, where instead of men, her female protagonists are the ones who flout the rules of marriage and propriety that govern a woman, especially a married woman’s conduct. In Garg’s novel Chitkobra, which became controversial on account of being termed obscene, her protagonist has a affair for years on end with a Scottish priest, Richard. As is characteristic of all writings that describe women as adulterers, Manu, the protagonist of Chitkobra does not experience any guilt over her affair, she separates sex from the love she feels for her husband. Like Chitkobra, “Adrishya” is also a story that discusses the adultery of a married woman. The protagonist, Veena has affairs with Naresh, Ramesh and Suresh. This string of affairs resembles male tendency to fall in and out of love and have multiple affairs in the process. Veena subverts the conventional hierarchy and gives part of herself to each of these men, but refuses to get serious with anyone of them. Since she has more than one affair, she succeeds in keeping these adulterous affairs casual. When there is just one person, then, there is always the risk of the affair getting serious and running into the sticky ground of pressure for commitment. In this case scenario, whenever things began to get serious, she went from one affair to another. And incidentally, her husband knew about her extra-marital affairs, as he himself committed adultery. Veena thus in a way balanced out the scales of gender privileges by appropriating the same rights that her husband enjoyed.

Garg’s novel Uske Hisse Ki Dhoop (Her Share of Sunshine) once again is another daring piece of writing. The protagonist declares that sexual enjoyment is life’s highest good, and the physical ecstasy of orgasm is totally unrelated to what Garg considers, ‘hollow ideals of romantic myths’. Manisha is an educated career woman and consistently emphasizes the physical side of the male-female relationship and rejects the idea that love or loyalty are in any way involved with each other. She even seems convinced that marriage hinders rather than facilitates a satisfying sexual relationship. While married to her first husband Jiten, she has an affair with Madhukar. And once she is married to Madhukar, she carries on an illicit relationship with her ex-husband. While this example is certainly taking the theme of sexual liberation to the extreme, yet at some

level this protagonist appears to represent a sort of latent desire that the writer might perceive in the women around her and who might have inspired her to write this novel.

Similarly in another story, whose title, “Yeh Kahani Nahin,” goes to prove that Pritam has either seen this as a realistic scenario or feels that this could very well be the biography of any ordinary man or woman, is a tale of love between a single man and married woman with a child of her own. The moving, poignant, style, which is simple yet realistic in its portrayal of an ordinary man and woman makes this love seem all the more convincing, and it is to the credit of the author that this love ceases to be an illicit extra-marital affair and the reader sees this as a pure, simple, tragic love story between two people, who are bound by religious differences and the social circumstance of marriage and thus cannot be joined together in a life of shared bliss. Instead of condemning the woman for having an affair outside of marriage, and jeopardizing the happiness of her marriage, family and child, Pritam succeeds in converting the reader over to join the woman’s cause and understand her need for true love. This true love, as Pritam states repeatedly, in her writings, does not necessarily result from or result in marriage. It can exist independent of any social relationship. In this case, it is left up to the reader to decide whether the man and woman also share a sexual relationship. The author offers no apologies or expresses guilt over the married woman’s relationship with another man. Having suffered in her own marriage and finding love years later with artist Imroz, it is not surprising that Pritam might not consider marriage to be an all-binding intuition, love however, is a different matter altogether. Pritam regards love as a sacred, pure and unselfish bond, which exists as a separate entity in a person’s life and it may or may not be solemnized by a social ceremony, it is not dependent on the respectability provided by social terminology of relationships such as marriage, husband, wife. For her the relationship exists apart from and above such worldly bonds and plays a central role in her writings.

_Wife as the Victim in Triangular Relationships:_

This genre of writings on the subject of adultery brings out the poignancy of women who are caught in this triangle between their husband and his mistress. Adultery, which is a universal and age-old phenomenon has pushed generations of wives into depths of loneliness, despair, and even self-guilt, by making themselves believe that they were somehow lacking and therefore pushed their husbands to look elsewhere. However, the fact remains that this predominantly male crime

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6Amrita Pritam, "Yeh Kahani Nahin" in _Saat Sau Bees Kadam: Chuni Hui Kahaniyan_, (New Delhi: Bharatiya Gyanpith, 2000.)
(at least in the context of the Indian society), has to result from male deficiencies of character, rather than female deficiencies in looks and physical beauty.

Tarabai Shinde, who lived from 1850-1910, wrote a forty page book called *A comparison of Men and Women* in 1882 which contained an essay called “Why Blame Women” in which she addresses the issue of adultery and polygamy. She exclaims that no woman ever runs off with another man just because her husband is ugly or poor, whereas men need the slightest pretext, sometimes not even that in order to remarry or to bring home a mistress. She questions her readers as to who needs to be blamed? Women or men? And then in righteous indignation lays the blame at men’s door.⁷ Ajeet Cour also picks up this thread and carries it further into contemporary times where unfortunately, even after more than a 100 years later, Shinde’s questions remain relevant and unanswered. Ajeet Cour’s story, “Maami,” questions social norms where a woman accepts her husband as her *pati parmeshwar* (husband raised to the position of a deity) even if he has the so called, *seven deficiencies.*⁸ In this story, the narrator’s *mama* (maternal uncle) left his wife, *maami,* after taking one look at her after the wedding. He remarried and had kids, whereas the *maami*’s life stood still since that moment. She lived on a monthly stipend of Rs. 10. Since she was both born into and married into an upper-class family, she did not work for a living because she felt it her duty to preserve the family honour. When her husband died, and even her meager stipend was discontinued by the second wife, she was then forced to work in that household as a servant performing menial domestic chores.

Ajeet Cour’s writings show an avid inclination towards sex, relationships and adultery and she writes both from the point of view of the wife as well as the ‘other woman’. While she uses her own personal experiences with regard to discussions of the ‘other woman’, her pro-wife writings are inspired by experiences of her family members such as aunts who belonged to a earlier generation where they entered into arranged marriages, which did not always turn out to exactly blissful, in fact as the following story projects, they could turn out to be fatal for the innocent, unsuspecting wives. “Yeh Bhi Itihaas Hai,” is an account of Ajeet Cour’s *masi,* (mother’s sister) which she had heard from her grandmother and possibly also from other members of her family while she was growing up. The story describes the travails of Prakash, a woman who was well educated by the standards of her time and who had been married off to an educated but poor man with a generous dowry. During Prakash’s return to her natal home for the delivery of her first baby, her husband had an affair with Tari. Tari was Prakash’s older sister

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Balwant's sister-in-law (her husband's sister). When Prakash returned with her new born baby, her husband mis-treated her, physically abused her and forbade her to visit her sister, who was her only relative in town. As a girl, she was raised with values of family honour and respect and taught sayings like "nivan suakkhar khivan gun, jihba ganiyan mant," or humility and bowing before wishes of others is the secret of a good and pious life and the greatest virtue of all is that of forgiveness. It was this belief that Prakash based her life on. She never complained to her parents and did not return to her natal home, despite her husband's various attempts to force her out of the house by violently ill-treating her. Prakash did not want to be a burden on her parents and forbore all troubles stoically. Finally her husband made three attempts to poison her with arsenic and was successful in murdering her in the presence of her parents. At one stage, knowing that she would rather die herself than see her husband die, he gave her the choice of either seeing him consume the arsenic pill or take it herself, and raised with the traditional values of dying a 'suhagan' or a married woman, and leaving her husband's house only on the bier and not in a widow's white clothes, she chose to eat the arsenic herself. Finally, when she battled for her life and the doctors extracted all traces of poison from her body, her husband once again mixed arsenic in her food and killed her. All the while when she was battling for her life in the hospital, he kept up a pretense of being repentant and told her not to testify against him to the police. He even had the audacity to threaten her with dire consequences regarding her infant daughter if she exposed him to the police. After her death, the husband's family did not even allow her parents to take the infant daughter, the last living memory of their beloved daughter who had died such a ghastly death at the hands of this man, and 4 months later that infant baby girl also passed away.

