

CHAPTER 4

BREACHING THE FRONTIERS OF IDEOLOGY

New Indian women authors precisely describe and explain contemporary conditions of Indian womanhood, with intense problems into positive yearnings. These writings take the mission of making both men and women conscious of the productive probability of a sound and sunny epicene society and disputes within all means the presumptions of patriarchal ideologies. In their works contemporary women writers strongly propagate the ideology of feminine freedom and gender equality that are notions of timeless significance for women.

Hans Bertans describes gender as:

Gender has to do not with how females (and males) really are, but with the way that a given culture or sub culture sees them, how they are cultured constructed. To say that women have two breasts is to say something about their biological nature to say something about what it is to be a female, to say that women are naturally timid or sweet, or initiative, or dependent, or self-pitying, is to construct a role for them. It tells how the speaker wants to see them, what traditionally has been called 'feminine', then, is a cultural construction, a gender role that has been culturally assigned to countless generations of women. (98)

The novels of Manju Kapur and those of Shobhaa De are remarkably similar in theme, as well as in the mode of presentation, the common ground being their deliberate departure from the beaten track. As women authors who support the emancipation of women, they have permeated their writings with revolutionary ideas, thoughts and arguments so that they stand for women's desire for liberation. With an apt feminist inclination both De and Kapur create the fictional situations and characters as stable with their own experience as

women in a male centered world. Both the writers depict their fictional worlds authentically from their subjective experience and from the light of their own private life, they create the characters and their situations.

Through the fictional works of De and Kapur, they boldly target at motivating, strengthening and empowering women to survive successfully in a socially unjust sexist society. Without spoiling the aesthetic essence of their novels, the authors please the readers with their interesting themes and attractive narrations. Slowly they take us to the sour and bitter experience of self-analysis and self-interrogation and later through a stream of feminist ideological propositions leading to the adoption of powerful doctrines and feasible ideologies for a revived and meaningful life.

Cora Kaplan in her work *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* declares that writing of female authors is all part of a political process of resistance and views that “defiance is a component of the act of writing for women” (129). Thus, at all times, feminist writings and literature are always controversial and disputable in terms of matter and in the manner of presentation.

Feminist authors strongly and intensely wobble the hegemonic pillars of the male centered society that has been aptly created by the societal meaning assigned to the biological and natural sexual differences. Feminist writers and critics aim to establish a change in attitude and behaviour among both men and women so as to bring a wide metamorphosis in the world. As Judith Fetterly mentions about feminist criticism, “At its best, feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who reads” (Bennet 49).

In Foucault’s words, “Where there is a power, there is resistance” (Mills 32). So almost all female authors and their works reveal the female opposition against patriarchal

power. Apart from the societal concept, even from the most intimate relationships, women face gender inequality. Hence to attempt a transformation, all female writers take the responsibility of resisting and reacting against the phallo-centric ideology and attempting to establish their own identity through the means of their works.

Both Kapur and De through their works attempt to highlight the oppressed state of women all over the world irrespective of their age, caste, religion, education, career, identity and nationality. Through their work, they attempt to establish each a self-awareness among women and proclaim the liberalised notion of 'new woman'. Similar to the Canadian feminist writer Margaret Atwood, Kapur and De assault to reconstruct the instituted entity. ". . . The impossibility of establishing certitudes in a constant flux of experience, and the inability to break free from established pattern of thought processes lead the artist to first establish a binary opposition and then move towards the systematic deconstruction of the entities" (Beegum 21).

These women writers through their novels project the emptiness of pre-destined concept of women by the conventional patriarchal assumptions. Through the caricature of the protagonists of their novels, they try to establish the concept of 'new womanhood' attempting to seek their own individual space in the society.

This chapter attempts to highlight similar and different aspects of feminine elements elucidated by Kapur and De. They simultaneously explicit the gender inequalities, suppressions, losing of identities by their female characters and also portray the attempts by them to establish their 'new woman' ideology in search of their identities.

Conventional writers usually paint women as contented housewives and devoted mothers. Deviating from the customary portrayal of women from the four walls, both Kapur and De introduce their female protagonists with the renowned title of modern women. In their

fictional world, these writers bring forward the positive, courageous, painful and daring images of 'modern women' rather than the negative conventional images of woman in the roles of daughter, wife, mother and grandmother. Both Kapur's and De's central female protagonists are women of self-importance, self-conviction, self-confidence, self-assertion and self-belief.

Kapur's protagonists Virmati, Nisha, Astha and Nina along with De's female characters Mikki, Maya, Nisha and Karuna represent the hard working enthusiastic and responsible group of modern women who try to make their lives significant and creative by eclipsing the socially mounted narrow domestic borders and self-imposed or socially imposed restrictions. Kapur's and De's female characters are not completely self-centered or ego-centered women but are those with self-importance. They perceive the very fact that their own life partners not their own children will make their lives completely worthy and fruitful.

Kapur and De very exactly portray the problems faced by Indian women. They untold the real difficult life of women and their pitiable situations where they fail to face their future life optimistically. In certain occasions, women's direct confrontation with the bare realities of life turns them to hard-hearted, insensitive, illogical and self-centered being. As Astha of *A Married Woman* reveals, "She didn't want to feel dependent, that was all. Surely equals could relate better than master and slave" (99)?

Being efficient feminist writers, both Kapur and De enroll the real distress of the women and aptly represents it in their fiction. For example, they create unsatisfied and enraged mothers, despondent wives and angstful young women in their fiction. Both Kapur and De assent to the view of Betty Friedan who looks into the reason for the worries and problems of women as: "Our culture does not permit women to gratify their basic need to grow, fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their

sexual roles” (*Feminine Mystique* 68).

In our established patriarchal pattern, women are constrained to the four walls of the kitchen and are compelled to act as the docile and unpaid house keepers. Due to the absence of social support and sufficient opportunities for enstrengthening themselves as efficient individuals, well-endowed Indian women represses their dreams, desires, ambitions and aspirations. It leads them to dissolutionment and sadness. Through the indirect implication and fictional situations involving the new women portrayed in their novels, Kapur and De suggest a solution for the suffering women and try to make them aware of the most empowering tools, education and employment, as the only way for emancipation.

Similar to various other feminist writers, Kapur and De affirm that education and employment exalt the status of women in society and promote them towards intellectual freedom, own decision making, self-standing behaviour and at prime, economic self-dependency. Above all, education and employment entrust women to enhance an awareness to defend their individual rights.

