Such a deviation makes Madhu as a victim not only of the double standards of society but of her own innocence for she had slept with Chandru one night in a hotel room in her innocence, and again, in her innocence, she discloses this to Som. Had she spared him the knowledge of her indiscreet act, the relation between the two would have remained normal. But Som with his typical male standard holds on to this lone act of sex forgetting the fact that he himself has had a full-fledged relation with a married woman before marriage. She reflects, “Purity, chastity and intact hymen—these are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter”. (SR 262) Through the character of Madhu, Deshpande suggests that in Indian society pre-marital sex could lead to disintegration of marriage. In this regard, Anand Kumar rightly observes: “Novels of Shashi Deshpande are critically appreciated as a resistant reading of the gendered materials involved in constructing the ideals of main stream, orthodox practices”. (Kumar 8)

The study of the novels selected shows how Deshpande makes an effective presentation of the feminine sensibility of the Indian women, who silently suffer and bear the agony at the loss of freedom and identity in an orthodox, male chauvinistic Indian society. Meanwhile, Manju Kapur’s her contemporary reaction to accessibility of Indian women and her portrayal of their sufferings in the male-controlled society are identified and discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter - IV

FEMININE ACCESSIBILITY IN THE NOVELS OF
MANJU KAPUR

“Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company”.

- Toni Morrison (Nobel Lecture 1993)

Indian society is male dominated where female suppression is prevalent in almost all the families and Indian women always find it a tougher task to overcome the self-imposed burden. The sufferings of the Indian woman start from the day she is born and continues as a daughter, sister, mother, a home maker and a working woman and she is bound to surrender herself due to the social constraints and the self-inflicted statutes.

Of late, in India, a new drift in literature is discerned. This change rallies to expose the real plight of the female folk and thereby create awareness among them about their social suppression and their right for freedom. One such writer who has taken up this cause is Manju Kapur, who ardently brings out the feminine sensibility in India through her novels. Her women characters are forcibly cornered to obey her even without their consent. Right from her debut novel, she has taken up the cause of women as a torch bearer. In her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, she attempts to stress the truth through Virmati, (her protagonist), that woman has to supplicate herself to man voluntarily though she
remains ignorant of it. Incompetent to succeed against male chauvinism and assess her genuine strength, she unwittingly falls as a victim without being aware of it.

Kapur characteristically opens her novel *Difficult Daughters* with the candid assertion of the narrator, ‘Ida’ meaning ‘a new slate, and a blank beginning’. (DD 256) Ida comments: “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother”. (DD 1) Throughout the novel Ida’s declaration echoes that she does not want to be like her mother and the novelist scrutinizes pertinent subjects like self-affirmation, man-woman relationship, and family-feud and above all the mother-daughter conflict and contradiction. The novel without any literary snobbery deals with a daughter’s reorganization of her fractured and patchy past hanging on her mother’s story.

*Difficult Daughters* is written in an autobiographical vein. Sumita Pal appropriately focuses on the autobiographical elements in the novel:

Like Virmati, Manju Kapur was born in Amritsar and teaches in college. Her family was a victim of partition and was Arya-Samajis like Virmati’s family. Manju Kapur’s father too was a professor, like Virmati’s husband. Manju Kapur admits that she herself had been a difficult daughter for the mother whose priority was marriage and she, in turn wants her daughters to have good jobs. (Pal 2)
The narrator Ida travels to Amritsar to trace her mother’s root from her relatives in order to peep into the past of her mother’s life. She comes to recognize the adolescent period of her mother and also her characteristic motherhood looking for her daughter’s safety. In a unique style Kapur develops the narratology by combining past and present as Ida collects clippings and cuttings of Virmati’s life from her relatives and friends. She comes to know that Virmati is the eldest of a long series of children born to an ever-pregnant mother. In a way her life bears the burden of family responsibilities as her loss of her childhood as a young mother to her siblings does not diminish her desire to study. Virmati pursued many courses such as FA, then BA, then BT on top of that, and even after her marriage, she studies MA in Government College, Lahore. But all these efforts to improve herself are not very easy tasks for her as her family members especially her mother presses her to get married but she wants to have her own space and identity. She desires to taste the wine of freedom like her cousin Shakuntala. After Shakuntala visits her aunt’s house, Virmati’s lifestyle changes and she thinks that it is always possible to be something other than a wife.

