

**Tribhuvan University**

**Passive Resistance in Jane Smiley's *Ordinary Love***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

**Yagyna Prasad Adhikari**

**Central Department of English**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

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**Tribhuvan University**  
**Central Department of English**  
**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Yagyan Prasad Adhikari has completed his thesis entitled “Passive Resistance in Jane Smiley’s *Ordinary Love*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2065/02/01 B.S. to 2065/08/15 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

-----  
Shankar Prasad Subedi

Supervisor

Date: -----

**Tribhuvan University**

**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Approval Letter**

This thesis entitled "Passive Resistance in Jane Smiley's *Ordinary Love*," submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Yagyna Prasad Adhikari has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

**Members of the Research Committee**

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Internal Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

Head

Central Department of English

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Yagyna Prasad Adhikari

## **Abstract**

Jane Smiley's *Ordinary Love* highlights women's resistance to oppressive patriarchal ideology through the major character, Rachel who attempts to break age-old patriarchal barrier by abandoning her demanding and uncompromising husband. As she becomes conscious of her inferior position and unequal status with her husband, she refuses to live with her husband by disclosing her relationship with another man because she wants to pursue her own independent course of her life. So, she leaves her house and children. Her abandonment is not an escapement; rather it is her passive resistance. So, as she experiences many hardships and discrimination in the male and white dominated society, Rachel becomes a rebel. Hence, this move of hers is a passive resistance to seek her self identity and freedom.

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## **I. Jane Smiley and Her Context: An Introduction**

This research work is a feminist study on Jane Smiley's novella, *Ordinary Love* published in 1989. The existing male dominance, female subordination, unstable and immoral social condition and impulsiveness in response to it have made the protagonist, Rachel Kinsella a passive receiver. Though she leaves her husband, children and home, her abandonment is not an escapement; rather it is a powerful means of resistance to the existing norms and values of the patriarchy. Therefore, her seeming silence is not an acceptance but a weapon of resistance.

In the novella, Smiley first presents Rachel as a passive woman who is eclipsed by her powerful husband, Pat. As the story progresses, Smiley portrays Rachel as being gradually assertive about her independence from her husband by defining for herself the workings of her mind, which provides her with an acceptable degree of autonomy, but it happens to her at the cost of integrated family life. Her move reflects her resistance to the patriarchal values, though it is not a radical revolt.

Born in Los Angeles, California, Smiley grew up in Webster Groves, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, and graduated from John Burroughs School. She obtained a B.A. at Vassar College, and then earned an M.F.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. While working towards her doctorate, she also spent a year studying in Iceland as a Fulbright Scholar.

Smiley published her first novel, *Barn Blind* in 1980, and won a 1985 O. Henry Award for her short story "Lily", which was published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Her best-selling, *A Thousand Acres*, a story based on William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in

1992. It was adapted into a film of the same title in 1997. In 1995 she wrote her sole television script, produced for an episode of *Homicide: Life on the Street*. Her novella *The Age of Grief* was made into the 2002 film *The Secret Lives of Dentists*. Her essay "Feminism Meets the Free Market" was included in the 2006 anthology *Mommy Wars* by Washington Post writer Leslie Morgan Steiner.

From 1981 to 1996, she taught undergraduate and graduate creative writing workshops at Iowa State University. She continued teaching at ISU even after moving her primary residence to California. In 2001, Smiley was elected a member of The American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her other remarkable works of fiction are, *At Paradise Gate*, *The Greenlanders*, *Duplicate Ke*, *Horse Heaven*, *Good Faith*, *The Thousand Acres*, *Charles Dickens*, *Ordinary Love*, *Good Will*, along with many essays on various magazines. Her most recent work, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel* is a non-fictional meditation on the history of the novel that spans from Don Quixote to the modern literature of today. She has written on politics, farming, horse training, child rearing, literature, impulse buying, getting dressed marriage and many other topics on women, domination upon women and their struggle to obtain their rights.

Smiley's publishing career officially began with the appearance of *Barn Blind* in 1980. Smiley's marital history suggests about her personal experience which informs her literary investigation into the politics of love, friendship, female inferiority and family. Her marriage to John Whiston ended in 1975, when she was still an undergraduate. A second marriage in 1970 to the editor William Silag produced two daughters Phoebe and Lucy,



but in 1986 it also ended in divorce. In 1987 Smiley married screen writer Stephen Mark Mortensen; they had a son, Axel, and were divorced in 1997. She has credited motherhood with having dramatically realigned her literary priorities. Upon finding herself pregnant for the first time, Smiley, the alienated modernist enamored of existential anomie abruptly became a "more tolerant humanist intent on illuminating the hard-fought moments of grace that buffer the follies and grief's of daily existence" (Humphreys 71). She subsequently set out to demonstrate that women can be procreative and creative at the same time, in contrary to literary prejudice of centuries.

Smiley has skillfully related maternal experience in literature, challenging both idealized caricatures by rendering the mother as an irreducibly complex subject rather than as the loved/loathed object of the disillusioned child-cum-writer. Accordingly, Smiley's fiction presents a wide array of women with varying aptitudes for the role. *Barn Blind's* Kate Karlson demonstrates how a strong parental personality can become the central force holding other family members in her orbit even as she "inflicts deep wound with her unflinching expectations, unyielding standards, and unquestioning exploitation" (Suzanne 13). Only a year later, *At Paradise Gate* demystified the Catheresque earth mother in the person of Anna Robinson, whose grandmotherly nature masks deep ambivalences about the choices she has made at considerable cost to her own sense of self. In *The Age of Grief and Ordinary Love*, two superbly crafted novellas, Smiley creates female characters whose seeming domestic idylls, the former as a professional partner as well as wife to her pediatrician husband, the latter as a

traditional housewife in the midst of young children, are ripped asunder by their respective adulteries.

Smiley's writing has depicted the inferior socio-cultural status of female. She presents her major characters who are compelled to live separately from their husbands due to reigning male ideology. Also, she has mapped the emotional terrain of women as well as men, children and parents. In the novella, *Good will* she assumes the first-person narrative voice of an aging Vietnam War veteran trapped in his own desperate effort to save his family from the corrupting influences of the broader culture. In *Barn Blind*, Smiley moves the reader through a kaleidoscope perspective in which each family member is accorded an independent point of view on the steadily unfolding tragedy of the Karlsons. In a more lightened vein, in *Moo*, even the hapless pig Earl Butz is accorded his own ruminations on his lot.

