

Chapter V

Queer Theory and Postfeminism in *Strange Obsession*

Queer theory is the academic discourse has largely replaced what used to be called gay and lesbian studies. The term was first coined by Teresa De Lauretis for a working conference on theorising gay and lesbian sexualities that was held at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in February 1990. The theory, as such encompasses a whole range of understanding issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. Queer theory is largely based on the works of Michel Foucault, the French Philosopher. Besides Foucault, the works of Derrida, Lacan and Freud have contributed as important theoretical references to such queer sexual orientation.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, sexuality gradually assumed a new status as an object of scientific and popular knowledge. The last two hundred years or so have seen what the critic and historian Michel Foucault once described as a “discursive explosion” (Foucault 38), around the question of sex, by which he did not simply mean that it came to be talked about more widely or more often or more explicitly, relaxing the grip of repressive conventions or taboos but also call for a genealogical analysis of sexuality as it has been lived and understood in Western culture over the last couple of centuries. The breadth of output in literary and cultural criticism which has investigated the specificities and constructions of human sexualities is vast and it is a corpus which continues to grow and explore some aspect or representation of sex, sexuality or sexual desire.

Developing out of the radical movements of the 1960s, queer theories have their roots outside academia too. In particular, the Gay Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s which can be traced to the Stonewall Riots in New York in

1969. This event is marked as a influential moment in the development of rhetoric and political doctrine to challenge the heterosexism of the mainstream society. The primary objective of queer upsurge was to increase public visibility. As Geltmaker asserts: “Our refusal to live in a closet is one way of “just saying no” to a world, a nation, and a regional culture intent on closing borders to those who are “different” (650). The main objective of such revolts is to break the barriers and make the normal diverse population to acknowledge and accept them. It’s a way of normalizing sexual preference of an individual irrespective of his or her gender.

Queer theory in accord with postfeminism applies the strategy of deconstructing the social norms and it aims to “denaturalize heteronormative understanding of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relation between them” (Sullivan 81). In popular culture the influence of postfeminism can be strongly felt when the narratives of non-heterosexual anecdotes are portrayed in a very normalized manner. There are many popular television series such as *Will & Grace*, *The L Word* and *Boys Don’t Cry* in American media which depicts the characterization of gay and bisexual people as absolute normal human beings leading their own life. Postfeminism does not discriminate lesbians from women. Lesbians are treated as equal and normal as another human being. Shobha De is thus successful in applying postfeminist queer ideologies into mainstream literature by representing the life of lesbians and bisexual in her novel *Strange Obsession*.

Strange Obsession is the narrative account of a young, ambitious and attractive young aspiring model, Amrita Aggarwal. On the very first day in Bombay she is recognized and hailed as the future super – model by various advertisement agencies. One day, she attracts the attention of a woman called, Meenakshi Iyengar (Minx).

According to Simone de Beauvoir:

The lesbian, in fact, is distinguished by her refusal of the male and her liking for feminine flesh; but every adolescent female fears penetration and repulsion for the male body, on the other hand, the female body is for her as for the male, an object of desire. (427)

As the days pass by the abusive and dominating behavior Minx grow in gigantic proportion making, Amrita's life into a nightmare.

Shobha De's explosive novel revolves around the life and lustful relationship of two young women, Amrita and Meenakshi.

Fundamentally, it seems to be a psychological documentation of sexual obsession of mysterious woman Meenakshi, also known as minx and her calamitous end. They seem to be hardly better than school girls playing adult games. It is through their behavior and conversation that Shobha De throws significant light on the predicament of these two young women-Minx and Amrita. (Kumar, Gajendra 228)

Meenkshi Iyengar (Minx) is the disturbed child of a Police Commissioner who suffers from indifference of her parents, who fail in sharing her claims of love. Hence she decides to lead her life in her own terms. Minx involves in a lesbian relationship with Amrita. In the case of Amrita and Minx, lesbianism is a strange obsession found by them to resort to each other for security and love. It later on Amrita becomes a victim of exploitation.

Shobha De tries to explore the concealed realities in the glitz world. The dreams of an innocent girl who wish to enter the movies and modeling are shattered and exploited in this novel. It is not presented as an issue of challenge in the case of Amrita. She is forcibly dragged into an abusive relationship and she tolerates this

injustice done to her just to survive in the modeling world and to builds her career. These kinds of relationships also lead to the destruction of one's own personality and career.

The strong emotional bond, support and solidarity that she found in a lesbian relationship makes Amrita to remain loyal Minx and to tolerates her abusive nature. If the equilibrium of love and understanding is lost in any relationship then it will break down the purpose of being in that relationship. Minx tries to captivate the heart of Amrita but she fails to protect her own identity till the end of the novel.

Karan, the photographer falls in love with Amrita. Karan waits for Amrita's to respond, he does not forces himself on her bullies her like Minx. Karan develops deep affection towards her, though she does not accept his proposal and advances. He becomes a protective layer for her life and shields her from the passionate lesbian, Minx to some extent.

The novel begins with the conversation between Amrita's mother, Mrs. Aggarwal and her neighbour, Mrs. Sethia about Amrita's debut into modelling profession. Mrs. Aggarwal brushes aside the objections raised by the neighbour, as Amrita is very much interested in that profession. Amrita's family pampers her all through her life because they believe that she is their good luck charm. By the time she is five years old, her family prospers sufficiently by having a bungalow at Vasant Vihar in Delhi. Her father and two brothers boast Amrita's achievements to the world. Though Amrita is an average student, there was something exceptionally brilliant about her. Amrita knows the effect of her enchanting laugh on people. Amrita is dressed in her favourite clothing when she is ready to go to Bombay for modelling.

Her father says: “We trust you, beti. Bombay is different from Delhi. You already know that. Take care of yourself” (SO 3).