In the male-centered society, man favours a life-partner who is much below in his status including education, occupation, earnings, social activities and positions held. On the one hand, he needs a woman skillfully excellent at household chores and child rearing. Ordinary Indian women lacking the strength and courage to move against the rigid mental conditioning comply to the needs of inferior and submissive feminine image making themselves away from empowering through education and employment. This state of society in the views of Simone de Beauvoir is as follows:

The privileged place held by men in economic life, their social usefulness, the prestige of marriage, the value of masculine backing, all this makes women wish ardently to please men. Women are still, for the most part in a state of

subjection. It follows that women sees herself and makes her choice not in accordance with her true nature in itself, but as man defines her . . . (169)

These sort of unfortunate women are forbidden from a world that provides “enjoyments beyond gratification of the senses, pressure of novelty of imagination and of intellect, contemplation of the sublime and the beautiful” and “the field of nature which is at once calculated to please and instruct, as well as aspirations of fame” (Mills 92). Both Kapur and De through their works present education as the initial step towards liberation and autonomy. Hence they portray their central female characters as well-educated, employed and self-reliant women who seek their joy and sense of satisfaction through their professional lives. Feminists view that a working woman who earns for herself develops high self-respect and self-confidence. These women are able to spare time for their children and family rather than a housewife who is completely entrapped and entangled in family ties.

Kapur and De very well depict the urge and aspiration of educated women to get a job and there by identifying their own space in the society. Even if the conventional society consents a female to work outside home, they favour to have part-time jobs or less challenging jobs so as to get enough time for women to look after their household chores too. In *A Married Woman*, when Astha feels bored and isolated in between her domestic responsibilities, Hemant permits her to seek her own space in the society by getting an employment in a nearby school. “As a teacher you will earn some money, but you will only be out half the day so the home will not suffer” (47). In *Home*, Nisha is also permitted to engage herself through the teaching job in the nearby kindergarten to vail away her idle hours at home. Even the patriarchal Banwari Lal’s family permits her to be engaged in the profession at school that involves less risk factors. Yashpal discussed the matter with his family that night. “It will be a good time pass,” he said anxiously, looking at his daughter’s face (269). Traditional patriarchal family depicted in Kapur’s *A Married Women* and *Home*,

compromise with their female protagonists wish to seek their own identity in the society only when Astha and Nisha get into the profession of teaching. But the protagonists move away from these sorts of less risk jobs to quench their self actualisation thirst. Gradually Astha becomes a part of the religious-social activity while Nisha herself emerges as a successful female entrepreneur. "I do not want to be a teacher" said Nisha (269).

Kapur also focuses on the imbalance in the division of labour in the family and the mental struggle between male and female in sharing the household responsibility. The interaction between Astha and Hemant of *A Married Woman* justifies it. After he came home the last thing he wished to bother about was taking care of his child. "It's your job", he said. "That's not what you thought when we had Anu", replied his wife. "I can't do everything myself. It's tiring." "It's woman's work," said Hemant firmly. "Hire somebody to help you, or quit your job" (70). Through this, the author streams on the requisite of the reconstruction of the convectional and gender based division of labour and urges men to come forward to take part in the duties of domesticity so that working women can manage their obligations towards marriage, motherhood and also their career.

Much similar to Kapur and De, Anita Nair too succeeds in presenting the story of women's quest for their own space and identity in a male dominated society. In her work *Ladies Coupe*, the protagonists raise the fundamental questions regarding their lives under oppressive patriarchal system. They focus on the restructuring of female society by claiming her dignity and attempt to fulfill their individual dreams. The novel proclaims the voyage of a woman to the realm of self realisation and affirmation of feminine identity in an androcentric society.

All the six female protagonists, Akhila, Janaky, the old woman, Margaret, the Chemistry teacher, Prabha Devi, the rich submissive wife Marikolunthu, Sheela, the fourteen

year old in a way or the other exemplify the hard suppressive nature of phallogentric society. Akhila's life is a narration of her desire, recollections and her loss. She realises the unworthiness of her toiled life shuttling between her career and family. Much alike Nina of *The Immigrant*, Akhila too sets for a journey in search of her own life and the meaning of her existence with a rejection towards the social standards, value and the traditional pattern of life.

Through their works, Kapur and De bring forward the urge of Indian women to have their own effective roles in the society. The persistent convergence of fact and fiction in the novels of these writers make the readers feel themselves and recognise the state of self-opposing the female submissiveness and the diverse plans for achieving empowerment of women. The women emancipation activities focus on strengthening the power to take decisions and to customise autonomy over their destiny. Both writers formulate their women characters with qualities to prove that females are not mediocre to males in all aspects including intellectual capacity or emotional stability and they act efficiently as men in various socio-political and economic activities. They stress on education, employment and economic self-sufficiency as tools for empowerment. In *A Room of One's Own* and *The Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf declares that economic independence is a major element for all round development of women.

Kapur and De highlight the idea that self-realisation and self-help are the crucial and significant measures for the liberation and self-actualisation of women. The bold decision of Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* to move away from Professor Harish by joining in the Prathibha Kanya Vidyalaya as the Principal is an attempt to seek her own self freeing of herself from the emotional bondage of Professor. “. . . Virmati found herself in the train leaving Amritsar, her feet on her bedroll, her metal box pushed behind it, its lock faintly clicking with the motion of the train” (182).

Astha's adamant decision to take part in the Babari-Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi's Ektayatra and Nina's daring resolution to walk out of the house to seek a job in the University of New Brunswick's library highlights the need of being herself in an alienated country. "When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again." (*The Immigrant* 330).

De's female protagonist Mikki of *Sisters* sturdy decision to break the marital relationship with Binny and take charge of her father's business to bring it back to its bliss and Maya of *Second Thought* attempts to fulfill her dream of tasting the sweetness of Mumbai life going along with Nikhil and Karuna's valiant fight to make her dream of becoming a model come true by crossing all the suppressive hurdles in her life shows the ardent desire of all these new women to fix their self-identity through their dauntless decisions. "I'm not a kid anymore. All the girls in my class are allowed to go wherever they want. Why can't both of you trust me?" (20) ". . . I will behave myself. It's only for two days" (*Socialite Evenings* 22).

The insentient ideological beliefs and presumptions controlling underneath the conscious thoughts strongly and adversely influence women's responses to conflicting circumstances. The perceptions and ideas of womanhood acquired from past experiences act as a hindrance for women to make free preference and choices in their day to day lives but stimulate a pre-assigned behaviour pattern in them.

In the beginning days of her married life, Maya of *Second Thought* is barely aware of the fact that her life is about lack challenges, thrills, adventures and heroic activities as because of her forced prediction for passivity and submissiveness towards patriarchal hierarchies. Maya shares almost same pathetic feelings of the protagonists of Nair's *Ladies*

Coupe. As a victim of suppressive hands of patriarchy, they sketch the bare realities faced by an Indian woman.

Similar to De and Kapur, Nair reveals her empathy and compassion towards the suppressive weaker section of society. The novelists make the female readers remember the fact that the seeds of the real change and liberation start from one's own inner self and at the moment when she takes the accountability of her own impressions, decisions, words and actions, she unknowingly modifies herself as the designer of her own orlay and makes a self-standing being.