Virmati is slowly trapped and she succumbs herself to a Professor by name Harish Chandra. While arguing about whether her supplication is imposed, the infliction is solely by the Professor himself, an English scholar who completed his
higher studies in England. His personality, status, knowledge, mannerism and talents attract the poor adolescent girl Virmati who knows nothing other than Amritsar and her grandpa’s house. Kapur portrays the Professor as a person who leaves his heart in England and returns for the sake of fear of sin, and the same feature continues in him till the end of the story.

Virmati after completing her FA joins A.S College, where Harish Chandra works as an English professor. It is here that the Professor notices her to be flower-like against a backdrop of male students. With his eyes fixed upon her beauty, he starts loving her being conscious of his status and dignity, he should have got rid of his desire. Instead he adds fuel to the fire by stimulating her intelligence with flames of lust. He makes use of her innocence and gets her mind corrupted through his persuading words. His crookedness goes to the extent of breaking her engagement with a canal engineer named Inderjeet, to whom her parents have decided to give her in marriage.

The Professor confuses Virmati’s mind by the enticing words that he apply in the letter he writes to her. He uses his poetic sense and vocabulary to make this innocent girl believe that the Professor is the only person who loves her more than any other person in this world. He encourages her and debases her mind by saying “you are imprinted on my mind, my heart, my soul so firmly that until we can be united in a more permanent way I live in a shadowy insubstantial
Virmati stands by the widely accepted fact that the woman’s mind is deeper than the ocean and no one could easily unfathom it. Unable to withstand the pressure. She falls prey after his persistent persuasion. Like a slow poison, his words and actions make her believe that she is the most important person for him as the selfish Professor spoils the mind of Virmati through his tempting words. The letters used for correspondence when Virmati is imprisoned in her own house shows his act of winning her heart without letting her mind to think.

Virmati too loves the Professor but the thought of her wedding is always at the back of her mind, splitting her into two socially unacceptable pieces. But Professor derogatorily talks about her fiancé as

Anybody who digs canals all day must have a soul as dull and uninspiring as the mud he deals in. What pain will he suffer? He does not even know you, has never tried to know you. For such men the individual is unimportant. It is the institution they are concerned with. If not you, then someone else. (DD 57)

These words clearly shows the Professor in a very bad light. His only concern is to compel Virmati to prevent her marriage so that he can make use of
her in his own way. He is very successful in that too for Virmati tries to commit suicide which results in bringing their relationship to light. Inderjit was then married to Virmati’s sister Indumathi.

The Professor, who is not true to the woman, whom he married, is also not true to Virmati and he says her that she means everything to him and he is forever hers. Talking like this, he makes his wife pregnant. When Virmati questions this, he tries to defend himself saying “He does what he can do to bring domestic harmony. An act is performed with what result you have already seen”. (DD 106) He goes on appealing to her to curse him and berate him but not to leave him.

Sudha Sri comments, “Right from her childhood, Virmati craves for a sense of recognition. But her parents were unable to do so as they had eleven children. Virmati wants to be distinctive but there is no unique identity for her”. (Sri 151) Wherever she goes, he follows her never minding whether it is to Lahore, where she goes for studying BT, or to Nahan to work in a school. He strongly believes that a faint heart never wins a fair lady and succeeds in his mission of winning her as his wife.

Virmati wants to improve her status through education. She wants to emulate her cousin Shakunthala, an educated girl who leads an independent life
and comes to the conclusion that education is the only way through which she can become economically and socially independent. To serve this purpose she does not want to marry Inderjit and comparing Inderjit with Professor she thinks that the Professor would be a better choice. Her desire for education makes her stop the marriage. But this action does not fulfill her desire too. In the meantime, intimacy between herself and the Professor goes to the extreme extent as she surrenders herself totally and as a result she cannot concentrate in her studies.

