



Representation of 'New Woman' in Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover*

Prof. Sucheta Pathania¹ and Dr. Pragati Jasrotia²

¹Department of English, University of Jammu

²Assistant Professor, Centre for Distance and Online Education, University of Jammu

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Abstract

The concept of the "New Woman" occupies a significant place in contemporary feminist discourse and forms the central concern of this study. For the purpose of this study, therefore, the ideal of the feminist movement as the modern emancipated woman is not necessarily the concept of the 'New Woman' although she might share some of the traits of the emancipated woman, yet she is something more. She represents a more complex identity shaped by self-awareness, resistance, and the quest for personal liberation. An emancipated woman refers to external freedom such as liberation, mobility, or economic self-independence, whereas the "New Woman" involves an internal ideological shift that critically questions and resists patriarchal structures. In this study, the protagonist is identified as a "New Woman" because her journey reflects not only independence but also growing awareness of how patriarchy operates across different relationships and contexts. This study examines the question in what respects the 'New Woman' is new. This paper examines how Taslima Nasrin portrays the struggles of women within the institution of marriage and within a society governed by patriarchal values.

French Lover is her medium to convey her views on various sociological, political issues which encompass not only the fate of any nation but also that of women everywhere. The analysis focuses on the failure of marriage in the case of various individuals, especially all the chief characters. The protagonist Nilanjana speaks on behalf of Nasrin, who justifies her liberated escapades as the result of the lack of real love or affection in her husband's attitude. Nilanjana does develop in the end as 'New Woman' discovering her own sexuality and realizes that her lover Benoir's, love is merely a more refined version of her husband Kishanlal. Nasrin introduces Nila as an apostle of the liberation movement, advocating freedom from the tradition bound Indian woman. Nasrin generalizes her opinion and makes the reading public aware that the liberation of women should start from one's own mind. Nasrin wants

women to develop a strong mentality which can counter men. She wants to banish intolerance, discrimination and injustice from the society. Nasrin's 'New Woman' is like Nila who has the capacity to withstand any onslaught of the society. Nasrin's 'New Woman' never surrenders, and pursues life independently. *French Lover* advocates the development of female agency, resilience, and autonomy, presenting the "New Woman" as courageous, self-conscious, and capable of resisting societal pressures.

Keywords: Liberation, New Woman, Marriage, Consciousness, Discrimination, Patriarchy

Introduction

Taslima Nasrin (b. 1962) is a Bangladeshi writer, physician, and feminist known for her outspoken criticism of religious fundamentalism and patriarchy. She gained international attention for her controversial writings that highlight women's oppression in South Asian society. Due to her views, she faced threats, legal actions, and was forced into exile from Bangladesh in 1994. Since then, she has lived in different countries and continues to write on issues of gender equality, human rights, and secularism. Taslima Nasrin has written extensively in multiple genres including novels, poetry, essays, short stories, and autobiography. Her early works include poetry collections such as *Shikore Bipul Khudha* (1982) and *Nirbashito Bahire Ontore* (1989), which reflect her developing feminist consciousness. She gained major attention with her essays and columns collected in *Nirbachita Column* (1990), where she strongly criticised religious orthodoxy and patriarchy.

Her novels include *Oporpokkho* (1992), *Shodh* (1992), and the highly controversial *Lajja* (1993), which brought her international fame and also led to bans and threats due to its political and religious themes. Other notable novels include *French Lover* (2001), which explores women's identity and independence.

Nasrin is also known for her autobiographical series such as *Amar Meyebela* (2002) and *Dwikhondito*, which were banned in several regions for their candid and critical

content. Through her diverse works, she consistently addresses themes of feminism, sexuality, social injustice, and freedom of expression.

Patriarchal society has traditionally confined women within restrictive roles that associate them with sacrifice and obedience. Women have often been represented as "Mother Nature," expected to endure suffering silently while subordinating their wishes and individuality to male authority. Feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir argue that womanhood is socially constructed through patriarchal and cultural conditioning rather than biological destiny. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir famously states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," (Woolf 87) emphasizing the role of society in shaping female identity.

