

Chapter -3

The Vigour of the Marginalised

Even the passage of centuries since Indian culture has formed, it does not make any permutation to women's hard fate, atleast in India, and that is what Manju Kapur is at pains to manifest. The anticipated fate of Indian middle –class women, the monotony of their lives, their helplessness to move away from the fixed patterns of cogitation, their absolute submissiveness to the male members of the family, their unfulfilled cravings and desires, their inner battles and agonies-all this find manifestation in her novels. The major feminist themes and the embodied trends of womanhood denoted in the novels of Kapur comprise the chief concern of this chapter.

In the Indian social context, gender is enormously commanding and forceful. This praxis is deeply accepted by both men and women. The traditions, norms, culture and customs prevailing in Indian society leads men to consider themselves as superior and powerful, culminating women to believe that they are mere inferior creations, who are not contemplated to play any role outside the traditionally created ones like being a wife to her husband, a mother to her children and a caretaker of the house. For centuries, Indian mindset failed to recognise anything unnatural in the dictions of Manu who demands the dependency of women of all age and time on the males of their families. The religion, education and literature of all times propogated and promoted this sort of prevailing sexist ideologies in an irresistible manner highly influencing the thoughts, words and deeds of Indian women. These ideologies succeeded in creating an effigy of Indian female as always smiling and cheerful, ready to serve and please and never attempt to cross the threshold of feminity constructed by the powerful patriarchy as Tagore quotes in his lines: “You are a woman; by serving you must workship, and by serving you must rule” (Maurua 154).

According to Indian tradition, a woman must be obedient to her husband in every possible respect. She bestows the duty to make the marital home pleasant for him. She must cook the meals, wash the dishes and take care of the children. She is not permitted to enquire about money and must be available to her husband's every demand. But scenario has changed and women no longer believe in the life that should be lead in this narrow fashion. Education and financial stability provides her, own stand and identity. Visibly there is a change in the perspectives and women have started accrediting themselves as the co-equals of men. Even though the hope of the complete execution of feminism has been washed away in the present social milieu, the relationship between man and woman becomes one of structured interrelationship. Still woman has to work for her liberation without resigning herself to her identity. Gender-equality still remains a myth.

As per Indian tradition, the mind set of both men and women are tuned to treat women as objects for the use and pleasure of others, conspicuously for men and never consider them as individuals with their own rights and desires in life. The Indian system of patriarchy magnificently presents the roles and goals of men and minimises the relvance of women in all walks of life.

Many feminist writers through their works foreground the violence, sexual abuse and harassment against women and try to provide awareness among the people. Many laws have been passed by the Government of India in protection to women. They are intended to protect them from domestic or social violence but only the passing of the laws and ladies inclination towards feminism fails to bring rapid changes and equate them to male flock. Until the orthodox attitude of the society changes, the laws may remain useless. Despite the efforts to secure women through laws, violence against them still persists and sexual harassment continues.

The National Crime Bureau has recorded an increase in number of violent crimes against women in recent years. The very incident of Nirbhaya that occurred at the capital city itself proclaims the insecurity that women face inspite of the enactment of bundles of laws for her protection. Despite of the extra ordinary proliferation of laws, violence against women including rape, sexual abuse, female foeticide and sexual exploitation still happens on a large scale. Not only the Delhi incident, the past decade has witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of major violent crimes against women.

On one side these types of violent incidents persist, and on the other, women have covered a long distance towards equality. Feminist movement has played a significant role in this regard, and made the womenfolk bold and brave striving to change the traditional social discrimination against women. The first woman Indian President Prathiba Patil has observed in this regard: “Beginning with their determined efforts in the days before our freedom, today, our women continue to strive to transform the social order in a more just and equal manner” (Sdhiri 10).

The more responsible for such a pitiable condition of women is none other than the concepts and attitude of the traditional family in our society. Prejudiced parents start their indiscrimination right from the time of birth. The rejoice that brings to the mind due to the birth of a girl child varies from that of a boy child. Prejudiced parents do not allow their daughters to have equal status like sons. Girls are not allowed to have the same privilege like boys. Even the rules for behaviour for girls are different from those boys. In this century also there are families in our society that prohibit the girl child from going to schools as their parents do not think that their education is essential for development.

A very recent report of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) is very shocking which reveals the discriminatory attitude of parents against their daughters. “NSSO

reveals shocking discrimination by families against girls on the issue of their education. This attitude continues outside too and prevents women from getting remunerative work, and equal wages. The denial of education to girls begins early within the families” (Rai 2).

The pain of this inequality, suppression and exploitation faced by women from the conservative society and their own families are manifested in various ways. At the same time as we are becoming proud of the extraordinary achievements of Indian women like Sunita Williams, Sania Mirza, Kiran Mazumdar and Kiran Bedi, a large number of working women on the other side face sexual harassment and physical violence both at their homes and in their working places. They are denied equal status and justice. They are not valued in the decision making process like men or a few privileged women like Sonia Gandhi, Mayawati, Sushama Swaraj and others.

Traditional Indian authors represented or misrepresented the actual female assumptions and affairs in their works and on the other hand, utilised literature as an efficacious way to transcend the patriarchal expectations and challenges on women. Subsequently, it leads to the publication of works that propagate highly idealised and augmented perception of womanhood in Indian traditional fiction.

The representation of these conventional ideas of womanhood highlights the borderlines for their movements hindering their expansion beyond the orthodox elucidation of idealised femininity. The Indian women writers who identified the hidden ideological operations of patriarchy underneath the configuration of literature begin to counter through their ‘practice of resistance’ in their writings. They authentically reflect the true picture of Indian womanhood, suffering from all aspects like political, socio- psychological, economic-religious and literary oppressions.

Few male writers like Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan had revealed the pitiable

oppressed state of women of their country and sincerely argued and wished for their upliftment. In his works, *Coolie*, *Untouchable* and *Gauri*, Anand acts as a spokesperson for the oppressed.

Gauri read as “the modern version of Sita” (Bhat 37) represents a lady abandoned by her husband, later married away to a rich man by her parents; followed by the act of acceptance by her former husband who forces her to prove her chastity. At this point, *Gauri* resembles the modern empowered woman who affirms her individuality and moves away from her husband leaving him behind, heading forward to her own life.

Like other contemporary Indian feminist writers, Kapur examines the prominent patriarchal beliefs and practices prevailing in Indian culture and life style. Through various means she denounces the ideology of gender that justifies and makes natural the unequal divisions between male and female. She articulates protest in her novels for “an egalitarian society which would uphold the rights of each individual to fulfill their potential” (Gordon 264).

The recent modern Indian woman’s writing mainly deals with the inner life, feelings, emotions, thoughts and subtle interpersonal relationships of the segregated protagonists. In a culture where self-reliance and objection have often remained unfamiliar ideas, and marital bliss and the woman’s role at home is a central focus, one can sense the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement.

Similar to other growing number of women writers from India, Kapur also paints the image of the suffering but stoic woman gradually moving against conventional frontiers that has a consequential impact. Kapur is a brave woman writer who purposefully and fearlessly overturns the gender based ideologies of womanhood and generously lets her female characters to grow and be modern. In her works, she explicit over how male supremacy

suppresses feminine identity and pushes women to a state of mental enslavement.

In her novels, Kapur tracks the lives of Indian middle class women who are conditioned to the society based on gender. Middle class women of India are much empowered than their working class counter-parts, and are more advantaged economically. Their exposure to educational and professional opportunities promotes them to work outside the domestic circle. She is actually aware of the disparity between the fervent longing of these women and their actual attainment in an androcentric context.

Indian middle-class women need to face conflicting forces; the ideological concept of an ideal of womanhood and the feminist ideal of empowered women's equality and autonomy. In *Second Sex*, Beauvoir describes the condition of women as follows: "Half way between revolt and slavery, she resigns reluctantly to masculine authority" (623). The unending battle fighting in the inner conscious of Indian women protesting gender politics and their futile efforts to get indefinite victory over their own lives are very effectively articulated in the novels of Kapur.

In 1930's, R. K Narayan's novels portrayed a traditional Indian society that held men in a superior position to women. But the feminine consciousness has brought about a social change in the society and an overall concept resulting in self- fulfilment and a search for individuality for women. It paved the way to a great change in the literature produced in the English language in India in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Many novelists like Arundhati Roy, Nayantara Sahgal and Arun Joshi have taken the quest for assertiveness as one of the main themes in their novels. They formed a new school of Indian English writers confirming with a specific genre in exploring the hitherto unknown and unheard melodies and sad plights of the Indian woman. These women writers added a new dimension to Indian-English fiction with their exquisite perception of men and matters.

Their fictional works provide insights into the contemporary writing in English. Through women writer's eyes a different world is felt through which one realises the potential of human achievement. They deal with the place and position of women in Indian society and their problems and sufferings from time to time. They analyse the socio-cultural aspects, modes and values that fetches Indian women their role and image along with their efforts to achieve a mellifluous association with their surroundings. In due course, they aimed at sketching realistically Indian women's sense of resentment and their remoteness.

Even in the modern period, the Indian women are as displaced, alienated figures, ground in the mill of convention, domestic injustice and internalised tyranny, the victims of their time, of their society and of their own romantic illusions. When a woman awakens, she awakens to the absurdity of life which follows the disintegration of familiar reality. The Sisyphian myth is recreated. Helen Deutsch writes, "They (the women) often participate in violent anonymous protests and join revolutionary moments. Most of the time they are unconsciously protesting against their own fate. By identifying themselves with the socially oppressed or the non-possessing class, they take up a position against their own unsatisfying role" (298).

The post-independence Indian women novelists like Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan deal with the conflict between conventionalism and unconventionalism. Deshpande's characters like Jaya and Indu stand for equality, freedom and self-assertion. This urge for self-preservation and self-identity is termed as "list for life" by Benjamin. B. Wolman in his book *Contemporary Theories and Systems in Psychology*. The portrayal of these uncustomary attitudes undermined Indian orthodox, traditional values.

The influence of modern changes in the whole world results in an unceasing surge forward against all sorts of odds. New literary works rarely follow the set patterns. On the

contrary, it follows the “codified literary patterns on the lines of generic fiction”. This type of literary quest of the western world embellished the literary texture of the Indian English fiction too.

Difficult Daughters is a simple, yet difficult story of a middle class educated woman, Virmati. It mirrors the time, places and people of India during freedom struggle and immediately after independence. Virmati alights from an affectionate, caring and well protected family. As against the traditional practice, inspired by her sister Shakunthala, she wishes to go for further studies. It is only the start.

Man believes and acts as the centre and drives woman to periphery or to margin. This is reflected in art and culture that is prescribed by man. Beauvoir states that, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (1956) in the Indian context, she does not become ‘one’ but from the very stages before she leaves the mother’s womb, she is one. The idea that she is a girl is reinforced by innumerable tragic instances.

Various religious and other laws are formulated to brainwash women to accept the secondary and subordinate position in the society. As Beauvoir refers “even after the attainment of equality, women’s world would remain different from men’s” (42). Kapur is one among the most recent Indian feminist novelists to examine this theme but from a different perspective. Dr. B. R. Agarwal views that “their fictional milieu is the Indian tradition with its cultural and ethical values in the melting point” (239). Due to the social and potential changes, the patriarchal society in which women are assigned a secondary position is undergoing a transformation. The group of contemporary Indian women writers focuses on this change from traditional, orthodox and rigid culture to liberal, modern and unconventional standards.