Meenakshi was buying a pack of imported cigarettes from the Pan-wallah in Coloba when she spotted Amrita for the first time. Amrita makes a last minute dash from the road divider and then a taxi-driver abuses her lustily and the crowds gathered. Then Minx heads towards Amrita and extends out her hand in a gesture of offering help to her. She introduces herself as the daughter of Inspector General, V.S.Iyengar and warns the cab driver not to act funny with her. Amrita is grateful that she has found a good friend, she then thanks Minx and introduces herself and also reveals that she is new to Bombay. Minx takes her to the agency saying that her uncle owns it. Minx waits for Amrita until she emerges three hours later. Amrita is elated to see Minx hanging around in a black jeep, chatting with some people. When questioned by Amrita about those people, Minx tells that they are her loyal local dadas. Amrita feels protected under the friendship of Minx and she is also elated when she receives compliments such as, “You are gorgeous... You know that? Of course you are. Everybody must be telling you so” (SO 6).

A sharp knock on her bedroom door wakes Amrita the next morning. Her landlady, Mrs. Pinto stands outside saying that the courier-man delivers a bouquet for her. Amrita does not listen to the words of Mrs. Pinto as she has to report for a jewellery campaign shoot at ten sharp. Karan is the man who shoots the most talked-about ads in the business. Karan prefers not to acknowledge her when she walks into the studio. Karan maintains an expressionless countenance throughout the tenure. Then Amrita thinks about how cold Bombay people are by comparison. She is astonished when she gets a phone call from Minx so that she gets the feeling that it is

probably wise not to look deep into her new friend's affairs. It is only through experience that people realize the attitude of their counterparts in the glamour world.

Karan is scrupulous, demanding and impatient. Amrita decides not to speak to him throughout the long photography session. She generally obeys the photographer's instructions without any objection. She knows that the decisive campaign that will take her to the top. She hears wild stories about Bombay girl's nights in the town. But her world is limited to Mrs. Pinto's confined room and cabins in fancy ad agencies. Amrita's career was blossoming and she begins to work hard throughout the day. After each tiring day of work Amrita is thankful that Minx is doing her transport arrangements. Initially Amrita feels safe in a new city just because she has Minx to protect her. But she fails to realize the concealed nature and intention of Minx.

There is a mystery in understanding the predicament of women caught in the sphere of lesbianism. Amrita realizes her inner garment is lost in the house and she decides to enquire Mrs. Pinto about them. She tells Amrita that Minx asks for them as she needs them urgently for next modeling session. The mysterious nature of Minx terrifies her. Amrita later on finds a diamond ring in her room and it fits perfectly. Suddenly, she feels afraid and rushes out of the room to talk to her mother and her brothers on phone. Mrs. Pinto waits for her to calm down. She sees a ring on the table and presumes that one of her male follower would have done this to annoy her.

Amrita cancels her shoot with Karan the following morning. She feels listless and tensed till mid-day. When she steps out, a car shrieks to a stop next to her. Karan gently forces Amrita and with her consent he takes her to his house in Worli. Amrita feels that his home is very peaceful. He serves tea for her and then she asks him about Minx. Karan tells that she is the daughter of a big-shot cop. Amrita's heart grips with

fear. Ignoring the thoughts of Minx, Amrita decides to spend the evening peacefully in his apartment silently. The strange stories about Minx cause confusion in Amrita's perception.

The attitude of Minx frightens Amrita to the core. Minx's voice over the phone sends a chill down Amrita's spine. Minx enquires if Karan revealed the absurd little stories about Minx. She continues to tell that Karan is an absolute manipulator. Amrita puts down the receiver just as Mrs. Pinto whirls saying that Minx has left something in the fridge, which looks like a human heart. Amrita asks in a relaxed manner why has she come all the way to her room. Minx just replies that she was very curious to know how Amrita is living there. She also tells that she wants to be Amrita's friend as she loves her and adores her very much. When Amrita refuses to do so, she warns her that she is not the one to give up so easily. Amrita at any rate wants to get as far away from Minx. She is afraid of Minx's advances. It is a strange situation that a woman is forcibly involved in lesbian encounters.

Karan advises Amrita that she should change her address in order to escape from Minx. But nobody is inaccessible to Minx in the police community. Amrita feels that she ought to forget about her modeling career. Karan objects to her proposal as she has prestigious contracts in her hand. She denies revealing this matter to her parents. On seeing the cigarette packets in her shooting spot, Amrita finds herself shaking as she smells the presence of Minx there. In a state of panic Amrita begins to cry as Karan was doing the shooting. Karan decides to postpone the shooting considering Amrita's condition but his entire team gets upset at his decision.

It is a strange situation for Amrita that she is trapped in this relationship with Minx without her full consent. It was past midnight when Amrita walks into her room,

mentally and physically exhausted after a long day's work. On seeing Minx on her bed, Amrita asks in a low voice, what she wants from her. Minx advises Amrita not to listen to any rumors about her. Amrita starts to go towards bathroom, but she jumps back instinctively at Minx, who reaches out for her. Amrita cannot hold back the disgust and in a shrill voice she calls after her saying that she hates Minx so much. She hears Minx lighting the gas in the Kitchen and assails the door of her room shut, taking care to lock it from the inside. Amrita finally sleeps well that night after thinking for a long time. In the morning she finds an envelope in which Minx has written a love poem. Amrita wants to speak to her mother on phone but she has to seek permission from Mrs. Pinto for an STD call. She finds the card on her bedside with the telephone numbers of the nearest police station. It is obvious that nobody can safeguard her from Minx.