The rise of feminism in the twentieth century challenged these patriarchal structures and gave prominence to the concept of the "New Woman." Coined by Sarah Grand in 1894, the term refers to women who seek individuality, education, economic independence, emotional fulfilment, and freedom from oppressive social conventions. The "New Woman" questions traditional gender roles, male domination, and attempts to construct her own identity beyond the boundaries imposed by society. However, the "New Woman" is not a uniform or entirely idealized figure. Alongside her progressive traits, she is also often associated with emotional

conflict, social alienation, moral ambiguity, and psychological struggle, as she negotiates between personal freedom and traditional expectations. These complexities reflect not weakness but the tensions produced by resistance to patriarchal norms.

This concept finds significant expression in the works of Taslima Nasrin who is known for her critique of patriarchy, religious orthodoxy, and gender discrimination. Her novel *French Lover* (2001), originally written in Bengali as *Forashi Premik* and translated into English by Sreejata Guha, portrays the journey of Nilanjana Mandal (Nila), a woman who gradually transforms from a tradition-bound wife into an independent and self-aware individual. The present study examines *French Lover* as a representation of the "New Woman" and explores how Nasrin critiques patriarchal structures through Nila's struggle for identity and freedom.

Review of Literature

A considerable amount of scholarly work has been done on Taslima Nasrin's writings, particularly focusing on feminism, patriarchy, and freedom of expression. Critics have examined her works from socio-political, religious, and feminist perspectives. However, the concept of the "New Woman" in relation to her novel *French Lover* remains less explored.

Hashima Taj-ul-Islam's article "Women and Islam: Taslima Nasrin, Society and Politics in Bangladesh" (1995) examines the socio-political controversy surrounding Taslima Nasrin in Bangladesh and highlights international concerns regarding women's rights and freedom of expression.

Peter Priskil's *Taslima Nasrin – The Death Order and its Background* (1997) discusses Nasrin's banned novel *Lajja*, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the threats faced by the author for her outspoken views.

Hanifa Deen's *The Crescent and the Pen: The Strange Journey of Taslima Nasreen* (2006)

portrays Nasrin as a symbol of resistance against patriarchy, religious extremism, and restrictions on free speech.

Adila Abusharaf's article "Women in Islamic Communities: The Quest for Gender Justice Research" (2006) analyses the role of religious institutions in shaping women's rights and stresses the importance of gender justice in Muslim societies.

N. Shantha Naik's *Feminist Psyche in World Women Novelists* (2012) studies feminist consciousness in women writers, including Taslima Nasrin, and explores themes of oppression, identity, and resistance.

Srikanth S. in "Religious Issues: Taslima Nasrin and Freedom of Speech" (2013) discusses Nasrin's criticism of patriarchal religious practices and the challenges faced by writers advocating freedom of expression.

Laxmikant Kapgate's "Impression of Nasreen's *Lajja* on the Politics of Bangladesh" (2014) examines the condition of women in Bangladesh and the relationship between religion and politics in Nasrin's writings.

Srikanth S.'s "Taslima Nasrin and Islamic Feminism" (2014) highlights Nasrin's contribution to Islamic feminism and her criticism of patriarchal interpretations of Islam.

Sanjeev Tomar in his article "Reimagining Society: A Critical Study of Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*," (2025) examines Nasrin's *Lajja* as a significant literary response to communal violence and religious fundamentalism in South Asia.

Mahbuba Sarker in "Women as Second Sex: Interpreting Taslima Nasrin's Poetries from Feminism and Postcolonial Perspectives" (2025) analyses Nasrin's poetry through feminist and postcolonial frameworks. The study highlights how Nasrin represents women as socially marginalised subjects shaped by patriarchy, religion, and cultural oppression.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and analytical research methodology. It is primarily based on textual analysis of Taslima Nasrin's novel *French Lover* (2001), originally written in Bengali as *Forashi Premik* and translated into English by Sreejata Guha. Close reading is employed to examine selected episodes, character interactions, and narrative developments in Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover* in order to understand how meanings of gender, sexuality, and identity are constructed within the text. In addition, feminist literary criticism is used as the primary theoretical lens to analyse how gender roles, and power relations shape the experiences of the female characters. This approach helps in situating Nila's transformation within the broader framework of the "New Woman," highlighting her negotiation with autonomy, desire, and social constraints. The study also draws on elements of discourse analysis to interpret how societal ideologies are embedded in narrative expressions. This combined methodology enables a critical understanding of the text not merely as a story, but as a site where gender ideologies are contested, and redefined. The study focuses on close reading of the text to examine the representation of the "New Woman" through the character of Nilanjana Mandal (Nila).