In the maiden venture of Kapur, the novel *Difficult Daughters*, she attempts to explore

the sociological and psychological aspects of Indian society from the perspective of its treatment towards women. The Indian culture has been affected by the liberal education, modernisation and wide impacts of globalisation. This influence is seen not only in India but true to other nations of the world as well. *Difficult Daughters* truthfully reflects the socio-political scenario of the era. Bhgabat Nayak remarks: “Manju Kapur seems to give a tribute to country’s celebration of independence in her novel as her protagonist, Virmati is projected as a cult to impugn the set norms and taboos imposed on women in the male dominated Indian society” (Nayak 198).

The novel, *A Married Woman* traces the life of Astha from her young adulthood through her early middle years. In the process she dates with a couple of young men of her own choice and like her western counterparts, marries a man of her parent’s choice and discovers the joys of intimacy with her husband, begets children, yet grows distant from him, and struggles to become a painter. Much against the wishes of her husband and her other family members she becomes a social activist, and falls in love with a woman, and finds herself- sort of more. In the Indian context this is something very strange and unheard of in Indian fiction except in certain movies.

Like Ibsen’s Nora in *A Doll’s House*, Astha also lives in a dream world, where she has to be satisfied with the luxuries of modern society and live happily in the secure fold of a husband, home and family. The husband is the manly provider and law giver while the wife is the passive-at times mutely rebellious follower.

Astha’s life is similar to Virmati’s, the protagonist of Kapur’s first work, *Difficult Daughters*. Virmati had suffered deeply in order to be united with her love, the Professor. Geetha Dhogat says about Virmati’s marriage to the professor: “Even as she breaks from old prison, she is locked into new ones. While her relationship with the professor provides an

escape from a loveless arranged marriage, it is itself furtive and claustrophobic . . . Even years of studying and working alone do not give her the confidence to strike independent roots and grow” (64).

Astha too has to depend totally upon the husband and the family that is what is socially acceptable. But Astha’s story continues where Virmati’s has ended. The roots of traditions and conventions are deeply rooted not only in the society, but also in Astha’s “MBA foreign returned” (33) husband, so that he craves for a male offspring. When the wife informs him that the cause of bearing a male child rests on the man and not the woman, the husband is visibly annoyed at the results of having an educated woman for a wife.

Like Ibsen’s *Doll’s House*, here too the husband gives very little endearments to his wife. He is busy in framing a successful business and future for his family. “Somewhere along the way Hemanth’s attitude to Astha changed. She told herself it was only slightly, but it oppressed her” (66).

Likely she becomes adamant and conflict starts growing in Astha, distinct itself in the form of recurring migraines and then developing a distance from her husband. Managing a job and the demands of growing children, pressure at home, silent disapproval of in-laws and the attitude of a non-responsive and non-understanding husband, Astha finds an escape in her writings and her sketching. She pours her emotions into her poetry but also becomes futile as the bleakness of the poems was not appreciated by the husband. “Good heavens, Az, they are all about cages and birds, and mice, and suffering in situations that are not even clear. There is not one happy poem here” (81).

Like Desai and Deshpande, Kapur can be considered as a prose rhapsodist of female sentiments, feelings and emotions. She can also be termed as one of the most powerful forerunners of women’s emancipation movements in Indian English Literature. Through her

third novel *Home*, Kapur proves that she is very much a writer of women. In *Home*, Kapur captures women in three generations, mother-in-law, daughter-in law and granddaughter. The novel focuses basically on three female characters, Sona, Nisha and Roopa. Till the birth of a daughter, followed by a son, Sona does not get a recognition in her in-laws's family. Only after the birth of her children, the power equation changes in her life.

Nisha is a modern girl, the girl of new generation who fits herself to Showalter's second phase, The Feminist Phase. She gets exhausted by her upbringing, faces an incestuous violence during her childhood. Later during her studies, by falling in love with a low-caste boy, she compels her traditionalist family to come out of the conservative thresholds.

Rupa believes that economic independence and creativity of one's own can fill the gap of any lack in life. "Without children, Rupa had the time to start a little pickle business. Her husband encouraged her, her father-in-law helped her paste on the labels with a trembling hand, her brother-in-law (Sona's husband) helped her with his contacts among the shopkeepers of Karol Bagh . . . Rupa worked at her recipes, experimenting with new ones and expanding her repertoire" (16). Perhaps Rupa's influence is high on Nisha such that it moulds her to be the woman she turns out to be.

In Kapur's fourth novel *The Immigrant* too, she portrays the protagonists as female longing for their self-identity and liberty from the traditionalist mentality of the society. It depicts the female protagonist Nina's quest for her identity at two planes- as a female and as an immigrant. In the work, identity is depicted as a continuous journey rather than a fixed construction.

The novel, *The Immigrant* can be read as a female bildungsroman that exhibits the female protagonist as a subject in process and points out how she manages with her sub-

altern identity and identity crisis. Kapur portrays Nina's immigrant experience as an expedition of a feminine incarnation in search of her complete identity. Nina transmutes herself to be apt for the third phase of Showalter, The Female Phase. The theme of migration leads to that of self-discovery. Her journey "is a journey from self-alienation to self-identification from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence" (Kumar 39).

Difficult Daughters is a story of scuffle against superstitions for independence. It revolves around a woman Virmati, born at the edge of twentieth century in a Punjabi family. Virmati's mother Kasturi, an ever pregnant lady is also an educated one. She has given birth to eleven children, Virmati being the eldest one. Due to her mother's constant pregnancy, Virmati needs to take care of the other ten younger children. Because of executing her obligations towards the family and her ever sick mother, she loses her childhood and becomes mature in her early stage. Whenever she seeks attention from her mother, she receives the remark, "You are the eldest, if you don't see things then who will" (*Difficult Daughters* 07)? Even at the age of seventeen, she needs to care her pregnant mother and it results in the failure of her F.A Examination. In her lifetime she fails to get affection, love, care and attention from her mother. "I am tired of knitting and sewing. . . . What is all this nonsense? In Amritsar you were bad tempered because you were busy and tired, here you are bad tempered because you are idle" (*Difficult Daughters* 12).

Right from the beginning of the story till the end, Virmati is presented as an emotionally starved being. Changes begin to happen in her life when she falls in love with Professor Harish who is a tenant in her aunt's house with his family consisting of wife and a child.

Contiguous to the turbulent years of the Second World War and the Partition of India, Kapur realistically depicts women of three generations, Kasturi, Virmati and Ida, focusing

more on Virmati, the difficult daughter of the second generation. “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother” (*Difficult Daughters*1). This mystifying statement is made by Virmati’s only daughter, Ida, a childless divorcee.

One among the difficult daughters, Ida fails to develop an understanding with her mother Virmati during her life time. After Virmati’s death, Ida sets out on a journey into her mother’s past by piling up the fragments of memory connected to a woman that she could know and understand more. Virmati’s past had been completely elusive to Ida and through her journey, she wished to fill the critical gaps. She visits different places and meets her mother’s agnates and companions to know more about Virmati, the woman. As the narration shuttles between the present and the past along with Ida, the consciousness of the reader also commutes.

Even though Virmati is presented as an emotionally starved being, she boldly rises against the stereotypical practices to fulfill her own urges. She boldly rejects the boy whom the family has arranged for her wedding. To get rid of it, even she dares to end up her life. Thus the protagonist Virmati stands as an incipient new woman who can be categorised into the second phase of Showalter, The Feminist Phase, with her own awareness, introspection and education. She wishes to build up a life for herself and in certain moments even strives to be bold against the current social codes. Through her actions she conveys a personal vision of womanhood.

R. K. Narayan also portrays a wide array of female characters from the stereotyped to the defiant. Savitri in *The Dark Room* moves out of her house asserting: “I don’t possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father’s, her husband’s or her son’s” (Bhat 37). Walking over patriarchal norms, Virmati challenges the societal expectations to claim her individuality

and desires to achieve self-fulfilment. But an analysis of her life shows that she is a loser whose acts totally alienate her from her own family and tries to create a space for herself.

Virmati who gets blinded by her passion, fails to see things in the right perspective. She not only fails to fulfill the filial duty but also becomes a victimiser by usurping what rightly belongs to Ganga, the Professor's first wife. The final lines of the novel recapitulate Ida's rejection of Virmati, not as a mother, but as a woman. "This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore" (*Difficult Daughters* 280). Ida who struggles to be the model daughter does not have the heart to reject Virmati, the mother, but her head, the rationale, rejects her as a woman after having an insight into Virmati's past.

Astha the principal character in the novel *A Married Woman* searches her soul and her soul mate. Astha forms many relationships with different people all the while searching for her identity. Her quest for identity is a "whole new look at woman-not as the property of father, husband or son, and dependant on their bounty, but as valuable human material to be brought to full flower and full participants in her life and events" (Guruwara 91). Astha's relationship with her boyfriends and husband are all by way of looking for that one perfect soul mate. This search ultimately leads her on to one of her own kind, another woman, with whom she embarks on a secret but deeply satisfying relationship. This makes her to be enlisted under the third phase of Showalter, The Female Phase.

According to the norms of the patriarchal society, they believe that men are only powerful enough to manage money matters and that women do not need to be consulted about anything and men are the sole decision makers. But as per the education received by Astha, it provides strength for her to question such a system, to want to be treated as an equal

by her husband. However, her husband castigates her feeble worded requests vigorously.

Astha sat stunned. What kind of fool had she been to expect Hemant to understand? She had a good life, but it was good because nothing was questioned. This boat could not be rocked. She should paint that on canvas put it up on the wall, and stare at it day and night, so that its message burnt its way through her brain into her heart. This boat cannot be rocked. (*A Married Woman* 99)

In such a scenario, it is the political disruption of Ram Janmabhoomi-Babari Masjid movement that assists as a turning point in Astha's life. Her talents as a writer and narrator are recognised by a social worker, Ajaz and his encouragement helps her to grow, learn and evolve. She is attracted to him and delights in his admiration but her roots cling to her and she continues to live in nowhere till Aijaz's untimely death in a Hindu-Muslim riot, as a result of Babri-Masjid destruction, catapults her actively into peaceful movements led by the secularists. Until the emergence of that movement, Astha, unlike her name, shows little faith in herself and others connected to her devalues her and puts her behind making her failure to become strong and not allowing her completely to believe in her strength. She is "pulled by the cords of transition, on the one hand, and by her own reluctance and hesitation to act, thanks to the social conditioning, on the other" (Banerjee 29). Till then Astha makes herself a passive participant in all events concerning her. She allows life to lead her where it will, making only ineffectual denials when things go against her wishes.

Tears came to her eyes. More tears for Astha, poor thing. She was climbing a mountain, and when she reached the top her face sweating, her heart going at its fastest, all she could see was another mountain. As she gazed at the jagged edged, her head began to ache, and the blood that was pounding in her heart

obliged by moving to her head and pounding there. (*A Married Woman* 78)

After the death of Aijaz, Astha finds void in her life and seeks a way to fulfill that she actively starts participating in rallies against communalism and has the courage to go against her husband's disapproval. She starts painting with enthusiasm and depicts her messages of peace and secularism in her paintings. Once her paintings start selling, it also gains for her, her husband's approbation.

Astha makes her paintings as a medium to transcend her conflict between her roots and wings. Even though her craving for a complete loving and giving relationship and her need for romance- all of which lies unfulfilled, her husband has changed into an adversary from a lover. Astha has had quite enough. "Astha as a woman is sick of sacrifice. She does not want to be pushed around in the name of family. She is fed up with the ideal of Indian womanhood, used to trap and jail. "Excuse me, stop the juggernaut and let me off. I have had enough" (*A Married Woman* 168).