Another novel, *A Thousand Acres* is a woman's story of mundane domestic life which is related in a plain style. Here Smiley boldly enunciates the "links between feminism and environmentalism by tracing the institutional networks of power that render all nature, be it within the female body or abroad in the landscape, passively subject to the male will to dominate" (Smith 23). Yet in the face of such hierarchies Smiley nonetheless insists that her women characters take themselves seriously as moral beings responsible for their own self-definition even as elucidates the circumstances that foster their economic and emotional dependencies.

*Ordinary Love* has been analyzed from various perspectives: New Historicist, Marxist, Psychoanalytic and Foucauldian among others. One of the critics, Alfred A. Knopf comments this novel from social point of view.

According to him, this novel powerfully evokes "breakdown in the lives of American families" (2). The idea of Catherine Morely is identical to the idea of Knopf since he argues this novel "portrays the fragmentation of family" (5). Another critic, William L. Howard comments on this work from the perspective of characters. He writes:

This novella captures the characters at the point in time when the consequences of their previous actions are made clear to them in ways heretofore unrealized. Under the apparent calm of the familiar domestic routines described in each story runs an undercurrent of betrayal, neglect and violence. The reader's shock at these events parallels the protagonists' sudden awareness of their culpability in generating the destructive forces that ravaged their family life. (23)

Interpreting the text from its thematic perspective, critic Michiko Kakutani argues that:

This is a 'rite of passage' that has to do not only with an awareness of mortality, but also with the realization that love ends, that families come apart that even parents cannot protect their children from the consequences of change and loss. It is a realization that the barriers between the circumstances of oneself and of the rest of the world have broken down . . . (3)

While reviewing the book on the *New York Times*, Josephine Huphreys appreciates Smiley's controlled use of language and her ability to maintain a sympathetic attitude for her characters who create their own

destruction" (1). This proves her caliber as a talented writer who has been able to use the proper language to convey her message.

Although several critics have made an attempt to depict women's plight in bits and pieces, they have not failed to do the full justice to feminist study of *Ordinary Love*, which this researcher seeks to accomplish.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work – a short introduction to Jane Smiley and a short literature review. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of the entire work.

The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It studies the novel from feminist perspective, so it discusses a short background and origin of Feminism in general and Liberal Feminism in particular.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how the novella *Ordinary Love* women's passive resistance. So, this chapter tries to prove the hypothesis of the study – though Rachel leaves her husband, children and home, her abandonment is not an escapement; rather it is a powerful means of resistance to the existing norms and values of the patriarchy. Therefore, her seeming silence is not an acceptance but a weapon of resistance.

Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the researcher.

## **II. Feminism: Liberal Feminism as a Developing Theoretical Support**

It is, at first, essential to know the meaning, origin and conceptual evolution of feminism in brief before going into the detailed discussion of liberal feminism on which the present research analysis is based. The term 'feminism,' discovered by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier, was taken from the French word 'feminisme'. The word was first used to suggest the support for women's equality and political rights as enjoyed by men. Now feminism also refers to any theory which shows the relationship among sexes as one of inequality, subordination and injustice. So, today's feminists have stepped forward against male-dominance in order to enhance women's rights and to secure women's emancipation. Feminism is related to the feminist social movement that seeks equal right for women, giving them equal status with men to decide on their careers and life. The patriarchy considers women weaker in every sphere of familial and social life. Because of this biological or physical construction and deep-rooted gender conception, men dominate women. Thus, the main objective of feminism has been to revolt against such ideology and parochial gender construction. Nowadays, the female writers have begun writing advocating for the emancipation of women from the oppressive patriarchy and have tried to establish women's position in male-dominated society.

Feminine and masculine relation has got predominance over the nature based male and female sexual relation at present. Domination of men over women in every social, economic, cultural and religious milieu of human life has precipitated the hierarchical power relation. This partiality, historically

current, sustains itself in the form of male-domination against female subordination through ideological practices. The patriarchy fosters the gender based inequalities that describes man as superior and women as inferior, man as powerful and the woman as powerless. One of the leading American feminists Kate Millett sees patriarchy as "grotesque, increasingly militaristic, increasingly greedy, colonialist, imperialistic, and brutal, with a terrible disregard of civil liberties, of democratic forms" (511).

As time passes, feminine consciousness gradually emerges among women and makes them realize the inhuman treatment of patriarchal system. From antiquity, women have gradually felt a need to launch a united movement against these injustices, inequalities and violence so as to eliminate discrimination and narrow the hierarchy between the two sexes, as Millett believes: "You don't have any oppressive system without its continuance being assured by members of the oppressed groups, that's true of oppressed people" (511). This led to the birth of feminism.

Feminism is concerned with women's voices, which are silenced in the patriarchal ideology. The feminists try to break the silence of women. So, Feminism is a political movement which has become successful in giving due place to the writing of non-canonical women writers. Feminism has come into practice as an attack against female marginalization as our society and civilization is pervasively patriarchal, that is, it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic (Abrams 89). It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature- which is described as feminine. By this cultural

process the masculine in our culture has come to be widely defined as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative, the feminine by systematic opposition to such traits has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional. (89)

Feminism is concerned with several norms and values that belong to the women's issues. Despite the diversity, feminism is often demonstrated as a single entity and somehow concerned with gender equality and freedom. Chris Beasley defines feminism as a "doctrine suggesting that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society and as advocating equal opportunities for men and women" (27). The main common theoretical assumption as shared by all branches of the movement is that there has been an historical tradition of male exploitation of woman.

By the time women became conscious of their position and discrimination in society, many feminists raised their voice to end this discrimination between men and women. It shows the consciousness of women who have begun to reject their own passivity. Feminism came into existence for the sake of women rights and human equality. The main aim of the feminist movement was to develop women's personalities. It, therefore, studied women as people who were either oppressed or suppressed or rejected the freedom of personal expression. All women writers who struggled against patriarchy to contain their womanhood were generally, considered feminist. Men may also be feminists but they cannot be feminists in the real sense of the term because of lack of feminine experience. That's why, unlike ancient women, today feminists are proud of their existence. In this regard, Toril Moi, a feminist has written: "the word feminist or feminism

are political labels indicating support for the aim of the new women's movement" (187).

In a nutshell, the term "feminism" explores the domination, exploitation, injustice and inequality prevalent in male-dominated society where women's rights are violated in different terms and conditions. It also attempts to end various kinds of oppressions against women for their emancipation. From the short discussion done above, it can be summed up that feminism is not a simple or unified philosophy. Many different women – and even men – call themselves feminists, and the beliefs of these groups of people vary quite a bit.

Feminists are plural. Their views, concepts, and approaches change from one another in course of time and by the trend of theory. Women's state and their oppression and subordination are variously explained. Generalizing all these concepts Barbara Milech has categorized the school of feminist theory into four: Liberal feminism, Marxist Feminism, Radical or Cultural Feminism and Psychoanalytic Feminism. However, the following section discusses the first Liberal Feminism because the research is based on this category.