Virmati naturally is caught in his trap and she gets completely lost in the whirlpool of the misplaced passion and does not feel guilty after losing her virginity. She thinks, “He is right, she was meant to be his, what was the point in foolishly denying it on the basis of an outmoded morality”? (DD 125)

It is really shocking to witness such a comment from Virmati who hails from a very pious family. Her father leads a life that is strictly confined to the rules of Arya Samaj and brings up his children as followers of the Arya Samaj. Her mother Kasthuri is educated both literally and emotionally. A girl being brought up in such an atmosphere naturally should be self-controlled and self-disciplined. On the contrary, Virmati is not self-disciplined and she knows that the Professor is a married man and if she accepts his love, their union will spoil the life of his two children and his wife. But she does not care about it. She loves him and
thereby spoils his family by becoming his second wife. If Virmati has stood firm in refusing him, her life might not have been ruined, yet, she does not do so.

She fails to understand the fact that a wife is not for display. It doesn't mean that a woman should be deprived of appreciation, but that appreciation should be a private affair, shared only by the two people involved in it. Only then there will be a certain beauty throughout their life and making an exhibition of these feelings is nothing but vulgarism at its worst but Virmati falls for it.

Virmati decides to put an end to her love as she feels guilty in spoiling the life of two children by marrying their father. She informs him through letter:

What has happened has happened for the good. In which world was I living, to be so caught up in the illusion of your love? Just as you must do your duty to your family and wife, so too I must do my duty to mine. I am proud that I belong to such a family, and I must keep up its traditions. (DD 107)

Her injured pride makes her leave Amritsar and to continue her studies at Lahore. Her mind is stable as long as she is separated from him but when he meets her and speaks, she willingly loses her stubbornness and falls at his feet, which ultimately results in their union again.
Marriage is a union of not only two individuals but of two families but Virmati fails to see this, throughout the story, though her common sense keeps reminding her about this simple fact. She is quick to silence her conscience and she is very much aware of the fact that sexual pleasure is the only motif of the professor. When Virmati asks him to marry her, he requests for time but continues with physical excitements and she too willingly agrees for meeting with him every time he visits Lahore which ultimately results in her pregnancy. He does not have the thought of marriage but wants to have physical relationship with her. He reasons with her, “Why? Aren’t you mine? And I yours? Body and soul, heart and mind? I worship you, Viru, I want to express it, that’s all”. (DD 125)

Throughout their relationship, whenever Virmati raises the question of legalizing their relationship, the Professor loses his temper and blames Virmati for denying him even that little pleasure in life. He is blind to Virmati’s miserable condition in the society and her family. Virmati should have thought about herself at this juncture that this might be the true nature of man. But it is also the true nature of Virmati that she unnecessarily supplicates herself to the needs of Harish and thereby ruins her identity. (Vanjani 84)

Virmati compares herself with other educated girls like Shakunthala and Swarnalatha. She also accepts the truth that she has wasted her life by courting the Professor:
Am I free, thought Virmati. I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. (DD 142)

Virmati realizes her mistakes, for both Shakunthala and Swarnalatha are representatives of the rising ‘new women’ that recur in Indian literature. The emerging image is one of a woman unfettered, Gilman declares “Here she comes running, out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman”. (Gilman 181) Shakunthala appears from the beginning as the example of the modern or liberated women. She studies and takes part in the Gandhian movement and Swarnalatha is the only female who gets what she wants out of life, without compromising too much. In the Punjab Women’s Students Conference she shines as an orator. “Heavy applause broke out as Swarna finished speaking”. (DD 145) She also continues to take an active part in political activities after her marriage and Virmati was very much impressed by these two characters and wanted to flutter her wings like them. But what actually happens is that the Professor’s thought occupied her whole being and she could not think of anything other than her lover. “she didn’t want to do anything that would alter the Professor’s undenying love for her”. (DD 135)
In the Students’ Conference each and every girl was burning with a sense of anger against the British rule and they revolted against the British Government. But Virmati is absent-minded though she physically sits there, “she felt out of place, an outcast amongst all these women. She thought of Harish who loved her. She must be satisfied with that”. (DD 144) Instead of the crowded hall, she visualized images of herself and the Professor embracing and kissing.