At this moment, Astha meets Pipeelika Khan, who is a strong woman of the world and as different from Astha, as chalk and cheese. Pipee is generator, forcing Astha into a secret lesbian relationship that leaves her at once bewildered, wonder struck, fulfilled and happy.

What Astha feels about their relationship is that for the first time she finds someone to open her heart to and then falls in love with Pipee. "Afterwards she felt strange, making love to a woman took getting used to. And it also felt strange, making love to a friend instead of an adversary" (*A Married Woman* 231).

The novel *The Immigrant* focuses on the NRI marriages and highlights the rootlessness alienation, and emotional estrangement of women in some alien land. Women

face double alienation firstly, due to their race and secondly because of their gender. Nina, the female protagonist of the novel, is an English lecturer who considers, “education as a gift” and willingly does not swap “the life of mind” for a “humdrum life of marriage” (*The Immigrant* 4). She protests against the world of “push, shove, jab and poke” (*The Immigrant* 9) that forces a female to restrain herself only to her body. She dissents to her mother’s hegemonial move to reduce her female body into a commodity to be “bought-sold-in marriage market” (*The Immigrant* 53). She protests against the stealthy and seeking patriarchal ideologies. She strives for a bonding of mind and body in the marriage that she fails to affirm in her own married life.

The author quotes the dilemma of the mature and professional new woman: “Things are not easy if you are educated, the mind needs companionship, the search becomes longer” (*The Immigrant* 12). The novel opens with the description of Nina’s life with her widowed mother in a shabby flat at Jangpura in New Delhi.

Even though Nina gets acquainted with Ananda through an arranged introduction, she does not seize the possibility of marrying an NRI dentist but exercises her personhood and takes her own time to resolve over her destiny. She mentally and physically prepares herself for her new married life “laced with choices, novelty and excitement” (*The Immigrant* 79) and migrates to Canada to share her rest of her life with her husband Ananda, a successful dentist there.

The major part of the novel revolves around the alien set-up of Canada. In certain occasions, the locale of Canada overpowers the major theme of man-woman relationship. Brinda Bose in *India Today* avers:

What redeems Kapur’s novel, however is its sure footed trail around the locations of the novel with its female protagonists Nina from the red brick

buildings of Miranda House in Delhi University to the bright corridors of Dalhousie University in Halifax where she pursues a degree in Library Science, enroute to employment in the adopted country that will provide her with the proverbial ticket to ride. (76)

Initially Nina dislikes her introduction to western world. Nina feels the rigorous process of close examination through which she passes at the Toronto airport questions her self-respect. “Nina had no idea why this is happening to her. She has a valid visa which had taken three months to acquire. She is decent, respectable, god fearing and worthy. If deported, she doesn’t think . . . her clothes (*The Immigrant* 105-106). Kapur describes the mental state of Nina as: “Rage fills her. Why were people so silent about the humiliations they faced in the West? She was a teacher at a University, yet this woman probably school pass, can imprison her in a cell like room, scare her and condemn her” (*The Immigrant* 108). She tries to inbuilt a mutually beneficial relationship with her husband Ananda in that alien land with utopian possibilities. But Nina fails to establish a deep and strong relationship with her husband in that alien country, she boldly decides to find her own identity and her own space miles away from her own country.

Nina tries to logically interpret Ananda’s physical inadequacies in terms of immigration trauma. “Did he not suffer crossing over none different time zones? Or was Canada so deeply embedded in his body that waking, sleeping, he moved to its rhythms? One day her system too would move to a different beat” (*The Immigrant* 122). Nina tries to imbibe the need of commitment in her marriage as Ananda is her only emotional and economic source of stability in the foreign land. As Sushila Chaudhary opines, Nina sets out to find entry into the system on her embodiment and its desire.

As an attempt to present women’s journey of liberation in a clear manner, Kapur

strives to juxtapose the position and perception of women of different generations in *Difficult Daughters*. Though a woman, completely dependent on man for her social and sexual identity and economic needs, Virmati's mother Kasturi and another woman who try to cross the portal of the patriarchal system and become self-directing through various trials and tribulations of life through the character of Virmati, Kasturi's elder daughter. Kapur masterly manages to sketch the mental conflicts, the restlessness, the personal yells and simmering revolt in the minds of women characters. The novel draws a parallel between the state of the country and women by converging on the issues like the awakening of the country for freedom, women education and feminine emancipation.

The inner conflicts and expeditions of Virmati in the novel can be referred to Virginia Woolf's view that "Life is not a series of gig lamps arranged symmetrically, life is a luminous halo, semi-transparent envelop surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (*Modern Fiction 2*). Kapur has framed the female characters with immense concern and understanding, particularly Virmati. She deals with her mind and soul and her inner workings and hidden, silent thoughts rather than her appearance. She pictures the suppressed and subjugated world of Indian women at its full light in the character of her protagonist. She demarcates all kinds of visible and invisible pressures that kept Indian women suffocated for long. Kapur places the whole story against the backdrop of Indian freedom movement.

Ida's impatience towards her mother's weakness put lights on the feministic elements in the novel. Ida's reaction to Parvati Masi's comment, "Virmati was a simple girl at heart" (*Difficult Daughters 224*) shows the inner perspective. "I hate the word 'simple'. Nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways." (*Difficult Daughters 224*)

Ida herself is a woman who dares to scorn patriarchal protection. One cannot identify

the traces of ignorance, simplicity and naiveness in her. The awareness of Virmati's unwed pregnancy and then its unsympathetic abortion is certainly an uneasiness for Ida who finally ends her married life with her husband, Prabhakar, because he had forced her to have an abortion. "In denying that incipient little thing in my belly, he sowed the seeds of our break up" (*Difficult Daughters* 144).

Through Ida's introspection of Swarnalatha, who enters into a wider sociopolitical sphere, the author analyses that a woman can stick on to her individuality and seek her interest without moving away from the family structures.

Overthrowing the societal norms is not enough for an empowered strong woman. She should be cognizant, self-restraint, poised, self-assured and sagacious, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A significant and an arrant change can be made only from one's inner will by making oneself free in the deeper psychic sense. It is rightly corroborated that *Difficult Daughters* is a feminist discourse not because the author is a female portraying the life of another female, but because, as Jaidev puts it she "has understood a woman and as a person pressurised by all kinds of visible and invisible contexts" (*Difficult Daughters* 68). Kapur successfully presents feminism at its complete sense in the Indian context. It develops a threadbare analysis of modern dynamics of man-woman relationship, particularly in Indian social background.

The story of *Difficult Daughters* revolves round an Arya Samaji family of Lala Diwan Chand. The author employs a narrative technique that tracks down a generational progression on the basis of a genealogical table of the family specially referring to the women-folk of second and the third generation.

The main protagonist Virmati belongs to the second generation and the principal narrative voice is that of Ida, who belongs to the third generation. She recounts the whole

story mainly basing upon her own past experiences, reminiscences and the plentiful of information that she gathers from Kailsanath and Gopinath, her maternal uncles and her Parvati *Masi* and all the close associates, friends and colleagues of her parents.

Difficult Daughters portrays the three separate composite sets of Indian women who centre on the idea, concept and spirit of marriage in the Indian context. One comes across a group of women characters in the novel who firmly uphold the traditional, orthodox values inspite of their personal miseries and sufferings. Even though all these women characters descend from different families and possess different approaches and outlook in bringing up their children, they adhere to orthodox values. These women's primary concern lies in the institution of marriage and their thoughts are limited to the closed entity of their family. They adhere to the patriarchal principles for the well being of the family and the community.

Another prominent character is Kasturi. Even though Kasturi, as a mother, is tired of procreating progenies, she is not protesting against the orthodox values and accepts it as a part of woman's life.

Her sister –in-laws' words echoes in her ears, 'Breeding like cats and dogs,' 'Harvest time again'. Kasturi could not remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs did not ache. Her back curved in towards the base of her spine, and carrying her children was a strain, even when they were very young. Her stomach was soft and spongy, her breasts long and unattractive. Her hair barely snaked down to mid-back, its length and thickness gone with her babies. Her teeth bled when she chewed her morning neem twigs, and she could feel some of them shaking. She had filled the house as her in-laws had wanted, but with another child there would be nothing left of her. (*Difficult Daughters* 7)

Kasturi gives prominence to the codes and conventions of the joint family and she thinks that “it is the duty of every girl to get married. . . . What is the need to do a job? A woman’s shaan is in her home” (*Difficult Daughters* 15-16). When Lajwanti supports the concept of girls getting married after completing their education, Kasturi chides her saying, “You are getting very modern in your thinking. We hardly get to see you as it is” (*Difficult Daughters* 15).

Kasturi denounces of anything, including education that works against the welfare of the family. On the other hand, Kasturi’s sister-in-law tries to fulfill her own needs and comforts inspite of her traditional outlook. Against the wish of Lala Diwan Chand, the father of Chander Prakash and Suraj Prakash, who opposes division in the family, Lajwanti forces her husband to look for a separate house of their own. Lajwanti eulogises Kasturi: “All the burden of running the shop . . . her eleven children” (*Difficult Daughters* 13)? According to him, “Further separation of the family is impossible . . . in them” (*Difficult Daughters* 28).

Lajwanti, unlike Kasturi, is liberal in her attitude towards her unmarried daughter Shakuntala and supports her in her activities. She remarks: “How can anyone see her when she has no time? Such a talented teacher, so popular, what an inspiring example she is for the younger ones” (*Difficult Daughters* 15). Kishori Devi, a conventional mother-in-law says: “In this life we can do nothing . . . control ourselves” (*Difficult Daughters* 211) Ganga is also gullible and naive that she considers her husband as her God, even after his marriage with Virmati. Kapur quotes: “Her husband continued to be Ganga’s public statement of self-hood . . . was still her god” (*Difficult Daughters* 278). Though Virmati crossed the traditional thresholds and had an unconventional marriage, “Her husband would be everything to her” (*Difficult Daughters* 207).

Kapur portrays Virmati, Shakuntala and Swarnalatha as unconventional type of

women who crave for a private space in their life to stand on their own. During the pre-independence period when women did not even dare to come out of their homes, these women rose against the traditional conventions. Their parents contemplate that they were spoiled individuals as a result of colonial influence. Kasturi senses this metamorphosis and vulnerably says: “In her time going to school had been a privilege, not to be abused by going against one’s parents. How had girls changed so much in just a generation” (*Difficult Daughters* 60)?

Some of them even feel that setting up of institution of marriage and maintaining family relations are burden for them. Till her acquaintance with the English Professor, Virmati was obedient and submissive to the family. Being the eldest of Kasturi’s eleven children, she was very much attached to her conventional Arya Samaj family. The following passage ensures this fact:

Ever since Virmati could remember she had been looking after children. It wasn’t only baby Parvati to whom she was indispensable, to her younger siblings she was second mother as well. She was impatient and intolerant of fuss. If they didn’t eat their meals, on her return home from school she would hunt out the offending brother or sister and shove the cold food down their throats. If they refused to wear the hand-me-down clothes she assigned them, she slapped them briskly. Usually once was enough. Sometimes she tried to be gentle, but it was weary work and she was almost always tired and harassed. (*Difficult Daughters* 6)

Virmati is tired of her conventional duties. With her exposure to few other’s life, Virmati’s attitude towards life too changes. It created a tug of war between Virmati and her mother Kasturi. Yet, she has no other way other than obeying her mother. These lines

articulate it: “Why can’t Indumati also take responsibility? Why does it always have to be me?”

‘You know they don’t listen to her’, snapped Kasturi. “You are the eldest. If you don’t see to things, who will?”

As Virmati got up to go, she realised her silliness. Why did she need to look for gestures when she knew how indispensable she was to her mother and the whole family (*Difficult Daughters* 6-7)?