### **Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism is characterized by an individualistic emphasis on equality. According to this philosophy, society itself does not need a major overhaul, but rather laws need to be changed and opportunities simply have to be opened up to allow women to become equals in society. To a liberal feminist, evidence of progress is seen largely by the numbers of women in positions previously occupied by men, especially powerful positions. In the



United States and much of the Western world, liberal feminism is the most mainstream form of feminism.

Liberal feminism is a response to and development of Liberalism. For this reason it is necessary to provide some background on Liberal thought. Mainstream Liberalism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in whatever variant offered a form of thought in which “the individual” is a “descendent of the Enlightenment concept of an autonomous rational being” (Gunew 17) and political equality is associated with that ability to reason. The Enlightenment is a term describing a collection of ideas which emerged in the West in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such ideas opposed religious explanation – God as truth – and the divine right of kings in favour of secular rationalism. According to Enlightenment thinking; all those who can reason are capable of independent thought and action and hence should be able to participate in society. In practice, however, all women and certain men – men of colonized countries and working-class men until they gained the vote – were excluded from these claims as less capable of reason. Mainstream Liberalism is a form of thought and a form of social regulation that has dominated Western societies since the emergence of the Enlightenment and draws strongly upon this two-fold legacy. Hence, in Western liberal societies some groups of people are afforded full citizenship and other are not.

In this context, liberal feminism pointed out those liberal, supposedly universal standards of humanity, equality and reason were not in fact universal because women were denied full social participation, public life and education. The seeming paradox at the heart of Liberalism, which

asserted equality and liberty for all yet maintained a rigorous inequality in relation to certain groups, should be understood in terms of the particular meanings given these words. Equality and liberty from intervention by government refer to human beings capable of reason. Only they can be granted the status of belonging to the universal human. Only they are to be regarded as autonomous persons, as individuals, and therefore able to be granted public rights and freedoms. Those who are deemed outside reason – that is, the ‘uncivilized’ or those closer to nature and therefore more animal-like – are not quite Human, and thus not capable of receiving these rights and freedoms. They – the ‘other’ – are instead to be controlled and cannot be ‘free’ within the private realm of the family (all women) and/or in public legal terms – all women and indigenous colonized men.

### **First-wave Liberal Feminism as an Inclusive Phase**

Liberal feminism from the late eighteenth century to the present day has pointed out that full social participation and public life has been denied to women. Liberal feminism asserts that the universalist claims of the Enlightenment and its descendent, Liberalism, which strove to counter the fixed social hierarchy of medieval custom and to extend social status, did not extend so far as to include women. In excluding women, who constitute half of the populations of Western societies, mainstream Liberalism is revealed as less about justice than a narrowly Western masculine political project. While Liberal feminists continue to defend what they regard as the critical spirit associated with the Enlightenment reason, they argue that mainstream Liberalism is a flawed descendent. Liberalism’s all-embracing pretensions

are built upon the assumption that only Western men matter, that men's equality in the West is equivalent to equality for all fully human beings.

Liberal feminism concentrates on women having the ability to maintain their equality through being responsible for their own actions and choices. The ideology of the liberal feminist is that women will transform society, through their own personal interactions with the opposite sex. The liberal feminist believes, "All women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society" (Brookes 11). The liberal feminist also believe that the equality of men and women can only be achieved by changes being brought through political and legal reform. They want the eradication of institutional bias and implementations of fairer laws towards women.

Some of the main issues of liberal feminism include reproductive and abortions rights, sexual harassment, voting rights, education, affordable childcare and affordable health care. The United States liberal feminists campaign for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and the Constitutional Equity Amendment. They want to ensure that men and women are treated as equals under the democratic laws that influence and govern women's lives. They also bring to the forefront the issues of sexual and domestic violence perpetrated against women. Other issues that the liberal feminists identify are disability rights, eco-feminism, family, marriage equality, mother's economical rights and media activism. Writers of liberal feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill were publishing within the first wave of feminism during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Liberal feminism imagines that women are morally and intellectually equal to men. But women lack opportunity and access to social institutions. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) was an extended defense of women as a rational being. She emphasizes that women are capable of benefiting from education and of performing the duties of citizens. Liberal feminism is further cleared as:

Liberal feminists attack the concept of unequal pay for equal work and unequal pay for comparable work and they lead many political and legal efforts to change our systems in accordance with these belief. They focus attention on providing more opportunities for choice for both women and men and point to changes that have occurred through such efforts. (Kahn-hun 268)

But liberal feminists neglect the biological and social differences between men and women. They also neglect the differences which undermine women's ability to make equal use of their political and legal rights.

One of the Liberal feminists of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Mary Wollstonecraft argued for women to be included in this masculine project. Wollstonecraft's aim was for women to be given access to education, to the liberal model of knowledge and rationality and to enter public life. She wanted women to attain what men of a similar class had in terms of opportunities and access to public activities. Wollstonecraft, in common with other Liberal feminists of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

drew on the liberal tradition's value of equality and individual freedom to argue that, just as social status at birth was no longer a legitimate basis on which to discriminate among men as liberals argued, so also sex at birth was no longer a legitimate basis on which to discriminate against women. (qtd in Beasley 27)

In other words, she did not question the model of a universal humanity based on rationality, or the universal notion of 'the individual' within mainstream.

As women for centuries have been considered weak, they have not been able to come to the ranks of men and at the same time they couldn't occupy equal status in society. Slowly and gradually, feminist movement focused to raise the female's status to keep them alive in literature. From those period women writers became more interested and valued their sexes. They did their best to be recognized through their writing. The central point in Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is that both man and women are perfect human being. There shouldn't be any matter of superiority and inferiority. They are themselves singular, separate individuals. Caroline Bird in the cover page of the book *Born Female* has inscribed that the females are exploited, brainwashed and underprivileged being by birth. Another American Journalist, Betty Frieden challenged the femininity of women of feminine natural in her book in the *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that all women were happy as housewives. German Greer has shown the women's compulsion to bear man's cruelties in her book *The Female Enoch*, (1970). Thus, it is clear that all feminist call for changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order to reduce and eventually overcome this

discrimination against women. The bottom line of all this subordination is the lack of freedom. Of course several writers, theorists and scholars have underlined this issue from varied perspectives. Marriage has become one of the bondages that restrict women from realizing her independent self. It has been defined by men as a legal authority over women. Feminists address these issues to instill a sense of human existence which is devoid of biasness.