This account, while seeming extreme in terms of how cruel a man can be in his bid to get rid of his wife and marry his lover, but it echoes the reality of society. While not many Prakashes have nieces like Ajeet Cour, who would use the power of their pen to share this traumatic incident with the world, and the newspaper carries only short news items about violence against women as fillers on its inside pages, the truth is that even today many women, not just in rural areas and small towns but even in the major metropolitans are being victimized in brutally violent psychological and physical assaults.

The reaction of the society to such actions of sometimes continuous and sustained torture and sometimes cold-blooded murder is mostly that of indifference. Neighbours, who might be aware of such goings on usually retreat into silence because they do not wish to intrude, especially in the big cities, where anonymity is fast becoming the norm of life. Moreover, the

9 Ibid., 123.
other major consideration for non-intervention by society, comprised of friends, family and
neighbours is their desire to stay away from police interrogation and innumerable court dates on
which they would have to be present to testify before the judge. Unfortunately, the prolonged
legal battles and often corrupt judgments which either let the culprits go scot-free or drag the
court cases on for years resulting in the alleged culprits roaming free on bail and even harassing
the people who might testify against them. Additionally, such prolonged court procedures
become hard to follow over time, they are extremely time-consuming and public passions of a
third party, which is not even directly involved in the matter dim over time and die a slow death.
Public memory of course is quite short, as is evident by Ajeet Cour’s account, where the husband
who had murdered his wife in broad daylight and blackmailed her parents into giving him all her
dowry jewelry, became the president of the gurudwara (Sikh temple) and was a well-respected
member of his community. So much for justice being served for a crime so hideous in nature.

Bachint Kaur also writes about adultery, and juxtaposes male and female attitudes
towards fidelity and commitment. Her writings reflect a sharp contrast between male and female
attitude towards adultery and this gender contrast especially heightens when one compares it to
Ajeet Cour’s “Yeh Bhi Itihaas Hai.” Bachint Kaur seems inclined to invest great faith in the
woman’s sense of love and single-minded devotion. The story describes a married man’s
adultery and attempt to have an affair with a cabaret dancer Chhaya. The wife of this married
man loves him and is faithful to him, yet he falls in love with Chhaya. Chhaya on the other hand
despite having many male friends and being a cabaret dancer, who exposes her body to many
men each night, remains faithful to one man, Mr. Desai, who in turn does not love her but this
does not affect Chhaya’s love for him. She remains committed to him and refuses to have an
affair with anyone else. It is significant that the author shows the woman as being true to her
commitment even without the bonds of marriage, where as the man was not faithful even to his
legally wedded wife. Thus Bachint Kaur argues that men and women differ not only in their
attitude towards love, sex and the relationship between the two, as was also evident in “Aadmi
Aurat,” but they also differ in their levels of commitment and fidelity, irrespective of their marital
status. Ironically the presence and absence of marital bonds is irrespective to the attitudes of both
men and women.

In her anthology, Kacche Resham Si Ladki, which comes across as a tribute to love and
its enduring strength to remain the most powerful emotion since the beginning of time, Pritam has
also shown the darker side of love. This side reflects the destructive capacity of love and

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emotional attachment. Women in stories portraying this aspect of love lose their self-esteem, independence and their identity as they lose their self in unrequited love.

In “Ek Andhera Kona,” the older wife of a man, who had remarried, stayed on in his house as a maid cum housekeeper, and when this man gave up his riches and his younger wife chose to stay in his luxurious house and kept all his wealth, the first wife followed him in order to serve him and tend to his needs.\(^{11}\)

Similarly, in “Shishe ki Aag,” Seema, a young woman in her early twenties, saw her mother suffer in love.\(^{12}\) She loved her husband to desperation even after he abandoned her. Seema saw her mother die of heartache and the sorrow of loss. Consequently, she was too scared of falling in love. She was afraid of losing someone and wanting and needing that person as much as her mother needed her father. She is, however, willing to marry as is expected of her in the context of the Indian culture and society. She even went so far as asking her brother to arrange her match without consulting her in the matter. The reason behind this unusual request was that she did not want to marry a man she may like and might eventually fall in love with, rather she wanted to marry someone she could live with emotionlessly. This way, if things didn't work out or if the man left her, like her father had left her mother, then she would still be able to go on with her life without needing or wanting him. She did not want to become, first, emotionally dependent and then later on, an emotional wreck. After she saw her mother lose her heart and peace of mind over a man, she guarded her own heart zealously and did not wish to part with any part of it. In other words, she wanted emotional immunity from love.

In this story, the author’s personal views about love and marriage are very forthcoming. She demarcates the distinction between love and marriage saying that marriage is a legal and social contract, which is ritualistic and when it breaks, there is trouble and pain, but then a human being bears them all and life goes on. However, when love is the basis of marriage or any relationship, then the pain of loss and sorrow and emotional dependency on that person is so great that the human being, who earlier could have borne the troubles herself, is no longer alive, awake or strong enough to bear the pain. Therefore, Seema in “Shishe ki Aag” is a woman, who is willing to marry and share her marital responsibilities and perform her duty as a wife, but has refused her heart the right to fall in love. She has sealed off that part of her life against emotional intrusion.

The title novelette in Jeelani Bano’s collection of four novelettes, Gudiya Ka Ghar (Doll’s House), revolves around Vinita, a young girl, who grew up in hostels and at relatives’

houses and longs for a house of her own. She cares deeply for Prakash, a colleague at the university where she teaches and mothers him, looks after his needs, likes and dislikes and dreams about creating an ideal, warm and comfortable home for the two of them. Prakash on the other hand, feels stifled, wishes to be away from home, free to roam about in the world. In her bid to tie him down and settle him in a cozy home, she fulfilled his whims and fancies and even when he breaks her heart, hurts her, overlooks her desire, ignores her hard work and crushes her sentiments, she still tries to continue humouring and indulging him.

However, as the novelette progresses, Prakash leaves her and abandons her in order to follow his sense of freedom. He deserts her and goes to Europe, where he starts living with an American hippie. The author has juxtaposed masculine and feminine views regarding love, commitment, settling down and creating a home. As opposed to Vinita’s love and commitment towards creating a home with him, Prakash stands polaristic in his desire not for Vinita, but for individual freedom. He forgets Vinita’s dreams and jilts her after the engagement. He moves not just to another continent but to another relationship, another attraction for another woman. On the other hand, Vinita who is unable to get over him and loses her mind over him, thinking that he will return soon. She even goes to the extent of daily re-heating food and preparing tea in anticipation of his arrival. She is unable to face the facts, her mind is in a state of denial and she refuses to accept the reality that he has left. She fails to reconcile herself to this truth and so she continues to let her life and her very being revolve around Prakash, and her dream of sharing a house with him even though he is physically out of her life. The author uses Prakash in a symbolic sense to portray male fear of commitment and their general attitude towards love and relationships, which is much less serious than women’s regarding these issues. Prakash viewed Vinita as just a passing fancy, a casual love affair to be continued only as long as it did not inconvenience him or compromise his desire for freedom. He left Vinita as soon as he got the opportunity, having stayed with her only as long as nothing better came along his way. All he saw in her was a female companion to laugh with, to take along as a date to social gatherings, and a willing partner to satisfy his sexual needs. She on the other hand, gave him her heart, her trust, love and built a future dream house around him. In the house that Prakash’s mother helped finance for her, Vinita even set his sofa in such a way that he would get a full view of the lawn. She arranged the rooms keeping his comfort as her priority, she put his picture up on the wall and gave him the best seat in the house along with the best view. While Prakash moved on, Vinita got stuck in the time warp. Her life had been destroyed as she had made him the center of her

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life. Having once seen him as the axis around which her life rotated, she continued to let her very existence move around the imaginary figure of Prakash.