The 'New Woman,' a significant cultural icon of the *fin de siècle* (characteristics of the end of 19th century). She is intelligent, educated, independent and self-supporting. The 'New Woman' was not only middle-class female radicals, but also factory and office workers of that time. As Sally Ledger in *The New Woman: Fiction and feminism at the Fin De Siecle* write, "The New Woman was a very *fin-de-siecle* phenomenon. Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s" (Leger 1). The emergence of the 'New Woman' is a global phenomenon. So also are the

stresses and strains she faces the world over. The discrimination she has to face, the sense of insecurity which she feels, the sexual harassment and violence to which she is exposed are similar in the advanced as well as in the developing countries. The other traits of the 'New Woman' also have universal characteristics such as her determination to oppose sexual harassment and male-domination, the urge to create a milieu for the full expression of her emotional and moral self. What is most important to her is the craving to be accepted as an individual, a person in her own right and enjoying the same status as man has always enjoyed. The word 'New Woman' has come to signify the awakening of woman into a new realization of her place and position in family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the 'New Woman' has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with man. The 'New Woman' phenomenon found an interesting representation in late Victorian fiction and anticipated various discourses of a new womanhood in the twentieth century. The New Woman fiction that appeared in the 1880s and 1890s does not constitute a single literary genre but rather multiple ones with a woman as a central character. Elaine Showalter, a key feminist critic, traces the development of women's writing and argues that the New Woman represents a crucial stage in feminist literary history, where women writers began challenging patriarchal constructions of femininity and domestic ideology. Through her concept of "gynocriticism," Showalter highlights how women's texts construct female experience and subjectivity from within, rather than through male-dominated frameworks.

The "New Woman" in Taslima Nasrin's works is not merely an emancipated female figure but a more complex identity shaped by self-awareness, emotional conflict, and a continuous struggle for freedom. *French Lover* explores this transformation through its protagonist Nilanjana Mandal, who gradually

evolves from a tradition-bound woman into an independent and self-conscious individual. She presents a woman playing quite different roles that is against the norms of society. It is about woman's search for love and freedom far away from home. In this novel, Nasrin presents the liberalising aspect of this gradual change in the attitude of women. *French Lover* tells the narrative of the patriarchal control exerted on the protagonist and her development with the passage of time. Like the traditional woman, the 'New Woman' too tolerates, makes adjustments but when she is done with all the compromises and sacrifices that point marks her growth as a 'New Woman.' It is also about the journeying of new culture.

Nilanjana Mandal also known as Nila, was a young Bengali graduate from Kolkata. She was the second child of Anirban and Molina after Nikhil. She was a voracious reader and was fond of writing poetry. Nasrin highlights the value of education through the character of Nila, who has her own outlook towards perception of life. Through her character, Nasrin foregrounds the importance of education in shaping female consciousness. Nila represents a woman who is aware of her rights and capable of questioning social conventions. Her marriage to Kishanlal, a Punjabi restaurant owner based in Paris, marks a turning point in her life. She went to Paris leaving her home town in order to forget Sushanta, her first love who seduced her falsely promising that he would marry her but he did not fulfil his promise because she was from lower caste. Nila's relationship with Sushanta shows that her rejection is not only personal but also influenced by caste hierarchy, as Sushanta abandons her due to caste considerations. This reveals that even intimate relationships are structured by social inequalities. Although the novel foregrounds gender more than caste. This dejection contributes further to Nila's disillusionment with traditional love and social norms, strengthening her transformation into a "New Woman" who questions multiple layers of oppression, including gender and caste-based

exclusion. She felt aggravated with his deception so much that she wanted to leave Calcutta in order to forget him. Nila's relationship with Sushanta exposed the infidelity of a love that failed before marriage. After she joined her husband in Paris, she experienced culture differences.