Considering women's poor plight in the society some male writers also started writing for women's emancipation and right as done by several women writers. They feel about women's suffering and oppression from women's point of view. So, they struggled for women's right in a manner like women writers. This struggle was marked by such books as John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Margaret Fuller's *Women in Nineteenth Century* (1845). These writers in their books present very important lines of woman's thoughts. The first dominant women's voice for the right of women had come from Mary Wollstonecraft, British political thinker through her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in which she proves how essential it is for women to acquire rights. Wollstonecraft argues that women are characterized as vulnerable to sensuality and passion but men also fall victim to love and passion. Wollstonecraft points out malpractice of men i.e. to confine women to trifling employment. Jone Freedman notes Wollstonecraft as saying "I shall think that woman a working machine" (23). Another precursor who plays significant role on claiming the women's right in the modern context is Virginia Woolf. Her *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and other fictional and prose works establish her as women author on the

cultural, economical and educational disabilities. This helped raise women's consciousness against what she called the "patriarchal society" (672).

### **The Second-wave of Feminism towards Establishing Equal Rights**

The second wave of feminism during the 1960's to 1970's produced liberal feminist writers such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem and Rebecca Walker who is one of the third wave's liberal feminist writers. Critics of liberal feminism say, "Individual assumptions make it difficult to see ways in which underlying social structures and values disadvantage women" (Brookes 11). They state that even if a woman is no longer dependent on an individual man, they will still be living in a patriarchal state. Thus institutional changes alone are insufficient to give women equality in society.

By the second wave of Feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, most women in Western countries had gained basic social and political rights such as the vote after considerable social dispute. The new 'women's movement' gave rise to a new form of Liberal feminism. Activists like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem in the USA and Beatrice Faustin Australia exemplified this new Liberal feminism. They were crucially involved in the emergence of new reform-oriented women's organizations such as NOW (National Organisation of Women) in the USA and WEL (Women's Electoral Lobby) in Australia. They argued that despite most gaining formal rights, women remained confined to the domestic and were still subject to many legal and customary constraints which significantly hindered their ability to access public life and its opportunities as men did. The public worlds of politics, business and the professions still remained gendered. Relatively, second-wave Liberal

feminism asserted that women continued to be marked as lesser, because they were judged as women and only secondly as individual human beings, whereas men were still more likely to be judged individually. This meant that women “continued to be discriminated against, not on the basis of merit but on the basis of their sex” (qtd in Beasley 29). This viewpoint amounted to a development of first-wave arguments, like those of Wollstonecraft, supporting women’s entry into the male world of public life.

Liberal feminism, from its earliest forms to now, may be understood as focusing upon the elimination of constraints facing women and gaining equal civil rights for women as public citizens. Today this focus remains an important aspect of the public face of feminism. It is crucial to public campaigns regarding childcare, maternity leave and flexibility in waged working hours among others, which aim to make workplaces more ‘family friendly’, or perhaps more accurately more ‘parent, relationship and community friendly’. Provisions like childcare are designed to assist women in juggling their continuing greater responsibilities for domestic and childcare labour with waged work in ways that lessen the impact of this ‘double load’ on women’s public participation. The orientation of such political interventions is overall to assimilate women more comfortably into a basically masculine model of social life without much altering the discrepancies between the existing differential roles of men and women. Women are assisted in fitting into workplace priorities, rather than fundamentally confronting gender inequities in public and domestic life. This orientation towards assimilation rather than significant reform is also revealed in the Liberal feminist concern to reverse women’s under-



representation in various areas of public life, especially those associated with higher status, economic reward and authority.

Second-wave Liberal feminism has tended to extend the more 'welfarist' version of mainstream Liberalism and, as such, counters the marked individualism of most of its forms. This second-wave approach develops the welfares strand within mainstream Liberalism in terms of advancing a sense of collective or social responsibility and a marked attention to social justice. The collective and social justice political programme of this form of Liberal feminism is evident in its focus upon overcoming discrimination against women as a class or group. It is also evident in the attention given to repealing or reforming social obstacles to women's public participation.

The emphasis on improving women's legal and political position as a group in second-wave Liberal feminism, while undercutting the individualism characteristic of mainstream Liberalism, nevertheless continued to be firmly oriented towards enabling women to become like men. Hence, even second-wave Liberal feminism's concern with collective politics, with women as a class/group, is strategic and temporary rather than long-term. Its political aim remains recognizably Liberal – that is, to enable women to achieve the status of autonomous 'individuals' in public life as equals of men and as equally capable of public participation.

More recently, a number of usually younger feminists have criticized this practical political collectivism with its focus on obstacles and discrimination/oppression against women. These 'third-wave' Liberal feminists (sometimes called 'post-feminists') argue that the 1960s and 1970s

women's movement and those which continue to adhere to its agenda are inclined to "overestimate social obstacles and are disinclined to admit women's own responsibility for their lives and status" (Beasley 30). Third-wave Liberal feminists, some of whom are sometimes described as 'anti-feminist' instead argue that women must take individual responsibility and not hide behind a group status as 'victims'. This amounts to a strong, indeed thoroughgoing, return to the individualism of mainstream Liberalism. Such writers may still be viewed as occupying a feminist position insofar as they still assume and advocate the equality of men and women but their explanation for women's inequality resides more in individuals, and in particular in individual women, than in social discrimination. In the work of some third-wave writers like that of Katie Roiphe (1994) or Rene Denfeld (1995), this analysis amounts to women-blaming but in others like Naomi Wolf there remains a greater recognition of women as collectively subject to discrimination.

### **Third-wave Liberal feminism: Move towards Empowering Women**

In Naomi Wolf's books on beauty and motherhood, *The Beauty Myth* (1990) and *Misconceptions* (2001) respectively, she devotes considerable attention to the social obstacles women face and, in typical Liberal feminist style, she urges social reform of these obstacles. Nevertheless, like other third-wave Liberal feminists, she also focuses upon empowering individuals. Her political programme as well as her political aim is about individuals. She celebrates the autonomous individual in traditional Liberal terms and criticizes what she calls "victim feminism" for saddling women with an "identity of powerlessness" (Beasley 33). Naomi Wolf suggests that women

should seize the power that is on offer. For Wolf this appears as a relatively simple matter, perhaps as much as anything question of attitude, a matter of will. She argues that seeing “competition, ambition and aggression as male and somehow evil undermines women’s quest for autonomy and self-determination” (Beasley 34). Her ‘power feminism’ celebrates meritocratic social hierarchy, personal responsibility, public success and the individual. This paean to social mobility is also evident in more recent writings which return to the problem of obstacles for women but remain up-beat about women as individual subjects, as active agents of change – especially personal change. Personal individual change flows on to a collective result. In her rather traditional reiteration of Liberal conceptions of power and the self, empowered/emancipated individual women can alter power relations. There is virtually no reference to the state or other social institutions in the analysis, but rather a focus on the spreading impact of empowered individuals who take control of their lives. Hence, she says in *Misconceptions* (2001) that the greatest loss for many new mothers is the loss of self.