The ideas of self-help is emphasised in the works of Kapur and De and with lives of their protagonists, they reassure women about the fact that only they can strengthen themselves. Kapur's protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina and De's Mikki and Karuna at a point in their lives recognise their strength and power and boldly decide their own resolutions for the problems they are encountering.

Kapur and De unitedly opine that it is the obligation and responsibility of women to create their own space among the overpowering patriarchal society. The writers focus on the emancipated empowered 'new woman' who takes strong decisions at the point of stress and trauma in their lives. They overcome all the obstacles and hindrances and prove their quality of endurance and coverage with high optimism. The female characters Astha, Nina, Nisha and Maya dare to cross the traditional thresholds and expectations of male dominated society. "I need to go away and think", she told Ananda. "Why can't you think here", he demanded. "As usual you are making excuses." ". . . I need to be by myself", she clarified (*The Immigrant* 329). The empowerment can be viewed in Nisha of *Home*, "her mother refused to let her go to these places alone; the first time she took Raju, the second time a salesperson from the shop, the third time she went by herself without telling anyone" (292).

Similar to them is Saru of Shashi Deshpande's *Dark Holds no Terrors* who comments, "that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth" (42). Readers are guided to give up the notion that "the eternal female dream of finding happiness through a man" (*Dark Holds No Terrors* 124) and not to end up their lives in silence, mourning and endless dejection where as strive for activities that make them self-actualised, attractive, venerable and loveable. Indu of *Roots and Shadows* says: "Long ago it had frightened me . . . my capacity for total self-surrender. It's not only tragic, it's foolish. That's what I had always thought. Self-abnegation had seemed to me to be an exercise in futility. But when I did it for Jayant . . ." (53).

Beauvoir rightly observes that: "Woman leans heavily upon man because she is not allowed to rely on herself; he will free himself in feeling that is to say, in giving her something to do in the world" (500). Both writers instruct women to move away from the male-imposed convention of feminine behaviour. They urge all to seek their own identity through self-fulfilling activities. The principle of the survival of the fittest is conveyed through the works of Kapur and De. The women protagonists burst out from the shackles of comfortable self-satisfaction attained through the life of lethargy.

Nair strengthens the woman folk through her work *Ladies Coupe*, "arise awake and stop not till the goal is reached" (305). The character of *Ladies Coupe*, Margaret advises Akhila to be bold enough to move forward discarding the mean concepts of society. "Once you stop worrying what the world will think of you, your life will become that much easier to line" (136).

Nair asserts the confused women to get out of their panic. "Panic fans the flames of fear, Panic dulls. Panic stills. Panic tugs at soaring dreams and hurls them down to earth. Panic destroys" (*Ladies Coupe* 39). Marikolunthu's schoolmaster of *Ladies Coupe* view the

world as “This is the world. Half of it is lit by the sun and other half remains in darkness. It is the same with life. There is good and bad and it’s our duty to remain in the right, be good” (212).

Charlotte Bunch, in her book *Passionate Politics* offers a different and relevant definition of feminism as “Feminism is a transformational politics. As such, feminism brings a perspective to any issue and cannot and must not be limited to a separate ghetto called “women issues”...feminism is about change in structures about ending domination and resisting oppression. Feminism is not just incorporating women into existing instructions” (23).

Both Kapur and De illustrate the procedure of metamorphosis or reconstruction of the mind set of their female characters from a mental and intellectual slavery to independence, self-identity and rationality. By presenting their female protagonists gradual transfiguration, the authors eloquently substantiate the ideas, attitudes and beliefs from the framework of ordinary women in India. Linda Hutcheon rightly observes: “Ideology both constructs and is constructed by the way in which we live our role in the social totality, and by the way we represent that process in art. Its fate, however, is to appear as natural, ordinary, commonsensical. Our consciousness of ourselves is usually, therefore, un-criticised because it is familiar, obvious and transparent” (Smyth 105).

Feminist writers intentionally attempt to destroy the irrational concept and notion of perfect ‘womanhood’ constructed by patriarchy. They seriously speak against the concepts of sexism and endeavour to revise the concept of ideal femininity by challenging the phallogocentric system through the means of creating a female centered world in their works.

The female world created by these authors construct three levels of women characters. Few belong not up to the expectations and demands of patriarchal system, others are who

satisfy or struggle to lead a perfect role of femininity in the gender based society. The last group are those who move above the patriarchal concepts of true womanhood and discard these scales and standards and lead their lives as best as they think.

“Literature acts on the world by acting on its readers” (Bennet 70). Feminist literature empowers the female readers by making them convince the need for change. Kapur and De fix the new idea of womanhood through their writings and boldly convey the message of liberation of women socially, psychologically and intellectually throughout the world resulting their novels universally appealing and accepted.

Kamala Markandaya, stresses the search for woman’s identity in her novels much same as that of Kapur, De and other Indian women authors. She projects Indian women’s issues and problems in her works and the deeper quest for their identity and self-redefining. Much same as the narrative style of Kapur and De, Markandaya depicts the emotional responses and predicaments of Indian female folk. She presents the journey of women from the state of self sacrifice to self-realisation. Similar to the fate of Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Rukmini in *Nectar in a Sieve* is also presented with full of hopes and distress, pleasures and pains, victory and loss, ascends and descends.

In her novels Kapur plainly criticises the attitude of traditional Indian, families and society that unwillingly accept and adapt the birth of a female child. In Kapur’s *Home*, when Sona delivered a girl child Nisha as the first baby, her mother-in-law was not so content enough to praise her and only after the birth of Raju the son, she gets more acceptance in the in-law’s house. Sona, herself feels recognised by the birth of her son Raju. “God has rewarded you”, cried the mother-in-law, clutching the day-old boy to her withered chest. “At last the name of his father and grandfather will continue” (48).

Women are forced to conceal their original self and natural feelings, real anger or

passion, depression or fear to maintain their feminine nature and to be accepted by their male counterparts. Maya of De's *Second Thought* suppresses her wishes, dreams and desires to make herself adjust to her husband's nature not only the material comfort, but even the emotional and physical desires. "I didn't want to blame Ranjan. Or anybody else, for that matter. It wasn't Ranjan who made the promises. It was I who had foolishly assumed them. Ranjan had pledged nothing more than financial support, a decent house to live in and four square meals a day. As far as he was concerned, he had redeemed his pledge. It was up to me to accept or reject it" (263). Just as, Nina of Kapur's *The Immigrant* tries to engage herself by devoting her emotional isolation from her husband in the alienated foreign country, Canada.

The loneliness, Ananda's therapy, her sense of betrayal, her mother and Zenobia, the thought of her whole life ahead of her, how could she bear it? Obediently she started to describe all this when the tears came, thousands for each of the above. She carried, till her eyes burned, her nose was raw from wiping, the tissue box next to her empty and her lap full of soggy balls. (*The Immigrant* 226)

Nina manages to be a part of a counselling group and takes an admission for the library course and fearlessly seeks an opportunity to establish her own identity. "When something failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back" (*The Immigrant* 330). Incensed by the menial status obtained by women in life and literature, Wollstonecraft, one of the pioneers of feminism denigrates the phallogocentric practice of the reification of women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792): "She was created to be the toy of man, his battle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused" (Greer 68).

