

## CHAPTER 2

### The Voices of Femininity

Human being by his natural instinct formulated a social pattern of life. As the passage of centuries and time paved way to his instinctual passion for material things that lead him to form a culture and civilisation making him move away from the bonds of nature to which he is born. The earlier period of uncivilised life catered the matter of muscle power on account of many survival necessities. Even later when he claims to be civilised and proves his power to restrain from the primitive animal instincts, the proneness to conquering, overpowering and capitalising the weaker ones persisted in his brain. Now he uses both his physical and intellectual powers to suppress and take advantage of the weaker sections, including his own female companion. An analysis of the whole history of human establishment is the narration of this subjugation, utilisation and exploitation. This very tendency of man is being strengthened by religious and the political institutions because these institutions are too the construction of the exploitative and suppressive factors in human brain.

The misusing perspective of man over woman resulted in the declining of women's place below the rank of men and this prejudiced attitude of civilisation has crossed through time and place to our present day from time immemorial. Stressing in the vincible factor of biological difference and abilities assigned to women by nature, like pregnancy and childbirth as the foundation, man converted life at all levels into his favour. There begins the history of sidelining women in all faces of social and domestic life. The age old suppression has fed the elements of the passivity and docility into the minds of women that was actually imposed upon them by patriarchy. It again charted certain unique social norms for women phrasing the internalized won't as 'feminine nature'. One can find the traces of this discrimination in all cultures, all civilisations and in all countries with only slight variations existing.

In most of the domains like political, social, familial and even in the interpersonal relationships women encounter varied forms of suppression. These forms of stifles have been so prudently proclaimed through the medium of religion, mythology, politics, philosophy, history, language and literature. Thus patriarchy stretches out its strong roots in an undeniable manner, secluding the roles of women to certain particular aspects of life. A woman's life history is a gradual transition from biological female sex to the culturally constructed feminine gender. She becomes a synonym for the biological function of reproduction entrusted by nature upon her as well as the discrimination imposed upon her by culture. As Levy Struass quotes: Passage from the state of nature to the state of culture is marked by man's ability to view biological relations as a series of contrasts; duality, alternation, opposition and symmetry, whether under definite or vague forms, constitute not so much phenomena to be explained as fundamental and immediately given data of social reality (Beauvoir xxiii).

Under the disguised banner of lovability as a beloved or a wife and her imposed responsibility towards her children, she is sidelined from the main stream of society impoverishing her from every intellectual and ideological activity as Vigrinia Woolf observes:

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction. Infact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (51)

The male dominated society approves the emotions of ‘aggression, intelligence, force and efficacy to man while they enthrust ‘passivity, ignorance, docility, niceties and ineffectuality’. In the histories of human civilisations women failed to enjoy priorities and preferences in the societal affairs. In Kate Millet’s concern, “male supremacy, like other political creeds does not finally reside in physical strength but in the acceptance of a value system which is not biological . . . Civilisation has always been able to substitute other methods (technic, weaponry, knowledge) for those of physical strength and contemporary civilisation has no further of it”(27).

Similar to the racial societies in the West where the white mastered the black, and the black, no one else to master, mastered his woman. It proves Kate Millet’s quotes; patriarchal behavioural pattern is a sort of ‘interior colonisation’.

But we must not consider patriarchy and male oriented family system as a legacy of all civilisation because the historical studies proves that there existed matriarchal system in the pre-historic period of human life. It was matriarchy that prevailed during the early life of human beings. But not for a longer any period, particular system gained its power in the society. As the wheels of history rotates, the ideologies also deviates from its path. Likewise, the patriarchal societal system also faces the collective opposition and rebellion. This collective rebellion led to the ‘feminist’ struggle against the patriarchal world. The struggles inconnection with feminist discourses that involves suggestions, quarrels, debates, attacks and counter attacks on the issues of female subjugation in human society are unending. Women’s fight against the patriarchal brutality in the Western countries even stretch as far back as Greek mythology.

The history of the modern feminist movement is generally split up into three ‘waves’, each one dealing with varied aspects of the issue feminine identity. The first wave feminist

movement ranges from nineteenth century in the United Kingdom and the United States dealing with the suffrage rights.

Even after centuries, Mary Wollstonecraft's book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is noted in the history of feminist struggle. She exposed both men's prejudices and women's follies in accepting these prejudices through the centuries. These follies she believed in are due to their wrong education and upbringing. Wollstonecraft paved the path for the unending vindication for women's right not only in England, but in the whole of European continent and America, that later spread to other continents.

The second wave feminism covers a period of feminist activity in the early 1960s to the late 1980s. While the second wave feminism encouraged much more radical thinking on the part of the empowerment, the third wave feminists focused on the indifferences in establishing equality for women focusing on the various communities and cultures. It covers many avant-garde feminist writers like Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Kate Millet.

In Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own*, which was published in 1929, she analyses the impact of economic vulnerability that restricts women from attaining intellectual sublimity. Simone de Beauvoir, during the post-war period published the revolutionary book that is still considered as the bible of feminists, *The Second Sex* (1949). She elaborates certain scientific wisdom combined with existential philosophy mentioning the woman's existential dilemma in a bourgeois male centered social arrangement.

In 1963, through the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan voices the discontentment exasperations of a lot American women who are being suppressed into mere homemakers after educating from college. Similar to Beauvoir, Friedan too counters the various theories of Sigmund Freud and his disciples specifically, the 'castration complex' and

'penis envy'. She rejects the blindfolded application of Freudian theory to women's life. Her work *Sexual Politics* infuriated the second wave of feminism in the entire part of European countries. She equates patriarchy to the political institution. She questions all sorts of oppressions shown by white towards black, rich towards poor, man towards woman, and the poor man towards his poorer woman.

The third-wave feminism that turns up by early 1990's as commented by Anita Balakrishnan, focuses "... on the inequality of women's subordination based upon the particular location of different communities in racial/class formations or hetero sexual economies" (110).

Different kinds of the feministic concepts are liberal, marxist, radical, psychoanalytical socialist and the existentialist. Each one attempts in their own pattern to seek solutions for the women's varied questions. Even though all these theories partially or completely fulfilled the queries, it paved way for the female subjugation. With the strength of these theories women evolve to take their own destinies and construct their own happy life as women.

Liberal feminism considered as the first form of feminism was formulated by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and by John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women*. The other forms of feminism emerged as a reaction against this traditional pattern of feminism. Liberal feminists believe that the female suppression is an offshoot of the cultural and traditional paradigms prevailing in the social sphere. Liberal feminist ideology opposes the traditional view regarding the weakness of women in comparison with men. They highlight the suppressive pattern faced by women while excluding her from the primary positions of the society denying her dream of realising her full potential. Liberal feminists demand equal rights and educational opportunities for women

so that they could achieve success in all fields of action. They claim gender equality and justice and stand for the abolition of all gender discrimination. The book *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan embodies the ideological concepts of liberal feminism.

In opposition to the vision and mission of the liberal feminism, the Marxist feminists claim that the dream of attaining gender equality is an impossible mission. Based on the theory of Friedrich Engels, Marxist feminists view that female oppression begins with the introduction of private property. Leading to capitalism making men privileged over women, they assert the replacement of capitalist system by a socialist system in which the means of production belongs to one and all. They claim for a classless society where women and men will be equal.

Radical feminists supported by Kate Millett's book *Sexual Politics* disagree with the views of liberal or Marxist feminist ideologies. They considered the patriarchal system as the whole responsible entity for women's sufferings and oppressions. Millet advocates that patriarchy is constructed on power structure in which the man woman relationship is viewed from the perspective of a hierarchical relationship where women are placed inferior. Radical feminists, through their works, attempt to make changes in the socio-cultural and political practices in the society. They seek the reason for the inferior status of women and blame the female biology and even uphold lesbianism.

Psychoanalytic feminists forming their strong basis on the studies of Sigmund Freud, attempt to trace the root of female oppression in the minds of each female. They promote the concept that patriarchy is a mere invention of male imagination, a sort of psychological trap from which all, mainly woman must break out. This acquisition of superiority by male resulted women to accede to the inferior position in all walks of life.

Simone de Beauvoir opines in her work *The Second Sex*, that woman is considered by

men as “the other” and this “otherness” makes her a victim of oppression. Women are deprived of the opportunity and the freedom to cross over the limitations in their life. So they must take control of their own life and attain whatever they want to be.