Later on Virmati confronts the Arya Samaj orthodox conventions in quest for her more personal space and knowledge. She conceives that her happiness lies outside her home where she can be free and independent. Being a daughter of a joint family, though she perceives that marriage is the be-all and end –all of her survival, she refuses to get engaged with Indrajeet, a canal engineer, with an intention of continuing her full fledged love-affair with the married professor. Yet she quotes in a letter to Professor Harish:

In my family marriages are not made like this.

Now I know there is still some life in your feelings for your wife- as it is proper there should be- it would be very wrong of me to come between you, especially when there is going to be another baby. But for the pregnancy, I would never have known . . . My people have always been straightforward people, Pitaji and Bade Baoji have always been known for their honesty and high standards. People blindly trust my father in business, our community respects us. I am proud that I belong to such a family, and I must keep up its traditions. I am going to Lahore to do my BT. (*Difficult Daughters* 107)

Virmati tries her best to get rid of her affair to the professor but she fails to do so and consequently imbibes the Western idea of going one's own way without minding what others would think of.

The Professor who is a mixing up of westernisation and traditionalism favours western standards in his etiquette, but adheres to the orthodox principles in his attitude towards family. Even though he gets educated in England and has attained English standards he is not able to leave behind his traditional roots. At home, he enjoys the position as the head of the family and no one dares to question what he decides. Through his word he convinces Virmati, "co-wives are part of our social traditions. If you refuse me you will change nothing. I don't live with her in any meaningful way" (*Difficult Daughters* 122).

Though by getting hitched Virmati and the Professor have been united, they are secluded and isolated from the traditional society because of the opposing notions of tradition and modernity. Society embodies the traditional world and on the other hand, Virmati, Harish Chandra, Shakuntala and Swarnalta are under the spell of western culture and modernity. While Professor unlawfully possesses Virmati, due to his desperate need for her, unknowingly he disturbs the harmony of his family.

Just after getting married to Professor Harish, Virmati thinks that she has obtained her identity and her private space. But soon she realises her behedged freedom and the dewindling of her personal space. She adrifts between tradition and modernity. The Professor wishes to have persisting intellectual companionship with Virmati because of Ganga's illiteracy. In the Professor's view, his marriage to Ganga seems to prove disadvantageous and as a restitution for this 'loss', he seeks for a permanent intellectual and emotional congruousness with an unmarried or else with a married girl. At this point, Virmati is trapped into the love rings of the professor. As Geetha Dhogat points out, Virmati has fallen into the

trench dug by her while hunting for her own freedom from the traditional family entanglements and yearning for an intellectual comradeship.

Kapur never permits Virmati any assertion of power, of freedom. Because even as she locked into newer ones. Her relationship with the Professor, for instance. While it does provide an escape for a loveless arranged marriage: it is itself furtive and claustrophobic, offering only a stolen togetherness behind curtained windows. Even tears of studying and working alone do not give her the confidence to strike independence roots and grow. She hovers uncertainly at the edge of each New World, never entering, least the Professor should call and not find her near. Eventually, marriage to the man of her choice is no triumph either. As second wife, she must fight social ostracism outside the house, and compete for the kitchen and conjugal bed with Ganga, the first wife, inside. (66)

Virmati's first cousin Shakuntala is the first daughter in the family to cross the threshold of the institution of marriage and family to spend an unconventional, westernised life. She sketches her own route for her life and goes her own way in search of independence and identity. Shakuntala confers with Virmati, "These people don't really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else" (*Difficult Daughters* 17). Shakuntala's influence on Virmati's life is immense and becomes a role-model for her. Virmati is fascinated and attracted to Shakuntala's unconventional activities. "She watched her ride horses, smoke, play cards and badminton, act without her mother's advice, buy anything she wanted without thinking it a waste of money, casually drop in on all the people the family knew. Above all, she never seemed to question or doubt herself in anything" (*Difficult Daughters* 18).

Swarnalatha, Virmati's roommate in Lahore, is another great influence. The elements of westernisation have a positive spell on Swarnalata inspite of her underestimating the conventional system. She does not devote herself to the unconventional egocentric way of life. She is a spirited social activist who fights for India's Independence and she tells Virmati:

I was very clear that I wanted to do something besides getting married. I told my parents that if they would support me for two more years I would be grateful. Otherwise I would be forced to offer Satyagraha along with other Congress workers against the British. And go on suffering it until taken to prison. Free food and lodging at the hands of the imperialists. (*Difficult Daughters* 118)

The third group, the new daughter of free India is Chotti and Ida. Chotti is an amalgamation of conventionality and modernity. She surpasses in her studies and joins the Indian Administrative Service. She stays single because "Her father thought no man good enough, and her mother dared not cross him in this respect" (*Difficult Daughters* 278).

When time comes, Virmati, as a mother is very strict and inflexible in her behaviour and this is expressed by Ida: "My mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older; she said it was for my own good" (*Difficult Daughters* 279).

Inspite of the fact that she is unconventional and a difficult daughter, time has changed her to a conventional mother and Ida herself acknowledges this: "You believed too strongly in the convention that a mother has no place in a daughter's home to stay with me, so you never really got to see the dynamics of our relationship close at hand" (*Difficult Daughters* 157). Right from her childhood days, Ida is so unconventional in her attitudes and she turns down conventionalism and tries to deviate from the usual route to lead her own sort of life. Raskar feels that, "Ida strives a reconciliatory note between egocentric

unconventionality and altruistic conventionalist” (6).

There are other things in life’, she told her mother. ‘Like what?’ asked Virmati. ‘Like living’. ‘You mean living only for yourself. You are disappointing your father.’ ‘Why is it so important to please him?’ Ida protested to her mother. She wanted to please herself sometimes, though by the time she grew up she was not sure what self she had to please. (*Difficult Daughters* 279)

Astha of *A Married Woman* feels conflict in her self-regarding her roles as wife, mother and that of a lover, making her feel guilty and panicky but she is in too deep into the relationship to turn her back away from it.

Now sexuality involved with another, she realised how many facets in the relationship between her husband and herself reflected power rather than love. Hemant had managed to ignore her because ultimately he filled his own landscape. That her discontent had been expressed in nuances that were minor, only helped him in his disregard. (*A Married Woman* 233)

Meanwhile Hemant starts missing his wife, who is not there with him, even when she is physically present. He realises the changes in his wife, and tries to bridge the gap. After sometime, Astha also realises that any relationship, even that between a woman and another woman, becomes demanding after a length of time.

Pipee demands Astha’s total commitment in their relationship. But Astha fails to give such an assurance. She is not willing to divorce herself from her old life. She wants to sail in both boats, keeping these two sections in her life, completely detached from each other.

Kapur has portrayed the character of Astha as one who is not so bold enough to

deviate from the path of marriage and lead a fulfilled life with Pipee. Later when Pipee sensed her failure in attaining Astha in all sense as she wished, she leaves for the USA and the relationship breaks up.

Kapur portrays Astha's growth and evolution through her relationship with the social worker Pipelika. Astha's inborn desires and longings are expressed in a much better manner through her paintings. She finds paintings as a means to make up what she lacks for in her attitude and way of living. Unknowingly Astha gets ultimate comfort through her paintings that act as strong and effective statements. Sinha asserts,

The roots of tradition, living up to the benchmark of the ideal Indian woman, sacrificing for family; putting self behind, devaluing herself, being content to live in the safety and security of husband, home and family-continually come in conflict with her postmodern sensibilities that lead her wings. Wings to question established norms, to search for her identity, too long for a soul mate, to develop, to enter socially forbidden relationships. (206)

As Astha passes through all these conflicts, she grows, evolves and transcends herself into a talented woman, surer of herself and more confident. "As her brush moved carefully over the canvas, her hand grew sure, her back straightened, she sat firmer on her stool, her gaze became more concentrated, her mind more focused. A calmness settled over her, her tenuously, fragile but calmness nevertheless. She thought of her name. Faith. Faith in herself. I was all she had" (*A Married Woman*299).

The conflict between the roots of oppressive patriarchal culture and the wings of female imagination and sensibility is brought out well in the novel. Astha leads her life in a pitiable condition. She gets overwhelmed by the responsibilities towards the growing requirements of members of family that are being ordained upon her. Her condition becomes

pitiable though she works as a teacher along with her status as a married woman. Her anguish intensifies when her husband Hemant reacts much imperviously to her feelings. Her condition becomes much inferior to that of an unpaid servant. Socio-political, economic and cultural practices are very much responsible for her helpless and subjugated condition. “It appears . . . the community allows women to do only unpaid work within her home and forces them to be utterly dependent on their husbands. But these husbands are often irresponsible men her father being one such” (Kapadia 79).

The female character of *A Married Woman* reacts against men’s unconcerned attitude towards women’s condition. She dissents against the traditional concept of conventional society that women should be like earth, bear the burden of the family and strictly follow the conservative norms of the society. Women are forced to keep numb against the barbarities inflicted on them by their husbands or in laws because religion track them in such a way not to speak against them, however brutal they may be. There is no relevance for her personal grievances. Its expression is considered to be the transgression of traditional norms. Women like untouchables and other marginals of the society are discriminated against in the conservative society. Women are untouchables who have no place in the scheme of success and survival and whosoever transgresses is bound to face rejection. But the protagonist of the novel Astha rejects the traditional views of the society. She tries to establish her own personal identity turning a blind eye on the conservative thoughts of her family. According to her, “Religion is a choice as much as other things” (*A Married Woman* 89). She revolts against her husband for herself actualisation challenging the traditional restriction and compulsion of women.

She turns to Pipeelika, a Hindu Brahmin girl who has married Aijaz Akhtar Khan, a sensitive Muslim lecturer of History. Astha appreciates Pipeelika’s ideas of love and marriage. She married a Muslim, being a high caste Hindu against her mother’s wishes and

social sanction. She asserts her right to marry the man of her wish like Ammu of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Saru of Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*.

New women wish to break away from the traumatic experiences of patriarchy. Modern women are more assertive, liberated and more expressive than those of the past. She asserted her identity through actions than words and no more suffers at the hands of male chauvinist. It is the male ego that suppresses women to a mediocre status but new women no longer hold this suppression and openly revolt in many ways. According to gynocritics, the language of silence is being spoken by all women throughout the world. The authors truthfully attempt to deal with the physic-psycho and emotional stress syndrome of women.

Kapur makes Nisha of *Home* to be caught up in the flux of institution, conversion, modernity, convention and trend. The social and cultural norms even influence the selection of school for Nisha's education. And of course gender was a consideration. "A girl's school would provide a traditional upbringing, and after her probable experience it was best there be no exposure to boys" (*Home*73). Kapur's protagonists project their revolt not only through their words but also through their deeds. In the patriarchal regime, women's wishes are subject to male authority. But Nisha does not stick on to the conservative notions towards love and marriage. She neglects the bonds of the orthodox family. "Don't be afraid of my family . . . by her" (*Home* 200).

Nisha establishes her own boutique "Nisha Creations" and tries to make her own trade and industrial sovereignty as a means of attaining her own identity. In the beginning, Nisha strives to become different from traditional women. But when her own determination and power to make changes in the society heightens, suddenly her righteousness disappears. She shrinks from herself for nothing but behaves just as ordinary Indian woman in search of ordinary social trends and emotions.