As Beauvoir comments “One is not born but rather becomes a woman” (295), Kate Millet also comments in her *Sexual Politics*, about the gender based discrimination as:

Because of our social circumstances, male and female are two cultures and the life experiences and utterly different-and this is crucial. Implicit in all gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents, the peers, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture and expression. Every moment of child’s life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one. In adolescence, the merciless task of conformity grows to crisis proportions generally cooling and setting in maturity. (Millet 31)

Feminist literary criticism interprets and re-reads literature with strong resistance to the pertaining patriarchal doctrines. They try to expound the text and elucidate the phallogocentric principle. Much resemblance with the inner desires of Maya of *Second Thought*, Nina of *The Immigrant* and Astha of *A Married Woman*, Sarojof Sahgal’s *Storm in Chandigarh* attempts to retain her individuality and lives freely in the suffocating backdrop of traditional pattern of married life. They strive for self-respect and honour.

Similar to Kapur’s female protagonist Nina, Sahgal’s protagonists Saroj of *Storm In Chandigarh*, Simrit of the *Day in Shadow*, Rashmi of *This Time of Morning* and Anna of *Plans for Departure* leave their husbands and move away from the marital bonds in search of their own fulfilment of their own womanhood. Quoting Betty Friedan: “For women as for men, the need for self-realisation, independence, individuality, self-actualisation is as important as the sexual need with as serious consequences when it is thwarted” (Friedan 1971:9).

Kapur and De opine that it is the responsibility of the feminist writers to demean the phallogocentric concepts regarding women, bethinking her conditions as inevitable, mostly deserved and as predetermined fate. They strengthen women and exhort them to make self-interrogation and introspection to apprehend how much they have trapped and imposed patriarchal doctrines demeaning themselves to nihilism. These authors make the women readers aware of the leeway to question the values, norms and beliefs that constitute their lives, hindering their career-ambitions and obstructing the wide horizons of knowledge and rationale from them.

In their fictional works, these writers depict few female characters and a large number of situations where female is made to be under yoked by male. The feminist ideologies of the authors are often vocalised through the central female protagonists who are 'new women' in their mind and body. They act as instruments against the androcentric ideas that govern the deeds and thoughts of the people connecting to them.

Sonali Rande, the protagonist of Sahgal's *Rich like us* highlight the strong-willed, emotionally independent women akin to Nisha of Kapur's *Home* and Mikki of De's *Sisters*. They refuse to bow before the strange hold of men, developing with their own dreams to fulfil "a new tradition to create, her independent worth to prove" (*Rich Like Us* 28)

Sahgal the powerful woman author of twentieth century, herself states: "The new woman does the opposite. No more Sati, she is determined to live, and to live in self-respect. Her virtue is courage, which is a willingness to risk the unknown and to face the consequences" (*Meet the Author* 83). Maya of Sahgal's *A Time To Be Happy* throws hints about woman's individual freedom from the struggling marital bondages.

Kapur and De have constructed three varied forms of women characters in their novels. The first category is those who wholeheartedly accept and adapt to the conventional

mode of living considering it quite convenient, comfortable and less challenging for them. These women readily co-operate with those who keep them in subordination and find their world in it.

The next category is the new women who possess the will, wisdom and power to change. They are aware about their rights and stand for their needs. Their thoughts precipitate in their words and actions. They belong to the liberated women or new women who are bright intelligent, independent, self-confident and self-sufficient. The women of new generation make themselves float along with the movements of the world. Chhotti and Ida belong to this group.

This feminine consciousness delved by Kapur and De, give rise to self-discovery of the women characters, which realise their inner strength. The amount of self-awareness differs in the second and third generation of women authors. The first group of women writers are hyper-sensitive, that leads them to dark dismal neurosis. The second group are silent sufferers and the third one owns new and noteworthy discoveries about themselves and seek a sense of fulfillment in their association with the world. All these features of self-identity stipulate new dimensions to women's writings from the point of view of techniques and themes. Sushila Singh in her work, *Jeminism* opines that there is something wrong in the society's treatment of women. Kapur analyses the problems of Virmati as a Socialist as well as Marxist feminist. She very well reflects the internal and external conflicts of Virmati.

Kapur states that education provides women the needed courage and boldness to select and opines for their own space and role in the society. When Virmati elopes with professor Harish, Kasturi laments "it was a setback to the Arya Samaj effort to educate girls" (85). In her view "education encourages girls to be independent and wayward" (*Difficult Daughters*181).

Virmati's mother Kasturi too had been sent to school and the first girl in the family not to be married off at a very young age. But she felt that, "school and college should strengthen you, not change you (*Difficult Daughters* 54). Along with imparting knowledge, Kasturi was never allowed to forget that "marriage was her destiny . . ." (*Difficult Daughters* 57). In case of her daughter, Kasturi attempts to practice the same; but Virmati rebels against many of her mother's orders especially when she tries to attach the 'female inheritance' with her. "That is what my mother tried to give me. Adjust, compromise, adapt" (*Difficult Daughters* 236). Making herself a replica of her cousin Shakunthala, Virmati fights for her wish, her time, and space in her own notion. Virmati admires Shakunthala as she appears to be, "One whose responsibilities went beyond a husband and children" (*Difficult Daughters* 14). The new woman, Shakunthala's words rejuvenates 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. With the awakening of the country in nationalistic fervor and partition politics the mighty empire was fighting for survival. (*Difficult Daughters* 216)

Kapur reveals in an interview, "Indian women novelists have concentrated on women's problem in their work and have given vent to a new approach to and consciousness of emerging phenomenon". Kapur presents them with an intimate understanding of women and their problems. She highlights the injustice done towards her women characters, from the concept of religion, God, morality, honesty and others. She presents 'marriage' as a security for women a conjugal compromise, transforming a fugitive desire into a lasting emotion for both.

Kapur's *Virmati* is a modern woman of colonial India and denotes as a metaphor to explore the possibilities of modern women in education and economic independence who face humiliation and disillusionment in their colonial matrix. The novel urges higher significance when read from the point of women's struggle for identity in all three generations. Apart from the political freedom, the true freedom for women still remains an elusive dream.

Kapur's third novel *Home*, too, projects these same theme of female subjugation and emancipation. Most of the female protagonists of the Indian novels are mostly educated aspiring individuals caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which family and society become intolerant of them. They struggle between tradition and modernity. It is their individual struggle with family and society, through which they plunge into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for themselves as qualified women with faultless backgrounds.