Juliet Mitchell, one of the promoters of socialist feminism claims that the present structures of the capitalism promote the gender discrimination right from the family itself. This root cause must be removed to promote gender equality.

The rapid rise of feministic ideas can be witnessed in the last period of twentieth century. Many western feminist theoreticians emphasised their ideologies through their works. The noted contributions of the early feminists are Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1952), Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970). Rework and reconstruction of the feminist ideology in accordance with the contemporary period paved way to the notion of ‘new woman’ who is bold, authentic and assertive in nature.

The aspect of ‘new woman’ emerged in the late nineteenth century and had a strong influence on the conception of feminism right from the beginning of twentieth century leading it to the twenty first century. Slightly varying from the prior concepts, the twenty first century female authors revolve around various social realities, current issues, identity quest, query for the human existence, individuality, self-actualisation and thirst for autonomy. They present a newer consciousness of femininity and rarely mention the failures and conflicts in between the man-woman relationships.

The traits of western feministic theories failed to have an influence on the Indian ideologies to an extent in the backdrop of India’s multicultural traditions and distinct ethnicity with ‘multiple consciousness’. It is only after 1947, the political structure of India came into existence and the pre-independent social framework was not at all convenient for

the seeds of feminism to sprout and develop as a philosophy or as a movement mainly due to the country's varied linguistic, cultural and geographical pattern.

Even though Indian women had a history of uniting for the sake of independence, they had not united in the name of women's cause. But through various social reforms and movements, Indian women attained certain basic rights. India is a country where women did not want to fight for voting rights, that was already included in the Indian constitution but for the abolition of various serious social evils like sati system, dowry system, child marriage, widow burning, sati pradha and other evil social practices. There is no scarcity of brave courageous women in Indian literature and Indian history. Indian women were considered with pride and honour during the pre-vedic period.

The stature of Indian women during the vedic as well as pre-vedic period was much nobler than any other society. Women were considered equal to the state of men and all girl children learnt all religious *samskaras* similar to a boy child. Polyandry as well as the practice of *niyoga*, an ancient Hindu convention that permits a woman to help her to bear a child from an appointed person without affecting the physical chastity prevailed during the period. Women relished the right to education, property, attended public assemblies and social gatherings where both men and women gathered together without any discriminations. Marriage was not the only single resort to lead their life ahead, there were instances of women remaining single. Even entertaining paramours was not considered as crime. Widow remarriages were promoted whereas child marriages were not put into practice. Through the practice of *niyoga*, even the childless widow could beget a child.

In the Vedic period too, women received the noblest of treatments, greatest respect and unrestricted love both from the family and the society. From 300 AD onwards the women's status began to receive a harsh repulse. She begins to be treated as a commodity



rather than a living object with senses. Her activities and appearances gained more prominence than her inner psyche and gradually she is streamlined into the four walls of the house. After passing through a long period of suppression and silence, Indian women venture for a change in the social convention.

Woman is considered as the partner of man in the sophistication of civilisation. But the sad fact of gender discrimination that still prevails in various nooks and the corners of society reduces a group of minority to witness object treatment. It is generally observed that a boy's birth brings happiness to a home whereas a girl's birth, a bane. According to Indian tradition, a woman is considered as the Goddess of the house, Grihalakshmi and a girl child born in a family announces the arrival of the Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. But it remains only as the preaching part of the gospel in practice. In reality she evolves as an all-in-one servant round the clock. Middle class parents spend on the education of their sons, but the girls are supposed to make do with the limited resources. Even if a girl is lucky enough to have a liberal family unbiased of gender, she confronts a society with a prejudiced vision of phallocentricism.

The Indian traditional practices and the customs owe their origin to various epics, one among them is Manu-smriti or Manu's code. Even though Manu speaks against the complete freedom of women, at many places he emphasises the need of the society to pay due respect to the women. As R.G. Chaturvedi quotes Manu in his work,

*“JamayoyaniGehaniShapantayapratipoojita*

*TaniKrithyahananeeltavinashyantisanamatatah”*

Doomed to be destroyed is that house whose women, for not getting proper regard, curses it to be destroyed.

*“Yatranarayastupoojyanteramantetatradevatah*

*Yatrataastunapoojyante, sarvasttrafalahkriyah”*

God themselves abide in places where women are worshipped or kept happy. Labours never bear fruit where women are not respected.

*“Santushtobharyayabharta, bhartabharyatathaivcha*

*Yasminnaivkuleniyamkalyanamtatravaidhruvam”*

Blessed is that home in which the husband is perfectly happy with his wife and the wife is in perfect happiness with her husband.

The early Indian feminists did not consider feminism as an ideological strike between two sexes from the aspects of gender roles nor was motivated by the philosophers of Wollstonecraft nor Woolf nor Beauvoir but with the intense desire for freedom from the suppressive hegemony.

From the twentieth century onwards, due to the East-West cultural encounter, a rapid variation occurs in the society of India. The progressive alteration in the society due to globalisation, liberalisation and technological innovations, lead to an easy exchange of ideas between East and West. It resulted in the emergence of a prominent culture making an awakening in the feminine demands and rights. This new awakening regarding the rights and privileges of women become exquisite through numerous writings that project the attitudinal change towards women as a contract to the prevailing patriarchal set pattern in all domains including political, social, familial and interpersonal state of affairs. These writings revealed the inner conflicts, silent sufferings, alienation, deprivation and a search for self identity. The feminist writers consider the legacy of writing as the fundamental of women’s privilege.

Educated men and women of the current society are much unveiled to Western culture

and values. Western feminist theories and ideologies begin to influence women's fight for equality, justice and freedom. Numerous academicians are discovered and social communities promoted the empowerment of women both in rural as well as urban areas of the country. The cultural blending with Europe, the independence struggle, active participation of women in it, development of democracy, insight regarding their own social rights, economic rights as well as political rights, rise in literacy rate are few factors that paved way for the discrimination of feminism throughout India. Eminent feminist writers like Woolf, Beauvoir and Friedan too have extended their influence on the development of Indian feminism. In a country like India, for the concept of feminism, there were more opponents than proponents. Many including women who are bound to traditional culture and practices belittle the concepts, issues, problems and the sufferings of women. It is an undeniable fact that education and employment has strengthened the status of Indian women. It resulted in the crossing off the thresholds of the traditional conditioning of women's mind and attaining the power of virginity by themselves.

Elaine Showalter, an American literary critic and feminist, deemed as one among the founders of feminist literary criticism in America. *Toward a Feminist Poetics* (1979), *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1997) and *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage* (2001) are few of her works. In her essay, *Toward a Feminist Poetics*, Showalter promotes a genre of feminist criticism with a new language and a new way of reading while following the history of women's literature, she divides it into three phases-'feminine', 'feminist' and 'female'.

The first phase, the Feminine phase dates from 1840 to 1880, the women writers attempt to put an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture. During this phase the feminist content of feminine art is typically oblique, because of the inferiority complex experienced by female writers. The aim of the female writers to construct their

works at this stage is an attempt to be with their male counterparts, whose intellectual accomplishment is prioritised. Acceptance of pseudonyms veiling their identity as woman denotes their urge to be considered co-equal to men. But the characters they framed failed to challenge the male centered society. The way in which female authors wrote and think made them to attain a place much equivalent to the male counterparts. Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Lynn Linton are few prominent writers of the time. They all attempt to be a part of public sphere, a phallogentric tradition.

The Feminist phase extends around 1920's, as a protest phase. The women during this phase begin to protest against androcentric attitudes. The women of this period begin to act as a rebel against the patriarchal attitudes and attempt their best to exaggerate women's position in the field of work, class and family. They seek autonomy with vigour. Wide change happened in the attitude towards women's freedom and the concept of liberation. The literature very well depicts the injustice done to women by men in various fields. Most of the protagonist exemplifies the suppressive state of women under male dominated society. The deviated thoughts and expressions entitle them as 'feminist'. The authors of this period poured out feminine problems from different angles. They consider the sufferings of women as a bondage of slavery. Few female writers are Mar Braddon, Rhoda Broughton and Florence Marry. Their protagonist depromote the golden-haired doll like paradigms of feminine beauty and the concept of 'Angels in the House'.