Naomi Wolf specifically locates her ‘power feminism’ as an extension of the liberal feminism of nineteenth-century thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft. In common with Wollstonecraft and most Liberal feminists, she is little concerned with class or money or race, and appears primarily focused on the problems of women like herself – that is, white, educated, middle-class young women. She encourages women, for example, to form ‘power groups’ to pool their resources in the way men do. Like all liberal feminists, she seeks to incorporate women and feminism into capitalism. Her

vision of 'power feminism' indeed appears itself to be a capitalist commodity. Wolf remarks: "I propose specific strategies to make pro-woman action into something that is effective, popularist, inclusive, easy, fun and even lucrative" (qtd in Beasley 36).

For Wolf this has not proved to be a peculiar claim. This kind of approach, with its emphasis on self-improvement and marketing, has a peculiarly North American tinge which becomes perhaps most strongly evident when her notion of Feminism's future is linked to particularly North American conceptions of individual liberty. According to Karen Lehrman, Wolf celebrates 'gun ownership among women as a sign of progress beyond victimhood' (qtd in Beasley 36). Nevertheless, the enthusiastic self-help and inspirational tone of her work, combined with its readability, has often been galvanizing and highly effective in showing women in an increasingly conservative political climate what feminism might mean to them individually.

### **Feminist Resistance**

Although majority of the women in the world have kept quiet on matters of male chauvinism, some women have raised their voice against oppressive patriarchal values and practices. Their voice, raised from the minority and margin, is a resistant voice. In order to make that voice more organized and united against male prejudice, feminist movement emerged. They have already organized conference, mass demonstrations and agitations.

Feminist writers advocated the female's equal rights with male through their works. They have tried to resist all kinds of discrimination and violence meted out them through their writing which has already been

discussed. As from philosophers to common men, all have shown discriminatory behaviours towards women on the grounds of weaker feminine body. They regard women's body as inferior and weak. Now modern feminists have attempted to counter this claim. So, in the emergent feminist theory, the body becomes a central focus of more practical concerns, which led to a more positive theorization. Despite an initially widespread emphasis in the need for women to escape the relations of reproduction, the reproductive body of female became a site for the reconceptualization of the feminine. First the female quality to give birth is their power which men lack Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price write:

The uniquely female capacity to give birth 'naturally' has been taken up as the center of women's power, simultaneously to be jealously guarded against the incursions of biotechnology, and celebrated in its own right. In the case of both sexuality and reproduction, the body retains something of its uncomfortable status as a place of ambush, of its vulnerability male power, and get it grounds an affirmation of the feminine that (4)

In addition, from many feminists, the maternal body has come to figure the claim that woman have a “unique ethical sense that lays stress on caring, relationality and responsibility – an ethical sense that is more adequate not simply to women themselves but to all humanity” (4). This proves that women's ability in general to menstruate, to develop another body unseen within their own, to give birth, and to lactate is enough to suggest an unusual and unique power through which women can resist male power.

If we study Foucault's power relationship, we get enough insight in order to understand and interpret feminism as body politics. As Foucault holds that power operators through multiple networks, prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity are maintained, not through physical restraint and coercion, but through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to the norm. Bordo quotes Foucault:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself. (253)

Though power is not seemingly held by anyone, it is, in fact, held by some in disguise. This helped promote male dominance and female subordination, so much of which, in a modern western context, is reproduced voluntarily, through self-normalization to everyday habits of masculinity and femininity. Here Foucault's ideas are central in self-normalization of daily habits for women. Bordo gives examples of eating disorders as arising out of and reproducing non-native feminine practices of our culture. She further writes: "These are practices which train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time being experienced in terms of 'power' and control" (253). Bordo is for subverting all this and for self-correcting to norms.

Foucault emphasized the fact that power relations are never seamless, but always generating new forms of culture and subjectivity, and new ways for potential resistance to emerge. He came to sex that where there is power,

there is always resistance. So, if we take Foucault's insight, prevailing norms have transformative potential. Bordo sees resistant power liberating power in women's docile bodies. She writes:

While it is true that we may experience the illusion of 'power' while actually performing as 'docile bodies' ... it is also true that our very 'docility' can have consequences that are personally liberating and/or culturally transforming. So, for example, the woman who goes on a rigorous weight-training programme in order to achieve a currently stylish look may discover that her new muscles also enable her to assert herself more forcefully at work ... 'feminine' decorativeness may function 'subversively' in professional contexts which are dominated by highly masculinist norms. Modern power relations are thus unstable; resistance is perpetual and hegemony precarious. (254)

Deconstruction has been helpful in pointing to the many-sided nature of meaning; for every interpretation, there is always a reading 'against the grain'. Foucault has been attractive to feminists for his later insistence that cultural resistance is ubiquitous and perpetual. An initial wave of Foucauldian-influenced feminism had seized on concepts such as 'discipline', 'docility', 'normalization' and 'bio-power' whereas a second postmodern wave has emphasized 'intervention' 'contestation', 'subversion', Bordo elaborates:

The first wave, while retaining the 'old' feminist conception of the 'colonized' female body, sought to complicate that discourses insufficiently textured, good guys/bad guy's

conception of social control. Postmodern feminism, on the other hand, criticizes both the old and discourse and its reconstruction for over-emphasizing such control, for failing to acknowledge adequately the creative and resistant responses that continually challenge and disrupt it. (254)

From this postmodern perspective, both the earlier emphasis on women's bodies as subject to 'social conditioning' and the later move to 'normalization', underestimate the unstable nature of subjectivity and the creative agency of individuals. In this sense, the dominant discourses which define femininity are continually allowing for the eruption of 'difference', and even the most subordinated subjects are therefore continually confronted with opportunities for resistance, for making meanings that oppose or evade the dominant ideology. So, postmodern feminism appreciates for the creative 'powers' of female bodies to resist the grip which male systemically tighten on the female bodies.



### **III. Rachel's Passive Resistance in *Ordinary Love*: Textual Analysis**

Jane Smiley's *Ordinary Love* relates the story of the impoverished woman, Rachel Kinsella's ordeal that she has been through at the hands of her "demanding husband" Pat who is obviously a representative of oppressive patriarchy in the so-called free American society (45). Though she does not tell us about her husband's open discriminatory attitude towards her before she deserted him, she provides us with abundant references that show that she has been treated as an inferior being, her voice has always been silenced, her individuality neglected and she has been always kept under her husband's control. He has treated her as a commodity to be consumed at his will, rather than showing love and affection as a human being. Pat is a doctor by profession. As a pediatrician with an international reputation for his research, he is too absorbed in his own affairs to pay steady attention to his family. As a result, Rachel leaves her husband and chooses her own individual and independent course of her life. So, the thesis argues that her action is not an escapement; rather it is a weapon of resistance against the patriarchy which has subordinated women, though Rachel does not act in a radical way.