Sexual abuses are not gender specific. This novel clearly throws light on the fact that sexual abuse happens even in the same sex relationships. Amrita tries to escape from the presence of Minx. Amrita was having a chit chat with three other models who are in rehearsal for a fashion show at the small café in Fort with. Amrita whirls around in her seat when someone calls her. It was Rover the Rogue. Rover starts teasing by kissing her, she surrenders herself to him. Later, Rover insists her to have wine and takes her to his apartment where he enjoys physical relationship with Amrita. Next day morning Minx arrives at Amrita's place and prepares breakfast for her. Minx advises Amrita that she should be medically examined. Immediately after hearing this, Amrita becomes furious and shouts at the top of her voice at Minx and asks her to leave the room immediately. Minx smiles: "What are you planning to do about it? Kill me? Story, darling. You are stuck with me. You don't get it, do you? I love you. I have to protect you. It's my duty" (SO 36).

Majority of women, both lesbian and heterosexual, are taught that their sexuality must conform to certain modes of behavior. The society with its existent culture voices shame upon a woman if she goes beyond the criteria of passivity and repression, and doubts her virtue if she refuses. (Tikkha 220)

Amrita cannot break the spell of her first kiss as she is addicted to the company of Rover. The small ferocious modelling world is buzzing with the news of their affair. Karan starts behaving almost like a jealous lover. Twice or thrice a week, Rover turns up where she lives and she drops everything in a rush to meet him downstairs. One night Rover fails to show up after calling her, Amrita is alarmed. It is Minx, who tells her that her lover boy will not come for her that night. She marches Amrita to the police station, where she sees Rover lying in an unconscious state on the smelly floor of a dark cell. She warns Amrita not to show so much interest in him or any man in general. Minx also says that she stopped the police from beating him otherwise Rover might have died.

Minx begins telling her a little story about herself that she had a lousy childhood. Her father's transfers and her mother's social work leave Minx to amuse herself on her own. She is expelled out of two schools. She also confesses that her father raped her, when she was thirteen years old. On knowing this, her mother develops hatred, which still haunts Minx. Later, her parents became cold and impersonal and pretended that she does not exist. It is an illustration how unattended children develop prejudice against society. Amrita develops

sympathy towards, taking this as an opportunity Minx gets up and raises her shoulders to kiss Amrita. Without waiting for a response, she walks out of the house. Amrita makes up her mind that she starts seriously looking for a new place to stay.

For Minx, lesbianism was a result of hatred and fear of deception from men. It was a report against society and norms laid down to under-rate women. By belonging to Amrita, protecting and helping her, she posed a great threat to male dominance and disrupted patriarchal oppression.
(Tikkha 220)

Amrita's next campaign for a successful cosmetics brand turns out to be a grand success. Sheila, her co-model also says that Amrita will probably buy her whole building two years from then as she is being hailed as the 'Supermodel' by news-magazines. But Amrita expresses her wishes to get married within two years from then and to settle in a family. Sheila nudges her: "But with that crazy woman in your life, how can you think of marriage? And heard all about what she did to Rover. People have been talking about the two of you. Minx is weird, man. We all know she is a lesbo" (SO 51).

Sense of belongingness and being loved by kinsfolk has always been non-existent in her life. Like her other novels, Shobha De brings out the absurdities of life in high-society of Bombay. De treats the subject of sex elaborately; the sadistic homosexual tendencies of Minx present the height of alternative sexuality. (Vats 104)

Amrita cries out angrily and then she breaks down. Sheila sympathetic and understanding as Amrita unfolds the story of how Minx is making her life miserable. Sheila comforts her not to get so nervous. Amrita feels confident and reassured and decides to move fast.

Amrita moves out on a Saturday. She does this in a hurry. Yet she knows that Minx would track her down eventually, but she does not stop her then. Amrita is stuck to her seat as Sheila speeds down the road. Her mind is on the next biggest fashion show and she does not really notice the persistent haunting of a car behind them. It is Minx, the same mad woman who catches up with them after ten minutes. She asks Sheila to give Amrita to her. When Sheila dithers to answer, Minx exhibits her power and terror by picking up the gun and blowing out one of the car's tyre. Amrita begs not to hurt her friend. By then, she knows there is no point in upsetting Minx, when she is in this state. Silently, the three of them steps into the Jeep and they drive off to Sheila's apartment. As they begin unloading their things, Minx walks up to Amrita and kisses her tenderly on the cheek saying: "Look after yourself. And if there's anything you need, call me" (SO 57).

Minx and Amrita share Sheila's flat for ten days then and Amrita is inconsolable about an assignment, she lost to another model, Lola. Sheila tries to console her saying that nobody believes in fair play in modeling business. She also tells that Lola is using the influence of a big shot and that is really pushing her up in the career graph. An impatient ringing of the doorbell disrupts their conversation. It is none other than Minx once again, and Minx asks Amrita to come out with her quickly. The minute they are in the car, Minx turns to Amrita and bursts out: "I have heard about it what Lola did to you. Don't worry. Lola won't

pose for another photograph or another show again” (SO 59-60). She says that she has thrown acid on Lola showing the photographs of the incident, which are very spine-chilling. Amrita wants to report to the police about Minx. But Minx tells her that Amrita becomes the obvious suspect as Lola stole her campaign. Amrita looks at Minx with rage and hate in her eyes that she would never love Minx. Finally Minx says: “Will that make you happy? I’ll myself. I’ll give you my life-what more can I give you?” (SO 62). Then she drives Amrita home. When Amrita enters the flat, she hears Sheila speaking on the telephone about that incident. At that instant, Amrita decides that she will have to keep quiet about Minx and Lola. Thus Minx’s obsession towards her partner is clearly exemplified.