The Female phase comes to light at the dawn of twentieth century. The writers of this period come out with vigour and raise their voice rebuking the patriarchal system of the society. 1960's witness the epitome of this phase. The women authors completely reject the influence of male thinking that was yet tinged in the previous periods. They try to create their

own domain discarding the blindfold imitation of male writers. Irish Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble and Beryl Bainbridge weigh the sufferings and experiences of women.

The Feminist and Female phases that urges boldness and vigour of women can be identified in the characters charted by Kapur and De. Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Mikki, Karuna and Maya in one way or the other protest against the age old set practices of patriarchy even including marriage. They get enstrengthened through education that boosts their individuality and self-identity which lead them to have an unquenchable desire to transcend the traditional patriarchal threshold seeking their own space in multiple arena of life.

The two Indian women authors of twentieth century Kapur and De try to bring out these attempts of Indian women through their protagonists. The fight for women's equality with man becomes prominent in the last few years. Indian female writers through their works initiated to question the patriarchal culture that commands the Indian scenario. They focus attention on women's problems in their works and attempts to provide a new approach to the developing situation. They very successfully bring to public the varied experiences of women from different strata of Indian society. A great amount of social and ideological conflicts result due to the changes in the roles of women in the society. The initial soft voices of protest steadily changes into an outburst of anger and modifies into an open rebellion.

Like other Indian female writers, De has been able to highlight women's displacement and marginalisation both in culture and society. She boldly tries to incarnate a new society through her ideas. Apart from creating a traditional woman again through her writings, she attempts to make the readers imagine of the new society, new code of conduct, new jobs, new social structure, new laws and new education where women try to set up themselves. She reconnoiters and succeeds in painting the new world of modern women through the

discussion of very sensitive aspects of human life, especially the urban women's status and their challenges. As Jaydeep Sing Dodiya and R K Dhawan remark:

Shobhaa De is essentially feminist writer. Like Nayantara Sehgal and Shashi Deshpande, she concentrates on women's problems and gives a new approach to them. She is modern novelist who recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down through the writings. She constantly tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against male dominance. For this, she explores the world of urban women in India. (15)

De attempts to break the patriarchal hegemony and challenges the male-dominance by depicting the 'new woman', a new literary female model, assertive and self-willed, searching to discover her true self. According to Ladva, "A new woman is in fact an urban middle-class woman who still suffers but not in silence as she need to be. The modern Indian woman who is at the centre of fiction of De, is no longer a model of vedic or pre-vedic dignified woman, nor is she modelled on the past-Aryan woman who is passive in nature and accepts the dominance of men in society." (246) Through the caricature of her female characters in her novels, *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights*, *Sisters*, *Strange Obsession*, *Sultry Days*, *Second Thoughts*, *Snapshots*, *Shooting From the Hip*, *Small Betrayals* and *Surviving Men* she truly designs the picture of the new woman.

An explicit reading of De's works discloses her protest against the good and ideal image of woman. She gallantly incites about the fair sex and caters a graphic portrayal of their pursuits and attitudes. She loudly revolts by raising their voices against the male-dominated Indian society where women are refuted the freedom and deal only according to the whims and wishes of their husbands. This blind revelation makes her to face various

criticisms from the orthodox Indian society but still she keeps on writing without being disturbed.

De through her writings attempts to create a space for feminine reality. She does not segregate with what is called a 'taboo subject' in her works. She acknowledges: "It is important for women to talk about it. Our mother endured it silently because it was a taboo subject. Nobody was interested in women's view on sex. Whether it was erotic poetry or prose, the perspective was always that of a man. It is only now that women are expressing the way they feel about this most elementary . . . aspect of conjugal life. It is a kind of catharsis" (Ramachandran 24). De's novels remark her sense of empathy towards the women, who in search of their identity bound back the strings of domesticity and marriage.

De's works deal with the psychic conflict in the minds of much liberated women protagonists who are trapped between a 'personal self' and a 'societal self'. Her first novel, *Socialite Evenings*, tells the story of the struggle of Karuna, a young girl, in the male dominated and the patriarchal system of the society. The novel begins with the description of the birth of the protagonist Karuna in a dusty clinic in Satara, a remote village in Maharashtra. Karuna in her later life get in connected with her mentor Anjali, a middle aged woman who becomes the portal to the glamorous world of fashion designing and advertising. Anjali, being a stylish stunning woman, succeeded in leaving a strong impact in the mind of the small village girl Karuna. Anjali, born in a conservative Jain family and married to Abbas Tyabji could no more live in a conservative and boring life and decides to join the exciting world of fashion and money.

Karuna's parents who wish to rear up their girl child within the boundaries of traditional culture protest against her friendly relationship with Anjali. But Karuna, who hunts behind her big dreams is able to revolt against the social restrictions. When the novel

begins, Karuna is a child who stands against the male psyche and the traditional system of the society. She darts from a small village to the mega city of Bombay, a city of dreams. She throws off the conventional moral values and revolts against the already set norms for the women.

De's women characters are similar to vamps who assault for the complete freedom of womankind from all sorts of patriarchal detentions. In the role of a wife, Karuna incarnates the misery of a woman in Indian male dominated society. "I felt like an indifferent boarder in the house, going through the motions of housekeeping and playing wife but the resentment and rebellion remained just under the surface, ready to break out the smallest provocation" (*Socialite Evenings* 69).

Karuna is portrayed as a woman who affirms her feminine psyche through protest and defense. She is identified as being in the female phase. She spurs against the stereotypes of gender biased culture. "We were reduced to being marginal people. Everything that mattered to us was trivialised. The message was you don't really count, except in the context my priorities. It was taken for granted that our needs were secondary to their's. And that in some way we ought to be grateful for having a roof over our head and four square meals a day" (*Socialite Evenings* 69).

De's women wish to liberate themselves by trying to assert their individuality through escapades and sex. Karuna's desolation of the male ego echos as: "You are even more of worms than I thought. You deserve Winnie. I hope she's got a wax doll of yours. I'll send her some extra pins to stick into it" (*Socialite Evenings* 264).

Karuna exemplifies the modern new woman, independent in thought and action. It is much reflected in her attitude in dress and manners and her ability to keep herself safe in the animal male dominated society. By witnessing the journey of her life, one realises that status



of a self sufficient woman moving through the ups and downs of her life exemplifies the rate of marginalisation in the hands of men.

De's fixing up of male characters in a negative aspect helps to highlight the status of women. Her women characters are mostly the masters of their own lives. They vary from other weak female characters who seek the shelter of their husband to survive in the society. Chaman Nahal observes, "I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome, where it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group when women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminine materializes" (30).

Throughout the novel, *Socialite Evenings*, Karuna is a bold woman who asserts her feminine psyche through protest. Her marriage is a failure since it is loveless and joyless. She states, "marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to" (*Socialite Evenings* 68). Karuna gets frustrated with her husband's cold attitude and absorbs a lesson that, "men like dogs could be conditioned through reward and punishment" (*Socialite Evenings* 87).

Karuna refuses to be the toy of man, his rattle "which must gingle in his ears whenever dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused" (Mary 34). In Dinesh Panwar's views,

Karuna is not a woman who wants to live within the four walls of the house. She wants to move out and explore the world. She is not meek, weak woman dependent on her husband to survive in the society. Karuna is a woman with an independent approach. Her breaking out of the bond of marriage and

finding her feet into a profession of her own choice is the example of her attitude to value her desires. (7)

Karuna is annoyed with the cool attitude of her husband and his lack of interest in her. She feels irritated when she finds him more interested in newspaper than in her. “I think our marriage was over the day our awful honeymoon started. As for you-I really don’t know to this day why you chose to marry me. I don’t think you even know who you married. You don’t have a clue what sort of woman I am” (*Socialite Evenings* 185). Lack of acceptance and love that she fails to receive from her husband made her incline towards theatre and later into a relationship with Krish, and in the lack of her regret in betraying her husband she reveals, “When the husband saw me off at the airport, I didn’t feel even a tinge of guilt, remorse or shame . . . At that moment, the one thing that mattered was being with Krish. Everything else was irrelevant secondary practically non-existent” (*Socialite Evenings* 64).