Like the other protesting women, Virmati does not have any fire burning inside her heart about Independence but she completely dedicates herself both physically and mentally to the Professor. This clearly shows that she is a self-centered woman who supplicates herself to the lust of the Professor.

It can also be argued that sexuality becomes a site of women’s oppression. Grounded in cultural, religious and social traditions, a woman’s body is pure as long as it is untouched by man. Having once experienced, the sex-trespassed flesh is then violated, offered and hence bound for good.

Loss of virginity has multiple implications in one’s life. This happens during the time of marriage and a sense of shame is inflicted and the woman gives in. What is a desire for one is a disgrace for the other. Simon de Beauvoir suggests “The youngest girl has hardly more than her body which she calls her own. It is her greatest treasure, the man who enters her takes it from her; she is overpowered, forced to compliance, conquered”. (Beauvoir 405)
Virmati too moves into the forbidden territory and she is compelled to think, “wasn’t her future partner decided by the first touch of a man on her body”? (DD 57) which is the mindset of almost all the women. If anyone exploits her physically, she is ready to give up all those that belonged to her and forces herself to accept and start to live with him. This is the fate of women and naturally Virmati serves as an example for such women.

The happiest and most attractive period in Virmati’s life is beyond doubt that which she spends in Nahan, the capital of Sirmaur, the small Himalayan state run by an enlightened Maharaja which gives her refuge for a while as the Headmistress of a girl’s School. It is there she achieves the greatest degree of control over her life. There are rules to obey and breaking them proves her fall but she is able to teach inside an ordered framework and her performance wins her a deserved respect.

Virmati’s destiny at this stage of her life is that she has to exercise her responsibilities entirely by herself and she attains a near exemplary level of female autonomy. For the first and only time, she has her own place to live in as Virginia Woolf’s famous *A Room of One’s Own* and yet she falls. She believes that she needs a man but makes a wrong choice by returning to a relationship that had already brought her nothing but suffering. Frequent visits of the Professor
make Virmati lose her employer’s confidence and she is made to quit her school, house and employment.

She does however, still have another option open for there is an opening that she glimpses but which finally eludes her and there is another place she could have gone and it is to Shanthi Niketan, to pursue her higher studies. When she is sent out of Nahan School, she decides to go to Shanthi Niketan. She waits in the Railway station for nearly ten hours which creates an oscillation in her mind and she meets the Professor’s friend, the poet, in his house and explains everything to him. She says that if Harish does not marry her, she would not meet him afterwards in her life and the Poet arranges for their marriage and both of them get married. Professor and Virmati return home and during her conjugal life Virmati feels that it would have been better if she had not been married with Harish. Suman Bala and Subhash Chandra analyse the man-woman relationship comprehensively and argue:

But her acceptance of the treatment meted out to her by her lover, the professor totally belies her expectations. The professor’s pursuit of Virmati even after she has been sent to Lahore....reluctance and constant postponing of the marriage in spite of her frequent entreaties....Male geocentricism blinds them to the situation of women. (Bala and Chandra 108)
It can be argued that Professor Harish Chandra enjoys the bliss of both the worlds: Ganga as a maid servant who fulfils his everyday needs, keeps his house tidy and Virmati who satisfies his academic urge who succeeds to marry Harish but doesn‘t secure any place for herself in the family for she is not even acknowledged for her intellectuality.

Like Robert Frost, she has two roads diverged before her, one to the world of wisdom (Shanthi Niketan) and another to worldly life (marriage with Professor). But unlike Frost, she takes the one which most immature self-induced persons travelled by and so she could not make all the difference. If Virmati had completed the journey, she could have rebuilt her life there. The indication of a spiritual awakening of a renewed autonomy fades into the distance. At all the junctures where she has to take important decisions, she proves herself to be timid, a coward woman who is unable to take risks. On every occasion she ruins herself by taking the wrong decision and being self-induced, she herself is responsible for all her sufferings and failures.