Karan is in the hospital when Amrita gets there to see Lola. On seeing her, Karan blames her that she is responsible for Lola’s condition. Amrita refuses to get provoked and she stays calm. He is still convinced that she is involved in that gruesome affair of attacking Lola. She is completely aggravated with this, she then picks up her bag and walks away. Karan experiences a strange sense of loss on Amrita’s departure. At this moment, the Police Inspector emerges from Lola’s room and advises not to enquire about Lola’s condition. When asked, the Doctor tells him that the person who had attacked Lola is a professional murderer. He wants to mention that Minx is involved in it but he decides against it. He thanks the Doctor and leaves the hospital abruptly. He then goes to the bar, ‘The watering Hole’ and finds Minx there in few minutes. She smiles as she watches him coming over her and offers his favourite drink. But Karan calls her a devil and asks how she can do such a thing. When she reminds of his drink, he picks up his glass and throws the contents in Minx’s

face. Karan cannot believe that Minx can remain cool as she calmly scrubs her forehead with a napkin. She is cool because it may consolidate Amrita's chances in modeling.

Amrita is deeply hurt and gets submerged into a deep depression after Lola's accident. Sheila proposes the idea of shopping to Amrita just to cheer her mood up. But on Amrita's request, they go to a fancy restaurant. The restaurant is packed when they enter but they manage to place themselves into a corner table. Later on in that same venue they both are surprised on seeing Karan and Minx sharing a table. Very soon she feels the touch of Minx's fingers on her bare shoulder, but Amrita pushes her hand away sharply. Karan says firmly to Amrita to get out of the restaurant. Sheila complains about her ruined afternoon. When Minx goes outside, Amrita curses Karan as he had befriended Minx. Karan looks deep into her eyes; and requests passionately to trust him that he is on her side. Suddenly, Minx cuts herself and stains Amrita's forehead with blood saying that she pawns her life to Amrita. Thus Minx's strange obsession to her own lover is revealed.

Two days later, Amrita talks nervously to Sheila from the Bombay airport lounge not to reveal her departure to Minx. It is a traumatic situation for Amrita to experience lesbianism forcibly. In order to escape from this plight, she decides to leave for her hometown. She does not enjoy flying as her mind is preoccupied with Minx. While accepting a glass of water from the stewardess, she accidentally drenches the person beside her. She grasps hold of a corner of her chiffon duppatta and begins cleaning the water off his chest, apologizing profusely. The stranger introduces himself as Parthasarthy and smiles at her saying: "You are so much better looking, than your photographs" (SO 79). He pulls out a copy of 'News Asia' and

Amrita promises a set of exclusive pictures to his magazine and gives her address to him. She feels that Parthasarthy is definitely a handsome man. At times, her womanly claims make her respond to charming men.

Thought Amrita had informed her parents about her arrival yet she finds nobody at the airport to receive her. She is surprised to see the family lined up near the gate as if they were all waiting for her. Her mother explains that Amrita's friend called ten minutes ago. Amrita's gets very nervousness at the very mention of the name Minx. Later, she switches on the light in her room and steps back with a small shock as her bed is covered with roses. Her brother, Ashish tells her that some fellow drove up in a car and gave these flowers. She bursts out: "Didn't you people ask him who she was and all that?" (SO 82). Her two brothers, Amrish and Ashish, and her mother do not know what the crisis is about. Amrita sobs uncontrollably for several minutes, while her mother holds her tenderly and strokes her hair. After repossession of her equanimity, Amrita strictly orders her mother that she should not accept flowers or gifts from strangers. Amrita feels her mother stiffen and then she requests her mother to forget all about it.

Minx wants to prove that she is also capable of performing everything equal to man in the society even in the case of loving a woman. Amrita wakes her up the next morning to a phone call. She is tempted to kick the receiver down but decides against it because of her father's presence. Amrita listens in deadly silence, trying not show any expression in her face. When she replaces the receiver, Amrita tells her father that the call is from her friend, Meenakshi Iyengar. Her father encourages her that she is lucky to make such a friend in Bombay who cares about her so much.

It is quite common that human beings crave for consolation in trouble. Sheila speaks to her three days later that the cops are asking questions about Amrita and Lola. On hearing this, Amrita bursts out violently. Except Minx, for Amrita there is no one to look upto in Bombay. Amrita's mother senses something is terribly wrong with her daughter and asks her gently about it. She is reluctant to tell her family, the ugly truth about either Minx or Lola. Fortunately, she receives a call from Parthasarthy at that moment. She asks him to meet her at Valentine's at one o'clock in order to escape from her mother's questioning. Parthasarthy wants to discuss the business deal with Amrita. While he orders wine, Amrita excuses herself to go to the ladies' room. Unexpectedly, the heel of her shoe breaks and finds herself stumbling on the granite floor. Just as she is going for a toss, she feels a firm hand steadying her it is none but Minx. Amrita tries to push her away, loses her balance and spreads out on the floor. Then she introduces Minx to Partha as her old friend. Partha extends an invitation asking Minx to join the party and she accepts it.

Amrita is impatient when she listens to Partha and Minx, chatting away as if they were old college friends. Partha pays his attention on Amrita and asks Minx they both became friends. Minx leans forward and touches Amrita's cheek with the back of her fingers saying: "From the very first moment that I saw Amrita, I knew that's what she reminded me of delicate, perfectly formed, saffron flower-valued for the fragrance it releases when its stamen is crushed" (SO 91). Partha shrinks and Amrita blushes deeply at her compliment.