Karuna’s contention to fix her own identity through a job lead her to the world of theatre where she desires to live an independent life. From the film industry, she meets Girish Sridhar, the great art film maker who wanted her to commit herself to much serious thing like Cinema. “But life is about more than just goofy kids and surfboards. I want you to get involved. Commit yourself. Get into the mainstream. ‘The mainstream of what? Cinema? Life? I find all that very complex” (*Socialite Evenings* 255). He offers the role of Shakunthala to Karuna in his new film. But she prefers modeling than intellectual cinema life. Karuna accepts that she was “sucked into a ruthless world without scruples” (*Socialite Evenings* 427). Her relationship does not end with Girish but extends to his son Kunal too. At the end, Karuna is recognised with the Ad Club award for the best advertisement of the year. This gives much priority to her own freedom and turns a blind eye to the advice of her friends to set up her own shop.

The novel *Second Thoughts* highlights human nature focusing on character's inner working, their aims and sensations. The agony and anxiety of the newly married woman as the central focus of the novel, it dives into the inner struggles of the characters. As K. K. Sinha says: "Shobhaa De's *Second Thought* is a successful attempt to present the plight of the new woman, who, being concerned is a maze of cores and ignored presence, takes bold and unconventional steps to keep her identity, her individuality intact" (248).

Maya, a young middle-class Bengali girl born and brought up in Calcutta married to a Bengali boy Ranjan who settled in the city of Bombay sets the story line of the novel. Maya is presented as a quite innocent and a fresher in the metro-city. She is curiously in love with and fascinated about the city life. Their pre-marriage scenario noted in the prologue mentions about the need of Maya's family to get into a relationship with Ranjan, a foreign returned boy who is in high demand in the marriage market. As they first met as per appointed, they liked each other as Maya says: "I'd met him just once in a formal gathering and I have to be honest and admit that I'd liked him. He liked me too, that's how we got married" (*Second Thought* 248).

Mrs. Malik on the other side reveals: "We wanted the right girl educated, yes but not one of those over-ambitious –career women without a care for their homes. I think we've made right choice in Maya" (*Second Thought* 9). Right in the first meeting itself it is decided that even if she is a trained textile designer, she is denied to join duty outside. Ranjan believes that it is woman's duty to run a good home. K.K. Sinha observes, "The husband usually believed that his wife knew nothing of the world; if he saw nothing. She was supposed to see nothing" (92).

Maya holding all her dreams about Bombay in her heart gets married to Ranjan, a handsome Bombay boy of twenty eight. She wishes to be a part of Bombay and a part of her

husband's life. In reality, Maya was completely in love with Bombay, not the Ranjan of Bombay. Soon after marriage, Maya tries her best to keep the house and makes herself a completely perfect wife. In contrary to her expectations her husband Ranjan is very conservative who is of the "I, me, myself type-mummy child who wants all the attention around the clock, that leaves no time to Maya" (Ladva 249). Each day she receives shocks from Ranjan, a quite cool husband who doesn't even care for his wife's dreams and feelings. This fact leads her towards disillusion. Till their first honeymoon at Mahabaleswar, Maya had a blind faith on Ranjan's chastity. As she said: ".....this was the foreign educated, modern, confident Bombay boy of twenty-eight who had never known another woman. I'd married a virgin" (*Second Thought* 48).

Maya's beliefs for Ranjan collapse as he tells: ". . . they're . . . they're different I never know what is going on in their heads. I have tried to make friends with them . . . but it is never known" (*Second Thought* 50). Her shock intensifies as Ranjan reveals his unsuccessful attempts in love with other women. She tries to approach him as a wife and attempts to unbutton his shirt, Ranjan pushes her away and says: "Wait . . . I'm not ready yet Maya. It's going to take time I can't I just can't." (*Second Thought* 55). Maya soon begins to realise the grayness of her life as Ranjan is too cool to satisfy her physical requirements.

Due to Ranjan's impotency, Maya is forced to accept with terror that she will not be able to mother a child in her life. Apart from this affliction, Ranjan too fails to give emotional support to Maya. Thus Maya is tormented in between the world of emptiness created by the lack of physical or emotional support of her husband and on the other hand her inner desire to lead a contented family life.

The concepts of patriarchy makes a woman amalgamate herself into others and completely discarding her own self. Maya's identity is lost and she has to confine herself to

her husband's needs. Ranjan as a husband fails to discuss any family issues, office matters or business with Maya. He does not even consider taking Maya for an outing or allows her to mingle with other people including neighbour. On the other hand, he gives it most priority to his mother, a lady who cherishes the value of patriarchy.

Likewise, Maya who dreamt of tasting and enjoying Bombay life through her marriage is coerced within the four walls of the flat provided with all her material needs but deprived of any physical, as well as emotional fulfillment. Ranjan purposefully ignores the fact that mere material things can construct a house and not a home. As he mentions: "I don't understand you, Maya what's your problem? You live in a comfortable decent house . . . if you want to I hardly make any demand I even eat whatever you give" (*Second Thought* 262).

Maya leads a life very similar to a caged bird who has been under the constrain of not to use installed facilities of her house. Every activity of her life came under the spell of the shadow of male dominance. It belittles her into a mere object. The meaning of her whole existence undergoes a metamorphosis as 'being for other rather than being for itself' as aptly quoted by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* that: "Imaginatively she is of the highest importance. Practically she is completely insignificant" (45-46).

Because of the marginalisation Maya is exposed to, she feels her life dry and monotonous. She even regrets her decision of marrying Ranjan because even though he is a successful man at the boardroom, he is completely unsuccessful at the bed-room. As a woman and in all sense, Maya is exposed to displacement and marginalisation. She feels: "Nobody needs me, absolutely nobody . . . a single true friend to call my own" (*Second Thought* 266).

De's *Sultry Days* opens with the filmy style girl who meets a boy in a college canteen

episode. The boy named Deb, known as God, is a domineering personality in college is attractive in a repulsive manner. Nisha, the narrator protagonist gets attracted towards him: “A sort of infatuation towards him that simultaneously attracted and repelled her”. Her description of him is as follows:

. . . his hair. I hated that too. Matted locks-which I was sure full of lice-nests and other creepy crawlies. One hand of his was invariably engage in scratching. The hand didn't stop at the head. I'd never seen a man who itched so much. Scratch, scratch, scratch . . . his hand tore inside his filthy shirt and scratched up a bloody pool. It travelled down to his groin, upon his armpits, right round his back. Sometimes he'd paused mid-scratch to make some point and then start again. He really was most revolting . . . what he really need desperately was a bath . . . (*Sultry Days* 2-3)

Nisha who descends from a respectable family of a company officer is delighted that this bawdy young man acknowledging himself as a communist accepts her as his consort. God is caricatured as a parasite living on other people for all his needs. He is a sponger and continues to borrow money from anyone, nor does he feels embarrassed for this habit of his. So begins their relationship, borrowing and making use of each other in whatever way they can. Nisha and Dev's relationship persists even after their graduation. Nisha gets into a mediocre ad agency and God takes up journalism. Their vocation gives them ample opportunities to get in contact with varied types of public figures, the business people, models, the painters, photographers, politicians, whores, homos and lesbians. Through them, the readers are exposed to the surface life of these people who move in and out of the novel without much affecting the unfolding of the story line.

The character of Nisha is portrayed as an omniscient yet elusory neutral viewer who

describes what these men and women are, how they dress and address, a little of their past and nothing of their personal private life. They pertain to the offices, restaurants, studios, art-galleries and night clubs. Through her perception she conveys about this world: “a moving collage without any depth. It is a flickering, quickly rendered world of characters who are shadows without substance” (*Sultry Days* 1). Even though Nisha is a detached spectator, her description gives full details of these people. “Iqbal the painter was known to be arrogant, temperamental, unpredictable and disgustingly attractive . . . The man’s hunger for beautiful girls matched his thirst for tea. He loved both equally” (*Sultry Days* 42).

De disregards the sacredly considered institution of marriage by the traditional society as an indispensable thing in her fictional world. As God remarks to Nisha, “who knows about marriage- sharrige, yaar. I am happy as I am” (*Sultry Days* 45). Even if he consents to get married with her, it is mainly out of his practical consideration, “daal-roti, a warm bed, twice –a- week maalish and a daily screw” (*Sultry Days* 261) other than the tinge of love. Despite their long lasting relationship, they fail to end up in marriage. It exemplifies the life of modern people who insignificantly place the institution of marriage.