Home depicts the life of many women characters mainly focusing on the life of Nisha and her mother Sona who is an ordinary girl, married into a prosperous Banwari Lal family. Her mother-in-law treats her with contempt for having bewitched her son by her good looks and forced him into marriage. Later only after ten years when she gives birth to Nisha and then to Raju, she attains a respectful position in the Banwari Lal family. Ironically in the later section of the story we come across this same Sona, who has borne suppression, contempt and fought the fierce battle for equality treating her daughter Nisha inferior to her son Raju. But Nisha questions and argues for her equality along with the boys. "Why should it be only Ajay, Vijay and Raju? There must be something I too can do" (*Home* 267). This sort of discrimination is seen throughout the novel. Sona feels that a girl has no right to choose her place of happiness. She states, "What is there in happiness? A girl has to be happy everywhere" (*Home* 135).

Nisha is criticised for her zeal to take up higher education, also, her mother says: “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* 127). She adds, “People are suspicious of brides who are very educated. Too many ideas make it difficult to adjust” (*Home* 140). At the end, Nisha succeeds at last, in her battle for education. Her family consents to her desire thinking, “Higher studies were just a time pass; it was not as though she was going to use her education. Working was art of question, and marriage was around the corner” (*Home* 142).

Nisha finds her college life adventurous, making her modern and bold in her decisions. She begins to act independently and react to her rigorous upbringing at home. She needs to negate everything her mother stood for. Her initial step was to cut her long hair that her mother treasured as indispensable for womanhood. “To encourage her rebellion she thought of the girls in her class, girls with swishing open hair, wavy, curly blow-dried, or hanging straight framing faces with fringes, flicks or stray tendrils she thought of her own, in the thick, rubber banded plait, never falling free, ugly, unimaginative” (*Home* 147).

Meanwhile Nisha fails in her affair with Suresh and the bad reputation of being ‘*Mangli*’ further delayed her marriage. The arrival of the rich, educated sister-in-law Pooja intensifies her misery. In order to escape the turmoil, she thinks about other opportunities and it lead to a strong motivation within her. She does not want to escape or turn back; instead she wants to face the odds in her life. She needs to analyse her strengths and ideas and wish to fuse them with her father’s influence. As a new emancipated woman, she decides to start a business in readymade garments. She boldly discloses her plan to become a business woman to her orthodox family, and even manages to get a loan from her father. “She would be better than Pooja. She would not only be the daughter of a prosperous man, but be responsible for wealth herself. After all, her father’s blood flowed in her, the blood of traders” (*Home* 287).

The establishment of Nisha as a new entrepreneur was something unheard of in a joint family set up where women stayed at home while the men were the only bread winners. Nisha's father trusted her completely and visualised an emerging business woman in her, whereas, her mother was disturbed with her daughter's new turn. Nisha proves her mother wrong and becomes a successful business woman with several workers under her and her 'Nisha Creations' being sold in all the leading stores of Delhi.

Nisha claims her independence in matrimony also; she wishes to marry a person who allows her to continue with her business. According to her wish, she gets married to a thirty-four year old *Manglik* widower, Arvind, who also consents with the proceedings of her business. Nisha is much alert about her business and future identity even after marriage. Even after her pregnancy, she carried on with her establishment. She bears the four-fold responsibilities of being a wife, daughter-in-law, mother and business-woman. The complications and the post pregnancy period make her to move away from her business field. She hands over her establishment to her sister-in-law, Pooja with an intention to enstrengthen it one day.

Thus, Kapur presents Nisha as the 'new woman' who stands out as a woman of determination to break free from the shackles of male domination and patriarchy. She searches for her own identity, for selfhood, to understand her ownself in order to have a more authentic life than the one she experiences. At last she realises that happiness is in being and sharing oneself with everyone.

The women writers of the twenty first century through the depiction of their assertive female protagonists, try to consciously break the feminine productiveness and bring out the females from the man-ordained suffocating narrow spaces. Through their narratives, they try to shatter the persisting myth that gives privilege to males as Gods in the house. Kapur's

second novel *A Married Woman* equips her heroine Astha to give a rigorous opposition to patriarchy by making herself metamorphosed into a feminist campaigner.

Married Woman is heavily plotted. It narrates the life of Astha right from her young adulthood through her early middle years. Amidst her family responsibilities, she searches for her own space. 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 a sort or more that is something strange in the Indian context. Astha is depicted as an authentic person living in an authentic existence. According to Heidegger, authenticity means whether an individual has a self-defined critical consciousness, as opposed to a mass produced or stereotypical identity. All female protagonists of Kapur and De have a reflective, critical consciousness capable of self-determined action.

Astha feels a sort of isolation and emotional detachment from her husband Hemant, whenever finds a temporary relief through her scribblings. Her poem, *Changes* very emphatically presents her pain, longing and determination.

I would never suffer again
 But no matter how many times
 I have the doorways of my soul,
 To let the chill light in
 The darken grows silently
 To hide me in the break of day. (81)

A Married Woman reveals a woman's obsession with love and lesbianism. It is a kind of narrative on a woman's incompatible marriage and resulting frustrations. In the novel, the

author employs her writing as a protest, charting from the point of view of a woman's experience. Along with the different issues rising out of a social-political upheaval in India, it also deals with the traumas, sufferings and anxieties of the female protagonist Astha who wish to change the Indian male perception. She is much shocked at the growth of fundamentalism and the rise of religious zealots to uplift and elevate the country by crusade and establish paranoid by presenting evil as a historical necessity.

The expectation and the attitudes from the part of Astha's husband and in-laws denied her self-fulfillment and leads to the collapse of the institution of marriage. Slowly she begins to feel discontentment that leads her to defiance and restlessness. Her inner feelings of anxiety, discomfort, loneliness and isolation results in the development of the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of self-esteem in facing the challenges of her life. She realises the true meaning of a married woman in a family is to play the role of an unpaid servant or a slave. In her view, "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth" (*A Married Woman* 231) are the essential prerequisites of a married woman.

Being torn between her duty and responsibility, faith and fact, history and contemporaneity, public ethos and personal ethics, Astha is compelled to find a resort in other things and relationships. Although she finds herself trapped between the pressures of the modern developing society and shackles of ancient biases, she sets out on her quest to find a much more meaningful life through the involvement in social activities and her bonding to Pipeelika through their lesbian relationship. She canonises and commemorates her insulted feminine sensibility raising the male tantrum to socially transform a society.

Comprehending the socio-political realities of the country and the position of women in it, she becomes attracted towards Pipeelika, a muslim wife and a professor's daughter and as one who has "lost everything and had nothing more to lose" (*A Married Woman* 184).