The journey to Shanti Niketan would have led her to a destination which would have opened her to a glimpse of spiritual arousal and of a renewed independence. But the journey is interrupted and the long- waiting opens up a trap that she slips into eternally. Virmati’s marriage was not successful for her marriage with the Professor turns out to be disastrous. Though she becomes the second wife legally, she frantically strives for self-assertion. The marriage
alienates her from the husband’s family too, apart from being abandoned by her own. She is ordained to live with her mother-in-law, Ganga and the children who are intimidating and full of hatred. When she slowly withstands and gets accustomed to her new life, she again suffers miscarriage. Once more, she finds consolation by pursuing her Master’s Degree at Lahore. At the end, the partition of India ironically unites Virmati with the Professor. More promisingly, she acquires her coveted place of wife and mother at Delhi. Regarding this, Dora Sales Salvador comments, “Kapur emphasizes the efforts made at that time by numerous women, while demanding equal opportunities, equal access to education and life-opportunities going beyond convention, were a visible force in non-violent resistance to the British”. (Salvador 356)

In her life, there is an endless shuttling between education and marriage. After some time Virmati becomes pregnant again and they are blessed with a girl child who is the Ida narrator. Virmati never corresponds to the longstanding family tradition but paradoxically she persuades Ida to make herself fit into the channel of the family. In her futile attempt, she tries to keep her under control but Ida emerges as an uncontrollable woman who is left alone having no issue, “engulfed in melancholy, depression and despair.” (DD 279) The search is that of Ida Virmati's daughter, as she seeks to reconstitute her mother's history. Ida, an educated woman, divorced and childless, apparently leads a freer life than her
mother's in external terms; yet inside her she feels, even if not quite so acutely, some of the same anxieties as had plagued her mother: “No matter how I might rationalize otherwise, I feel my existence as a single woman reverberate desolately”. (DD 3) It is clear from the book’s pages that Ida, the narrator through whose voice Kapur speaks, has achieved more than her mother and that this is so even through the simple creative fact of writing down her own family history.

To quote Dora Sales Salvador again “In *Difficult Daughters* we do not listen to Virmati's voice. She could not speak out being certainly situated at the juncture of two oppressions: colonialism and patriarchy. What we have is her daughter's reconstruction and representation”. (Salvador 10) There is, then, a qualitative leap between the life-histories of (narrated) mother and (narrating) daughter. In addition, as another of Kapur's commentators, Gur Pyari Jandial, correctly points out, it would be a mistake to devalue Virmati's struggle because she failed, for what mattered was to have made the attempt: “What is necessary is to break the patriarchal mould, and for Virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement”. (Jandial 43)

At last, the novel evokes some concern over the problems of women in a patriarchal society where laws for women are designed by men in its social matrix and a husband stands as a ‘sheltering tree’ under which a woman proves her strength through her suffering. Kapur has defended this through her Virmati
with this idea, and presents the other women like Lajwanti, Kasthuri, Kishori Devi
and Ganga as glorifying the institution of marriage and taking pride in being
submissive. But the social scenario of Indian Independence is vividly visualized
through the protagonist Virmati, her cousin Shakuntala, and her hostel
roommate Swarnalata. Shakuntala makes her recognize that education is the only
means for freedom to women and Swarnalata makes her understand that men
exploit women for she is a vociferous, politically active and striking woman
activist who inspires Virmati and influences in her self-assertion.

Apparently the novel does not seem to profess or propagate feminist
outlook but there is an undercurrent feminine point of view, which gives a
serious touch to the story. Vandita Mishra appropriately analyzes.

Kapur never permits Virmati any assertion of power of freedom.
Because she breaks free from old prisons, she is 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 years of studying and working
alone do not give her the confidence to strike independent roots
and grow. She hovers uncertainly at the edge of each new world,
ever entering, lest 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 it. (Mishra 4)

The women in *Difficult Daughters* are all educated and modern, who are reluctant to blindly follow the age old convictions and beliefs that curb the freedom of women as an individual. They are women who want to prove their individuality and continuously struggle towards attaining their own objectives and motivate themselves and work towards their upliftment. These women do not accept the authority of the society, religion or even the tradition. Their conviction is, “that society would be better off if its females were effective and capable”. (DD 150)