Kapur writes that her intention in telling this particular story the way in which she told it was to highlight the power struggles that go on in families the areas of control and ways in which spaces are constantly negotiated. She also wanted to explore variations that existed within the same family, which meant she had to have a pretty large cast of characters. Kapur in her works puts forward the innumerable issues that are deep rooted in the family revolt against the age old tradition, the search for identity and the position of Indian women in society. Our society fixes certain roles for women to be played in their lives. Mary Klages points out in the work *Literary Theory: A Guide For the Perplexed* that gender is constructed through “binary oppositions that . . . divide the world into male and female and valuing male over female” (12).

The novel *Home* refers one of the elements of Indian women’s suffering and ill-treatment, that is, dowry. In Indian tradition, giving and receiving dowry is an integral part in the weddings. Banwari Lal’s family too follows the same practice. In the case of Yashpal’s marriage, Banwari Lal initially disapproves the wedding only because of Sona’s poor financial background. Banwari Lal’s expectation of a large dowry to carry on their business which has collapsed when Sona’s father reveals that they were small people and their only yearning is their daughter Sona. Only due to Yashpal’s adamant stand, his marriage with beautiful Sona bloomed.

Banwari Lal’s daughter Sunitha too becomes a victim of the evil practice dowry system. Banwari Lal’s only daughter Sunitha is married off when she was eighteen years old to Murali in Bareilly only because “the dowry asked for had been negligible and the boy when Banwari Lal went to visit him, had seemed decent enough” (*Home* 5). All the consultations of horoscopes and that with Babaji proved futile when Murali becomes a sot and pressurised Sunitha’s family to demand her dowry as they enjoy their financial reputation. Sunitha’s determination not to exploit her father further led to an accident in

kitchen that follows her death. Banwari Lal's family accepted it as her bad karma and along with him Yashpal attended the cremation while Pyare Lal manages the shop and "the women stayed at home as was appropriate" (*Home* 15).

Even after Sunitha's death, Banwari Lal's family continues with the scathy practice of dowry. The weddings of Ajay's, Vijay's and Raju's are settled with scrupulous plans. During the settlement of Vijay's marriage, "the girl had been seen, the boy had been seen, the prices agreed upon, now the only thing left was for the young people to meet each other" (*Home* 159). The National Centre for Women Rights claims that "in this socially inhospitable environment of patriarchal and male dominated society, a girl is considered to be someone, who will never contribute to the family income but who at marriage will take a large portion of family assets as dowry" (2).

Similar to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the novel *Home* too reflects the approach of the community towards a girl at her marriageable age. "It was necessary for marriageable girls to blossom during occasions (like marriages), it being likely that among the guests a boy or better still, his parents would cast a glance and hold it steadily upon her person that it was hoped subsequently enquiries would yield results" (*Home* 2). As per mentioned, Sona blossomed and attracts Yashpal. While Nisha was in her seventeens, Sona forces her to bloom with the same expectations during her cousin's wedding. Sona thinks that "it was time that clothes were engaged to do their job properly, to set off her looks, as hers were done . . ." (*Home* 136).

In a patriarchal society, marriages become the centrality in a woman's life that too from the childhood. When Nisha tells Sona to fast for the wellbeing of her future husband she innocently but sensibly responds, "Why should I? That's for older women" (*Home* 92). In the case of Nina, to have a marital relationship with Ananda, she sacrifices her job of a lecturer in

India which in turn is her loss of identity. It adds to her frustration, disappointment and nostalgia. In her life at Canada, she is caught in between the flux of eastern and western values. She tries to free herself from the intense solitude by distracting herself with the books she bought from the grocery shop to pass away time. She makes up her mind to assimilate and acculture herself to end her in the comfort zone. Kapur opines “As immigrants fly across oceans they shed their old clothing, because clothes make the man, and new ones help ease the transition” (*The Immigrant* 150). She loses her identity she had once possessed and mingles, merges, changes and evolves. She compensates with her habit, style and self-perception.

She begins to wear jeans and eat meat, the thought of which was always disgusting and impossible. Even the body that wore a sari with accustomed grace begins to change, to lose its softness, to look better in sweatpants and T-shirt. She transplants Indian culture and disposes it off to assimilate her Indianness into Canadianness through reinventing her identity, as perceptions forever keep on molding into something new. (*The Immigrant* 152)

Nina desires for a child in the alien country. She feels that through motherhood, she could get more connected to the new country by finding her own identity, self-fulfillment, security, assimilation and belongingness. She observes, “If she had a baby, the next twenty years would be taken care of. Her interest in Canada would grow, her child’s home after all (*The Immigrant* 162). The barrenness in her relationship elevates when she fails to conceive. As Sushila Chaudhary elucidates

Nina is transformed from a feisty, lively, brilliant rebel into a depressed, withdrawn, self-absorbed “patient” obsessed with redeeming herself through her body’s reproductive success. She is quite predictably haunted by a

paralyzing sense of guilt, helplessness, loss of control and lack of confidence in her femininity. (*The Immigrant* 165)

In due course Nina empowers her and begins to acknowledge her bodily needs and interrupts the communication hiatus in her sexual life: “Now she had taken the plunge, she had to swim. It’s too short, not even five-ten seconds. Surely that can’t be normal. I love you, but when it is over so quickly I get frustrated. Maybe that is why I have not conceived” (*The Immigrant* 183). Nina scours through various magazines on sexuality and tries to allocate the cause of their sexual problem, “sex was a form of communication, and if they couldn’t communicate on this most basic level, what about everything else” (*The Immigrant* 186)? Nina openly suggests a sexual therapy at Masters and Johnson for Ananda, who shows his reluctance in acknowledging his impotency. Sushila Chaudhary remarks in her article,

Kapur’s female protagonist demonstrate amazing bodily courage in resisting alienation and the struggle to discover ways of belonging to her female body, at times, to repossess her body from exilic conditions. Coping with both joys and traumas of new situation she constantly works on her capability of creating as well as sustaining new social relationships, within potentially inhospitable and discriminatory environment. She reconciles the tensions of her fractured identity. (45)

The married life of Nina at Canada casts her to various convoluted physical, mental and emotional agony that has a great repercussion over her personality carving her into a whole new being. With her restrained aspirations, she initiates a new life and refabricates her identity. “I need to find my feet in this country. I can’t walk on yours” (*The Immigrant* 216).

In her journey of self-discovery by adapting to the western way of life, she gets a therapeutic support from La Leche League that re-imparts her confidence, “In a clinical setup

the anxieties and problems women have tend to be treated as neurosis, rather than the result of stress that comes from coping in a male dominated world. Often women feel inadequate, powerless even sexually vulnerable because of professional therapies” (*The Immigrant* 217).

At a point in her life, Nina liberates her from the stereotypical expectations of her gender and strengthens her mind to rectify the hollowness in her life by taking up a part time job in library. Kapur sketches the developing thoughts of Nina: “The important thing was to get an entry into the system. From small things, big things come, but from nothing come only nothing” (*The Immigrant* 212). The barrenness of her life draws to her: “I feel like a shadow. What I am but your wife” (*The Immigrant* 237). Kapur’s portrayal of Nina, in the words of Sushila Chaudhary,

Makes her individuality nurture and strengthens its own boundaries by pursuing her interest in studies of library science. Her confidence in her mental power results in an admission with fee waiver. From being controlled by circumstances, Nina takes her step towards autonomy. She becomes a part of a student body, no longer the outsider. (46)

Nina’s venture to hunt her own complete self moved her away from her unaffectionate husband to Anton, her batch mate. After realising that sexuality is an important factor of her identity, Nina comprehends the inequality between male and female sexuality in the Indian culture. When she sexually mingles with Anton, she perceives her own identity and, affinity and involves in a relationship without any expectation. She shatters all her previous self-perceptions and created a new sexual identity in that alien land. Nina merely replaces the old one with the new and different perceptions: “Every citizen in North America regarded good sex as their inalienable right. It was her right too” (*The Immigrant* 263) and “her body was her own-and that included her digestive system and her vagina” (*The*

Immigrant 271).

Nina considers her sexual intermingling with Anton as an expression of her free gratification of her sexual desires. It meant only an unconditional give and take of bodies: “it was merely a meeting of bodies, a healthy give and take” (*The Immigrant 273*). For her, the moments of pleasure shuts even in her sexual mingling with Anton when he too takes the stand of patriarchal and colonial approach. “He mercilessly crushes Nina’s psyche and body by physically imposing his sexuality on her” (*The Immigrant 273*). The author interprets Nina’s adultery as not a moral deprecation but an attempt to seek feminine freedom, self gratification and sexual autonomy. Eventhough her relation with Anton did not bring completeness in her life it plays a therapeutic and liberating effect on her embodied self. The deception from the part of Ananda and his rifting from the marital commitment paved way to the breaking up of companionship in marriage. While ponders over her unfaithful deeds against her conjugal, the discovery of golden hair on their pillow reveals that their marriage “was based on more than one person’s lies” (*The Immigrant 328*).

After the death of her mother, Nina feels emotionally isolated in an alien land. At times, she feels herself as a total failure but she rejuvenates herself to seek a position for her in the world of instability and motion. She daringly throws away the burden of marriage and re-establishes herself independently. As Sushila Chaudary comments in her article,

At the moment of crisis, she overpowers the disturbances of mind. Some immigrant women become victims of their circumstances and loses their power before the struggles of life but Nina re-positions her perspective on her immigrant status. Her thought process reveal her true identity and grounding what she is and ought to be. Her tragedy which has resulted in displacement and alienation becomes her strength. (47)

Instead of collapsing in front of the stark real circumstances and becoming a prey to the cultural beliefs, practices, norms and ideas of the homeland, she wins over the situations and parades forward in her life. As Kapur says:

The things that might have made separation in India were hers to command in Canada. Financial self-sufficiency, rental ease, social acceptability. She hoped independence would facilitate her thought processes. She looked down the path on which there would be no husband and so the difficulties, the pain and the solitude. Nevertheless, treading it was not unimaginable and Nina affirms: "I need to be myself". (*The Immigrant* 329)

The necessity of female unanimity is stressed by Bell Hooks in her essay *Sisterhood*

When women actively struggle in a truly supportive way to understand out differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity . . . To experience solidarity; we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. (67)

Nina feels this sisterhood when she visits La Leche League. "We are going to counsel each other, but that's not all . . . She needed her support as sisters did in a male world" (*The Immigrant* 229). With the help of Beth, Nina begins to analyse the faults and starts to seek its remedies, "Without awareness, we can be both manipulated and manipulative exploited, as well as exploitative" (*The Immigrant* 223). As Imelda Whelehan points out, "a common heritage of oppression. . . . To recognise what we hold in common is not to underestimate our differences, but to provide us with a context for understanding them more clearly" (6). Eight 'white' and two 'brown' faces get solace as they discuss and share their problems.

The influence of her cousin Shakunthala and the Oxford returned Professor Harish had a prominence in the life of Virmati. The impact of these two persons on Virmati's life can be identified by the inspiration that she gets from their style of living life on their own terms and conditions and their education.

Virmati undergoes a continuous conflict between herself in her desires and the reality. She reveals her desire through her words, "Now I will try non co-operation" (*Difficult Daughters* 259), for she gets frustrated in following the conventions and the norms of the society. She needs to free herself from the entangles of the society. She wishes to be a part of Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement in which numerous Indians were participating in their fight for freedom. She tries to fulfill her desires and participate in various camps to help the needy even against Harish's will.

Virmati's daughter Ida also as her mother refuses to submit to the dictates of the male dominant society and believes in the personal freedom: She is not ready to follow the traditions and rituals of the society. When Virmati tells her, "you are disappointing your father, she protests and says, "why is it so important to please him" (*Difficult Daughters* 279)?She also leads a separate life from her husband Prabhakar because he insists that she undergoes abortion against her wish. Ida always tries to reach that goal that her mother aimed in her life. Ida reveals her mother's wishes that were her inner desires and were totally against the Indian tradition and customs. "I stared again at my mother's ashes and wondered what memorial I could give her. She, who had not wanted to be mourned in any way" (*Difficult Daughters* 1).