Amrita's mother innocently greets Minx warmly by giving her an affectionate hug. Amrita is startled at the innocence of her mother as she was showing affection to

her daughter's abuser without her knowledge. Minx gently forces Amrita into her bedroom. All

of a sudden when they both were alone in the room, Minx removes her tops and stands naked in front of Amrita, Amrita notices a fresh red wound under her breasts. When enquired by Amrita, Minx says that she had gone to the plastic surgeon and requests him to cut her breasts off as she hates them. For the first time Amrita feels pity for this helpless and wretched woman who was standing before her. She hears Minx's voice cracking as she carries on: "And then I met you, I fell in love. A love so intense I felt my body would burst" (SO 93). Amrita begins to cry as it is all getting to be too much for her. Amrita shuts her eyes and ceases to think or feel, surrendering to Minx's advances. After what must have been two hours, they finally fall into a light sleep. Shobha De's presence in the literary world has brought a revolutionary change, shaking the traditionally affluent and culturally robust Indian society with her open debate on concealed secrets of physical relationship between two women.

Minx and Amrita had a long night and they fall asleep together and a sharp knock on the door wakes them up. It is already late and Minx decides to leave right after dinner. The next morning Minx gives Amrita the tiny box which contains an eternity band linked by emeralds. When she refuses to take it, Minx says: "After last night, darling, no explanations are necessary. You belong to me and I belong to you, it's that simple" (SO 96). Minx has a dreamy look in her eyes as they are out of the car and walks towards Partha's office. Amrita begs her not to come with her but Minx refuses to hear her obligations. Then Partha interferes and calls Minx aside and tells her that he wants to discuss something confidential. Minx refuses to budge and so Partha dismisses both of them. To her surprise, he winks and signals for Amrita to

phone. She calls through phone to Partha's residence and tells him that she wants to converse on an important issue with him. Minx suddenly intrudes in the pretext of asking for Karan. At that moment, Ashish comes and inquires whether she is in some sort of trouble. Amrita requests them to go away as she needs to get some sleep. While returning back, Minx warns her about Partha's wife who is very hysterical in nature. But still Amrita cannot stop her attraction towards Partha. She calls Karan, and she begins to cry into the phone explaining that she feels so helpless because of Minx. The inexorable bondage that restricts Amrita's freedom reflects the plight she is seeking to escape from Minx with the help of a male lover.

Karan congratulates Amrita for she bags 'Allure Campaign and Calendar's' for the next year. Amrita's excitement vanishes when she thinks she has to stay in Bombay. Karan proposes to marry Amrita but she gently rejects stating the reason that one cannot marry someone on the pretext of an accommodation problem. Amrita finds it difficult to go on saying that her problem is too much complicated. Yet Karan offers a help that Amrita can stay with him till she finds a suitable for herself in Bombay. After speaking to Karan, she feels at peace.

Every time Minx finds Amrita helpless before her, she experiences ecstasy and sadistic pleasure that compensates her anxiety. When Minx wakes Amrita up, she pulls the sheets up to her chin as she goes to bed naked. Minx approaches near her and hugs her telling that: "Every fibre of my body vibrates with yours" (SO 105). Amrita hates herself for surrendering to Minx's advances without protesting. She knows that she is not able to escape from Minx that morning. Minx says that she constructs a temple of love for them one day.

The lesbian relationship between Amrita and Minx shows the emerging reality of the new modern woman who finds sexual satisfaction with persons of the same gender. A new moral code is thus distinctly emerging, as these women freely choose their partners whether they belong to the opposite sex or to the same sex.

(Ningthoujam 38)

Amrita tells her that she is sorry for the mistake and she will not love her.

Then Minx kissed her saying: “I worship you... You are my goddess ... My Devi ... I live for you. I shall die for you” (SO 107). A little later, she picks Amrita up and walks into the bathroom. Minx lowers Amrita’s body into the perfumed bath. Amrita slowly begins to enjoy and responds to the sexual advances of Minx as her body feels relaxed. They stay together in that condition for more than an hour in utter peace and relaxed state. It is inevitable for Amrita to maintain strange relationship with Minx in order to survive in the modeling profession.

Amrita realizes what she has done to her and decides to escape from Minx so she tries to contact Partha. She makes a telephone call to him and requests him to meet her urgently. She rushes to the kitchen to tell her mother she is off. Partha is at one of the small tables when she sees him in the restaurant. He asks what her problem is. Amrita openly tells Partha that she is trapped with Minx. Then Partha says that: “I won’t call her a lesbo. The correct term these days for them is, I believe, people who practice alternative sexuality” (SO 113). Partha assures that he will do anything out of his reach to help her bring out of this situation. Abruptly, she asks him whether he is in love with his wife. When he gives negative answer, she leans over and kisses him warmly. He wants to design a plan to help her before it is too late. It is an illustration

of sheer exploitation of an innocent woman who falls a prey to the web of opportunists.

It is observed that women feign well rather than men. Minx is talking with her mother in the kitchen when Amrita gets back. Her mother feels very relieved because they believe that Amrita is well taken care by her friend Minx in Bombay. Amrita replies she has not made up her mind to go back to Bombay. Then Minx reveals the plans to take Amrita for a holiday which is happily accepted by Mrs. Aggarwal. Amrita walks off with Minx. As soon as the bedroom door shuts on them, Minx tries to kiss her. Amrita tries hard to struggle and get out of her embrace ferociously and loudly protests saying: "You are a manipulating bitch and I hate you. I really do. But you can't get away with this for long ... wait and see" (SO 117). Minx asks casually whether the Pansy journalist friend of hers protects her. Amrita blurts out that she is not going to spend the rest of her life being controlled by a pervert. Minx warns her that Partha's wife is a tigress and leaves the house. The bizarre fixation that Minx develops on Amrita confuses Amrita to the core as she has never witnessed anything like this before.