The women portrayed by Kapur are the women of 1940s and the events are set to revolve around the backdrop of Indian struggle for Independence. Women’s emancipation, possibly is not something novel today but during the pre-independence era, the fight for women’s autonomy and freedom was in its early stages. So, Virmati’s attempt to succeed in her fight to assert herself has to be held in great appreciation. Though she fails, she has made an attempt. Because of her acquaintance with the Professor, she not only comes to comprehend the value of education and the higher things in life but also about
the other darker aspects of life. The eternal vicissitudes of life makes her a matured woman and she tramples and defies the patriarchal constraints and expectations. By this she makes a valiant attempt to assert her identity and achieves self-satisfaction and self-fulfilment in her life.

In her next novel, *A Married Woman*, she presents the struggle of the womenfolk in yet another perspective. The first part of the novel is slower and longer as she presents Astha, the main character’s childhood and the early part of her marriage. The story begins to claim much attention only when Astha has the turning point of her life, in meeting Aijaz. Once the readers are in the grip of Astha’s internal unrest and the Indian social upheavals, the plot begins to draw the readers in.

Kapur resonates with her feminine proclamation, hatred for violence, blood, death and ill feeling in the name of God and religion, and her feminine assertion remains untouched by history, politics and human interpretations, for it is basically a novel for women at large. In *The Hindu* Kapur talks about Astha’s character “I don’t think so because a lot depends on how the subject-matter is treated”. (4)

Astha, a young woman and the protagonist of the novel is brought up in Delhi, succumbs to the pressure of her parents to decide on her groom in a traditionally arranged manner. Within the bounds of marriage, she discovers a
latent sexuality that is driven by love and passion and her desire to assert her individualism. The main ideas devised in the novel are based on family life, sexual relationship, gender discrimination, socio-political commotions and the longing for a peaceful co-existence. The purpose of the novelist seems to be one-dimensional with the idea of how love can really drive a woman into such a relationship.

Astha, the sensitive daughter of an enlightened father and orthodox mother has grown in a middle-class educated family in South Delhi and becomes a housewife, teacher, painter, and a lesbian in her status of a married woman and fights for self-assertion. Unlike many unmarried girls she had her infatuations of adolescent love for Bunty, a boy of another colony and for Rohan who left for overseas for a better career.

Her real story of love and marriage starts with Hemant. After marriage, Astha gets disillusioned about human nature in general and the politics of the country in particular. Astha is brought up, as befits a woman, with large sentiments of fear. She enters a traditional Indian arranged marriage and initially finds love and companionship. After the birth of her two children she begins to find that she has sacrificed her own identity while striving to satisfy the traditional duties and family values.
In her family life, Astha is not that happy and nothing is right with her. As a married woman, she becomes an enduring wife and a sacrificing mother. Her volatile incongruity with her husband who is passionate with corporate culture compels her to play the role of the mother as well as the father for her children. This stonewalls her self-fulfillment and thus her married life crumbles. Discontentment leads her to defiance and restlessness and her anxiety, discomfort, loneliness and isolation do not encourage her to give voice to her unhappiness over her troubled relationship; rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of self-esteem in facing the challenges of her life.

Astha understands that a married woman’s place in the family is to be that of an unpaid servant or a slave and the thought of divorce brings social and economic death in her Indian status. She realizes, “A willing bed at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth” (MW 231) are the indispensable requisites of a married woman and she contemplates marriage as a terrible decision as it puts her in a lot to enjoy bouts of rage, pain and indecision.

Astha likes to have a break from her dependence on others and proceeds on the path of full human status that poses a threat to Hemant and his male superiority. The husband has changed into an antagonist from a lover. The marriage bed is their only meeting point for otherwise they live in armed truce.
Astha has had quite enough: “Astha was a woman and she was sick of Sacrifice. She didn’t want to be pushed around in the name of family. She was fed up with the ideal of Indian womanhood, used to trap and jail”. (MW 168)

It is at such a time that Astha meets Pipeelika Khan, a strong woman of the world as different from Astha, as chalk and cheese. Pipee is the initiator, driving Astha into a secret lesbian relationship that leaves her at once bewildered, fulfilled and happy. For the first time, she finds someone to open her heart to, and she falls in love with Pipeelika. Although she finds herself trapped between the pressures of the modern developing society and the shackles of ancient biases she sets out on her quest for a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship. She canonizes and commemorates her insulted feminine sensibility raising the male tantrum to socially transform a society.