The marital bond between Bubli and Harsh denotes the “typical Bombay, marriage in which she goes her way and he goes his” (*Sultry Days* 300). Such marriages cease to prolong and become short lived lacking any joys and pleasures. These marriages become shallow and superficial and fail to have true union of two minds. Incongruous relationship is one among the reasons of the marital failure. Bubli confesses to Nisha that, “We tried it. But he wanted to walk counter clock-wise. And I prefer clockwise-we both wanted to go in different directions” (*Sultry Days* 303). Reema in *Snapshots* too affirms that, “Imagine not knowing any other body, any other feeling, and any other sensation. Forever sounds terrible. Like eating dal- chaval day in and day out” (152).

De affirms the concept of inconstancy and faithlessness in married life through the portrayal of Anjali, in *Socialite Evenings*. For her, getting into an illicit love relationship is the fulfillment of her dream. She reveals it to Karan, “this is the most beautiful thing to have happened to me” (88) at the same time she divulges to Karuna, her relationship with Pierre as, “this is the experience I have been waiting for” (*Socialite Evenings* 70). These sort of people lack the thought of constancy and faithfulness in their married life. They give priority to their sexual freedom. De through her novels gives us a very clear cut unreserved portrayal of the variety of characters with their notions toward life, marriage, love and the taxing involved in it.

*Sultry Days* caricatures a group of modern new women who when faces the neglect and ill-treatment switch themselves to rebellious and protesting women. Even Nisha’s mother who attempts to be a perfect conventional silent wife fails to endure with the mischief of her husband any longer. She objects to his relationship with his Sindhi secretary and avers:

I have had enough of your bullying and hypocrisy. I have kept quiet for too long. Go to hell with your corporate nonsense. Who cares what your boss thinks? Or those bloody women think? Where were they when my world was collapsing and you were with that Sindhi whore? . . . And you want me to bother about them? Why should I? Why should I bother about you either? You can also go to hell with your pompous talk and empty boasts. I am sick, do you hear. Sick of living this false life. Varnishing my nails, setting my hair, wearing these silky saris and smiling through your office parties pretending nothing is wrong with my life. Well-it is my turn now . . . you don’t deserve me . . . whether you like it or not. Henceforth I will make the decisions about my life. (*Sultry Days* 242)



Sujata, a self-reliant independent woman is portrayed as a 'new woman' who least worries about what her husband wants. She abides by her own rules and regulations apart from that of society. Her friendship extends to men's circle too besides that with women.

*Sultry Days* deals with the women who can be identified as the third phase that is Female phase and are intensely preoccupied with men and they wish to beat men at their own games. De's *Sisters* has a background of a corrupt world of big business and narrates the life of two wealthy socialite women, lead by ardent desire, lust and an abiding rivalry. De has portrayed the central protagonist Mikki, as a woman who boldly struggles against the bounds of being a woman and finally achieves her ardent quest towards being herself.

*Sisters* opens when the central protagonist Mikki is forced to return from her studies at US due to the unexpected death of her parents in an air-crash. The Hiralal Industry almost at the verge of bankruptcy becomes Mikki's whole responsibility. In reality she is unprepared to take over the responsibility that deprives her of her personal freedom. Mikki is unwilling to lose the colourful life in America. "Given the choice, Mikki wanted this nightmare to end now. Her parents were dead. There was nobody whom she cared for. And nobody who cared for her . . . Her life in India . . . was over" (*Sisters* 9). But without any other alternative, Mikki resolves to lead the struggling industries. At once, completely devoted to her duties, she gets involved in the matters of business, and begins to show her managerial skills.

The existence of Alisha, Mikki's half-sister gives her a sense of solace in the loneliness she feels after the demise of her parents. It is not Alisha's wealth that draws Mikki towards her, but her trust in human values that inspires her to establish a relationship with Alisha.

In the story, a number of men of all ages aspire to get married to Mikki including Binny Malhotra who wins her and gains the entire proprietorship of Hiralal Industry. Unlike

De's other female protagonists who generally wish to free themselves from the bonds of married life, Mikki intentionally walks into it. Initially in the presence of Binny, Mikki not only gets an insight into her 'self' but also feels a sense of security and becomes proud of being his wife. "She felt liberated, uninhibited and arosed to the point of primitive abandon . . . And he was finally hers" (*Sisters*109).

Binny, a womaniser begins to reveal his real oppressive nature as the days go on. She is denied of motherhood and her individual freedom. He mercilessly affirms that he needs a wife "who stays at home and looks after me . . . our women stay at home and make sure the place is perfectly run. They fulfil their husband's every need and look good when their men get home in the evening. No office going" (*Sisters* 109). Eventhough Mikki fails to find in Binny a man with whom she could share her life, she is "willing to compromise her own life if it means he'd notice her, listen to her, acknowledge her existence" (*Sisters* 140). Despite her total submission to Binny, his suspicion of her chastity shatters the golden days of Mikki's married life. When he leads her out of his home, helplessly she pleads: "Binny . . . I love you. Only you . . . I can't live without you" (*Sisters* 141). Her disillusionment heightens when he goes in for a divorce devastating her efforts to live with him. Mikki can no more tolerate Binny's indifference to her. She finds her suitor impudent and is forced to move away from him.

Apart from the painful experience that Mikki receives from Binny, her relationship with him boosted in her an insight into her own 'being' as a woman and as an individual. Mikki resolves to retain her industries with which she identifies herself. Even before Mikki takes any further actions, the unexpected death of Binny along with his illegitimate family brings her back all the assets.

Now Mikki is a changed woman powerful enough to deal with the realities of life. She

gets transformed from a mere social butterfly to a mature, sturdy woman and later to a kind mother-figure concerned about her alienated half-sister Alisha. Throughout the novel, Alisha stands as a contrast to the character of Mikki. Mikki's encounter with different men assists her to empower herself into an independent-minded woman, whereas, Alisha fails to learn from her experience and becomes an introvert. The novel deals with the rivalry and at the same time unfolds the emotional bond between two half-sisters.

De presents her women characters as very powerful and are prone to work for the liberation of woman. In the words of Dinesh Panwar, "she has brought those women of the society on the surface that is ready to transgress the existing one sided moral values to establish her own identity in the society" (9). Through her characters Karuna and Anjali, De portrays women who fight for individual identity and equal rights in the society she lives and raises voice against the prevalent imbalance of power.

As the story unfolds the free life of the women is restricted by marriage and family life. The sexual liberties of Anjali at last seeks solace in religion after her second marriage with Kumar, an impotent and incompatible man. Ebullient Ritu who artistically flirts leaves her second husband for a smuggler, Si, a highly immoral character. Karuna, a prominent Bombay socialite tries to escape from the boredom of marriage and childbirth. The concepts and thoughts of sexual behaviour of these heroines varies from that of her friends and parents.

Different from Jane Wagners's Kate in *The Search for Signs*, who narrates, "I am sick of being the victim of trends I reflect but don't even understand" (53), Karuna too becomes aware of her state in the society whose trends incarnate her but emerges as a different woman. She is eager to transient herself from the subjugation that "compels her to assume the status of the other" (Simone de Beauvoir 85). Right from her childhood, she begins to decline the traditional path of behaviour and manners. As she grows, Karuna's emotional quest to

identify with the outside world and modern society developed along with her. “Her slap-dash entry into all that is modern lands her in the lewd and clandestine world of modeling with her secret assignment as the Terkosa Girl” (24).

*Socialite Evenings*, the protagonist Karuna emerges not as a victim, but as a new woman who asserts her feminine psyche through protest and defiance. Karuna’s introduction into the fashionable world of modern life begins when she gets acquainted with Anjali. Her dates with the film-maker in London and her stay in the US provides her a feeling of superiority and assertiveness. Karuna with all her effort to assert her identity, discards the stereotypes and hegemony of male supremacy.

Beauvoir views man-woman kinship as quite unsymmetrical and uncomplimentary. “. . . man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity” ( Selden 534).

In our society, a woman is never considered as an autonomous being for she always represents a subordinate and relative stance.