The obsession of Karan towards Amrita is clearly depicted in the novel. When Karan hears the news of Amrita's return, he is shooting a motorbike commercial advertisement with four teenagers. Karan feels deeply disappointed that Amrita did not inform him of her arrival beforehand. His heart roars as he listens to Amrita's husky voice speaking with urgency, who stay at Minx's place in Colaba. He decides to rescue Amrita out from the hell, she has landed herself in without her full consent. Minx comes asking whether she is speaking to Karan. Minx has a functional, comfortable, fourteen-floor two-bedroom apartment in a high-rise. Amrita decides to

bear with Minx and wait for the right opportunity. She thinks of Partha in Delhi and wonders whether he will come in rescue her. Reluctantly, she surrenders herself to Minx's advances. But she cannot adapt herself with Minx's abnormal behaviour.

It is not an easy task to be free from the strange obsession like lesbianism. On the very next day, Amrita reads the news in the newspaper that Partha is injured in a road accident while driving to his farmhouse on the suburb of Delhi. Amrita blames that Minx is responsible for it. Minx replies that she is not that powerful. Then Minx rises and throws away Amrita's plate saying that she will be denied lunch that day. Later, she picks up her car-keys and walks out. Amrita steps into Minx's room for the first time since her arrival. Quickly, she scans a few things in her room but soon gives up. Amrita is offered a drink by Minx and all of a sudden she begins to feel giddy. As soon as Amrita faints, Minx sexually assaults Amrita.

In the case of Minx, lesbianism results from her deep hatred of men and fear of deception. Her becoming a lesbian is a form of revolt against the male-dominated society. She wants to show that she is also capable of doing all those things which a man does in the society.

(Ningthoujam 68)

The gender difference is not a barricade for the postmodern woman to fulfil her repressed sexual urges through which she enters the domain of lesbianism rejecting the code of conduct meant for an Indian woman. Minx grasps the video camera and starts shooting her in startling close ups, focussing on a few square inches at a time. She states: "I want to remember every bit of you-every pore, every mole, each little hair" (SO 128). After what seems like an hour, but is probably just a few

short minutes, Amrita sees her leap off and rush into her bathroom. Later Amrita finds her in the bathtub, watching the just-shot tape on the small screen repeatedly.

Six months later, after the incident Amrita realized that both of them are living as man and wife and she was eagerly waiting for Minx to return home, she feels ashamed of herself for falling into the pattern set up by Minx. Amrita has accepted her fate without retaliating. She accepts all the sexual advances of Minx, all her anger and all her tortures. It looked perfectly normal to her. Amrita comes back to her career which grows slowly. Most of her clients feel uncomfortable when they see Minx and Amrita together. Minx becomes the decision maker of Amrita regarding her career, and Amrita is strictly prohibited to work with Karan. Minx also handles her finances and gives a monthly allowance to her as a pocket money. Amrita is not allowed to go for outing alone without Minx. And people around their circle slowly began to see then as a couple. Nobody dares to question Minx or extend friendship to Amrita.

Amrita knows her parents are pleasantly surprised by her success and the money she is making. But behind the pleasure, lurks a certain anxiety her mother expresses during their frequent phone conversations. Mrs. Aggarwal confesses to her husband that she is worried about their daughter's marriage. The moment she sees Rakesh Bhatia, she feels that he is the suitable life partner for her daughter. He is the son-in-law of her dreams who has been in America for the past ten years. Mrs. Aggarwal dials to Amrita saying that they had selected a groom for her from New York. Amrita's eyes shine brightly in the dark as Rakesh is going to help her escape from Minx.

It is quite unbelievable to think that a woman becomes a protective lover and a substitute for man. Amrita meets Rakesh at the Rangoli restaurant. She tells Minx, she

is off to the Oberoi Tower's shopping Arcade for a couple of hours. Minx jokes: "We've become a dull old married couple" (SO141). That comment makes Amrita feel embarrassed. In any case, their relationship settles into a placid groove and Minx seems far more confident about it. Rakesh smiles friendly and takes both Amrita's hands in his, saying that she is the most beautiful girl in India. She suddenly remembers that she has to rush home and she rejects the offer of Rakesh who was willing to drop her home. She feels that she would be relieved from the attacks of Minx. Amrita is paying for the croissant at the cafeteria counter when she hears Minx call out to her. Amrita begins to shiver in fear when he requested Minx to leave Amrita. Minx in a majestic way pushes him away roughly and reprimands Amrita for flirting with him. Rakesh steps in between the two women and catches Amrita's hand. Amrita makes a move towards Rakesh but suddenly she feels a pistol prodding her ribs. Minx nudges her forward with the barrel of the gun and the three of them walks fast out of the arcade. Once home, Amrita weeps uncontrollably. She begs Minx to forgive her. Minx cackles and tries to light Amrita's pubic hair. Amrita grabs a pillow and tries to defend herself by clutching it to her. Without warning and without mercy, Minx forces Amrita's legs apart and she experiences a sharp pain as something hard and long is thrust violently into her.

When Amrita regains her consciousness she realizes that she is in the hospital. Rakesh informs everything to Mrs. Aggarwal regarding the abuse faced by her daughter. On seeing her mother, she cries uncontrollably and requests her mother to escape because Minx would harm her mother too. They hurry to her room and start packing swiftly. Amrita also asks her mother to inform Karan regarding this as early as possible. Amrita and her mother are safely airborne when Karan meets a crazed Minx running blindly out of the parking lot. She tries hard to stop the flight saying

that there is a bomb in it but she cannot. Karan hears Minx blustering above the roar of take-offs and landings.

When the concealed realities are disclosed, Amrita's parents wonder about the unimaginable relationship between two women. Mrs. Aggarwal asks Amrita why she did not tell her what was going on between them. Her mother suggests her that she should marry Rakesh and forget the horrible past. Amrita nods her head firmly. Then Karan rings them up telling that Minx had tried to kill herself. Partha tells her on the phone that he is not going to publish it in his paper, and advises her to get out of town in order to escape from the scandal. Amrita's father looks concerned as he counsels his wife quietly.