Astha’s marriage to a Pan-American and Pan-Indian husband of her parent’s choice is a total miscalculation. Hemant’s foreign education, banking profession and addiction to minting money do not make Astha happy. Hemant’s resignation from the banking job and joining in T.V manufacturing business and Astha’s joining as a teacher and her giving birth to Anuradha and Himanshu bring enough change in her life.
Her impression that “with good job comes independence” (MW 4) is proved wrong and she “seemed very pedestrian”. (MW 47) By giving birth to a son on the one hand, she proves herself not “socially inferior” and enjoys the gratitude of her family members for whom the family is whole and on the other she expresses commitment to her profession.

Like every married woman, no doubt she has a liking for motherhood but she resents the sex-subjugating attitude of her in-laws. She is surprised at the reaction of the family and society when they remain sceptical of Anuradha’s birth but gets an overwhelming approval of motherhood after the birth of Himanshu. In her feministic assertion, Astha does not appreciate superstition, sex-subjugation and pride and prejudices of having children just for their discriminated sex in the Indian perception.

Being “caught up in the web of daily life” (MW 84) she develops restlessness, anxiety and tension, “the disease of modern life” (MW 76). She remembers her mother’s words “woman is earth” (MW 69), and that duties, responsibilities and obligations help a married woman to understand the grandeur of Hinduism, a Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is a Sanskrit phrase that means that the whole world is one single family. Everyone has their own world view which is quite often different from person to person. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam means respecting this difference. Contrary to single world view, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam says animals, birds, plants, trees and other
organisms in the ecosystem have atma that are part of our family. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasudhaiva_Kutumbakam)

Asth a does not believe that a woman can bring purity and peace to the family and she becomes serious of man’s ignorance at women’s suffering and asserts her rights with the knowledge that “Religion is a choice as much as other things”. (MW 89) Astha differs from the male perception of woman as a holy cow. The inhospitable family and hostile social atmosphere due to Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi issue have made her realize the other side of a woman’s life.

Pipeelika, a Hindu Brahmin girl, had married Aijaz Akhtar Khan a Muslim, and a sensitive, socially committed history lecturer, painter, theatre activist and founder of Street Theatre Troupe. Astha appreciates them for the ideas of their conjugal life and their secularist vision. Like a modern feminist, with all her feminine sensibilities, she appreciates Aijaz’s aesthetic and creative genius and for his service to help slum dwellers and underaged girls. She admires Pipee for asserting her right to marry against her mother’s desire and against society’s recommendation.

Understanding the socio-political realities of the country and the position of women in it she becomes attracted towards Pipeelika as one who has “lost everything and had nothing more to lose”. (MW 184) Both of them fulfill female bonding through passionate and intense fantasies of lovemaking with their body.
Astha gloats with herself in flirting by just flaunting 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.

The variance between her role of wife, mother and that of a lover continues, making her feel culpable and frightened, but she has gone too far to turn back. It is now that the husband starts missing his wife, who is not there with him, even when she is physically present. He notices the changes in his wife, and tries to bridge the gap.

After sometime, Astha too realizes that any relationship, even that between two women, becomes demanding after a length of time. Pipee wants Astha totally committed to her but Astha is not willing to distance herself from her old life. She wants to sail in both boats, keeping these two important parts of her life separate from each other. “Though she finds a soul mate in Pipee, Astha thought that if husband and wife are one person, then Pipee and she were even more so. She had shared parts of herself she had never shared before. She felt complete with her”. (MW 243) However such a relationship can continue only between two people who are firm and strong and totally resolved to live together. Astha is not a strong woman as she could never be bold enough to
leave her marriage and live with Pipeelika and so ultimately Pipeelika leaves for the U.S.A and the relationship breaks up.