This novelette echoes sentiments penned by Pritam in “Shishe ki Aag,” where the protagonist, Seema fears falling in love because she had seen her mother pine away for her deserter husband. Like Vinita, she too had made her husband the centre of her existence and then felt like she had lost the anchor of her life when he left her.

**Wife’s Response to Adulterous Husbands:**

Women’s response to adulterous relationships differs according to situations, individual personalities and the women’s own resourcefulness. Ma Bibi’s response to her husband’s adultery in the novel *Zindaginama* is quite passive. Women’s only hope and response to such situations can be patience and faith in God’s justice and as Sobti writes, blessings of older, wiser women like Chachi. Additionally, in this case, the wronged wife asks Chachi to use her influence with the thanedaar (policeman) and have her husband threatened. Similarly, in *Dilo Danish* also, Mehak Bano visits the shrine of the Matka Peer and Kutumb Pyari, the wife of the adulterous and bigamist vaqil sahib, visits Bhairon Baba’s temple and performs religious rituals as a means of getting marital bliss and their husband back, who incidentally is the same man. Women’s response to the infidelity of their husbands has been strong in terms of their perseverance and strong faith in their eventual return home, however other than this, their actual response and reaction stays quite passive as is clear from the above examples.

While adultery committed with any woman is bad enough, there are some instances when this bad situation is made worse, one such case is when adultery takes the form of an incestuous relationship. In her collection *Kacche Resham si Ladki*, Pritam has portrayed adultery in its various forms shapes and colours and placed it in myriad social contexts, some of which make its impact all the more severe on the wife. Such contexts include adulterous affairs with the wife of another male member of the extended family or worse still, incestuous affairs with a cousin sister. Sisters-in-law, when close in age to the young brides are usually treated as friends and often a camaraderie might develop between the two. However, Pritam exposes the harsh reality of when such trust in the friendship of a sister-in-law is breached in her stories “Heere ki Kani” and

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16 Krishna Sobti, *Dilo Danish*, (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1995.)
"Murabbonwali." This causes a double betrayal for the wife, firstly by the husband and secondly by the sister-in-law, in whom the wife had sought an ally.

Despite changing times and growing awareness, women of older generations continued to suffer silently. Women such as Raj Kaur of "Murabbonwali" live their entire lives with full knowledge of a continuous adulterous affair, yet maintaining their dignity. Raj Kaur's husband did not raise his voice with her, he respected her for her decision to not nag him or rant and rave about his affair. In fact her quiet dignity gave her a power over him, as he lived in awe of her superior status of purity. Raj Kaur also refused to follow her husband's lead by having an affair, and while she did hold her own in other household decisions, she refused to discuss her husband's infidelity with him or with anyone else. This gave her a courageous and stoic stand and earned her the respect of her husband as well as the village community. Other wives such as Pritam's Jindo in "Heere ki Kani," (Diamond Dust) chose to resist social pressure and refuse to live with an adulterous husband. However, "Jindo" saw her way out in death and ended her life in order to end her charade of a marriage.

Contrasting with this passive response is the more active response of women like "Karmanwali" who leaves her adulterous husband and decides to eke out a living for herself by working part time in her uncle's restaurant and doing piecework as a seamstress. She chooses to live, not to die, she is not the culprit so she should neither take on a death sentence of her own accord, nor should she be given one. She not only separates from her husband in a society that looks down upon such women as fallen women, she is bold enough to request the author to write her story without even changing her original name. She was not ashamed of her life, and the choice she made, rather she wanted it to be written about and read by everybody. Pritam emphasizes that she took pride in her strength and determination to succeed in life on her own without succumbing to social pressure, which endeavoured to force her to unite with her adulterous husband once again.

Changing times and the advent of the independent 'new woman' who was no longer dependent on her husband for support, has ensured that wives' reaction to adultery has undergone

18 Ibid.
19 A similar phenomenon is described by Madhu Kishwar who writes that even when husbands might be promiscuous, women tend to stay chaste and monogamous. She describes her interview with a woman who had a promiscuous husband and writes that this woman is truly proud of her unconditional resolve not to mess around with men regardless of what her husband does. It is not as if she is afraid of retaliating in other matters. But, for her, having sexual relations outside marriage amounts to losing her own dignity. Madhu Kishwar, "Women, Sex and Marriage: Restraint as a Feminine Strategy," in Manushi, Issue No. 98 (March-April 1997.)
even further change from passive to active. Mannu Bhandari’s story, “Ek Baar Aur” is highly indicative of this development. In this scenario, Kunj, the man is the weak character, who is passive and indecisive. He is married to Madhu despite having an ongoing affair with Binni. He is a selfish man, who wants to have both wife and a mistress to fill his empty time and keep him entertained. He does not really love either of them but he does not have the guts to leave anyone of them as he lacks the courage and boldness necessary to make a break with the two women in his life. Finally, his wife Madhu, who is out of town, takes matters into her own hands and serves him an ultimatum in a letter to him saying that Kunj has to decide between the two of them, and if he chooses Binni, then she will quietly withdraw from his life. Kunj is such a weak character that instead of confronting facts himself, he leaves this letter on the dressing table where it is in full view of Binni, who is bound to read it and then the decision-making responsibility rests on her shoulders. Hence both women, especially the wife takes the initiative in ending the adulterous status quo and bringing her husband to task. This response which is highly confrontational and straightforward, and certainly not passive in nature thus marking a step forward in the direction of improving relationships and lives of both women and men. Although women cannot stop their husbands from having adulterous affairs, they can however, take control of the situation and instead of passively waiting for the circumstances to change and their husbands to amend their ways, ‘new women’ can now move beyond this incident of betrayal, break away from a triangular marriage relationship and carry on with their lives without making their husband and his infidelity the central focus of their existence.

The ‘Other Woman’ and The Other Side of the Story
Adultery being the other side of the coin of the institution of marriage not just in India but the world over, has been written about by almost every author writing about women’s lives and relationships. Majority of the writers under study have portrayed adultery from the point of view of the wife and have represented the ‘other woman’ as the house-breaker and fallen woman. However, amidst this sea of pro-wife adultery literature, a few writings stand out for their portrayal of the ‘other woman’ as the one suffering at least as much, probably even more than the wife.

Writings such as Prabha Khaitan’s Chhinnamasta and Amrita Pritam’s story “Ek Zabtshuda Kitaab” stand out in their representation of adultery from the point of view of the ‘other woman.’ These writings which are autobiographical in nature as they are inspired by the
author’s real life experience of being the ‘other woman’ in the life of a married man, Oma. In the same vein Ajeet Cour’s “Faltu Aurat” (Spare Woman) and the subsequently written “Ek Aur Faltu Aurat” (Another Spare Woman) in Qasaibaaraa are moving portrayals of women who fall in love with married men and are led on by them with false dreams and hope of sharing a home and a respectful relationship. However, in both these stories, the adulterous man represents a trait typical of majority of adulterous men, who want to have their cake and eat it too. Both Umesh and Kalu want to carry on an affair with Geeta and Rano respectively, without having to give up their wives and families. Geeta, the protagonist of “Faltu Aurat” was not even a mistress in the strict sense of the word, because she was not a kept woman, dependent on Umesh’s financial support. Unlike Rano, who was being supported by Kalu and was put up in a tiny room which had been a former servants’ quarter, Geeta was financially independent, had her own house and yet was emotionally dependent on Umesh, a married man, who kept dangling the carrot of love before her and contrary to her wishes continued to maintain status quo in his life by having a wife and a lover in two separate cities.