By understanding the story line of Virmati, to the end of the novel, Ida tries to get connected to her mother. "This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, Mama, and

leave me be. Do not haunt me anymore” (*Difficult Daughters* 280). Through Virmati, Ida, Shakunthala and Swarnalatha, Kapur wishes to convey the effect of education in changing the present scenario. Women get enlightened and struggle hard to find their own self in the family and the society. They lead a life to fulfil their wish rooted in complete liberty. It’s high time not to keep women behind the curtains or in four walls or to crucify. Women of present society deserve their own place and existence. If they donot get what they aim, they rise up against that and attain whatever they want. The orthodox thinking of the male sphere obviously needs a modification.

The novel reveals a saga of Indian woman’s innocent aspirations, her rebellion against the tradition-beyond society, self-doubt, resolution and acceptance. It denotes the actual Indianwomen who revealthe contingencies of cultural, historical and ideological essentialisms and remain unvanquished by virtue of their attempted reversal of such colonialist strategies.

Difficult Daughters successfully regenerates India’s voyage into a new nation and a new world. This birth is entwined with Virmati’s saga of rebellion and her quest for independence. Through courage and resilience Virmati survives and so does India. One feels a radical retelling in Kapur’s treatment that emphasises the strength and endurance needed for survival. With the backdrop of partition of the country, the author tries to express the impact of the social changes of the time on each individual in a very clear manner. The novel covers myriad issues like revolt against ingrained family tradition, the search for self-hood, women’s rights, marriage and the battle for independence at both fronts-personal and national. The suffering is mingled with hope and its renewal.

After passing through the horror of partition, at the culmination of the novel, one can feel the sense of upliftment. In the married life of Virmati and Professor Harish, they also feel

some semblance of peace after the turbulent events in connection with independence and partition of India. Ida courageously pushes aside her past and is making herself to begin life afresh. The novel depicts the triumph of the spirit, the longing to beat the odds, to conquer weakness and to move forward.

The novel explicates the deeply felt and suffered rebellion by the female protagonists, against the entire system of social relationships. Virmati's transformation from a lover to a dutiful wife is full of scars and stresses. It is a long and painful process. The Indian society glorifies ideal wives, mothers, housewives and ideal daughters-in-law. All the social institutions of the society like religion, ritual, law, family, the educational institutions, literature and art set forth gender roles and gender stereotypes. Women are forced to accept what is socially established. A woman has to lead a life up to social ideals or else will be labelled as an outcast. Virmati rebelled but her guilt could never leave her. After her grandfather's death she felt: "Her father died . . . grandfather too" (*Difficult Daughters* 221). Ida remembers her as "silent brisk, and bad tempered" (*Difficult Daughters* 2). After her departure, Ida felt "despair and sorrow" in her photograph and she says: "the guilt that her life had kept in check now overwhelmed me" (*Difficult Daughters* 2).

Deshpande's *The Dark Holds no Terrors* presents Saru, an anxious, self-assertive, eager and ambitious woman. She shares her dilemma in her life as a daughter, wife, mother and above all as a human being. She is confused, hopeless, dull and in a state of despair. Alienated from her husband, she returns to her father's house to get away from a troubled marriage. As Saru in *The Dark Holds no Terrors*, suffers a lot right from her family to everybody else for being a female child, Virmati is also denied the freedom of education for the only reason of being a woman.

Astha herself becomes a threat to her husband Hemant turning to lesbianism in

association with Pipeelika who is also the victim of social violence as she becomes a widow after the death of her husband in a riot. Realising the trap framed by traditional socio-political and cultural code and bounded in inhospitable and hostile behaviour of her husband and in-laws, she starts searching for her fulfillment and more meaningful life turning to lesbian relationship with Pipeelika who relieves her mind from emotional stress and provides pleasure which she does not get associated with her husband as the status of a married woman.

Astha becomes conscious of herself fulfillment like a post colonial woman and craves out a life for herself violating social codes that restrict her from asserting her own womanhood. Turning to lesbianism and denying social code, she empowers herself in association with Pipeelika. “Many of these lesbians identified themselves as lesbian feminists to emphasise their connection to all women and many of them identified as lesbian separatists to stress the connection they felt to lesbians everywhere and the strength they got from being with other lesbians” (Chandra 110).

By picturing Astha as a lesbian, Kapur has posed an intimidation to male ego centricism which powers them to turn their faces away from the plight and pitiable situation of women. Kapur through *A Married Woman* challenges the male-chauvanism that has deprived women from socio-political rights and emotional fulfillment compelling them to be subservient and subjugating. Many of the post colonial novelists like Deshpandae, Arundhati Roy, Mukherjee, Desai, Markandaya, Sahgal and Kapur have unraveled men’s unquestionable superiority in family matters and social affairs. They focuses on the plight of women in general and Indian women in particular.

Much similar to other Indian women writers, Kapur focuses on the women’s problems especially the domestic ones they encounter in their daily life and also explores the

possibilities of their emancipation from the atrocious clutches of male chauvinism defying man made prejudices.

Astha sat stunned. What kind of fool had she been to expect Hemant to understand? She had a good life, but it was good because nothing was questioned. This boat could not be rocked. She should paint that on a canvas and put it up on the wall, stare at it day and night, so that its message burnt its way through her brain into her heart. This boat cannot be rocked. (*A Married Woman* 99)

Kapur's Astha, differs from the other protagonists of her's novels as well. Astha turns lesbian seeking emotional satisfaction and challenging the ego-centricism of her husband unlike Manjari of Deshpandae's *Moving on*, who seeks heterosexual love even outside marriage for her self-fulfilment and uses sex like drinking water.

The protagonist Astha differs even from Virmati, major woman character of Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* who breaks social code having married the man of her choice against the wishes of her mother. Virmathi's act resembles that of Ammu of Arundathi Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Saru of Deshpandae's *The Dark Holds no Terror*. These women protest against their husbands who cheated and subjected them. In their dissent, they don't try to conquer rather moves against the norms of society. Ammu in *The God of Small Things* sacrifices her life on the altar of traditional discrimination against women who remained deprived, depressed and subjugated for ages. But Astha of *A Married Woman* took a varied way of rebellion against male chauvinism. She neither breaks herself nor becomes violent in the violation of traditional concept of society rather she becomes more severe in her attack on the established norms of socio-cultural set up of traditional patriarchal system in turning herself to lesbianism. She shoots two birds with one stone. She challenges the male

chauvinism of her husband on the one hand while on the other she satisfies emotions of womanhood in her lesbian relationship with Pipeelika.

Slowly Pipee put her arms around her. She could feel her hands on the narrowness of her back, on the beginning spread of her hips. Gently she undid her blouse hooks, and her bra, looking at her face as she did so and slowly she continued, feeling her back with her palm, coming round up towards her breasts, feeling their softness, especially where the nipples were, feeling them again and again, in no hurry to reach any conclusion. They were enclosed in a circle of silence, the only sound, the sound of their breaths, close together and mingled. (*A Married Woman* 230-231)

Astha feels that her husband is incapable of satisfying her emotion and passion. Hemant on the other side has never realised and respected her deeper self to be loved. “When she was with Hemant she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed nothing” (*A Married Woman* 287). She feels the colour in life only when Pipeelika satisfies her passion for love which she sought in her. She is thus retrieved from the depression and discrimination that she feels when along with her husband and her in-laws.

Kapur skillfully portrays the character of Nisha from her infancy and how gender plays a crucial role in her development. Gender discrimination creeps into the way she is dealt by others right from her infancy when her colour was commented upon. When Nisha receives a lot of gifts in gold and silver during her naming ceremony, Kapur comments, “With this gold, Nisha’s dowry was begun” (*Home* 40). She was not allowed to play with boys in the sun, making herself ‘dirty and black’ and spoiling her beautiful dress. Nisha plays board games with her grandmother preserving her clothes and complexion.

Nisha lives in a big family, and its members along with her fail to read and

understand the indications revealed by her to the act of Vicky's molestation. When she is moved to Rupa aunty's house, there she receives much encouragement, care and protection. The revelation of the horrific reality of Vicky - Nisha episode is its outcome. Elders with the intention of maintaining the family honour, did not bring it into the open.

Nisha's stay along with her aunt becomes a turning point in her life. She visits her home every weekend, senses more care, affection concern and feels at ease at her aunt's home. There, her primary focus is to learn and it motivates her interest towards education. She enjoys special attention, care and encouragement of both of her uncle and aunt that she lacks from her parent's side. At her home, she is merely referred to as a girl who needs to take care of her elders and they fail to identify the relevance of education in her life.

By the compulsion of need, when Nisha moves to her own home to look after her old ailing grandmother, she is "jerked into reality- the harsh reality of woman's world" (Samuel 226). Nisha's mother Sona complains about Rupa's upbringing of Nisha as "negligent upbringing". In Sona's view, "cooking" and "marriage" are the most important things in a woman's life than education. Sona considers her own daughter "useless absolutely useless" when she fails to cut ginger like matchsticks. Sona tries to convince Rupa saying, "This is the life of a woman: to look after her home, her husband, her children and give them food she has cooked with her own hands" (*Home* 126). Nisha feels helpless in front of "her mother's idea of a daughter was one who helped her everytime anybody ate" (*Home* 128). While Sona makes Nisha read "The Vat Savitri Katha", her own eyes are filled with tears thinking about the sacrifice she made for her family and concludes " this is what you must be like" (*Home* 133).

The education that Nisha acquired helps her to empower herself and strengthens her to stand against the orthodox tradition represented by the family around her. The very act of

cutting her long hair that symbolises the traditional upbringing is an instance that emphasises Nisha's rebellion against her traditional upbringing. "Nisha's understanding of 'personal worth' 'pure mind' and 'feelings of the heart' in connection with marriage is against the traditional patriarchal values" (Pradhan 119). While her friends accept her new look which made her resemble a film star, she fails to get the approval of her family.

However emancipated Nisha is in her mind, the spell of strong traditional patriarchy falls on her. As Hannah Samuel puts it,

Suresh, her love, who has firmly assured her of marrying her against all odds, betrays her at the time of crisis. It is hinted he is pressurized by 'force, money and threats' by her family. She then encounters the growth of a skin condition that manifests her suppressed mental agony and renders her body unbeautiful, vitiating her marriage prospects. She then feels desperately lonely, which in turn triggers her venture into entrepreneurship, and eventually she is captivated to the pressures of marriage and motherhood. (227)

In Samuel's words, gender has its repercussion on Nisha's life paving way to "the crushing of her individuality and finally reaches a state where in her sense of autonomy is hopelessly and mercilessly crushed along with her potentials in the name of virtue" (228).

Julie Mullins in *Children in Need* says,

Discrimination against girls and women in the developing world is a devastating reality. It results in millions of individual tragedies, which add up to lost potential of entire countries. Studies show, there is a direct link between a country's attitude towards women and its progress socially and economically. The status of women is central to the health of a society. If one part suffers, so does the whole. (16)

After fixing her own destiny in life, Nina of *The Immigrant* feels at her ease (relieved) and relishes in her regeneration. She enslaves herself from the nuptial bond, cultural and ideological influences of homeland and regains her feminine uniqueness. Nina moves away from Halifax in search of a job and contemplates over her acquaintances at Canada but feels that they were all temporary. The author points that: “She thought of those who had been nice to her, wayfarers on the path, nothing permanent, but interacting with them had made that stretch easier. Colleagues at HRL, the woman’s group that encouraged her to be angry and assertive. Beth, Gayatri, Library School; the sense of community was there, warming but temporary - everything temporary” (*The Immigrant* 333). She makes herself courageous and realises : “For an immigrant there was no going back” (*The Immigrant* 333). The novel *The Immigrant* ends with an inspiring message: “The continent was full of people escaping unhappy parts. She too was heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, a floating resident of the western world” (334).