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees . . . she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex- absolute sex, no less. She is denied and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. (Selden 534)

The novel *Socialite Evenings* portrays the invisibilisation of Indian women in the folds of married life. Similar to other protagonists of De, Karuna also acts as a motivating factor in society to initiate and regulate their own lives. Karuna’s married life becomes a

failure, lacking love, joy and bonding between the husband and wife. She feels that she had married “the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time “She feels her husband as a plain Indian man, “unexciting, uninspiring, and untutored. He was not made for introspection” (65). She feels the average Indian woman’s life as “an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left” and “marriage” was “like a skin allergy, an irritant.” But she boldly and defiantly faces it believing “marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to” (*Socialite Evenings* 68) and makes herself adjust and gets used to this stereotyped institution in due course of time. She adjusts herself with the heartless activities of husbands who busied themselves in monotonous activities like reading the business pages of the Times of India. Apart from all these, Indian tradition considers a husband as above all these, as a sheltering tree and a rock to the wife who is considered only as a peripheral object. Karuna reveals:

We were reduced to being marginal people. Everything that mattered to us was trivialised. The message was you don’t really count, except in the context of my priorities. It was taken for granted that our needs were secondary to their’s. And that in some way we ought to be grateful for having a roof over our head and four square meals a day. (*Socialite Evenings* 69)

De’s women are ‘new women’ who instead of bowing down in meek subordination, fight back, resist and shout back at the patriarchal male- dominated society. De pictures the subaltern women as helpless, lacking the thoughts of feminine liberty and equality. In *Socialite Evenings*, it is portrayed through the life of a qualified surgeon who was purposefully humiliated by her husband stating that she married him for money. “And what of the wife? She was feeling humiliated and demoralised enough to actually half-believe what he was saying” (*Socialite Evenings*69). Pitiably state of a house wife is as: “He brain washes me constantly. I’m made to feel obliged and in debt. It’s awful, but even my insistence on

working and contributing to the running expenses of the house has become a battleground. I don't know what to do- either way I'm stuck" (*Socialite Evenings* 69).

De presents the Indian male as a person "terribly threatened by self-sufficient women" (*Socialite Evenings* 69). Since the male lacks the traits of an ideal husband and possesses the fear of the loss of superiority, he tries to control the self-affirming wife through several defence mechanisms. Their ego restricts him from a free exchange of views with his female partners. As Karuna wonders: "how could we communicate anything at all to men who perpetually sat reading pages of the Times of India while concentrated picking their noses" (*Socialite Evenings* 68)?

Ritu of *Socialite Evenings* is too fed up with her husband's compulsive nature. She tries to find resort in books, crosswords and newspaper chess to overcome the utter boredom. In spite of her little acts of protest, she is "a well-trained, Indian wife" (*Socialite Evenings* 51) who is forced to suppress the rational qualities as similar to men. Women are not "the toy of man, his rattle," which "must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused" (Wollstonecraft 34).

Not only in her married life, but also right from her childhood, Ritu was facing a sense of non-belongingness. At her father's house too she lacked the warmth and affection. From the time of puberty onwards, her mother banned her mingling with others. Therefore she dreams about a carefree, unchecked life, away from restrictions after her marriage. But in contrast to her wishes she is plunged into the more restricted cage. Her dreams and hopes collapsed like a palace of cards. In her deeper mind, she craves for more love and affection as she feels isolated in her sexual life as she confesses: "And I had no sex life at all? That I'd never experienced orgasm? That I still felt ashamed and shy to be naked in my husband's presence" (*Second Thought* 258)? Maya's further attempts to establish a sexual relationship

with Ranjan ends in futility. He rejects her as a cheap woman similar to a prostitute and continuously avoids her complaining about his tiredness. Maya admits that in real sense they are not leading the life a husband and wife. "Our life in bedroom settled into a routine . . . Ranjan did reach out for me it was a gesture devoid of any passion. An impersonal, friendly sort of gesture which always left me feeling like a well-trained dog being rewarded for his good-behaviour" (*Second Thought* 251).

Maya's life is engulfed by depression, disappointment and a deep sense of non-belongingness to condemn herself stating. "I had never felt so useless. Nobody needed me, nobody, my parents, my husband. It was unlikely I would bear children who would belong to me" (*Second Thought* 267).

Amidst her utter loneliness, misery and woe, Maya gets into contact with a college going boy named Nikhil Verma, an attractive and charming character. In the beginning Maya takes a serious stand towards Nikhil, as a chaste woman does not allow him to intrude into her life. But in reality, because she has been fully rejected physically as well as emotionally by her husband, she is compelled to think of him.

Maya is completely aware about the fancy that Nikhil is the 'other man' and getting interacted with him is an attempt to go astray the social codes and moral code. But Maya feels beauty, pleasure and completeness in her life along with Nikhil. As her all attempts to strive love and affection from her lawful husband resulted in failure, she makes up her mind to have her friendly relationship with Nikhil and dares to go on an outing with him. "I was ready to jump on Nikhil's motorbike and say good bye to my uninspiring life without the slightest regret" (*Second Thought* 171).

Although Maya feels the torments of guilt in maintaining the relationship with Nikhil, she is imposed to accept the unconventional means to give justice to her 'individuality',

‘identity’ and her ‘self-esteem’. The very act of Maya completely involving and enjoying herself through Nikhil’s kisses and act of love-making on a particular day when he comes to her house self-announcing his birthday proves her deep quest to feel the meaning of her existence.

De has plotted the character of Nikhil as a foil to that of Ranjan. Through their companionship, Maya begins to love herself, her appearance and even her existence. It leads to a meaningful change in her. As Ladva puts “New woman has waken up in her. She has been recognized, accepted and completely cared. She has broken the norms for once while others have ignored it for ages” (252). There arises a new ray of hope in her life that assures her with a new promise of life. Maya confesses, “I felt beautiful and I wanted to look beautiful” (*Second Thought* 281).

Anyhow Maya’s happiness in kinship with Nikhil fails to last long. It gets interrupted by the news about him getting into a marital relationship. Even though Maya ceases to meet him, her state of mind is not alarmed as such: “I know I would have to make it again from scratch. So what? I had all the time in the world new” (*Second Thought* 289).

The much empowered thoughts of Maya make her to identify the powerful ‘new woman’ in her. Through Nikhil, she succeeds to identify herself and learns to live as herself. Maya’s life itself is an instance of a ‘new woman’s’ revolt against the practiced conventions and traditions. The spirit of the revolt does not arise in her mind unexpectedly or accidentally but in a true sense it was a last resort that takes place when all other channels are slammed.

Nisha of *Sultry Days* differs from De’s other women characters who possess keen interest in glamour and sex. She is much presented as a mature character who through her relationship with Deb perceives her oral responsibility and she herself decides to entrust for it. Along with her mother and her friend Pratimaben, she fights for a cause and exposes



Yashwantbhai Dawani and his underworld connections. They jointly uncover Yashwantbhai for his abuses against Pramila.

De through her novels succeeds in highlighting the important issues related to marriage, protest through the actions, assertions and behaviour of her female characters. She analyses and sketches the position of women in the urban and modern sector of society and the diverse attempts of women's objection against their marginalisation.

Being a post-independence woman writer, De deals with many contemporary problems specially related to Indian women. The entire fictional world of De is dominated by the women characters, contrary to the male characters, who are marginalised. Because much prominence is given to women, men seem to be inconsequential. Her plots are set in such a pattern that women characters appear to be superior to their male counterparts. Or in other words, here she is a manipulator whose clever policies look beyond male comprehension.

In *Sultry Days*, De's skill in depicting the female characters is simply remarkable. Karen Roy's wife, "an overbearing, imperious bitch" (*Sultry Days* 114) is not mentioned by her first name. She is addressed to as Mrs. D' Lima though her husband is known by his first name. Although they lead a separate lives, she is proud of being a woman of "exotic good looks that couldn't be traced to any ethnic group" (*Sultry Days* 115). She explains, "I am one-eighth Turkish-my great-grand mother was a naughty girl-one fourth khasi, one sixth Goan and one-third Himachali" (*Sultry Days* 115).

Another portrayal is Karen Roy's beloved, Maitreyee who represents 'the available Bombay woman'-"brazen, bold, brassy. She has hair streaked with gold and purple, and wears a swirling *ghagra* with a backless choli" (*Sultry Days* 116-117). She is famous for her 'unusual vigour' and asks "Is there some special virtue in consistency" (*Sultry Days* 118)?

Lotika is another new woman who acts like an *apsara* in her previous life and has intermitted a *rishi*'s meditation by her attractive beauty. The narrator observes that she “was a sought-after woman on the social circuit” whose the biggest asset “was her single status and it was her colourful coats that sent out signals” (*Sultry Days* 349). Lotika recently reveals to an interviewer of a woman's monthly magazine that she was the victim of child abuse at eight, was raped by the cousin at the age of fourteen, was married off at the age of nineteen and was divorced at twenty four. Her experience and feelings through all these are content in the meaningful comment: “Chaltahai” (*Sultry Days* 349).