Kalu had allured Rano with his money and enticed her with memorized romantic phrases and she left her family in Chandigarh and relocated to Delhi. When the euphoria of love and elopement wore away and consciousness struck, she realized that Kalu was on his way to Europe with his wife and she was stuck in a former servants’ quarter. Kalu took his wife to Europe for a vacation as a bribe, because he was unfaithful to her and wanted to give her something big to make it up to her. Ajeet Cour points out that when a man steals something from a woman, who is his legally wedded socially accepted wife, then he tries to bribe her. The size of the bribe is proportionate to the size of the theft, which in this case is the promised lifelong fidelity, so the bribe is as big and expensive as going together on a vacation to Europe. However, on the contrary, the ‘other woman’ who is spare, and who is kept, a mere mistress who gets no social recognition for her love and feelings for the man, and no religious sacrament or legal contract to bind the man, can be amused and trapped by food shelter, clothes and jewelry and of course false promises. In other words, the ‘other woman’ is not important enough to be kept extremely happy as she is just any woman, who if she leaves, can be easily replaced by enticing another woman.

Thus while the man expects his mistress or lover to be faithful to him, he in his turn expects her to understand the fact that he has a wife and that his duty first and foremost lies with
his wife and she being the 'other woman' with no self-respect in the first place will always be secondary in his affections and attentions.

So it can be assumed that most men have affairs in their quest for sexual excitement and variety rather than for love or affection. They do not respect these women the way they might a wife, however, such women become emotionally dependent on their married lovers and might often even resort to committing suicide or sending threats to the man and his family in order to get her feelings reciprocated in equal measure from the man.

Love and relationships form the common theme of Pritam's short story collection, *Kacche Resham si Ladki*, therefore it goes without saying that adultery is one of the major themes in this collection, and the protagonist is not necessarily the wife in every story.24 Many stories are written from the point of view of the so-called "other woman." But in every case, regardless of the vantage point of narration, it is the woman who is the victim, men hardly, if ever, pay for their adultery.

While the number of stories presenting the wife's point of view instead of being written from the side of the 'other woman' might be higher than the stories revolving around the latter, it is apparent that the author believes that to present a just, comprehensive picture of adultery in the Indian marriage and society, both points of view must be presented. Her sympathies lie not simply with the wife, instead she is sensitive enough to understand the complexity of human relationships and treats these relationships with the respect due to their inherently complicated nature. Interestingly enough, she doesn’t place her characters into traditional slots of good and bad. She ignores, or rather breaks the traditional mold of conventional stereotyping of the wife as the good, virtuous woman, who is always the victim and the 'other woman' as a loose, fallen woman, who acts like a conniving housebreaker.

Thus she represents both sides of the coin and writes with the belief that a mirror has two faces and this belief is never more pronounced than in her story, "Ek Zabtshuda Kitaab."25 This story is basically a conversation between the wife, or rather the widow and the mistress of a just deceased man. They talk about how each of them stole him from the other yet they never had that man as a whole, they had to share pieces of him, while that man had both these women for his pleasure at his convenience.

Although the wife had of course lost her husband to the 'other woman,' she still did however have the comfort and solace of her children. However, the 'other woman' in the

husband's life had paid for her relationship by giving up the joy of motherhood and the comfort of children. She was forced to abort her unborn child because the man she was in love with did not want to share his love with any children other than the ones he already had with his wife. So while he could transfer his wife's share of love to another woman without any qualms, he was not willing to share his children's share of love with anyone else. The 'other woman' also did not have any legal rights or social respect as a wife, she did not even have the right to grieve his death openly, because even though in her heart she was a widow, legally, she was still just an unmarried woman with no rights as far as the deceased man was concerned. In the end, however, both women, came a full circle and mourned their loss together, because they had both lost the man they loved.

Although most portrayals of the 'other woman' either show her as the vamp, or as the suffering victim, however, Mannu Bhandari's Binni in "Ek Baar Aur" ad Ajeet Cour's "Faltu Aurat" show how in the absence of any positive move from the spineless Kunj, she takes her cue from the second woman in the relationship, Kunj's wife, Madhu and breaks off the relationship. Hence both women decide to change the status quo and decide one way or the other. In the latter story, the 'other woman' alone takes initiative and ends things with her married lover.

Here it is important to present a quick description of Mannu Bhandari's story, “Stree Subodhini” which is like an essay on men and adultery that is narrated in first person by a young professional woman who had an affair with a married man who kept ditching her, cancelled dates and finally had himself transferred to another city. After this bitterly disappointing experience, this jilted woman writes an account of male adultery and men’s behaviour in this triangular relationship. Her account ends with four summary points regarding adultery:

i) In the Indian scenario, love blossoms successfully only within the home and family set up. ii) Women should not count on married men leaving wife and kids for the sake of so called 'true love' as Indian men can only go as far as stepping in two boats simultaneously. iii) Married women can have affairs whenever they feel like and when they get bored they can always go back to their husband and family, unfortunately, the 'other woman' does not have this option. iv) Men do not see adultery as a crime as long as they stay bound within marriage vows to a woman. They do not feel guilty, but fear being found out. She highlights that it is the urban working woman who gets into such relationships because living alone in the city is difficult. So in a way, ‘new women’ are more vulnerable and susceptible in this regard. She stresses the fact that young professional women in love with married men take the relationship seriously, whereas the men don't. She ends her narrative by clearly stating that in such cases, the men continue to dally and

try to let the status quo, which benefits only the man, not the wife or the 'other woman'. They go
to great lengths to avoid a confrontation with both the wife and the 'other woman'. Therefore it
is the 'other woman' who has to take the initiative of taking charge and ending the relationship.

My study of such 'other woman' literature, shows that there are some underlying
commonalities between these stories, which is also responsible for making such relationships
more common these days. In almost all cases, the 'other women' are young professional women
who are working, usually financially independent (a fact that departs from the previous notion of
mistress, who used to be 'kept' that is all her expenses we re paid for by her married patron and
lover) so they are not in the relationship for money, they are career women liberated from
parental control. The family has no say in her lifestyle, activities and behaviour, being physically
far from the woman, they can't even chastise her, or guide her by providing elderly advice. Since
she is most likely the breadwinner of the family as was the case in "Stree Subodhini" and "Faltu
Aurat," the family is in no position to object or keep tabs on her. She is after all the person who
is feeding, clothing and educating the younger siblings. She ceases to be accountable for her
actions to her parents. Most of them work in cities, away from their families so they are lonely at
the end of the day, and because of the family being remotely located, they cannot offer their
support.

The fact that all these 'new woman' adultery affairs take place in the cities proves that
anonymity of city life is an important component of these relationships. In the hectic pace of
urban life, people do not care about others' affairs, they do not have much time for meddling and
guiding young people as would have been the case in the village set up. Moreover, out of fear of
being caught, the clandestine nature of the whole affair and rental of hotel rooms, can only take
place in big cities and metropolitans.

It is in light of this analysis then that I would like to refer to "Faltu Aurat" one of the
boldest stories written on the theme. Ajeet Cour's story "Faltu Aurat," written from the
perspective of Geeta, the 'other woman', as stated earlier, is highly autobiographical. In her
autobiography, Khanabadoush, Ajeet Cour refers to her affair with Umesh, a married man. She
writes that she realized that he was not willing to give up his wife and family for her. Therefore,
despite feeling very dependent on him emotionally, she describes his practicality which she hated
and contrasts it with her self-description of being "awara, jungli hava and sufne da beej," (free-
spirited and dreamy like a wind breeze) and says she did not want to sleep with him, but she fell
into the trap of love. However, like the strong 'new woman' that she is, she took responsibility
for giving the relationship some kind of direction, and when she found it going in the opposite
direction, she actively became involved in the task of breaking off these relations and freeing
herself from the hold of this man. The protagonist of “Faltu Aurat” is probably fashioned after the author herself, therefore, she also takes the bold step of breaking off relations with a man who showed no commitment to her, gave importance to his wife and children but wanted to enjoy sexual pleasure with his mistress also.