Kapur in her fictional work leaves Nina’s immigrant soul to frame out a space for her in the strange foreign land: “When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again” (*The Immigrant* 330).

When Nina decides to head out for a job interview at the University of New Brunswick, her return to her Halifax life is touched with uncertainty. It appears as though she is now ready to take control of her own destiny- “heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances. . . . When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home’ (*The Immigrant* 330). As Christopher Rollason reviews,

The Immigrant can be read as an exploration of an initial phase of constitution of the globalised, hybrid identity today being assumed by increasing numbers

of educated Indians - and, too, as evidence of what may now be a major mutation going on within IWE, from a manifestation of the postcolonial to new literature of the global. (105)

Nina of *The Immigrant* is left alone to brood over her pitiable state. As Anupama Chowdhary refers in her article,

Nina finds she is not only ill prepared for the cultural gulf she encounters but also the gaping distances intellectual, emotional and physical in her barren relationship. Nina suffers a two-fold alienation. In a foreign land with no one to talk to but the husband, she feels rootless. This displacement is not merely a change of address but is also socio-cultural. Immigration results in the physical as well as imaginative border crossing. In addition to this is the oppression that a woman suffers from in a male dominated society. (17)

Similar to Jhumpa Lahiri who makes a sensitive observation of the lives of Indian immigrants and expatriates in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Unaccustomed Earth*, Kapur also wishes to portray the experiences of cultural dislocation, alienation and loss of identity related to “diaspora”.

The protagonist Mohini of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *Music for Mohini* draws a contrast to Virmati. Mohini, a self-sacrificing woman, made a compromise with tradition and modernity. The novel concludes with an optimistic note. At the end, her reunion with her husband and the coming of a child, results in a feeling of ecstasy and ultimate joy: “At last there was no discord. Life was music. . . the true quest of every woman, her deepest need.” (52)

Indu, the protagonist of the novel, *Roots and Shadows* is also a mutineer, who takes

the bold step of marrying a man of her own choice against the wishes of her family. Unlike Virmati, at a point of her life, Indu realises that marriage, the promised land for every girl is nothing but another trap. Virmati throughout her life failed to perceive it. Indu gains an insight and feels that she is sacrificing her real self to please her husband Jayant. She regrets over her loss and transforms into a new Indu determined, free and wanting to make her marriage work, but on new terms. Unlike Indu, Virmati who battles for her identity sacrifices that for the sake of her lover who turns to be her husband.

Apart from the other characters, Prem Nath and Rupa hoist them beyond this age old gender myth. Nisha shuttles between modernism and traditionalism by being “calm, composed and complete” (Pradhan 119). To an extent, Nisha is able to consummate women’s freedom, proposed by Beauvoir “economic independence and liberation from orthodox traditions of society” (126).

Nisha tries to dismantle the traditional societal convention and to bring a new social order that brace the physical, social and psychic well being of women. Along with Kapur’s other female protagonists, P.C Pradhan remarks that,

Nisha challenges the existing socio-cultural patriarchal system. In the social milieu, they are educated, modern, intelligent, bold and assertive. Even though they try to transcend the social hierarchy by demolishing it, they undergo serious psychological traumas in the absence of an alternative, planned feminist ideology that may give them freedom, security and peace of mind. . . (they) ultimately return to the traditional mode of life, most probably thinking that home is where they may get peace and space. (25)

Shobana Bhattacharji alleges that in *Home*,

There's no hand-wringing over status of women issues; simply a cool-
 therefore powerful-marking of how people talk, what they allow a girl to do or
 not to do, the social and economic areas she is permitted, and how these need
 not imprison her, yet she can take no compassion for granted, nor presume that
 it will be translated into practical help. (19)

The novel *Home* captures the incompatible dichotomies of tradition and modernity, poverty and prosperity, man and woman concerns in a much remarkable manner. The two sisters Sona and Rupa are undoubtedly portrayed as a mere contrast. In the chapter titled "Birth", Rupa is described as: "She had not suffered like her sister, nor had she fasted and done penance" (33). Chapter "Vicky" presents the two differing sisters as follows: "Two sisters more different than Sona and Rupa he could not imagine. One self-obsessed, complaining and dissatisfied, the other a well of sweet water from which everyone drank" (*Home* 70). Kapur delineates the character of Rupa as a woman who never seems to bother about a child. On the other hand, she instigates to console Sona and Yashpal when they were worrying about the nocturnal screams of Nisha and her declining health. Rupa with care and love takes Nisha to her house and fosters her back to normal health. Rupa's husband, a busy clerk in a Central Government office (Defence Ministry), takes care of Nisha's proper education. He encourages Nisha to fetch higher education. Till Nisha finds a new home after her marriage, she is not treated properly by her mother: "Once you are married, and in your own home, you can do what your in-laws think fit" (*Home* 228). She believes, "a daughter-in-law has to function in her married home" (*Home* 226). Even Nisha's father initially opines that she does not "have her own home to occupy herself with" (*Home* 270) and later corrects himself as: "This is your home, why are you talking as though you are orphan?" (*Home* 283) As the novel ends, Nisha feels completely relaxed beyond by her near and dear ones: "All mine, she thought, all mine" (*Home* 337) as mentioned by Nissim Ezekiel in his poem

“Enterprise”, “Home is where we have to gather grace” (30).

Another apprehension of female world in Kapur’s fiction is the curse of barrenness. *Difficult Daughters*, *The Immigrant*, *Home* throws up this issues abundantly. After a long anxious wait of ten long years, and many sleepless nights, severe penance and prayers, Sona becomes a mother of a daughter and a son. She prayed to Lord Krishna “. . . Please, I am growing old, bless us with a child, girl or boy, I do not care, but I cannot bear the emptiness in my heart” (*Home* 20). Even after adopting Vicky as their son, Sona was not so happy. She says. “A borrowed child? Ten years old? From another woman’s womb” (*Home* 23)?

However, Rupa also goes through the same crisis, and advises her siser to consult a doctor as she “can afford the best medical care” (*Home* 24). The partriarchal society blames the female partner for the barrenness under the influence of blind credulity but the husband may also be the reason for it. Rupa confidently affirms Sona that “One day your time will come, Didi, I am sure of it ” (*Home* 26).

Through *A Married Woman*, Kapur chronicles a married woman’s fervor for another woman and presents lesbianism as a powerful component for the attainment of woman’s emotional as well as sexual needs. Studies states that through the relationship of lesbianism the pleasure attained by women is same as that of heterosexual intercourse. The novelist presents Astha and Pipeelika as lesbians for their self-fulfilment and posing challenge to male chauvinism. As Lisy opines in her article,

Pipeelika herself becomes a victim of domestic violation as well as, a victim of social violence and becomes widow when her husband dies in a riot. It is generally seen that if there is any violence whether domestic or social, women are more affected in our society. After the death of her husband Pipeelika has

lost everything she had. Nothing is left to her to lose. But she doesn't lose her heart. (19)

Anita Desai's protagonist Manisha in *The Voices in the City* differs from Astha. Astha does not agree with the endurance and passive suffering. She does not take suicidal attempt like Manisha. But she is more aggressive to claim her rights.

Like many other women novelists, Kapur also being obsessed with women's manifold problems, has approached feminism. Through the traditional set up of socio economic culture of patriarchal system, injustice and inequality are meted out to women. Feminism is the result of protest against such discrimination. Women's voice against injustice and inequality unravel the fact that feminism is the consequence of the culture or society shaped and governed by men to suit their needs and interest regardless to women's basic needs and happiness. In this man made society everything is meant for the pleasure and profit of male sexuality (Prasad 246). In Muthuraman's view,

Kapur states that the scenario has changed that the post modern women will never tolerate inequality, injustice and discrimination like a holy cow which is the orthodox concept of traditional Indian society. In each and every situation women rate their status and quickly express their protest in any means if they find any discrimination. They are very quick to their feminine assertion and assert their identity breaking traditional customs and religious faith.

Traditional laws do not find meaning, if they are compelled to be emotionally starved and socio-economically deprived. (20)

Home presents the couple Rupa and PremNath as those who had transcended gender. When Rupa faces a failure to conceive, instead of getting depressed, the couple soon accept their plight and Rupa puts her foot steps into the entrepreneurship of pickle business and

flourishes greatly with the help of Yashpal. As Jacob quotes, “Because of the great back up of education they both stand for reason, acceptance and a class that emerges victoriously above the mundane realities of gender” (85). They lead a happily fulfilled life highly supported by their education and hand over this light to Nisha, the sapling of the next generation.

It is the education that Nisha receives imbibes her with sense and reason that makes herself a new woman in Rupa’s home for the first time in her life. There Nisha finds herself more empowered, and feels equal in power or even more than the other boys in her home. But Nisha’s re-introduction to Banwari Lal’s family’s patriarchal norms shatters her complacency and jerks her into reality of a gender based home. As the year passes, though Nisha is suppressed of her nobility and individuality, she empowers herself and flies into her own space as an entrepreneur and emerges as a successful business woman crossing the thresholds of unimaginable boundaries craving a place and position for herself.

Yet Nisha is trapped into the hutch of marriage, wifhood and motherhood that hinders her in the smooth balancing of her business. Due to her priority she concentrates more on her home, intending to resurrect her ‘Nisha’s Creation’ after her commitment towards family. But when she is fully engaged with a ‘robust girl’ and ‘fragile boy’ - she is forced to compromise the conflict for autonomy and separate identity with her obligations.

Virmati is similar to Jaya in *That Long Silence* where she moulds herself to conform to her husband’s idea of a perfect wife. As a contrast to Mohan who suppresses his wife never allowing to bloom her talents, Professor Harish wanted his wife to have her own identity that too under the slight threshold of patriarchy. Similar to the character in *What the Body Remembers*, Virmati falls in love and get into a married relationship with an already married man. In the triangular family, it is the woman who suffers the most.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati is caricatured far ahead of her times who does not

hesitate in establishing immoral and illicit relations with her married lover, while is not sanctioned by the society. It puts light on the moral degradation of both Virmati and her married lover. Through Astha, Kapur openly defines the social code of marriage in which women are forced to play a passive role in in-laws' house. They are compelled to accept the views of male members of the family whether they like them or not. Their sentiments and personal requirements become negligible in front of their husband's view that lead their lives to discontentment and restlessness. They fail to express the agony and unhappiness against their husbands over their troubled relationship.

If they raise their voice against their husband and in laws, it would lead them to total isolation from social constructs and leave them to the place where they would have no refuge. They are forced to be enduring and sacrificing wives neglecting their personal requirements. Kapur through her novel challenges such traditional views of Indian society, by presenting her protagonist as seeking solace in lesbianism.

Sahgal also denounces such conditions of Indian women in her novel *Rich Like Us*. She critically portrays the insensitive attitude of man towards his wife. In the novel, Ram Swoop marries Rose though he is already married to Mona. He still develops a love affair with Marcella and discloses it to Rose which touches her sentiment. After this incident she suffers a lot. Sahgal's women react against the total dedication to their husbands. "These female characters are also budding with revolt against male chauvinism but inside the framework of patriarchal system of society. Her anguish and rage fought for an outlet and gathered a gale inside her without a word said, as music threatening to burst but not bursting" (Sahgal 115).