Both of them fulfill female bonding in passionate, and intense fantasies of love making with their overwhelmed body. Astha gloats herself in flirting by just flying lesbianism as a component of larger human urge, as pleasure is an important element in sexual activity. In her shattered family life she prefers this as an antidote to masochism offering homage to her conventional morality. In their feminine habit they forget their personal anguish, and agony in dedication, thinking that their identities as individuals are threatened under the guises of mother, wife and daughter and becomes a property and the purity of their bodies come at a premium. While the lesbian attempts drag Pipeelika to the world of forgetfulness, Astha takes a sweet revenge on her husband. In this act of vengeance, unnatural sex, little excitement, little impatience and much imagination, she has a big jerk in her mind and this cripples her married life.

Astha is Kapur's new woman, "Conscious, introspective, educated, wants to carve a life for herself, to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes" (Malik 171). Similar to other female protagonists of Kapur and De, the new women in *A Married Woman*, Astha and Pipeelika attain independent thinking through their education and become intolerant for the family and society. They struggle between tradition and modernity and develop the awareness of the modern women, who has a voice of her own. Marriage, as a social institution traps and bound their spirit into the responsibilities of a home.

The new women, Astha and Pipeelika face a disillusioned life under the grip of patriarchy and unconsciously they search for a safe, warm and loved place after their shattered conjugal lives. Kapur presents her woman protagonists as a victim of biology, gender, domestic violence and circumstances. She reveals her thought in an interview that "There is a man within every woman and a woman in every man when manhood is questioned and womanhood is fragmented".

The Immigrant, Kapur dares to break certain conventional attitudes of the society by presenting the bold Nina who dares to find her own identity in the alien country, Canada. In the new country when she faces isolation, disillusionment and rootlessness instead of losing her mind completely, she strengthens herself and decides to build up her own life and seek ways to quench her thirst for her own space. Emotionally, mentally and physically she feels isolated from her husband but without losing her mind, she moves ahead to create her own self. In the twenty first century, women refuse to accept the second class citizenship assigned to them by the society. In the present scenario of globalisation and liberalisation women are bold enough to step out of their four walls with the aim to thrive in a male-dominated society by being self-reliant or self-dependent.

When compared to De's characterisation, Kapur's women characters are much more inclined to morality. They consider sex as a medium to establish intimacy and a sort of connecting herself to her male partner.

That was all she wanted to do. Forget. Forget, forget. Forget. She felt a deep emptiness inside her, which she constructed as yearning for the Professor. Oh, how she longed to meet him, to throw herself on his chest, babble out her story, feel his love and sympathy, his regret that he wasn't there pouring over her in a great tidal wave that would cleanse her of all guilt and sorrow!

(Difficult Daughters 173)

On the other hand, De uses sex as a medium to establish power and control over the opposite sex. In most of her works the element of sex is insinuated in a much more explicated form. In *Socialite Evenings*, De paints the erotic sexual lives of the high society in Mumbai. De sketches the life of the contemporary urban middle class women who are educated and boldly deal with the matter of sex as an inevitable part of life and time without any hesitation.

She discusses about the housewives and their loveless rich husbands. The protagonist of *Socialite Evenings*, Karuna acquires a divorce from her husband for she becomes bored with the life of a home maker. Involved in the fields of modelling, advertisements and script writing and at last a novelist, De is critically viewed for her open discussion on sexual matters. De as a writer is noted for her creative writing and through it she brings forth the psyche of woman and her problems.

Socialite Evenings exhibits the agony, frustration and distress of Karuna as a house wife. The concept of sex is intertwined with the birth of children. But the creativity of a woman is not limited to the child birth. De deals with life that wish to have a freedom from hypocritical relationship in a marriage. Her novels always have a social concern and present the liberated upper class women who accept sensuality and sexuality as a part of their life. The novels of De present a group of restoration women who enjoy their life through physical love outside their marriage. She too, similar to Kapur, tries to change the world's concept that women are inferior to men and the world to be masculine. It is hightime to change the prejudice of the society against women.

Male perception towards women needs a gradual change both individually and socially. Women must have the opportunity to talk boldly and freely about their wishes, somewhat intelligently without offending others. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes in her article *Can the Subaltern Speak?*: "Between patriarchy and imperialism subject constitution and object formation, the figure of women disappears not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is displaced figuration of the 'Third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation" (Spivak 80).

Anita Desai dives into the inner conflicts of female protagonists and exemplifies the realities of their lives. Maya of Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* stands astray from the bold and

assertive female protagonists of Kapur and De. Gautama, as a usual Indian husband expects his wife to be attached to the traditional customs of Indian society and be traditional, submissive, tolerant and compassionate. In the initial time period she attempts her maximum to be a loyal wife. But she turns to be silent and passive when Gautama reacts insensitively towards her feelings and emotions. Instead of becoming pro-active and revengeful, she get absorbed into herself. Maya herself paved way for Gautama's death for she knew they "never lived and never would" (*Cry, the Peacock* 172).

Anita Desai's yet another work *Where Shall We Go this Summer*, varies from the thread of *Cry, the Peacock*. It presents a spirited middle aged woman much akin to Kapur's Astha and De's Karuna. Bored with her monotonous routine life along with her husband and children, she attempts to escape from it. But realising the sprouting of a new life inside her womb and making no other choice to be back to her previous life, she makes her mind to be a part of harsh realities of life and fit herself in to the mainstream of the Indian culture.

Desai's novels also replace the distributed psyche of women who become the victims of male dominance hindering their desire for self discovery and introspection much similar to the suffering mindsets of Kapur's and De's female characters. Women move out of their home and family tie ups only for the emotional gratification. The modern day's husbands and wives lack the emotional bonding, love and compassion leading to the disconnection of their nuptial knots. For quenching their emotional thirst, modern women cross the martial boundaries where sexual and emotional needs are fulfilled.

De through her novels creates the images of new Indian woman who have been traditionally moulded as a docile, weak and submissive individual suppressed and dominated by the male dominated society. De stands apart from other female novelists in a way that her new woman takes advantage of her physical potential much more emphatically than others.

Her works focus on power-politics and power imbalance in sexual relationships and various other social issues, through her Indian eyes. Through De's characters and other instances plotted in the novel, it gives great insight to the real picture of the Indian lifestyle and psyche.

Even though Kapur too deals with the element of sex in her works, it differs from that of De's. De is not at all restrained by social sanctions unlike other female writers. Other writers including Kapur show a conscious restraint in writing about the physical side of man-woman relationship and also about the dark side of loose morals in marital relationships. Using her creative writing, she attempts to destroy the patriarchal hegemony. She demands herself to be "Among the first to explore the world of the urban woman in India". De writes in *The Hindustan Times Magazine*, "I with great deal empathy towards women, without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about woman's situation" (3).

De's novels breed a group of modern women who demand equality with men in all walks of life. In *Socialite Evenings*, De develops the modern woman Karuna recognising her 'otherness' wish to break out. The author presents her as not as a submissive and compromising lady to the traditional old set patterns of the society but rather develops herself as a different woman searching for her identity in the fascinating modern world. Karuna affirms her bold feminine psyche through protest and rebellion. Through her dating along with the film makers and her stay in US, she rejuvenates and empowers herself to face all the condemnation from friends and society.