Aarti, an account executive also stands as an emancipated woman in the novel. She wears “cutaway sleeved choli blouses without shaving her armpits” and smokes Charms cigarettes holding them awkwardly between her fingers and blowing smoke out of her nostrils”(125). She keeps raising her arms constantly, which to Deb means “it is the animal in her”. She would giggle and giggle “jangling the two hundreds silver bangles . . . on both arms from wrist to elbow” (*Sultry Days*127).

Vimala, a widow from Madhya Pradesh, refers to herself as a ‘bachelor girl’. Later through the caricature of the character Manju and her attitude towards her husband Vikki, De depicts the concept of a completely liberated and emancipated woman. She behaves like a dominating and overbearing lady. Under her influence, her husband Vikki appears to be a mere doll. She remarks about her husband sarcastically:

Looks after the kids. Takes leave when I travel to stay home. Vikki even cooks us all a great meal when the servant doesn't show up . . . I hate entering the kitchen. I can't make a cup of tea . . . forget that, I don't even know how to light the bloody gas . . . She cared for just two things in the world-her job and her bank account. . . I refuse to spend on *ghar-ka-kharcha*. That is my Vikki's

responsibility. What is the point of having a husband if he can't pay all the bills . . . for the kids Vikki does everything-bath-shath, breakfast, potty, dropping, fetching. He is the one who goes for Open Day, Sports, dramatics all that nonsense. Where do I have the time? The kids are fast asleep when I get home. And I wake up after they have left for school. (*Sultry Days* 192-193)

De pictures a group of modern women like D' Lima, Lotika, Vimala, Aarti, Maitreyee and Manju who denote much liberated and emancipated new women to emphasise the distorted vistas of women now a days. Various other female characters depicted in the novel too move away from the established patriarchal norms through their different behaviour. Their thoughts, deeds and claims emphasise the fact that they are highly independent young new women.

Chandni is one among them who dress herself in a wildly colourful ghagra and tunic, looks "like a horny banjaranor a sexy sweepers" (255). Shona, the model from London, knows how to "look different-from Cleopatra to Sridevi. She wears a skillfully cut wig. To hide her major beauty flaw that is her forehead is as large as apapad" (*Sultry Days* 173). There she describes the most sought-after playback singer, Tanya the Temptress, has "bed room eyes which look like luminous dishes the size of a full moon" (*Sultry Days* 222).

Feroze, yet another woman is independent in many ways. She is brave, adventurous and full of charm. She lives on a diet of film magazines. She strongly desires to become the first woman Parsee director of Hindi films. She has "lived, breathed and dreamed movies" (*Sultry Days* 243). In her personal life, she is a weird lesbian and a sex-maniac. She walks behind the actress Kiki "like a puppy. Sending her flowers and poems. Fetching her food. Carrying her clothes. Generally behaving like a love-lorn maiden" (*Sultry Days* 248).

Miki is similar to a dynamite on the set. Zainab is Miki's chief rival. She takes pride

in being “the film industry’s first unwed mother”, the father of the child being “a mysterious stranger-a foreigner not connected with showbiz at all” (*Sultry Days* 249). Through the portrayal of Mikki, the author very successfully throws light on the harsh realities of the patriarchal society. It also hints about the growing awareness among the women who wake from their ignorance and inaction. Mikki’s pitiable life with Binny strengthens her innate desire for freedom.

Different from De’s other female characters, who wish to have a liberated life, Mikki never thinks of a life beyond marital bonds and she tries to become an ideal wife and a responsible social being providing a moral dimension for the novel. Mikki considers the materialistic pleasure without freedom of the self as meaningless. As an empowered woman she turns rebellious when she is denied her personal freedom. As De observes in an interview, “it is not enough to have a mind of your own if you don’t have an income to match . . . With this economic freedom has come assertiveness, confidence and refused to be treated as doormats”.

De tries to highlight the changes in the attitude of both high society and middle class society towards the institution of marriage. The characters are concerned about the new facts of marriage like the trend to live single or without getting married.

As Tagore says, similar to various other suppressed Indian women, Karuna too combines her in both fact and fantasy. Her desire for the fulfillment of her physical cravings find reflection in her fantasies. Talking of women, Virginia Woolf in her work, *A Room of One’s Own* says:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance: Practically she is completely insignificant . . . Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound

thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell and was the property of her husband. (45-46)

Karuna expresses her views about the meaningless marriage to which she is trapped: “I think our marriage was over the day our awful honey-moon started. We’ve got nothing going. I don’t love you-never have. As for you-I really didn’t know to this day why chose to marry me. I don’t think you even know who you married. You don’t have a clue what sort of woman I am. I’m tired of your smugness, your irritating mannerisms, the way you take me for granted and expect me to fall into your overall scheme of things-I was another one for your well- calculated deals” ( *Socialite Evenings*185).

Karuna leads a life of emotional frozenness due to her entrapment into a frail and unavailing marital relationship. Their relationship lacked meaningful communication, smiles, laughter, free exchange of thoughts, ideas, queries and questions but silence. Karuna divulges: “ It wasn’t that I never tried, but there was no question that my husband and I inhabited different planets ”( *Socialite Evenings* 68).

Besides all these emotional gaps that Karuna is exposed to, she tries to be an ideal housewife adhering to the demands of tradition. She compromised with her husband and dutifully obeyed him, keeping the house in a perfect order. On the other hand, Karuna’s husband too is a forgiving sort of person who is not a cruel and merciless individual to throw away her for her affairs with Girish:

I’ve thought over the whole thing carefully. I would’ve thrown you right now- but I’m prepared to give you one more chance. I’m not a mean man. You’ve been a good wife-I’m prepared to cancel this one black mark on your performance record and start with a clean slate. But you have to swear you’ll

never see or keep in touch with that man again . . . you have sinned but I must be generous and forgive you. (*Socialite Evenings* 184)

One can view this act of forgiveness from the part of her husband as an act of his male ego, a sort of assertion of superiority. One feels absurd when he affirms that “I am not a mean man” (*Socialite Evenings* 46) while he himself denies his wife the conjugal bliss of a marital life by keeping aloof from her. Karuna’s husband overlooks the biological needs of her’s female self. Karuna’s comment, “You never cared to understand me as a woman” (*Socialite Evenings* 185) reveals how fragmented she is. Her affair with Girish is only an attempt to fulfil her psychological and emotional needs. Authentically the role of Karuna as a respectable, conservative Hindu housewife restricts her self-development. As Viola Klein comments: “Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to in order to survive psychologically. Virtually, all women engage in the feminine role playing” (*The Feminine Character* 200).

Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* attempts different roles as a model, a house wife, a society lady and an actor writer and a paramour at different times to fulfill her emotional and psychic thirst. Above all, she feels that the concept of marriage subjugates and enslaves women. It results in “aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose” (Beauvoir 500).

But Karuna unlike other married women rises above the situation and emerges as a new woman of independent thoughts with her own opinions, ways, means and thoughts. Apart from her husband’s interference by the way of guidance and advice, Karuna’s life is led by her own instincts and urges. Unlike other married women slavishly tagged to tradition, she has her own style and her act of unburdening herself is a compromise with herself.

De successfully brings out the plight of the ‘new woman’ who is trapped in between

the domestic chores who reemerges like phoenix moving against the unconventional decision to attain her individuality and her identity. As Ladva quotes regarding *Second Thought*:

Here Maya is a new woman who is prepared to face the consequences of her choices. Her protest is not for equality but for the right to be acknowledged as an individual-capable of intelligence and feeling. Here the new woman is new in the dimension of time by being a rebel against the general currents of patriarchal society and in exploring her true potential, along with the struggle to fulfill her urges and needs. (253)

K. K. Sinha rightly comments on the new woman as: “The woman of today doesn’t work to play the imposter any more. She feels like owing up the truth and to brave it at . . . Divorce is no more a Death word for her.” (92)

As a bold feminist writer, De thinks forward and creates the characters of ‘new woman’ who challenges and survives the age old practices of patriarchy. She peeps into their inner heart and analyses her emotions, feelings and passions. Apart from the real economic problems that certain rural women are facing, they are mostly unaware of their rights as women and are controlled by their ‘worthy husbands’. L. Sonia Nightyam remarks:

By laying bare the details of possibly real happenings in the world of the affluent, the self-sufficient new women and her reckless sexual escapades and her various unfeminine attitudes, Shobhaa De projects the world of the new woman. It is only natural that as a literary writer she presents an honest and truthful images of this unconventional and even convention bashing woman who aspires to subvert the male-dominated society. Consequently, her candid writing has got her into a generous amount of controversies.(118)

All the women characters presented in the novel completely unheed the basic spiritual and moral concerns of the womanhood. They all belong to a different value system. They wish to have a complete freedom and liberation in all walks of their life. As Mrs. Mehta affirms Mrs. Verma that: “We are not only housekeepers, after all. If there is no servant, then forget work, yaar. You can order food from the club-nobody will notice” (*Sultry Days* 39).