The distress of down-trodden women is unspeakable as one feels in the suffering of Sohini the woman of Mulkraj Anand's novel *Untouchable*. But the scenario has changed and

the post modern educated women cannot tolerate the atrocities inflicted on them. They raise a brave face against such exploitation of women. They are always in search of their identity and meaning of their self in the society. If ever their liberty is questioned by someone, they turn rebellious.

R. K Narayan's Rosie does the same in *The Guide* and Shanta Bai in *The DarkRoom*. Shabitri who is tormented by her husband is the typical example of traditional Hindu wife. She is tormented in the name of tradition and religion, but Shanta Bai is quite different from her. She develops adulterous affair with Ramani for her fulfillment. Rosie, the female protagonist of R.K Narayan's novel *The Guide* has rebelled against her husband due to his indifference towards her love for dancing which imparts her identity. Restriction imposed on her which is suffocating and intolerable is broken by her having accepted Raju who is sympathetic to her. Having challenged the social norms that cramp a married woman from attaining self completion, she asserts her identity showing her flair of dancing as Astha asserts her identity resorting to lesbianism with Pipeelika defying her husband's indifference to her love.

Even though the traditional patriarchal system fails to equivocate man and woman, woman has been endowed with special power by nature. From time long past, they have been playing as a centre of power. Such powerful women are noted in the historical records. Salman Rushdie has revealed in his most recent novel, *Enchantress of Florence* that Jodhabai tried "seven types of unguiculation" on Akbar to keep him at her side. Robert Greene mentions about seduction in his book *The Art of Seduction* and it becomes essential for feminine power. "Seduction is nothing but mental witchcraft psychological persuasion that follows pattern-attraction, a taste of sensual pleasure, then once the man is hooked, a withdrawal, forcing him into a pursuit of favours once enjoyed and then ultimately, slavery to the woman" (119).

Modern women wish to have their direct control over their own destiny and to assert their own self identity. They challenge and even question the traditional subordination and strive for self-fulfilment. The female characters of *A Married Woman*, Astha and Pipeelika move through the same modern path. They belong to the new women of post colonial era who adopt the means of empowerment for self fulfillment. They explore every possibility of self-reliance and strive towards complete freedom from social and economic constraints. “Please Hemant. I am thirty-six. I need to be independent” (*A Married Woman* 227).

Similar to the approach of modern women, Astha too searches for a job and becomes a teacher for her exoneration from economic strain. Pipeelika goes to U.S.A in pursuit of higher education to get Ph.D degree. Both these protagonists adopt the means of empowerment and try to liberate themselves from social constraints. They are in a quest for their identity and also in search of a place of their own where no one will exploit them. They try to have their own identity and enjoy the physical fulfillment and emotional intimacy.

To attain women’s right and their identity, essentially there must be a change in the norms of traditional patriarchal system. Post colonial-post modern women no longer tolerate sexual subjugation and discrimination. They treat both sexes as equal. They also expect and want co- existence and equal treatment in socio-political aspects of life. The social or domestic violence are no longer tolerated by them. They do not wish to smash or dissolve their identity for the sake of any social or religious matters and may challenge the identity.

Kapur through her works enables the women to construct a feminocentric protest and motivates them to be out from the stifling patriarchal institutions like family and married life. Similar to Aritha Van Herk’s protagonist Judith in her work *Judith*, Astha also faces the enormous burden of gender discrimination in the society.

The finite dimension of the kinship between man and woman has been authorised by

man and not by woman. Her limits have been imposed on her by man who is ruled by the mastery-motive. She accepts it because of biosocial reasons. Very often this acceptance is not harmonious with the bare reality that lies underneath. Modern women prefer to exercise their choice and break away from traumatic experiences. Women are now more insistent, more extricate in their perspective, and more articulate in their expression than the woman of the past. Instead of accepting the elements of suffering at the hands of her lover or husband or man, they have started asserting their real identity in action, not in words.

Whether it is Devi of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*, or Sita of Deshpande's *The Dark Holds no Terrors*, or Lucy of J M Coetzee's *Disgrace*, women have established a cogent class structure-one of affirmation of identity and confrontation of male supremacy, and oppose at being subordinated by man.

An analysis through history reveals that it is the male ego that has given the woman an inferior status through the ages. Man degrades her to a second-class citizen. As Ramesh. V. Patil opines in his article,

Many of the modern Indian women novelists influenced by multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious social dimensions have pinpointed the problems of women in general and in middle-class and upper-class women in particular. Like other Indian women novelists, Kapur very successfully depicts the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women in India while the gynocritics throughout the world believe that the language of suppressed women are none other than silence. (28)

When enquired about what inspired Kapur to frame a story like *The Immigrant*, she reflects that, that was an idea she had for a long time-partly as a response to the numerous NRIs that any Indian is witness to. They strike one as not quite Indian, yet not completely

foreign, they inhabit an in-between space that they themselves are all too aware of. Kapur successfully presents the life of men and women struggling and striving under the influence of a narrow minded society. While women lacked the privilege of equality in socio-economic scenario, men failed to express their originality formulating as mere puppets in the society. Both are deprived of “their aspirations to their individuality and self reliance” (Warake 269).

Inquisitely, Kapur probes deep into the psyche of her characters and expresses her reflections through simple style. Nina and Ananda confront various identity problems at various stages of their life so as to get acclimated with their new culture. They are haunted by the losses of identities, familial life, economic security, social status and feel insecure about the preservation of their own religion. When Nina collapses in maintaining the stability between her American and Indian identity she is led to an “identity crisis” in her life. It further leads her to cultural isolation as well as personal isolation.

Not only Nina, but Ananda also faces the dull loneliness of an immigrant when he lands in Halifax initially. At his uncle’s home, he misses the warmth of Indian life, the communal meals, rich spices and vegetarian diet he used to enjoy. But soon he gets assimilated to the Western culture. The act of changing his name to Andy and converting himself to “non-veg” make one sense his attempt to get assimilated to the Western culture.

Nina on the contrary finds it tough to comply to the new-world. While using the word Andy at her home she feels the alienation creeping into the bedroom. Through the caricature of Nina’s character, Kapur portrays the peculiar confrontations faced by the immigrant wives.

The immigrant who comes as a wife has a more difficult time. If work exists for her, it is in the future and after much finding of feet. At present all she is, a wife, and a wife is alone for many, many hours. There will come a day when even books are powerless to distract. When the house and its conveniences can

no longer completely charm or compensate. Then she realises he is an immigrant for life. (*The Immigrant* 122)

Nina's complete isolation in all sense in the new soil makes her pine for "home". She painfully recalls that "never, for a moment, in all her years at home, had she to think about who or what she was. She had belonged. Only now was she beginning to realise how much that meant" (*The Immigrant* 157). When Nina includes beef and fish in her diet, she hides the truth of inner felt fragmentations and distress. She boldly faces the problems of her marital life, becomes empowered and qualifies herself as a librarian. When she boards a Greyhound bus for another new start, one senses that she has met with her own identity: "Anchors you had to be your own anchor" (*The Immigrant* 328).

All over the world, male domination that results in the woman's subjugation, discrimination, exploitation and oppression presents sexism in its meanest form. Pam Morris, in the book *Literature and Feminism* points out that "literary texts provide a strong powerful understanding of the ways in which society works to the disadvantage of women (7). As social institutions carves the voluntary roles of women as mother in their family despite of their richness, caste, class or religion. Nina comprehends that, "We are conditioned to think a woman's fulfillment lies in birth and motherhood, just as we are conditioned to feel failure if we don't marry" (*The Immigrant* 233).

By the extent of patriarchy, usually Indian woman faces two sorts of oppression like imposition of motherhood her responsibility to continue the human race. After a certain period of time after marriage, if the couple fails to conceive, the wife is usually blamed for it. "Though medically speaking, infertility was not specifically a woman's problem; it was she who bore the brunt of this particular deficiency" (*The Immigrant* 165).

Especially in the eastern culture, female-sexuality is never recognised and her bodily

desires are regarded as depravity. Society needs women to be meek, docile, silent and sexually passive. Kate Millet, in her *Sexual Politics* (1970), makes a distinction between “sex” and “gender” and argues that “sex” is determined biologically whereas “gender” is culturally socially psychologically constructed through sex-role stereotyping. As Beauvoir observes in *The Second Sex*: “One is not born but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature” (457).

Contemporary feminist theories focuses on the psychological pressure resulted by this repressive ideology. Millet refers to this as “a most ingenious form of interior colonization” (*Sexual Politics* 25). Ananda’ welcoming of Nina to Canada, “Welcome home, darling’. Putting his arm around his wife was not meant for her orgasm but the fact that she was home” (*The Immigrant* 121). Thus Nina is forced to compromise her own physical passion. Anupama Chowdhary mentions “Female body also becomes the site of forced colonization which the male master uses and abuses according to his own sweet will. Thus, it is rendered “docile” under the domination of patriarchy. It becomes primarily a source of social control in an androcentric social order” (30).

Kapur through her narrative tries to pinpoint such important issues as a woman’s right to her body. Body permanently owns an important site for feminist discourse. As Susan Bordo in *The Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* argues, the body is “a practical, direct locus of social control” (236). In Nina’s case, she needs to surrender her body willingly or unwillingly, to her husband Ananda and later to her white partner, Anton. She thus feels the panic of being raped both inside and outside marriage. Nina tries to adapt to her new country and culture making the realisation that it is necessary to have control over one’s own body. “That Monday Nina walked to the library . . . was her own” (*The Immigrant* 271).

Through her work, *The Immigrant*, Kapur dares to traverse the threshold of certain conventional perspectives that prevailed in our society. From past few decades, Indian women writers including novelists and poets dare to mention the taboo subject of female sexuality in their works. Through various complicated interwines, Kapur probes into the issues that are deep rooted in the traditional families-protest against the age-old tradition, the search for selfhood, woman's rights and the politics of marriage.

Nina's ultimate decision to sketch her own identity away from her husband makes one think about Kamala Das's work "I shall someday Leave":

I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon

You built around me with morning tea,

Love words flung from doormats,

And of course your tired lust. (*The Immigrant* 150)

Nina's own realisation empowers her and there lies her newly gained confidence, courage and identity.

Through her works, Kapur seeks to inquire into the psycho-social features of Indian society with respect to the treatment of women. The Indian tradition and cultural roots are being shaken by liberal education, modernisation and the impact of globalisation and transformation is not only a single nation's phenomenon but genuine to the other nations of the world as well. As the Australian scholar Brahma Kumar Peter Long has quoted in the course of his interview: "Instead of feeling despondent over the depleting world and the degradation that has occurred in every sphere of society, we should concentrate on creating ways to establish our eternal identity." In her works Kapur shed light on the forgotten and lost traditional values by unveiling certain dangers of unconventionalism. Kapur explicates

the Indian Women's trauma of exploitation in one of her talks as:

In general a woman's role is often highly respected, even glorified-especially in traditional families. We have a whole slew of goddesses in the Hindu pantheon that represent all kinds of female power. Yet, how can I say, with our history of crimes against women, our low sex ratio, our female feticide, how can I say that we respect women more than in the West? I can't. We don't.

Thus through her works, Kapur successfully attempts to highlight the emergence of modern woman in the inner thoughts and actions of female protagonists who surpass the conflicts of modernity and tradition. With an inner spirit, they dare to transient themselves to modern woman bold enough to cross the thresholds of androcentric society.

The ensuing chapter delineates a comparative analysis on the modern women presented by the two fervent feminist writers Kapur and De.