#### **Rachel's Free and Independent Life as a Result of her Resistance**

Instead of keeping mum over what has happened to her, Rachel has been vocal about her life that she spent with Pat. She very candidly speaks her heart and mind to her children, which also reflects her objection against patriarchy. Otherwise, it generally happens that women keep mum however much suffering they undergo at the hands of males. The way she relates the story of her life is significant in this connection as she tells it from her first

person narrative. While giving an account of her sons and daughter's life, Rachel ironically calls herself the “font of wisdom about babies that they think I am now my hip was made for carrying an infant; I could thread my way among toys and toddlers without stumbling” (6). This shows how male ideology has relegated women to the role of child-bearing and caring machine. And “they think I am now” refers to her children who are convinced by the ideology that a woman's role is only limited to reproduction and care (7).

Rachel has abandoned the role as a subordinate being as she now lives in her own house after parting with her husband. She wants to promote her individuality and she loves the house very much as she meticulously scrubs it. She takes pride in the fact that she has bought it with her own hard-earned money. She says:

After buffing the floor, I go in to the bathroom and scour the tub and the sink. I love this house. I used to drive past it everyday on my work, and then it came up for sale, and I bought it. It is a four-bedroom Colonial Revival, on a huge corner lot, with a wraparound porch downstairs and a second story walk-out balcony, too much for a single woman, but just enough, for me. I think of it as my ‘acreage.’ Here alone, the way I usually am, I appreciate the largeness of its peace – no grandeur, but plenty of roomy quite. There are three chestnut trees in the yard that must be indestructible, since there aren't three chestnuts so close together anywhere else in the state. (6-7)

Rachel's description of her house not only explains the largeness of the house in terms of physicality, but also in terms of freedom and autonomy the house provides her with. It gives her space as she is the sole owner of the house. That is why she thinks of it as her 'acreage'. However at the same time her house reminds her of the time when her husband had sold their old house and bought a new house which Rachel was not allowed visiting. So, as she turns toward the kitchen in her house, an "ancient wave of terror" seems to unroll from her head downward (5). She knows exactly where the terror comes from. When her elder child Ellen was ten and the twins, Joe and Michael were five, Pat had sold the house without telling her and he had taken the children abroad without asking her, causing her great sorrow. Rachel recollects:

The morning I saw them for the first time in almost a year, this terror was so strong that I staggered from one side of the walk to the other as I approached his new house. I know they were watching from the window. I was trying with all my concentration to walk normally, but I was literally unbalanced by the prospect of seeing them. There are things we can do in our family – eat peacefully, lend money, confide – but reunions are fraught with echoes. (8)

This above passage exposes the treatment meted out to Rachel as a wife to Dr. Pat. But the last sentence explains her freedom that she has gained after parting with her husband. The happy and cheerful memories and moments that she shares with her sons and daughters was once very distant and wishful thought while she was living with Pat. There is no uneasy and restricted

atmosphere between the mother, sons and daughters now as Rachel says, "We try to maintain a light, ironic atmosphere around home" (9). She really finds her present life happy with her children helping her with her household works and those living away making a call from time to time and paying a visit to her. She plans a picnic with her children in "Eagle Point Park" which symbolically suggests a higher place with a higher aim (12). This represents greater autonomy and power. She remarks: "Eagle Point Park is one of my favourite places, if there is something I have been looking forward to . . . it is this pleasure" (37). This shows Rachel's quest for freedom from patriarchal rules. As she spends her time with her children now, Rachel brings to her memory the past joy with her twin children:

I loved having twins, even though there were three children under five years old already running around the place. We lived in a huge old house on five acres of ground. My favourite moment of the day was in the morning, when I would be lying in bed, nursing the twins, one on each side, and then the other children would come and climb under the covers, and the dogs, too. I would be buried in flesh and noise all thoughts scattered. We were twenty-seven, and drunk with the immensity of the world we had already made. (13)

Though she describes her delight at the beginning of her family life with her small children, Rachel casts some doubts over her future as she was too much involved in physical activities like taking care of children and playing with them. What all this suggests is her search for own independence from every bondage.

### **Rachel's Recollection of her Husband, Pat's Domination**

Rachel describes her husband, Pat as having bossy and conceited nature, who never compromised with his family on anything. He demanded strict discipline and dignity from his family. Rachel reacts:

No matter how busy he was, Pat insisted on a nightly family dinner, and he was sparkling at the table. No matter how young the children were, he addressed them with arresting hypothesis, pointed questions, opinions about their opinions. He was wooing them. He wooed me the same way. And, really, it was hard to take your eyes from his face, whether you were his child or his wife. (14)

This shows his male chauvinistic nature, which Rachel disapproves. Even the way Pat behaved with children was uncanny. The children used to call him "the fourth man," and later Pat became "the controversial fifth man," as Joe and Ellen still sometimes refer to him as "five" (20).

When it became too much for Rachel to live together with Pat, she chooses a writer, Ed as her lover who she thinks is a liberal and sympathetic towards females. She says: "My passion for Ed . . . above his kitchen table was a map of the world, and it was covered with pins, designating places he had visited . . . I'm sure what I really wanted was not to love him but to be him" (52-53). This clearly reveals the fact that Rachel has been confined and limited to traditional women's role of taking care of house and children, which she thinks, has obstructed her from creating her separate identity, for which she rebels against her husband. However, Rachel knew that her relationship with Ed would be a "temporary shelter" in the sense that her

association with him would inspire her to become an independent and broad-minded woman like him (46). At the same time Rachel has placed some trust on Ed, as she thinks, he is a sensitive writer. Smiley writes how Rachel has been able to manage time between her responsibility towards her family and Ed. She writes: "With five children, a demanding husband, a mother in ill health, and a major remodeling, I couldn't possibly have had time for him; I made time for him" (45). This shows how Rachel tries to make compromises with Ed in order to promote her individuality.