Intervention to end the injustice being meted out to the ‘other women’ can also be undertaken by a ‘new woman’ who is not herself directly involved in the affair. *Chhinnamasta* is a unique example of writings on the theme of adultery in the sense that the protagonist herself is not the adulterer the ‘other woman’ but rather she fights for the rights of her father-in-law’s mistress and their illegitimate daughter. Unlike Binni and Geeta, who take matters in their own hands for their very own sakes, this novel in fact is example that illustrates the role the ‘new woman’ is playing in society and the active initiative that she is taking in regard to helping not just herself, but rather other women and trying to fight for their rights and rightful position within family and society. Priya, an educated, self-employed, ‘new woman’ tries to force her father-in-law to recognize the rights since both mother and daughter love this man deeply. She asks her husband to acknowledge them as his step mother and half sister but he refuses. Priya then tries to make up for all the wrongs done to her step-mother-in-law and half-sister-in-law by visiting them regularly, giving them gifts from her own money and taking her young son to spend time with them and making him address them as his *daadi* and *bhua* (paternal grandmother and paternal aunt) respectively. Ultimately, Priya gets so incensed with the callous attitude of her husband and mother-in-law, especially after the death of her father-in-law that she leaves home and goes and lives with her step mother-in-law and makes her sister-in-law join her business. Priya’s crusading spirit runs so deep that when faced with the choice, she even gives up her son and finally, even refuses to attend his wedding celebrations unless he invited his step mother-in-law and aunt along. The son refuses and Priya stays firm in her own decision to not attend her only son’s marriage ceremony, despite being torn inside because of the pain she receives from her son. Pritam refers to a similar emotion in her story “Trishul.” This story describes that a young woman has enough warmth in her large heart to welcome her fiancee’s step sister (who is his father’s illegitimate daughter) into the fold of her love and the new life that she is about to begin with her prospective husband, thus making up for all the ills that had befallen her because of the neglectful, irresponsible and callous attitude displayed by her prospective parents-in-law.

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Educated, aware and socially committed ‘new women’ are thus taking the lead in extending their helping hand and recognizing that the ‘other woman’ is not necessarily a housebreaker and the perpetrator of evil designs, rather as portrayed by the above literary analysis, in many ways the ‘other woman’ suffers even more than the wife. However, these writings reflect a hopeful trend where the social acceptance and giving the women their rightful due is concerned.

**Women Transcend Betrayal**

**Bond Between Wife and the ‘Other Woman’**

Apart from the pro-wife and pro-‘other woman’ writings, there are other writings which describe bonds and relationships between women who are involved with the same man. These are tales in which women transcend their feelings regarding the adulterous affair that the other woman had shared with her husband and seeks something good out of the whole experience, such as bonding with the ‘other woman’. While the bonding between women and their husbands’ mistresses or their love interest is rare in the literature, bonding between co-wives in a polygamous marriage is portrayed more commonly, even though relatively so. The reason for this phenomenon lies in the fact that these women were often left together by themselves within their sphere of home, kitchen, family and children. Since these polygamous marriages are mostly a thing of the past and that too in the rural areas or in small townships, the division between the public sphere of men and private sphere of women was quite pronounced. Therefore women who spend more time with each other than they do with their own mothers, sisters and other blood relations, are bound to develop some kind of bond or affinity with each other. In the following section, I reflect on this particular aspect of women bonding in their relatively secluded world and forming relationships that overcame the reality of adultery and polygamy.

**The Seclusion of Women and Formation of Womanly Bonds**

Traditionally raised women had problem negotiating the spaces, both private and public, outside the physical parameters of home and this posed as a challenge for women as they left the safe cocoon of familiarity and comfort of the home to enter the unknown, unfamiliar dangers and hardships that they imagined the public sphere to be full of. As Sobti vividly portrays such scenes in *Dilo Danish*, women always had men accompanying them, sort of like chaperoning and protecting them, whenever they ventured out of the house, rarely did they make solitary

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29 Ibid.
30 Krishna Sobti, *Dilo-Danish*. (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1995)
journeys into the public sphere. Women were dependent on men economically, but they were also remarkably self-sufficient. As Minault states, “from the women’s point of view, their world was central to life, and the other world of men peripheral.” Chhanno Bibi, one of the main, so-called supporting characters of the novel and her numerous nieces, cousins, sisters-in-law, all contributed to making the inner quarters abuzz with activity. These women’s lives were isolated in some respects but not in others. Minault believes that they were literally at the center of the household, in the courtyard with its manifold activities. Older women such as mothers and mothers-in-law managed the household and trained the younger women in their duties. Minault argues that their lives though possibly claustrophobic, were nevertheless rich in human contact. Both comfort and condemnation were never far and there were always women around to talk to, defer to, order around, quarrel with, laugh or cry with or curse. Seen in this light, both Zindaginama and Dilo Danish appear as tributes to those generations of women, who were restricted in small spaces and confined by patriarchal social and concrete structures.

In households similar to the one described in Dilo Danish, women developed bonds of womanhood with each other. They form close relationships, which include light teasing and other friendly banter. In restrictive societies, such teasing can be seen as a substitute for contact with members of the opposite sex. Thus neglected wives who felt emotionally and sexually abandoned by their husbands and other lonely women could enjoy the social bonding and form support groups of women who shared similar experiences, constraints and disappointments. This was especially true in case of a polygamous husband who might have a roving eye and the older wives therefore could identify with one another and sympathize with their common lot.

Women’s sphere of activity could be seen as a bastion of female assertiveness and female bonding as an alternative to self-destruction and suffocation by constricting patriarchal norms and conventions which allowed adulterous traditions such as polygamy to continue while at the same time they kept women’s sexuality under close scrutiny and placed a high premium on her chastity, denying her the right to choose her own mate in love, or if she was dissatisfied with her spouse, to choose another male diversion as her husband sought out a female one.

“Andere Ka Kamandal” represents a unique bond between women, who are in fact like rival wives, who have borne children of the same man. After the man abandons them they set up house and take up their separate roles, one becomes the breadwinner and the other takes care

31 Minault, Other Voices, Other Rooms, 117.
32 Ibid., 111.
33 These Generalizations are derived from the texts discussed in the article by Gail Minault as well as from Urdu novels such as those of Nazir Ahmad, Mirat-ul-arus, Taubat un-nasuh, and so on.
of the house and children. When Dr. Rai is in labour and ready to deliver her child, Vidya, the legal wife of the man whose child Dr. Rai is about to give birth to, tends to her lovingly. Pritam uses names of close female relationships and bonds such as those of mother and mother-in-law, and those of sister and sister-in-law. Even though mothers and daughters-in-law and sisters-in-law might not be on best of terms under normal circumstances, during critical times such as childbirth and illness, women forget their differences and bond together. They relate though their common experience of childbirth and motherhood, and in a way shut out the male world with their traditional rituals and bonds of sympathy and understanding. These two women also form such a bond, where the apology offered by Dr. Rai for taking away Vidya’s husband is brushed aside by her saying that she did not steal her husband, in fact she had given herself as a husband who supported Vidya and her child.