Societal gatherings were described through group conversations in the novel. In Paris, Nila experiences cultural alienation and emotional isolation. Nila, always on the periphery of any group, hears bits and pieces of incoherent conversations. They were all criticizing Indian habits and culture. But when it comes to women, they believe that Indian wives were the best for marriage because of their submissive nature. This shows their hypocrisy which is shown by the writer. One of Kishanlal's friends Tariq said, "Kishan really needed a wife like this." "Why so?" "So beautiful, so good- so totally Indian. Foreigners are no good! They are good for a little lovemaking, but not for marriage. For marriage it has to be an Indian" (Nasrin 19). Feeling of loneliness crept in her mind when everybody left. She was disappointed with Kishanlal's behaviour. She was feeling dejected because she has not dreamt of this kind of life in Paris. She came to Paris with hopes and desires. Kishanlal remained mechanical in the matter of conjugal love. "Nila lay beneath Kishan's hairy body. She asked herself, 'Is that pleasure?' The answer came from within, 'No' (Nasrin 22). This moment highlights Nasrin's critique of patriarchal sexuality, where women are reduced to passive recipients of male desire. Fatma A. Sabbah, a Bangladeshi critic in her work *Women in the Muslim Unconscious* (1984) says that in the orthodox discourse,

"Woman is an object of pleasure intended for the gratification of man.... In the patriarchal universe the sexual act is not an act uniting two persons equally endowed with will; it is an act in which a sole human being masturbates with an object, woman,

who is often compared to inanimate objects and categorized as a piece of property" (Sabbah 44).

After staying few days with her husband, Nila realized that he was least bothered about her desires. She had joined her husband with ray of hope that he would care about her feelings. She wanted him to show concern towards her and consider her likes and dislikes. He remained emotionless and indifferent in the matters of household and lovemaking. He failed to understand her feelings even at the time of their intercourse. She always wanted a man who admires her beauty. One of the most significant values of the 'New Woman' novel is an attempt to renegotiate sexual relations between the sexes, and gendered behaviour. Nila felt like an outcaste. Nila felt that Kishanlal failed to treat her as a wife. She was already missing Calcutta and her carefree life. When he insisted her to do the household work like cooking, washing etc, she felt that she was conducted like a housemaid.

Kishanlal's lavish apartment seemed to Nilanjana as a gilded cage. She was subdued within its friendless boundaries. One day sitting idle at home she thought of using the key of the house to go outside in the streets of Paris as she had always desired. Kishanlal had strictly advised her not to go outside. She walked aimlessly on the streets of Paris. She lost herself in the endless world of Paris. She no longer remembered that she was Mrs. Kishanlal. Nila knew that Kishanlal could have taken her out and yet she went alone because she wanted to be alone. Besides, she believed strongly that one should not depend on anybody and should earn money and be independent so that one can enjoy self-esteem. Thus Nila expressed her wish to work as an independent woman to her husband. On hearing it, Kishanlal was astounded and did not approve her idea. He said that there was no shortage of money as his business was well flourished and asked her to drop her interest to work. Nila argues with him stating that he only earns for himself. He felt offended by her

argument and objected to her way of arguing with him. There was a hot exchange of words in which Kishanlal warned her that she had no other option but to depend on him.

Economic independence or right to have one's own money is one of the important traits of 'New Woman'. Nila was educated and wanted to earn money for her satisfaction and desires. Women empowerment through education is very important to bring changes in the socio-economic conditions of women. No society will progress if women, a major part of society remain behind. Women cannot defend their rights without financial independence and education. Ellen E. Jordan in her 'The Christening of the New Woman' observes, "the English females endowed the new women with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self-sufficient, single and yet fulfilling life" (Jordan 19). Amidst her husband's objections, Nila was able to get a humble job of packing computers in boxes. This moment symbolises the emergence of the "New Woman" who seeks economic self-reliance as a means of empowerment. One day she invited her colleagues Danielle and Catherine for dinner. On the day of the dinner, she cooked fish and meat for her friends in her house despite the fact that Kishanlal was a vegetarian and entertained her friends with dinner. Kishanlal came home late and lost his patience on noticing that Nila had cooked fish and meat in the house. He reacted to her in such a bad manner that she felt humiliated in front of her friends. Nila's resistance becomes more visible when she defies domestic restrictions and asserts her individuality. Her decision to cook non-vegetarian food for her friends in Kishanlal's house represents a symbolic act of rebellion against marital control. Kishanlal's anger at this act exposes his inability to accept her autonomy.

Nila felt disappointed with Kishanlal's unfriendly behaviour in front of her friends.

Nila's dissatisfaction within marriage reflects Nasrin's critique of patriarchal sexuality. She discovered that Kishanlal was a loveless person. At this juncture, Danielle, who she met at work, suggested her that she should leave her husband. Nila left Kishanlal and goes to stay with Danielle at her place. Indian women are always portrayed as silent, sufferers who were ready to sacrifice everything for her family. Nasrin has very well portrayed the 'New Woman' in the character of Nila who is ready to break the walls of phony patriarchy for her own self.