Rachel's life as a wife to Pat has been really suffocating for her as she accepts, "It seemed like if I gave up and went to sleep, the walls would cave in and all sorts of darkness would just flood me" (29). Though Rachel, in retrospect, appreciates Pat's accomplishments as a diagnostician which she now regards as "nicer and humane," but still not "the point" (24). This explains of Pat as a robot rather than a human being who has to be sensitive to other's needs and feelings. Rachel further remarks about Pat:

Pat is not happy, not at peace, not possessed of much self-knowledge, not even rich, for a specialist. He has what he could have had with only average intelligence – tow wives, nine children, a sense that there is something missing – the mind is a wheel, like a paddlewheel, turning slowly, with a kind of ordered vastness, bigger than it seems to be, going deeper, . . .  
(24)

Rachel discloses the fact that she and her husband "did not part peacefully" twenty years ago (44). The time of their parting was a Saturday night during the Johnson Administration. She describes herself as the "protagonist and

victim" and her husband as "antagonist and perpetrator" (46). She relates the incident that on the day of their parting she faced her husband boldly putting her hands on "her hips as if to fight Pat (46). In a challenging manner, she recollects saying: "Pat, I have been having a relationship with Ed Stackhouse, down the road, and I am not going to stop. It is a sexual relationship and a friendship, too" (46). Rachel has gathered up her courage to defy her husband though she seemed less resolute, passive after disclosing her relationship with Ed. She writes: "I felt myself relent, as if my vertebrate were unhooking, and I opened my mouth to say something less resolute, when he slapped me so hard across the face that I fell to the month-old flooring" (47). She does not reciprocate with any blow. In order to suggest the tense atmosphere, tremendous thunderstorm, with pounding rain, thunder crashing and lightning striking almost continuously" (47). There was so much noise from the storm that it was very difficult to "hear the sirens warning of nearby tornadoes" (47). This refers to the symbolic storm in their life. Rachel recollects that that evening Pat took her into the kitchen and said, "his hands balled into fists at his sides . . . he would kill me. As if to make sure that I believed him, he knocked me down again. I believed him. I thought, though, that if I agreed to what he wanted, and gave him time to cool off, he would accept a new life" (47). This shows how patriarchy has kept women under its control, and women are not supposed to defy men. But in this novella, Rachel is not ready to be subordinated because she does not live with her husband putting up with her husband's ill-treatment.

After the incident, Rachel feels "too proud to call Ed Stackhouse" though she suspects that he would disapprove her (47). But Rachel tells us the hard fact that Ed really rejects her:

The next day he called me and said that we couldn't be seeing each other anymore, even to talk. I had admired the single-minded focus that allowed Ed to write a novel about Alaska in the morning and a book about the white House in the afternoon, so there was a way in which I had to admire the fact he never spoke to me again. (50)

This reveals that males are never ready to help and support women in distress however educated they may be. They only exploit women and take advantage of them and their situation.

When Pat does not allow the mother and children to meet and takes all his children to London without her consent, Rachel goes through a very hard time trying to find an access to her children. She works at a University and has to use up thousand dollars on the lawyer she had to hire to find the children and get them back; her joint bank accounts are also closed.

After the break-up with her husband, Rachel "does not feel to be humbled at all," though she accepts that she has been reduced to a few clear positions (51). Though she acknowledges the fact that her life has been difficult economically, one of the relief at the end of married life, she believes, "the dawn of privacy, another was resolve upon a professional degree and a good job," which is a real weapon of resistance against her husband and the patriarchy for that matter (51). The clarity of this goal and the fact that she has been "dead," (passive) to the past gives her one



advantage over Pat, who was in turmoil of longing and fury over what had been lost and how to make it again with another woman. At this, Rachel describes Pat as a "wily and powerful and adversary, smarter than I was, as always. I had been foolish to tell him about Ed, foolish to drive away without children, foolish to hire the inexperienced lawyer that I could afford, foolish to underestimate Pat's desire for revenge" (51). This quote refers to Rachel's tendency towards passivity to put up with male domination. She thinks that she should not have told Pat about her relationship because she is afraid that Pat would kill her as the males are all in all in our society. She recollects the threatening act of Pat in the lawyer's office:

In the lawyer's office one time, he lunged across the table at me, and his lawyer, a burly ex-rower, had to grab him by the coat and then the shoulders and pull him back. I stood there without blinking, small and hard and ready to be killed. By the time I was ready for anything, as ferociously attentive as a marten or a mink – one of those small, vicious northern animals that can never be tamed. For courage I reminded myself that I had caught him unawares once. (51)

This shows that Rachel does not show any sign of fear in the face of her belligerent husband. She tries to make herself bold by comparing herself with a "martin or a mink," which are supposed to be very difficult to tame. Moreover, she even reminds herself of her husband's wrongdoing so as to embolden herself in denouncing the atrocities of patriarchy.

The children are spoilt and displaced at the hands of Pat who, as representative of patriarchy, is driven by ego to take the responsibility of the children and finally, his "passion ends" (52). Rachel further writes:

And Pat's passion ended. It got increasingly convenient for him to let me have more of the children. Joe, whiny then, shy and hard to please, lived with me most of the time. Daniel went through a period of bad behaviour – low grades, smoking marijuana, drinking and driving – and was shipped to me in a hurry. Annie spent her sullen stages at my house. With Ellen, Pat was locked in battle. When she made herself horrible enough, he sent her to me. (52)

In this way, one after the other Pat sends the children to Rachel. The fact that she has been a mother for years now the years have given her as many habits and predilection as her childhood did. She says that the bodies in the house, whose presence comforts her "are the bodies of my children; what comforts me is not my own safety anymore, but theirs" (57). This shows how, unlike the father, a mother becomes concerned for her children. She has learned over the years to "embrace the possible and not to mourn for the rest" (57). This shows Rachel does not regret leaving her husband and house, and she is ready to face any challenges that would come her way.

### **Rachel as a Conscious and Mature Woman**

Her long struggle for her individuality makes Rachel a mature and conscious woman. Her many years of relationship with her husband has taught her many things and made her resolute about her desire for female identity and freedom for which she has sacrificed so much. She firmly

believes that if one has a strong desire about something there is "always room for it," as she thinks that desire is the only motivation. She gives her own example of how she has managed to lead her life with her household chores and a bunch of kids and a demanding husband and a lover on the side. She further tells Ellen proudly how she describes herself as a strong woman who "goes without lunch, goes without noontime aerobics, and picks up her kids half an hour later at the day-care center, and is rightly alert" (82). She does not hesitate to relate her ordeal to her children as she believes that it is imperative to let her children know her plight. She describes herself as another woman who is struggling to secure her identity by resisting male domination. She writes:

A new life is coursing through her unlike any previous life – this time she is married, and what she feels is compounded equally of terror and desire. I could say she knows what I know but didn't know twenty years ago, that both the terror and the desire will be fulfilled, and equally. This woman is suddenly so real to me that thinking of her here in the dark has an odd effect. I think, why not? Why not tell them? They are grown up now, have had passions of their own. (82)