Yet another story of an unusual bond between women is presented by Pritam’s “Apna-Apna Karz.” Murti and Rukmini are once again rival co-wives, yet they share a secret and create a bond which makes them inseparable so much so that Murti refuses offers of marriage on the grounds that the person who marries her has to marry her “sister Rukki” also. They share a baby as twin mothers. Murti being the biological one and Rukmini, the foster mother, who in fact loves and brings up the child as her very own. Rukmini and Murti both are victims of male desire and deception. While Rukmini’s childlessness drives her husband to marry again, Murti’s boyfriend absconds after hearing of her pregnancy. Both women bond together against husband and lover, both of whom personified their male oppressors and make a life for themselves, bringing up their mutual child. And later on, when Murti is proposed to, she refuses to abandon Rukmini and lays a most unusual precondition of the man marrying both these women. She does not want to deprive Rukmini of her happiness all over again. Her bond with her adopted sister takes precedence over any other bond she may form. Thus Pritam is talking about the importance of women’s relationship and their ability of being able to identify with each other. Significantly, while they were alone, each by herself, they were exploited by the men in their lives, but when they joined forces, they became strong and resilient, they succeeded in subverting the social order within their own household at least and thus were able to resist any further male encroachment over their personal rights and freedom.

While I greatly admire and appreciate this kind of bonding and eagerly accept this as a reflection of women’s ability to identify with each other and the surfacing of their so

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called inherently 'caring nature', I would also like to seek and present another less emotional and more rational explanation for this kind of bonding. Therefore, at this juncture in the discussion, I would like to borrow the equity theory explained by sociologist Louise K. Martell to explain the phenomenon of support and bonding between two women. While Martell discusses this concept of female bonding in the context of mother and daughter, I would like to transfer it to the context at hand, the bond between co-wives, usually, one childless and the other child-bearing.

According to the equity theory, feelings toward each other are positive or neutral if the parties perceive that the exchange is equitable. For example, childless co-wives give help in hopes of expecting a return such as access to their future step-child, and more importantly, providing their husband with an heir, thus reducing his chances to bring another wife.

This study supports the view that perception of equity is more strongly associated with emotional closeness than either help given or help received between primary wives and their co-wives. This goes to prove that many of these bonds, especially from the vantage point of the childless women, are formed out of sheer necessity of having a child, being a mother (as older wives were legally considered to be the mothers of any offspring borne by any of the other wives), having cordial relations with the birth mother of these children, will ensure that they do not turn their children against them, thereby also making sure that there will be someone to be cared by in their old age.

Apart from such co-wifely bonds, there are other bonds which form between the wife and the mistress. "Khure Hue Rang" is one such story of women bonding in the most unlikliest of relationships. This is the story of Bebe (mother) Chand Kaur as narrated by her daughters. Bebe's husband, Bai, has another woman, whom the girls call Chachi Santi (Aunty Santi) and whenever Bai got angry at Bebe, he would run off to Chahci Santi's house. Whenever Bai vanished for a few days and was not to be found at Santi's house either, Bebe would run to Santi and cry her heart out, asking for her advice. Both women were united in their concern for Bai, even though on the surface Santi appeared to be making fun of Bebe, and prodded her wounds and instigated her against her husband, however, she was the only one to whom Bebe could turn to with her concerns and worries regarding her husband. This was so because Bebe fully

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37 Ibid., 309.
acknowledged the fact that even though Santi was her rival and competitor for her husband’s affection and attention, she did indeed love him and worried for him just as Bebe herself did. She probably saw themselves as being able to identify with each other. Thus the man, who was supposed to be the bone of contention between the two of them, in fact became the bond which tied them together. Thus it was a bond of mutual reciprocity, which even continued after Bebe’s death when Chachi repayed her debts of sharing Bebe’s husband by adopting and loving her daughters as her own.

“Khure Hue Rang” and the other writings discussed above show the brighter side of the unfortunate situation of adultery. While no woman would want a rival wife in the age when it was common for men to have a second wife, even though illegally, women tried to make this arrangement work by identifying their mutual interest and trying to accommodate each other’s interest and living by compromise. Such arrangements were mutually beneficial, not only did the wives form a support group for each other in times of worry and crisis, they also watched out for each other’s interests and formed a bond as loving as real sisters.

**Women Against Women:**

**Polygamy and Second Wives:**

While adultery is not a new concept since it is as old as the institution of marriage, however, its present day definition which makes it synonymous with infidelity, its current clandestine nature and the disrespect and humiliation that it heaps on the adulterous man is a relatively new development. It is as recent as the outlawing of polygamy. I firmly believe that adultery has been around for centuries in the unjust form of polygamy, which has existed alongside notions of female chastity and devotion to a single husband, thus reflecting the blatant gendered divisions based on double standards which allow men to have affairs and give them the respectable name of polygamous marriage, when all it actually means is that the man can bring his mistresses, usually younger, more attractive women, home and enjoy sexual relations with them as and when they please without fear of social sanction, legal action and public embarrassment. This is the reason that I have included polygamous marriages in this discussion of adultery.

As I have highlighted in the other chapters as well, Bachint Kaur shows special penchant for placing identical issues in different contexts. In this light she presents different facets of women, marriage and adultery in varied socio-economic settings. On the issues of adultery and the involved offspring, on the one hand she has portrayed women as the caring and bonding motherly sisters, on the other hand, she also portrays the mean streak of women in “Memna,”
which is discussed in the following section and shows how a woman can let her vengeance wreak havoc on her rival wife.

“Memna” is a gory tale of how jealousy can drive a woman to an insane desire for revenge. Shankari forces her husband to sleep with his 12-13 year-old step-daughter Gurbachan in order to seek revenge against her rival wife. Shankari, who herself has a daughter almost Gurbachan’s age, is driven blind with rage as she bides her time and waits for her rival wife’s daughter to grow up. The wickedness of this heartless act, where she uses an innocent child as the sacrificial lamb or “memna,” as the story’s title suggests, shows that Shankari was highly possessive of her husband and hated losing him to the other woman. Her hatred for the other woman ran so deep that she failed to identify with the other woman not just being a woman but even as being the mother of a daughter. When the young girl reminds her step father that she was like a daughter to him, just like Surjeet, his own daughter, the couple gets angry at her for comparing herself with their daughter. As a final farewell not only to Gurbachan, but probably also to her rival-wife’s happiness, peace of mind and her relationship with her husband, Shankari hands over Gurbachan her blood-soiled clothes and instructs her to narrate her ruin in great detail to her mother.

A classic example of how women, especially rural women, who do not have a career and whose entire lives centre around their husbands and families react when they lose the one relationship that their life revolved around. As in this case, bound by traditions and conventional attitudes, Shankari did not have the option to divorce this man, or separate from him and refuse to have relations with him. She could not legally separate from him, take her kids and move on with her life immersing herself in her job or career and seek a new relationship with another man. Society grants men the benefit of condoning their extra-marital affairs and indirectly even permits polygamy by ignoring such unions and not ostracizing or bad-mouthing polygamous men.

Unfortunately, this same society denies such rights to women. Thus left in a situation, where they are spurned by their husbands in favour of another woman, women like Shankari are left with very few choices. They can either live a lonely existence and be available to satisfy their husbands’ sexual hunger whenever the men so desire. This path of life has loneliness and tears and a passive existence for the woman. The other path, which such women might choose is that of active resistance. They can protest against the husband, although usually the protest is directed against the other woman rather than one’s own husband. And in this case, the spurned wife resorts to traditional methods of protest and active resistance, such as bad-mouthing the other

woman within the community, physically picking up fights with her, or in the most extreme case, giving her life-long agony and mental torture by raping her young daughter.