Danielle, a French character in the novel, represents a form of sexuality shaped by personal trauma and Western sexual freedom, which positions her within a non-normative framework of desire. Within the narrative, Danielle initiates a same-sex encounter with Nila, who is initially unaware of Danielle's sexual orientation and intentions. This creates a situation marked by imbalance in awareness and emotional preparedness, where Nila is drawn into an unfamiliar form of intimacy without fully understanding its implications. When she learned that Danielle was attempting to seduce her, she resisted but it was futile, "Nila was still confused. Before her eyes, the room began to spin, it flew in the air...Nila lay there speechless, breathless" (Nasrin 99). Nila's response indicates that she does not experience this encounter as fulfilling, but as a disturbing moment in her ongoing search for meaningful connection.

They continued to stay together, as she had nowhere else to go, until one day she was informed that Nila's mother was suffering from a serious illness. When Nila arrived to see her mother she was shocked to discover that though her father and brother were efficient doctors in the town, they had not done anything to save her mother who had been suffering from cancer. She remembered sadly that how her mother's basic wishes were turned down by her father. Anirban had been in the pursuit of extramarital affair.

Nasrin is not content with exposing the male chauvinism of Anirban's extramarital affair. She moves a step ahead to condemn it by Nila's reaction against her father. When Nila arrived home, Anirban called her to his room and enquired her about her with regard to her separation from Kishanlal. He advised her to make amendments for her bad behaviour with Kishanlal. He also blamed that she had spoiled the life of Kishanlal who, according to him, was a straightforward man. She reminded him of his wickedness and deception of his wife. She said, There's a word - regret. Have you ever heard it? Have you ever felt it? No, you haven't. You married Ma because you needed money. ..Ma was like a servant in this house, right? No one said anything because that's how women often are in their husband's house. (Nasrin 138)

In a patriarchal society, Nila's freedom and independent thinking show the author's idea of the 'New Woman', who has broken free from old rules and blind obedience. Nasrin has incorporated the feature of rebellion against gender prejudice in the role of her mother. Her mother had inherited a large sum of money from the property of her parents as her share. She did not reveal it either to her husband or her son. She had preserved it in the form of bank bonds worth rupees twenty lakhs for Nila. She knew that she would not live long. She called Nila and handed it over to her reminding her that she should not share it with anybody. After her mother's demise Nila wanted to be gone like her mother.

Nila's father insisted her to return back to Paris. So she had to leave for Paris. With this state of her mind, she happened to meet a handsome French man in the airplane. His name was Benoir. In their interaction, Benoir shared the details of his life with Nila. He was married to a white woman Pascale and had a daughter Jacqueline. Nila felt attracted to the young man and began to think of him as the man of her dreams, someone who could satisfy her emotional needs. Gradually, she fell in love with

him. Through this relationship, Nasrin highlights female sexual desire, which is often suppressed by male dominance. Benoir provides Nila with sexual gratification, which some critics may view negatively, but within this study, the 'New Woman' is seen as free from rigid social norms. Female sexuality has long been treated as a taboo, and Nasrin addresses it within this restrictive social context.

Nila experiences deep disillusionment when Benoir admits that his passion for her is not love. She is shocked, as she believes that physical intimacy should be rooted in emotional commitment. Gradually, she realizes that Benoir's relationship with her is detached from genuine love. Although he occasionally expresses affection, saying "Je t'aime," his actions remain inconsistent, as he continues to maintain ties with his wife Pascale and daughter Jacqueline. Nila continued her love affair with Benoir and spend extravagantly on Benoir. He took her to his parents and they stayed in their place for some time. With passage of time, Nila and Benoir discussed and shared so many things. Benoir was still inclined towards his wife Pascale and daughter Jacqueline. He even decided to live permanently with her in her apartment. But he continuously visited his wife and daughter. Nila experienced west supremacy in his behaviour because Benoir was obsessed with Paris and its culture. For him India was a land of filth and dirt. Nila discerned that the relationship between her and Benoir became complicated progressively. She realized that if it was possible for Benoir to fall for her while he was still in deep love with his wife, it was also possible for him to fall for another woman. Her realization deepens when she becomes pregnant and confirms through a DNA test that Benoir is the father. She recognises that she has been deceived and that her emotional investment in him was misplaced. Nila concludes that being with him means a loss of self, as his affection is hypocritical and self-serving.