Sujata dares to liberate herself by stopping to play the roles of wife and mother as she feels that she had fulfilled her duties as their children are self-dependent. She justifies herself.

My duties are over. They are on their own . . . I have played the roles I was expected to at the appropriate time. Now . . . I am on my own. And they are on their own. This is my life. I want to live it my way . . . Yes . . . They accept. Why shouldn't they? I have been a good wife and mother. I am still here, living in the same house. They are grateful. I could easily have left and gone away. So many men have longed to make me theirs. I receive marriage proposals all the time . . . even now. (*Sultry Days* 51)

Women like Chandani, Shona, Tanya, Feroze are much similar to Sujata who becomes the attractive and confident socialite woman who views marriage in a new concept that is, replacing the mutual loyalty with sexual freedom.

Unlike Shashi Deshpande and other women writers, De does not overwhelm the women's suffering but transforms it into a creative principle of art and beauty. As Helene Cixous observes: “A male privilege can be seen in the opposition between activity and passivity. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is coupled with the same opposition: activity/passivity” (*Feminist English Literature* 288) the subjugation of women in a malist culture is hierachisation of socio-moral values between the sexes.



Cixous opines women as often the symbols of passivity. “Either the woman is passive; or she doesn’t exist. What is left is unthinkable, unthought of. She does not enter into the opposition, she is not coupled with the father who is coupled with the son” (Lodge 288). Women in many ways are reduced to mere matter, an object. The commodification of a woman is one among the attitude of phallogocentric pattern. Karuna’s husband treats her as a mere object subjected to his own will. Whereas, Karuna undermines the male superiority. She averses her husband’s “post-mortems” and boldly declares her inner desire to fulfill herself through love:

I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him- in Venice. There is a good chance that I will feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. May be he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant me. In which case it will really be A Death in Venice. You know by now that I’m not the flighty sort. I don’t flirt at random like my other friends. I’m steady and grounded. It’s the Tautean in me that’s surfacing these days. Treat this as a short term mania that will wear itself out. (*Socialite Evenings*186)

In their married life, Karuna and her husband fail to develop intimacy and it emerges just as a formal relationship. Karuna’s failure in calling her husband by his name derogatorily as ‘Black Label’ proves it. “. . . The fact that his wife had taken a lover excited him. It seemed immoral that we should make love under the circumstances, but there was no point in resisting- it would have only consumed more time” (*Socialite Evenings* 188). As Swain observes,

Women in Shobhaa De’s novels symbolise the overpowering materialism and the lack of spirituality, that characterizes modern age. With the crumbling of moral and ethical values there is an inner conflict which drives the modern

Indian women to seek shelter in different identities for momentary solace. One of the most notable features of these women is that they lack an identity (197).

In *Socialite Evenings*, the author explicates her own opinion towards the freedom of womankind in all means from all forms of patriarchal restraints. As a house wife, Karuna encapsulates the plight of the Indian woman: “I felt like an indifferent boarder in the house, going through the motions of house-keeping and playing wife but the resentment and rebellion remained just under the surface, ready to break out at the smallest provocation” (*Socialite Evenings*69). Karuna avoids her husband’s flattering nature, his duplicity and deviousness. When he accepts and agrees to Karuna, it becomes too late for her in a wrong time, for she has already undergone the protracted pangs of an abortion. So she demolishes the male ego: “. . . you are even more of a worm than I thought. You deserve Winnie. I hope she’s got a wax doll of yours. I’ll send her some extra pins to stick into it (*Socialite Evenings* 264 ).

Ritu, through her sexual power politics tries to attain a superior position and makes the male “a conditioned dog”. But such a perspective is not accepted by Karuna’s mother. She prefers the traditional way of life:

A woman cannot live alone. It is not safe we are here today- but who knows about tomorrow? A woman needs a man’s protection. Society can be very cruel . . . a woman’s real place is in her husband’s house-not in her parent’s- Take your time but marry. And marry the right one-that is important . . . Before we die, we want to see you secure and at peace. (*Socialite Evenings* 275-276)

But no longer in India, the institution of marriage is viewed in the traditional sense of security. So Karuna questions: “But, mother why does security rest with a man? I feel

confident now that I can look after myself. I am earning as much money as any man, I have a roof over my head. I don't really have any responsibilities. I am at peace with myself. I'm not answerable to anyone . . . I can't make any "sacrifices- not now" (*Socialite Evenings*276).

The pitiable state of women's present psychological state is the only one aspect involved in the growth of individual freedom. Through the new women like Karuna are "disgustingly self-sufficient" (*Socialite Evenings*305), De pictures women with a lot of "pot passions". Through her characters she exhibits the traits of neither the liberal feminists nor the radical feminists.

Thus De's novel delineates the toils of women in the male-dominated society. By performing the drama of seduction and betrayal in her own way against patriarchal structures, the glamorous vamp in De's novels "may end up being as seductively treacherous to women as to men" (Gilbert and Gubar 145).

While dealing with the problems of women in the male dominated society, De fails to end up with the solutions for the suffering womanhood. When a woman in the Indian society gets into the bond of marriage, she is not just married to the man, but to his family too, that subsequently results in the loss of her identity in marriage and he ends up about pleasing everyone. But the new generation of women with their new-found release from matrimonial bondage adopt different perceptives and move against the old order. De's women are much emancipated souls in pursuit of a niche in their lives through escapades and sexcapades.

De's women, Anjali and Karuna transmit their passion to other female characters so as to deconstruct the male ego. They like to be "eroticized as objects, not subjects" (Morgan 143). Through eroticism these women try to fulfill their emotional and carnal urge. It may also be ". . . a measure between the beginning of our sense of self, and the chaos of our strongest feelings . . . an internal sense of satisfaction to which we can aspire" (Morgan 143).

De through her characters rejects the hierarchisation of male values who considers the feminine factors as negative and almost nullified. Her statements affirm her feminine self and it is itself a search for her own female self in a male centered phallogentric world. Karuna isolates her from the traditional Indian heritage and its social implications never bothering about the social repercussions. De portrays the world of female characters at its brim since her humanness is alleayed with femininity as Marilyn French observes: “A masculine world is less fully human than a feminine one” (*Beyond Power* 72).

As Viola Klein observes: “Being in the position of outsiders, intruding into a finished system, and restricted by a century-old history of submissions, which had bred in them a sense of inferiority women’s chief claim in their struggle was, as a natural result, to prove that in all respects they were just as good as men” (*Feminine Character*34).

De’s novels present a new hybrid culture that blends the western style, ideas and values with the Indian traditional pattern. Through the heroines who take central narratives De delves deep into the psyche of her women characters. She asserts in an interview that she did write with a great deal of empathy towards woman. Without waving the feminist flag, she feels very strongly about women’s situation. By exploring the world of urban woman in India, De tries to shatter the patriarchal hegemony. While her protagonists urge to have more or less equal footing relationship with men, she tries to question the patriarchal stereotype. Her novels *Sisters*, *Second Thoughts*, *Sultry Days* and *Socialite Evenings* very well expose the moral degradation of modern society and depict the heroines as those who attain success to an extent in gaining freedom from social bondage but never reaching self-actualisation.

The era of twentieth century began to witness the rise of the new woman as an impact of modern feminism. The modern woman liberates herself from the conventional constraints, demands women’s rights and changes the concepts of marriage system and sexuality. The

modern woman deviates from the age old practices of existing traditions and are 'new' in their approach. The novels of De caricature many new women, who very valiantly face the harsh realities of their lives.

The next chapter anatomises the notions of modern women caricatured in the select works of Manju Kapur.