Rachel goes on talking about her desire to her son Joe, who like other men, dismisses her for it. She says that "men dismiss women whom they don't imagine to be objects of desire" (83). She further says how she acknowledges the men as having desire that is why she has let Pat remarry a beautiful young woman, and produce more young children in his forties. But "my great passion was buying a house" which symbolizes a means of security and

identity (83). She candidly tells Joe that "Ed was the third point of the triangle that ended my marriage with your father" (83). Again she tells him the reason why she established relationship with Ed. The reason is symbolic as it is associated with her freedom. She says: "Yes. I met him because he had an old horse that used to ride bareback up and down the lane. I used to ride bareback in Nebraska, so once we got to talking about horses. He was a writer, though" (84). Her desire in riding horse symbolizes her high ambition of becoming a free and independent person. She further remarks how Ed impressed her:

Very light dappled gray, yes. Ed used to laugh at every thing I said. He would stop, and I would stop what I was doing, and we would talk. Then we talked longer. His eyes were a strange colour, kind of Federal blue. He'd been everywhere, even though he was still in his twenties. (84)

This shows that Rachel discloses that her relationship with Ed was on the basis of equality. Both of them talked freely and openly. There was no sense of restraint or superiority and inferiority. This was what she was deprived of her husband. She says:

It was the sense of having been drawn in and drawn in, encouraged to have trust, to open up. Ed loved to talk. For me to talk. That's mostly what we did. And then it was suddenly gone. It was the mystery that made me want to kill myself, not exactly loss. That feeling of opening up got awfully entwined with the feeling of mysterious danger. But look at it – I let myself go,

and then I got punished for it. By Ed and by your father too.

(87)

As a conscious woman, Rachel loves frankness and forthrightness. So, she states the fact that how her quest for freedom has been thwarted by the two men, her husband and Ed.

When Rachel tells him the reason for her break-up with his father, Joe asks her why she told him about her relationship with Ed. At this she says that she has been contemplating over it for a long time as to what and how to explain it. She has been considering different explanations. At first, she cannot speak out her true mind and heart due to the fear of the patriarchal values. She goes through a dilemma as to what to say. She says, "I suppose all the explanations I've considered over the past twenty years seem trivial, in light of the consequences. I begin the self-justification – I didn't know what – I thought – but I can't bear it. I look from one to another" (86). But eventually, she makes up her mind to resist her husband's dominance over her and decides to tell him frankly. She says, "Finally, I wanted him [her husband] to know I wasn't his. Such a little thing, with them looking at me like this" (86). Thus, though submissive at the beginning, Rachel revolts against her husband.

She cannot say how her story has affected her children, but having told it makes her "hollow fear" (87). It is the way that she has constrained it all these years that, she believes, has "given her strength," and now it seems to her that "she has risked that" (88). Rachel is a woman who proves to be a strong woman who has risked her life. She then tells her son, Daniel that her

husband Pat behaved differently before they got married. She finally says how their sex life was:

Didn't I know he was like this, unrestrained and blind to the potential to consequence of his own action? Before we got married, he would make love to me anywhere- in the kitchen, against the refrigerator, with the possibility that his roommate would walk in at any time, often in his car, sometimes right beside the highway, where he had pulled over in the middle of the trip, more than once on the floor of his lab, with the door unlocked. He was passionate. I didn't protest. I though I was irresistible. After we had children, I said over and over, always laughing. (96)

This passage reveals that how men treat women as an object to be consumed. It shows that just like the object loses its usefulness over a long span of time due to frequent use, women lose luster and men do not take any interest in them and turn to other younger girls. She further says that when she stepped out from between father and children, not knowing, but not knowing, either, she "left them to their own device," (97). Rachel tells her children about her bold and mature decision in leaving both the men who did not treat her as their equal. She recollects:

Here is something I remember about Ed. A year went by, and I fell out of love with him, and another year went by, and another, and finally he moved away. In those three years I saw him from time to time, and every time I became nothing again. Even after I realized that he had intended none of this, that his

cruelty was compounded of fear and shame, not disapproval and antagonism, his presence negated me. Damaged, he damaged me. A small thing. Smaller by far, than the damage I did to Pat, than the damage we did to our children. (97).

Though Ed did not directly do anything to Rachel, he could not live up to her trust that she had placed on him as a lover. As he did not support her through the thick and thin, she felt neglected by Ed. She feels that he has damaged her life as she came to him by abandoning her husband. Rachel now lives with her children who are grown up, and she relates her life story to them clearly and honestly. In this way, Rachel reflects on the situation of herself, her children and the history of her children in her absence, at the mercy of their father. While relating her incompatible relationship and with her husband and Ed, she boldly appreciates the steps she took to pursue her individual course of her life. She abandoned both of the men as they did not treat her as their equal. This reflects her rebellious nature against patriarchy though she does not rebel in a radical way. She just does not agree to be treated as an inferior being by her husband. She just does not want to work at home by confining herself to traditional household works. She wants to work outside as men and create her own space. This is how Rachel resists male dominance. Hence, her resistance is sort of passive resistance as she refuses to conform to the patriarchal values represented by her husband.

#### IV. Conclusion

In Jane Smiley's novella *Ordinary Love* the protagonist, Rachel Kinsella, who is compelled to become submissive and passive receiver by patriarchy at first, becomes more conscious about her situation with her demanding husband. As it becomes difficult to live with her husband, she leaves him, children and home. This research argues that her abandonment is not an escapement; rather it is a powerful means of resistance to the existing norms and values of the patriarchy. Therefore, her seeming silence is not an acceptance but a weapon of resistance. In this sense, she becomes a liberal feminist, who remaining within the status quo, seeks equality with men.

According to liberal feminists, all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society. Issues important to liberal feminists include reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting, education, 'equal pay for equal work,' affordable childcare, affordable health care, and bringing to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women. This is what the protagonist Rachel advocates in *Ordinary Love*.

In the novella, Smiley first presents Rachel as a passive woman who is eclipsed by her powerful husband, Pat. As the story progresses, Smiley portrays Rachel as being gradually assertive about her rights by defining for herself the workings of her mind, which provides her with an acceptable degree of autonomy, but it happens to her at the cost of integrated family life. Her move reflects her resistance to the patriarchal values, though it is not a radical revolt.



Rachel's recollection of her past suffering and struggle for securing her rights is a significant revelation of how she has borne the brunt of domination at the hands of her husband. She frankly speaks her heart and mind to her grow-up children who act as her close companions. She tells them about the circumstances under which she left her husband, who was very unloving and demanding. This shows her courage to revolt against her husband though it is not a radical one. She refuses to be treated as a secondary being by her husband. She wants to lead her life as an independent individual. So, her resistance is sort of passive resistance as she declines to conform to the patriarchal values.

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