In a similar vein, Dalip Kaur Tiwana's much acclaimed novel, *Langh Gaye Dariya* is also an example of how women chose to dominate other women as their means of resisting patriarchal encroachments over their rights.\textsuperscript{40} Once again, the trend here does not show much protest against husbands, patriarchs and their polygamous marriage arrangements, but rather against other women, who in first place are themselves victims of polygamy. While admittedly, I have also interpreted *Langh Gaye Dariya* as a literary work that does represent women's resistance against the male social order, however at the same time, this novel also brings out women's subjugation of other women, often in league with their husbands and sons. In this case, Tiwana brings out the various techniques which women adopt in order to get their way around patriarchal insistence on concepts of paternity and a male heir, they often secretly adopt male infants and pass them off as their own.

While such methods show their strength in the face of crisis, Tiwana has also brought out the ways in which women help capture other women in a position of subjugation and then develop mechanisms to hold them there for the rest of their lives. The elder *sardarni* (wife of a *sardar*) is childless and so considering the period in which this novel is set and the high caste, class and economic status of the *sardar*, it was accepted as the natural course of events that he should remarry. Such a situation would normally imply the extraction of power, status and prestige from the first wife as a younger one came into her husband's life and household. However, it is to the credit of these women that they sought to make the best of even this situation. At least for appearances sake, they looked willing and happy enough to welcome a new woman, who firstly, being younger and therefore more attractive, and secondly, being a possible heir-giver had great chances of being the favoured one in her husband's good graces. However, by a series of manouvres and methods, the elder *sardarni* retained her position as the principal wife and the mistress of the household. Her success in this pursuit was so great that even the children borne by the younger wife were actually considered to be the children of the elder wife and she was the in fact recognized as their mother. Thus the status of the younger wife in essence was reduced to that of a child bearer, a surrogate mother who bore children for her husband and her elder co-wife and a wet-nurse, who fed her milk to the *sardar* and elder *sardarni's* children.

\textsuperscript{40} Dalip Kaur Tiwana, *Langh Gaye Dariya* (1990) (*Gone are the Rivers*) Translated from the Punjabi original by S. C. Narula and Bhupinder Singh, (Chennai: Macmillan, 1998)
Although, as mentioned in the novel, bigamy was the trend among the sardars at the time, men did need their wives’ approval, if not their permission to remarry a girl, usually a decade or two younger than themselves. They looked for an excuse to remarry and childlessness, which was almost always interpreted as the women’s barrenness, was the most commonly used excuse for re-marriage. However, even this did not ensure the birth of an heir, as Tiwana points out, and one of the sardars married twice and then both wives had to secretly adopt male children in order to prevent further remarriage of their husband.

In case of Sardar Bakhshish Singh’s household, the elder sardarni, having appeared to accept the fact that her husband will certainly re-marry, even if ostensibly for producing an heir, herself set upon the task of choosing an appropriate bride, who would also be a willingly subservient co-wife. She deliberately declined prospective matches from families of high social standing because she wanted the consolation of getting a girl from an ordinary family, which was economically much lower so that the younger wife would never be her equal. On being told about family intrigues for property and wealth, where one younger wife after bearing two sons, poisoned her husband to get complete control of the property without having to share it with the child-less older wife, the elder sardarni, Basant Kaur, disregarded any such fears on her behalf. She had ensured that she herself would never have to go through that fate. A bride from an ordinary family would never have this sort of courage, which could be found only among the upper class girls of sardar families, who were brought up amidst an atmosphere of court intrigue and manipulative tendencies within its zenana or the women’s quarters. As Tiwana rightfully points out, only women belonging to great houses and lineages were capable of planning grand intrigues with the support of their fathers and brothers. Moreover, even after a woman from an ordinary family is brought home, the elder wife tries her best to make sure that the younger one knew her place in the household and accepted that she would always be second and would be sharing her husband equally with the first wife.

The creation of this hierarchy was not the result of just a single woman’s maneuvers, but other women also supported this cause partly out of a desire to retain the status quo in terms of the family power equation and also possibly because they were or could have been in the same boat and might have had to share their husbands with other wives and so they sympathized with the lot of the first wife. Even though these women permitted and accepted this system of bigamy, does not mean that they were not unhappy about it. Another reason why women became associates and worked to keep the younger wife in her place was more selfish and personal and that was to ensure their own position in the elder wife’s good graces and keep her from becoming disgruntled or dissatisfied. As in this case, sardar Bakhshish Singh’s sister, Bibaji of Siddhupur,
joined hands with the elder wife when she gave her vote of confidence in support of the elder wife by favouring her, thus making the hierarchy of the house quite clear. The elder sardarni used her confidential discussions with her sister-in-law as a diplomatic way of gaining influence over her husband and keeping an upper hand over the younger wife. The sister-in-law openly favoured the elder wife because she knew that it would assuage her vanity and ego and thus keep her happy. In this case, the happiness of the elder wife was important because she could never take a slight and if she was dethroned or removed from her supreme position in the household she could become desperate enough to become a threat to the sardar's household, in fact his very life itself. The younger sardarni, however, being from an ordinary family could bear more, be tolerant and stick loyally with the sardar through adverse circumstances as well.

While working indirectly on the psyche of the younger wife through her confidential conversations with her sister-in-law, the elder wife also filled her husband's ears in the hope of earning a rebuke or reprimand for her co-wife. Tiwana mentions the elder sardarni hovering around her husband and complaining about the younger sardarni's way of dressing in tight outfits or her manner of laughing a bit too loudly and not being able to learn the etiquette of the house. Thus she tried to control both her husband and her co-wife's lives while her writ ran large in the entire household. It was she who decided what to give the servants, what gifts to present at court ceremonies and weddings. In fact it was only with her permission that the younger wife, whose family hesitated in visiting her in the grand house, could go and visit her family. Thus Tiwana very effectively brings out the various levels of subjugation and resistance, oppression and subversion, whereby, on the one hand women were being exploited by the patriarchal preference for bigamy, and on the other, they created niches of power and control within that environment of oppression. Unfortunately, these niches of power rested on the subjugation of other women. Ironically, the very instruments, which some women used to gain power, were in turn weapons of oppression for other women. They turned against their sisters to gain power over the men in their lives and then used those men as tools to suppress vital aspects of other women's lives in their family and society.

In other instances, very often in villages, especially in the Punjab region childless wives would bring home their younger sisters and nieces as the second wives for their husbands in order to produce a child, an heir. This was the case described by Krishna Sobti in her epic, Zindaginama, where Shahdad's childless wife Mariam brings home her sister's daughter, her niece, Haleema as her younger co-wife, in order to give birth to an heir. While this sort of system might be acceptable in the remote, traditional cultures, it is however emotionally taxing on

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the women. The older wife may be threatened by the favourable position of the child-bearing new wife and might feel induced to keep the younger woman under her thumb. While the younger one might feel deprived of the pleasures of having a husband all to herself and having a house of her own. She might also resent the overbearing ways of the older co-wife as is often the case in such situations. Thus there is a family feud going on between the two women, they keep vying with each other for the husband's affections and backbite against each other. They become each others' worst enemies and thus support the men of the house in suppressing each other. Thus they end up hurting each other and reducing women to a position much lower than men's in the social hierarchy of family and society.

_Zindaginama_, which describes polygamy as the accepted norm, especially amongst Muslim households, brings out the level of antagonism that exists between two co-wives and how they both destroy the peace of the house by hurling the choicest of abuses, curses and physical blows to each other. The younger woman has the upper hand because she has more influence with the husband, however since they both try to fill his ears against each other, he usually stays out of the dispute, which after all was a result of his bigamy. The only time that he interferes is when he get physically violent with one of them, in order to punish her for creating a chaotic and hostile atmosphere within the house. Hence while the husband keeps aloof from these daily confrontations, and enjoys the comforts of two wives to cook, clean and sleep with him, the women get victimized by being pitted against each other. While men are to be blamed for their miserable marriages, they, however, keep conspiring against each other. Instead of uniting their energies and keeping the man in control, they see other women who are actually in the same boat as they are, as their enemies.