Socialite Evenings presents a picture of marginalisation of Indian women at the hands of their husbands focusing mainly on the glittering and excited easy going women of Mumbai. Karuna's married life lacks love, faith, bonding and it ends up as a total disaster. She feels, "She has married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time"

(*Socialite Evenings* 1). For her, husband is “unexciting, uninspiring, untutored. He was not made for introspection” (*Socialite Evenings* 65). Towards her husband’s indifferent attitude, she never feels weak, but resists, shouts and fights back as a bold modern woman.

In a patriarchal male dominated society, women are marginalised and completely by all means trivialised. Meanwhile, De caricatures the Indian male in her works as those who are “terribly threatened by self-sufficient women” (*Socialite Evenings* 47). Accepting her husband’s incompetence and inability, Karuna seeks the psychological and emotional fulfillment in Girish.

As an opposition towards the bullies, thrashes and attempts to assert the male chauvinistic power, she wishes to be whole and stands by herself without a man. As a free woman, she attempts different roles to quench her thirst for self-actualisation finding her own ways and means to unfurl the creativity subdued within herself. Kapur and De attempt to create a new paradigm by deconstructing the hierarchal arrangement of societal relationships between the sexes.

De always tries to give her female characters their own identity in the society by developing them into bold, confident and professional women in an urban atmosphere. She presents the urban world where man and woman do not become one in marriage, but act merely as partners in love.

The major reason that makes De a popular writer on her straight forward attempts of the contemporary urban woman’s state of being and the challenges she faces. As a modern novelist, she very well recognises the distortion and marginalisation of women and seeks to make change in the set pattern upside down through her writings. She ventures to shatter patriarchal hegemony and protest against male dominance.

De's women differ a lot from her male characters. Even though Indian women are marginalised by the male-dominated society, her women revolt against the traditional image of Indian women in words and deeds. De can be considered as an Indian woman writer with a sense of liberated womanhood. Her female characters act as mouthpiece of New Indian woman of the creamy layer of society. Khushwant Singh comments on the traditional view on Indian women: "this is all most Indian women know of sex-an unpleasant subjection to men's desire-necessary in order to have sons, bearable because of its brevity"(42).

Sisters of De presents the new woman Mikki who boldly transfers herself to a powerful woman to face the realities of life. She unknowingly transforms herself to a mature sturdy woman from being a highly emotional sensitive woman. In the early period of her marriage with Binny, she feels a sense of security. But she later realises the real nature of her husband as a womaniser who has already got a family.

Similar to any other traditional Indian wife, Mikki too remains silent and tries to adapt and compromise with Binny. All her properties are transferred to Binny and later only she recognises his real motive in marrying her, to keep up his image in the society. She is even denied the right of motherhood and her wish to become an active partner both in life and business. He needs a wife "who stays at home and looks after me . . . our women stay at home and make sure the place is perfectly run. They fulfill their husbands every need and look good when their men get home in the evening. No office going" (*Sisters* 109). Binny as a representative of harsh rigidity of patriarchy, behaves cruelly to Mikki. She pleads with him "I can look after you and at least a part of the business. We could work together . . . I won't have to wait hours to see you" (*Sisters* 109).

De's women are much liberated from economic constraints. They urge for their personal freedom and if denied, they turn rebellious. They even bravely dare to break the

marriage oath and engage themselves in extra-marital relations. Mikki in *Sisters* is in a constant revolt with herself as a woman and as a human being. Even when her husband suspects her chastity, she pleads and wishes to be attached with him: “Binny . . . I love you. Only you . . . I can’t live without you” (*Sisters*141). Despite her complete subservience to Binny, his strong suspicion regarding her chastity shatters the golden days of her married life. As an epitome of it, he proceeds for a divorce and throws her out of his home.

In spite of all throbbing incidents that Mikki faces from Binny, she was unknowingly strengthening herself into her own ‘being’ as a woman and as a bold individual. She strongly determines to keep hold of her industries through which she identifies herself. Mikki gains power to smash the traditional image of woman whose acts against the patriarchal male culture. As Beauvoir quotes: “What they demand today is to be recognised as existents by the same right as men and not to subordinate existence to life, the human being to its animality” (*Sisters*123). Before Mikki takes any further actions, the unexpected death of Binny together with his illegitimate family brings her back all the assets. She advances in her life as a bold, enthusiastic, strong lady managing her business and industries along with her sister Alisha.

Another bold voice of feminine fury in Indian English literature other than Kapur and De who attempt to capture the pitiable state of Indian womanhood is Deshpande. Through her works, she revolts against the androcentric attitudes; “However I found out, very early in my writing career, that women’s experiences are believed to be of interest only to women, that women’s problems, ideas and lives are specifically and narrowly considered as women’s problems and not human ones. It is male problems, male ideas and male experiences which are human” (Jain 33). Deshpande’s protagonists, much identical with that of Kapur’s and De’s reject to sacrifice their individuality and identity for the sake of persisting the traditional roles framed by the society for women. Saritha of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* moves away from the life of her husband Mahohar. Same as the thoughts of Nisha and Istah of *Home* and

A Married Woman, Saritha too evolves into an individual with her own perspective besides simply being a daughter, sister, wife and mother chained inside the four walls of house. She feels "... because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 220).

Like Ranjan of De's *Second Thought*, Jayant in Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* suffocates his wife Indu by his extreme dominance and gives a trapped feeling in her mind. She recounts. "When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant, when I dress I think of Jayant . . . Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him . . . Have I become so fluid, with no shape no form of my own (*Roots and Shadows* 34).

A little bit different from Maya of *Second Thought* and similar to Nina and Mikki of *The Immigrant* and *Sisters*, Indu of *Roots and Shadows* gradually transfigures her into an individual with her own identity and resumes her life on her own terms and conditions. Bharathi Mukherjee also through her works *Wife* and *Jasmine* depicts the frustrated Indian housewives who even take hard measures to unravel from the harsh bounds of married life.

Through their novels both De and Kapur mock at the attitudes of the educated and sophisticated men who fail to understand or give consideration of the feelings of women. Most of them fail to recognise the worth of their women, debasing them as mere beautiful celluloid dolls. De's *Second Thought* narrates the story of a young middle class Bengali girl Maya, who gets more fascinated and falls in love with Bombay than her expected husband Ranjan who descends from Bombay. When life starts to move on just contrary to her expectations, young Maya adjust herself to survive the sultriness of not only Bombay but also her marriage.

Through the portrayal of Maya's life, De explicates the hollowness of Indian marriage system. She very painfully recognises that inspite of Ranjan's stay abroad, he is very

traditional and above all, an insensitive husband. In the first meeting, before their marriage, when Maya's mother expresses her liking towards working after marriage, suddenly Ranjan intervenes and declares: "I am earning well enough to support a wife and family. I believe it is a women's duty to run a good home" (*Second Thought* 11). Even before Maya ponders whether it to agree or disagree, her uncle notes, "In any Indian family, the husband's comforts always come first. Everything else follows" (*Second Thought* 11).