Nila understood that being his lover was like losing herself. She realized that his love for her was hypocritical. In the subsequent interaction between them, Nila informed him that she had exhausted her money and decided to shift her residence from this costly house to a moderate one and to take up a job. Benoir replied that he was ready to look after her without sending her for any job and thus invites her to go and stay with him in his house. He had resolved to send his wife, Pascale to some other house on rent but Nila refused.

By now Nila had realized that patriarchy exists everywhere. She reminded Benoir that he was an example of the whole cult of patriarchy whose love and sympathy for woman were basically two-faced. Irrespective of their role, there was always a vested interest among men to express their sympathy for women. She has gained this wisdom through her exposure to unreliable nature of men in her life and revealed this to Benoir. She said, 'I have realized one thing by now: you are no different from my father Anirban, my lover Sushanta, my husband Kishanlal ... all of you have some things in common.' (Nasrin 286) This moment represents her complete awakening to the universality of patriarchy. Benoir was trembling and drew her close to his heart. He tried to persuade Nila not to leave him. Nila realized that patriarchy exists everywhere as Benoir was also a part of that patriarchy.

Benoir reminded her that she was carrying his child, but Nila decided to abort the pregnancy because she felt the unborn child was a result of lust, not love. Benoir started abusing her. This shows his mental set up, hypocrisy, and male superiority complex. From this quarrel it was clearly shown that he had not been earnest and honest in this relationship. Nila realized that he was an exploiter of woman. He had never sought a lover in her but a woman for his sexual enjoyment. She became conscious of the fact that men look at women as an object of sex and in order to enjoy women, they pretend to be fond of them. She wanted to get rid of men

altogether after this consciousness. Thus, she informed Benoir to collect his belongings and leave her house at once and for all. He felt offended by her act and tried to kill her in anger. She endured them all and saw to it that he was out of her life forever. She felt free after he left. Nila was ready to spend her life on her own terms. She never felt so empowered and strong. She felt a sense of freedom and was ready to begin her new journey of life. *Anatole Broyard* in a *New York Times* in 1982 in 'The New Woman' book review remarked that this "New Woman is no longer sentimental nor is she the repository for tradition and nostalgia. Her traditional reticence has disappeared and is replaced by articulateness...her favourite form of attack or defence" (Broyard).

French Lover is radical in thought and influential in implementation. This story is a captivating quick look into the workings of a woman's intelligence as she struggles to get nearer to terms with her individuality in an antagonistic civilization. It's a tale of a female who deals with her individual puzzled self, her sexuality, and her search for self. *French Lover* revolves not only round the Indian bride who becomes a liberated woman afterwards, but also on the less privileged women who are measured as things of sexual gratification as many women in less developed countries. Nila overcomes all these situations which make her the apotheosis of 'New Woman'. Nila turned away such pitiable situations of self-centred men in her sexual encounters. The unfaithfulness of her much-loved husband, friend and lover enlighten Nila, the naive and ignorant dreamy bride into a transformed 'New Woman'. Nila's decision to break away from the mismatched marriage and her refusal to accept the life given by Benoir reveals that a woman can determine her self.

Nasrin's strength as a writer is shown as she sometimes speaks through her characters and at other times like a guiding voice. She strongly influences the flow of events throughout the narrative. Nila for the foremost

time and only time has a room of her own that is a place to live life on her own conditions. Nila learns from her mistakes. She decides to forge her identity in a life of her own likings and desires. She suffers immensely which is largely due to the individual awareness in a conservative male world. Nila strives to overcome the prescriptive norms of her family and society and eventually emerges from the shadow of patriarchal dominance with a transcending awareness of a new identity, an identity that gave her space, which she had never enjoyed.

Nasrin creates the "New Woman" not as a perfect figure but as a complex subject shaped by conflict, and self-realisation. Nila's journey from emotional reliance to independence personifies the essence of the "New Woman" who is self-aware, resilient, and courageous to challenge repressive structures. Thus, *French Lover* becomes a powerful critique of patriarchy while simultaneously presenting a vision of female autonomy grounded in lived experience rather than abstract idealism.

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