Polygamy appears to be especially rampant in the region of Punjab, therefore one notices a predominance of Punjabi writings exposing this aspect of patriarchal society. Bachint Kaur, Dalip Kaur Tiwana and even Amrita Pritam have referred to this phenomenon. Pritam talks about the traditional practice of bringing home a younger bride for an already married man in order to produce an heir. This practice was more common in pre-independence India, but still exists in villages, especially in states like Punjab, whose economy is based primarily on cultivation. Lack of an heir usually results in the passing of the land into the hands of outsiders. This is not an easily acceptable proposition and so the practice of marrying a second time has developed and sustained itself to some degree even in post-independence India.

While it commonly might be the mother-in-law who forces her son to remarry, in some cases, the older, childless wife of the man may bring home the second bride, usually a younger
girl to produce a child heir. In the case of “Ek Nishvaas,” Nihal Kaur brings home Veero.\textsuperscript{42} Since the necessity of producing an heir is more pressing if the property and wealth of the childless family is considerable, this practice is mostly found amongst the rich landlords and property holders. The man usually considers remarrying only as a last resort after trying for many years to produce an heir with the first wife and therefore is much older than his young bride, whose youth is a prerequisite for being able to conceive and deliver a healthy child.

Such situations are like a double-edged sword where both wives younger as well as older act as the two edges and then in turn are victimized by the other edge. While it is unfair for the younger girl to be married to an older man, it is equally unfair for the older wife to have a younger woman living in her house sharing her husband, all her privileges as a wife and being the mother of the child who will inherit all the wealth and property. Thus it becomes a case where women assist in subjugating and even demeaning each other. The younger woman lives her life tied to an old man, all her dreams and hopes of a young, handsome husband are thwarted forever and ironically another woman is responsible for pushing her into this condition.

\textit{Adultery and the ‘Vicious Other Woman’}

Most literary instances of women becoming women’s worst enemies are represented via the institution of polygamy, probably because co-wives who spend considerable time with each other have a greater chance and capacity to make each other’s lives miserable. However, mistresses who are usually considered dispossessed of all rights can only possess enough capacity to ruin a woman’s life as she does by stealing away her husband’s affections and love interests. However, the following two examples show how mistresses can become lethal in their mal-intent of ousting the wife and staking their claim to the socially honourable and legally recognized position of wifehood.

Tari, the ‘other woman’ in Ajeet Cour’s “Yeh Bhi Itihaas Hai,” is not just out to break Prakash’s house, but is a co-conspirator in Prakash’s husband’s plot to murder his wife.\textsuperscript{43} She should not only have not had an affair with a married man, but she did not even have the heart to show some compassion to Prakash and her infant daughter, Tari was after all a woman, but she felt no sense of common identity with Prakash, and did not feel that she was robbing that woman of her happiness, her husband and family, which were rightfully hers. If she so desired, she could

\textsuperscript{42} Amrita Pritam, “Ek Nishvaas,” in \textit{Saat Sau Bees Kadam: Chuni Hui Kahaniyan}, (New Delhi: Bharatiya Gyanpith, 2000.)

\textsuperscript{43} Ajeet Cour, “Yeh Bhi Itihaas Hai,” in \textit{Qasaibaaraa}, (New Delhi: Kitaabghar Prakashan, 2002.)

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have put an end to this affair and returned Prakash’s husband back to her, but she was cold-blooded and selfish enough to hatch a murder plot and see her die in the painful torturous manner, which left her mother mentally disturbed for the rest of her life. This is an example of how women lose track of their gender identity and willingly play enemy to one of their own sisters. Similarly, the ‘other woman’ in Mridula Garg’s story “Adrishya” also forces Dr. Deven to divorce his wife, and when the doctor refuses, she conspires to have the wife killed and does in fact have her murdered in cold blood.44

Just as there are not many examples of mistresses becoming so bold as to try to usurp the position of the wife, there are also not very many examples of the wife, who is normally a passive actor in the whole adultery scenario as to actually put the mistress in her place and to directly make her limits clear to her. Pritam, one of whose pet subjects is the observation and portrayal of the interaction between women and their relationship with each other, both positive or negative, brings out the classic way in which women work against women by becoming the other woman in her story, “Shah Di Kanjari.”45 Thus women become associates of men and ruin the peace and life of other women and exploit them. Mistresses have been known to wreak havoc on many a household and this is a subject written about in man writings by women. This story brings out the resignation in the heart and mind of the shahni or the wife of the shah, after he takes a young songstress as his mistress. She takes consolation in the fact that at least her house is her own domain, which no mistress can snatch away from her. This also brings to light the importance of the house, household and the domestic domain in the mind of the woman, whose entire life and universe revolves around the house and whose mission in life is to take care of the house and see to the smooth running of the household. This woman can share her husband and his love but cannot bear to share her house with another woman. The house is her sacred ground where the fallen woman is not allowed to step foot. The woman of the house can manage to gather the fortitude to bear the besotted look on her husband’s face as he gazes upon his mistress but she cannot allow the mistress to give the illusion of being part of her household. Therefore, towards the end of the story when the mistress refuses to accept money from the wife by highlighting her relationship with the shah, the shahni gives her money to put her in her place and to establish her mark on the household domain. This story reflects the attitude and outlook of many women in similar situations, where husband and his heart might be public property to be shared under duress, but the house and the honour and power that go with it are strictly the

property of the lady of the house. No matter how passive this act of reaction and protest might appear, however, it did fulfill its part in humiliating the mistress before a houseful of guests and made it clear and black and white as to who was the lady of the house.

In Conclusion:
This survey of writings proves that the writers have given a big share of thought and reflection to the issue of adultery and infidelity within supposedly monogamous institutions of love and marriage. They have studied and analysed this problem from various possible angles and written from the perspective of both the women involved in such scenarios. Two important conclusions emerge from this study. One, since there are so many writings that present female adultery without apologies, it shows that these writers are very disillusioned with the institution of marriage and what it entails for the woman. Secondly, they also sympathise with the plight of the other woman, who can't get social recognition, sanction and security attached to marriage. Hence presenting both aspects, these writers do not pass value judgments in favour of one or the other.

The writings overwhelmingly portray male infidelity, whereas women's adulterous affairs are treated with a sympathetic understanding and presented in an unapologetic tone, leading to the possibility that these writers might see women's adultery as a means of evening out the skewed graph of male adulterous liaisons. Women's extra-marital affairs, such as the one portrayed by Pritam in “Neeche Ke Kapde,” are represented as a short respite within the life long sacrifice at the patriarchal altar of marriage, in other words, these affairs end up being justified. Men's affairs on the other hand are unanimously condemned irrespective of whether the victim is the wife or the ‘other woman’, or the younger, secondary wife. The central theme is that the individual likely to be victimized in either situation is invariably the woman. When wives fight adultery or polygamy, ironically, they fight against the other woman, rather than the husband or the lover or the patriarchal setup which enables men to get away with such breaches of monogamy. While it is not totally in the women's hands to stop men from committing adultery, they can certainly discourage it more effectively and reduce its impact on their lives by directing their forces against the man, rather than the second woman in the relationship. Some women have tried to do so and this attempt is reflected in the highly unexpected bonds that are formed between the wife and the ‘other woman’. These bitter-sweet relationships relay the message that women can emerge stronger and even isolate the man to some extent. By joining forces with each other, these women reduce their victimized status and emerge if not victorious, then at least, not completely defeated by their adulterous men.