On Partha's advice, Amrita refuses all interviews. Though Rakesh was away in New York for a while yet he contacts Amrita often to check if she was safe. Two weeks later, she tells her mother that she cannot sit around all her life waiting for that maniac to appear. Her mother tells her that she has to work with her father. But she wants to phone Partha seeking a job in his paper. Two hours later, Rakesh is on their door step looking relaxed and victorious. He says that he would go to meet his parents and gets their official permission to marry Amrita. She turns her face away to hide the rising colour. Two ugly stories about the Minx-Amrita affair appear in the press, on that day itself her engagement to Rakesh is announced. Nobody refers to the article in the paper.

Most of the write-ups concentrate on the strangeness of her relationship, without actually calling her a lesbian. Rakesh too laughs it off requesting Amrita to forget it. She raises the subject of Minx with him on the morning of the engagement that she affects Rakesh. She feels guilty for using Rakesh to escape from Minx. It

finally happens the day after Rakesh's birth day. When Rakesh brings her to his flat, she is surprised to see a

different apartment. He holds her tight, while she clings on to him whispering, whimpering, crying, and moaning but overcomes with longing nevertheless. Rakesh promises her that the nightmare of Minx is over and she will not be able to touch her as long as he is alive. She thinks to herself cheerfully that Rakish makes a wonderful husband to her.

At the wee hours of the morning Minx arrives at Karan's place seeking for help. She says: "I can't live without her" (SO 162), and then faints at his doorstep. Karan shows sympathy on her and invites her inside the house and advises her to forget Amrita. Karan also reminds Minx that Amrita was forced into this relationship and pleads Minx to allow Amrita to lead her life on her own terms. The deep love woman carry for another woman is well depicted in the words of Ningthoujam as:

It is the new woman's drive for self-determination which prompts her to explore new fields like lesbianism. De's depiction of explicit sex between women is a truthful picture of the new reality which is coming up fast in the modern world and its increasingly independent women-folk who are throwing challenges to men in almost all spheres of human activity. (70)

Amrita and Rakesh decides to marry and are happy, they discuss about their honeymoon location and Amrita seems to be coming out of her trauma caused by Minx. The last night before her wedding, Amrita decides to spend the full night talking to her mother and she asks so many incidents from her childhood that night. That night when she goes to sleep, the memories of Minx haunt her. Amrita introduces Karan to Rakesh saying that he was the one who saved her life many times

from Minx and she considers him as her best friend. Karan becomes emotional and seeks permission from Rakesh to kiss her, he then kisses Amrita on her both cheeks and then abruptly strides away out of the wedding hall as well as out of their lives.

In *Strange Obsession*, husband-wife relationship is disturbed by destructive obsession of Amrita with Minx. By marrying Rakesh, Amrita desires to escape from the clutches of Minx. At the same time, she creates a heap of doubts whether she would be suitable and fulfil the desires of her husband. The unethical sexual relations with Minx caused unwarranted effects on Amrita's mind. (Wanjari 197)

The Oberoi hotel suite is appropriately dressed up for the wedding night occasion. Within minutes, they are fast asleep. It is around 4 a.m. that they hear someone knocking on the door of their suite. Amrita suspects that it is none but Minx. She calls up the lobby manager requesting him to take action. The security guards takes Minx away from them and they are shifts to a penthouse suite.

Rakesh and Amrita drive up to Nainital. By the time they reached the isolated wooden, colonial bungalow on a distant hill, it is close to ten at night. A log fire is burning inside the three- bedroom house and all the lights are on, casting a warm glow on the fringes of the dense forest surrounding it.

On the next day Rakesh and Amrita wakes up to a peaceful morning with the chirping of birds. Rakesh goes to the forest but he does not come back Amrita accompanies Mali in search of Rakesh. They meet Ram Swarup half a mile down the forest path. It is the Mali who spot Rakesh's scarf flapping in the underbrush. It is only after two hours a policeman shows up at the bungalow. The police give her some

story about poachers but she is not convinced and feels desperate. Then the district superintendent of police comes and consoles her saying that Rakseh might be alive. He also arranges police protection for her for that night.

The helper boy hands over a small parcel. He was holding a package and tells her that it is given by a hill-boy from the neighbouring village. When she opens it, a cassette and Rakesh's ring rolls out. She comes to a conclusion that Rakesh is kidnapped for ransom after all. She hears the voice of Minx on tape with a finality that is chilling. Minx says, "This is good bye, my darling. You will never have to suffer the sound of my voice in your precious ears again. But before I leave you, there is one more mission I have to complete" (SO185). The tape stops abruptly and Amrita jerks back into reality. The tape is still on and then she hears the muffled sound of Rakesh's voice. Amrita rejoices as he is alive. The police suspects that the kidnapers are using new tactics. Amrita suspects its none other than Minx. The police insist that she has to tell the name of her friend who is involved in it. The Inspector says that they are expecting the Commissioner of Police shortly.

Minx stands a few feet away dressed in her standard black costume. Rakesh stares at her in awe. He is held in a cramped log cabin upon a ridge and loses consciousness. When he comes to senses, he asks Minx what she had done to Amrita. Later, she hands a can of imported beer to him and he drinks it down within seconds. Minx tells him: "Good bye. No talk? Fine. I'll talk. Amrita was mine and will remain mine. No matter what said she might have shoveled in your direction, that is the truth. She loved me then and you can be bloody sure she loves me now" (SO 191). She asks him to watch the images on the small screen television, but he looks at them

impassively. On the screen, a grotesque close up of Amrita's genitals flicker briefly before Minx abruptly switches off the machine.