The restriction that begins right from their first meeting continues into Maya's life after marriage. Ranjan declares "There are certain rules. You have to abide by them whether you like them or not" (*Second Thought* 83). He promises her in providing her financial support, a decent house and four square meals a day. "As for he was concerned, he had redeemed his pledge" (*Second Thought* 263). He reminds her about her duties as a married woman. He hardly shows any sign of her presence in "his home". He shows a cool reaction towards the physical needs of her. He expresses a genuine lack of interest in her. Even when he returns after ten days from Calcutta, he reacts strangely to her when she caresses him. He jumps back "as though he had received an electric shock. He had lain trembling in bed for a long time, his breathing heavy, his eyes screwed shut" (*Second Thought* 259). She slowly recognises her probability of being childless due to his stand.

In her utter loneliness, Maya puts her head wearily on the pillow. Meanwhile, Ranjan slips into deep sleep not at all aware of the pain he has caused to her. Her relationship with him is not only a failure at the sexual level but even their temperaments are at different levels lacking compatibility. Amongst her suppression both physically and mentally, she finds a solace in Nikhil, a neighbouring boy. In the darkness of her loneliness, in between her dilemma whether to stick back to the traditional pattern of Indian housewife or to move along with Nikhil, she boldly chooses to seek her own identity and quench her thirst for being herself enjoying the sweetness of life by fulfilling her dreams of knowing the beauty of

Bombay. “But it didn’t matter. I was determined to get out of the house anyway and find out if I was still in love with Bombay, or if even that had died within me” (*Second Thought* 171).

De’s character Maya faces a deeper inner conflict between the conventional and unconventional role expected to be played by an Indian housewife. Every now and then, she daringly becomes unconventional to seek meaning in her life. “Every bit of me was suddenly alive to the feel of Nikhil’s lips, hands, arms, neck, chest, knees, and legs. An unknown recklessness started to sweep over me. Maybe I was going crazy. I didn’t want to think of consequences. I refused to assume responsibility. I really didn’t care one way or the other. I felt free. Lunatic. Wonderful” (*Second Thought* 268).

De portrays Maya as a character who faces and suffers humiliation concerning her social, economic and cultural life. “I had no desire to move, get out of bed, bathe or straighten the bedcovers. I wanted to lie there for the rest of my life, savouring each micro-second of what had transpired between Nikhil and me” (*Second Thought* 271). But she finds herself strong enough to struggle, compromise and realise her existence at the end.

Deshpande’s *Jaya of That Long Silence* is depicted as an Indian housewife suppressing her pains and hardships in her mind maintaining a long silence throughout her life appears as a contrast to the female characters painted by Kapur and De. Jaya acts as a symbol of a typical, submissive Indian housewife who makes herself an epitome of patience. Silently bearing all the troubles from the male dominated society, Jaya is forced to be blind towards her husband’s illegal earnings at his office and even pressurised to make changes to her journalistic writings based on her husband’s likes and dislikes. She ponders over her life: “Middle class. Bourgeoisie. Upper-caste. Distanced from real life. Scared of writing, scared of failing. Oh God, I had thought, I can’t take anymore. Even a worm has a hole it can crawl into. I had mine- as Mohan’s wife, as Rahul’s and Rita’s mother” (*That Long Silence* 148).

Through her constant silence, she evolves into a woman with her own view, concept and identity gaining enough courage and self confidence. Most of Deshpande's female characters same as that of Kapur's and De's pass through various physical, mental and emotional anguish that mould them into a whole new being.

Sultry Days portrays not only a single new woman but caricatures a group of bold, self-empowered new women in India through the concept of Nisha. They all face one sort or the other forms of ill-treatment and at a point in their lives switch themselves to rebellious and protesting women. De has truthfully figured the divergence in the feminine world through her female character Nisha. She has analysed her individual approach to life and its challenges.

De and Kapur as writers are blessed with remarkable capacity to confer very sensitive aspects of human life judiciously. The way they recount each and every aspect of human relationship in general and their handling of man-woman relationship in particular is really noteworthy. As a writer they stand apart from other Indian women novelists writing in English. They adopt a very frank description of incidents and happenings. One of the major reasons of their popularity as writers is their perfect reading of the psychic-mind of woman and their issues. Says De in *The Hindustan Times*: "I did write with a great deal of empathy toward women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel strongly about woman's situation".

Generally speaking, Indian fiction displays three varieties of women: first, the rural class women, belonging to the poor section of society, portrayed by writers like Markandaya and R.K Narayan; second group is the middle class women, specifically the educated and employed, depicted by writers like Sahgal, Deshpande and Kapur and thirdly, the affluent aristocrat women depicted by writers like Namita Gokhale and De.

Her novels, says R.S. Pathak in *Feminist Concerns in Shobhaa De's Works* "seem to be the modern version of picaresque novels of the eighteenth century. The picaro will be a woman but she, too, is avid of experiences, in search of which she goes from place to place" (45). Kapur and De are essentially a feminist writers. Like Saghal and Deshpande, they concentrate on women's problems and give a new approach to them. They are modern novelists who recognize the displacement and marginalisation of women and attempt to turn this pattern upside down through their writings. They incessantly attempt to demolish the patriarchal hegemony and voice a protest against the male ascendancy. For this, they inquire into the world of urban women in India. They knockdown the man- woman interrelating image framed by the conventional society.

De and Kapur toil to change this titled and deformed image of woman who lament for freedom and equality which still remains unheard in the patriarchal world. Due to this, female protagonists in their works are much potent than men. Women are caricatured as individuals with sexual liberty and free thinking and take the traits of the modern women in later twentieth century fiction.

In 1927, an article entitled "Feminist-New Style" in Haper's Magazine expressed

The newly evolved modern woman be a composite figure, a boyish girl who combines the flapper's physical freedom, sexuality, and stamina with feminist self-assertiveness and traditional domestic femininity, a woman who can happily combine pleasure, career and marriage. To the advanced young man of the time, this modern woman seems the perfect companion-fearless, bright and eager to participate in work, in play, in marital sex."(68)

This image might be admired and easily accepted by the Indian males. Kapur and De thus shape their women to be fit in the concept of modern woman.

Even though the country has travelled a long distance in the field of development, still the state and role of Indian women remains only peripheral. The new generation Indian female authors through the caricature of their bold exuberant female characters assert the suppressive folk of Indian women to raise their voice and act against the brutalities and violences affecting them as well as the society in which they are a part of. Through their works, the female writers including Kapur and De challenge the male dominated Indian society that discourages self-confidence, self-reliance and self-empowerment of the female community that desires to get hold of their dreams.

The following chapter entails the finale, the summation of this study.