Amrita rushes to the woods all by herself to rescue her husband. There she finds the spot where the scarf was hanging. She reaches the hill top with the help of a local boy. All of a sudden Amrita comes face to face with Minx. Then Minx pulls Amrita towards the base of a tree and there she tries to touch her, but Minx all of a sudden pulls her own hand away and screams: "I can't ...you smell different. You smell of a man ...Your man. He is all over you. Everywhere" (SO 195).

Rakesh spots Amrita and he feels happy on seeing her. Minx goes near him and removes the knots with the help of a knife. Amrita falls beside her husband and hugs him. Minx orders them to get ready for the performance and she turns around with her camera. Rakesh grabs Minx by her knees but she leaps out of his grasp and aims the gun at both of them. Amrita requests to leave her husband alone, but Minx pushes her away roughly. Minx orders them to perform the act of sex in front of her, so that she can film it. Minx stares at the two of them through the lens of her video camera and exclaims: "Pretty good so far. You two should consider doing blue films together" (SO 199). Exhausted by the effort, Amrita lies on Rakesh's chest while he momentarily shuts his eyes. They hear the small sharp click of a cigarette lighter and they smell the smoke. Within seconds, they are enveloped in flames. The flame engulfs them and Minx is heard laughing by watching them burn. They both try to escape jumping out of the cabin and down to the floor. Amrita hears the sound of villagers approaching along with a couple of policemen. Two limp bodies are carried out minutes later. The Police Commissioner, Mr. Iyenger tells Amrita that Minx is his daughter.

Mr. Iyengar leads Amrita away from the hospital room. He thanks Rakesh for saving his daughter, Minx. Amrita explains everything about Minx to her parents.

Amrita sees Mr. Iyengar crumple before her eyes as he unsteadily reaches for a chair.

He says,

My daughter is the severely disturbed child of a disturbed mother. She suffers from delusions, she tells lies, and she makes up stories, the number of schools she has been expelled from having their own tales to tell. I tried hard, too hard, to be both mother and father to her. To protect her. But today I realize just how badly I've failed. (SO 203)

When Amrita tries to tell the truth about her relationship with Minx, Mr. Iyengar interrupts and asks her not to proceed further as he was feeling bad to hear the truth about his daughter. Vats asserts:

Shobha De has concentrated more on the psychopathological aspect of Minx's personality which has prevented the balanced development of her character. This novel discusses Meenakshi's neurotic moods and eccentric moves in vivid details. (111)

As the definition of morality changes from time to time, the modern Indian woman is carving her own portrait with multi-coloured shades which are anew and afresh, liberating herself from the dictatorial male world. He assures her that Minx will not trouble her anymore.

Amrita lives in Delhi with her husband Rakesh. Two years pass by. One day she reads 'Hindustan Times' and she scans the headlines disinterestedly. She misses the obituary column on her first reading. Something makes her go back to the top of

the page. Amrita assumes it is yet another anonymous Iyengar who had died under tragic circumstances, but it is Minx. Vats affirms:

The novel discusses the pathological anxiety of Minx in vivid details. It describes how, under the overwhelming stress, she breaks down beyond redemption. Through her eccentricities she tries to avenge herself on the environment which is the source of her anxiety. (99)

Amrita reads and re-reads the news a dozen of times to assure herself if it was true. She however shivers in fear. But Amrita feels relaxed and finally feels fully rescued from the clutches of Minx. Vats comments:

Strange obsession is different from other novels of Shobha De which deal with the theme of refusal of Modern Indian Women to carry the load of traditional morality and their liberation from the dictate of traditional male-chauvinated society. (99)

The central concept of queer theory is that your gender is constructed through your own repetitive performance of gender. The structure or discourse of gender according to Judith Butler is bodily and nonverbal. Butler's theory does not accept stable and coherent gender identity. According To Judith Butler gender is "a stylized repetition of acts . . . which are internally discontinuous . . . [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (*Performative* 352). To say that gender is performative is to argue that gender is "real only to the extent that it is performed" (*Performative* 352). Thus Minx prefers to perform like a male who later becomes as an oppressor and a victimizer.

The dominance of femininity or masculinity comes into being only when the body performs and chooses a gender for its performance and thus making it naturalized and consolidated. As Butler notes, gender is “an identity tenuously constituted in time...instituted through the stylisation of the body” (*Performative* 402). The gendered body is performative in the sense that it has “no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute reality” (*Gender* 136), and thus gender “can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived” (*Gender* 141). Hence a strong trait of gender in a human being is the result of the repeated imitation that the person chooses to perform.

Meenakshi's homosexual behaviour with Amrita is the outcome of her sexual abuse by her own father which leads to the conditioning in which heterosexual behaviour becomes an aversive stimulus. The sexual relationship with her father turns her towards homosexuality as a safer sexual outlet. Thus Amrita is one of the magnificent creations of Shobha De who is destined to overcome oppression from a person of her own sex. Though the focal point in the novel is the lesbian relationship between Minx and Amria, Shobha De never forgets for a moment that she is portraying the tainted image of liberated women who are in quest to establish themselves as successful person in their life.

In this novel Shobha De has focused more on the psychopathological aspect of Minx's personality which has prevented the balanced development of her character. Her clever manipulation of her surroundings and her ruthless behavior assume criminal dimensions. Satisfying her physiological needs of her hunger, thirst and sex, Minx moves on to fulfill her safety needs. She successfully secures a state and stability through her father's top position and her own dominant behavior.

In relation to postfeminism, the importance of the concept of gender parody lies in its transgressive doubleness, whereby it both undermines and reinforces normative representations of gender, blurring the opposition between activity and passivity, subject and object, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual. *Strange Obsession* is a postfeministic novel which clearly analyses the queer nature of individuals who are a part of the society though segregated from the main-stream culture.