Kapur shows Astha growing and evolving through this relationship like Celie and Shug Avery in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Her innate desires and yearnings are now better expressed through her paintings and they are strong and effective statements as they bring her the ultimate comfort. If Astha becomes the victim of male passion, Pipeelika becomes the victim of communal riot. In their feminine habits they forget their personal anguish and agony in dedication, thinking that their identities are individual entities that are threatened under the disguise of mother, wife and daughter and they become a property and the purity of their bodies comes 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, small 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 who is conscious, introspective and educated, wants to carve a life of her own and to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes.
The greatest strength of this novel lies in its rich social context that expresses the author’s concern for a girl who is uprooted from the familiar environment of her childhood, girlhood and youth who leaves behind the most formative part of her life, and who molds herself a new in a completely strange environment, with a completely new set of rules regarding it as the only permanent fact of her existence.

Asth a completely gets dejected with the male ego allowing the nation bleed with violence, murder and damage to other’s faith in the name of religion and God. Astha realizes how the power seekers and politicians on both sides (Hindus and Muslims) have used religion quite blatantly in the name of secularism.

In the complex relationship, Astha and Aijaz have their ideological love for man, religion and society, Aijaz and Pipeelika have their secular love and Astha and Pipeelika have their lesbian affair. Manju Kapur has made a thorough sociological study in the Astha-Aijaz-Pipeelika relationship. Astha and Pipeelika are impressed with the community as they are good friends, partners and human beings in spite of oblique references. “four wives, large families, instant divorce, Inter-community marriages, the religion of babies from such unions”. (MW 132)

The beginning of Astha’s marriage, founded upon her sacrificing her own identity
while trying to satisfy the traditional duties of a Hindu wife, coincides with the events leading up to the Babri Masjid demolition. Anita Nair comments: “The key to the plot is the Babri Masjid episode. If one is looking for a metaphor, here it is, a nation falling apart because of difference that can’t be bridged”. (Nair 84)

Marriage, the social institution, traps and curbs their spirit by binding them to the responsibility of a home. In her novels, Kapur has exhibited the new facets of the married women. Her new women, Astha and Pipeelika are disillusioned in life with their suspicions of male integrity, and their awareness of male frailty. In their sundry experiences both had found their husbands as “embryonic Othellos”. (MW 221)

Aware of the root cause of the problems of the women, families and societies in general, Kapur brought out the causes of Astha’s restlessness and her search for identity. In depicting the inner subtlety of a woman’s mind, Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Most of all, Kapur manages to blend the personal with the external for she speaks as someone who has lived through the unrest of the communal riots, which in some way affected the lives of all the Indians. The unrest and the communal riots were major historical events and Kapur has entwined them with simplicity and understanding into the lives of Astha and Pipeelika.
In her writings Kapur has always given much importance to the issues in the context of patriarchy, inter-religious marriage, family bondage, male-female bonding and co-existence of past and present in the socio-political arena. She has delineated her women protagonists as victims of biological, gender and domestic violence as well as circumstances.

Kapur’s *A Married Woman* is a well-balanced depiction of a country’s inner development, its strengths and its failures and the agony of a woman’s turbulent mindset, which is as complicated as the social and political turmoil that takes place around her. Here, Kapur has confined just to the women with zeal and seems to suggest that a married woman’s work is not as a housekeeper and child-bearer but has something more than the defined work.

Kapur offers a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanism by inner potential as an individual and the desire to attain personal recognition, through Astha. In the gynocentric struggle for liberation and fulfillment, Astha struggles for the togetherness of the family as a unit.

On the whole *A Married Woman* is the classic story of the woman who has sacrificed her own individuality for the sake of the family. This sets the stage for the reader to conclude that, even though women are trying to defy the
patriarchal norms, they cannot come out of their family web and Kapur’s conclusion achieves a fine balance.

Through this novel, Kapur sets a new trend by becoming the first Indian feminist to introduce the lesbian love as an imperative issue to be discussed by the champions of women rights. In spite of the fact that Kapur’s declaration of sexuality in the form of lesbian relationship may create much hue and cry, what she told in an interview to Ira Pandey about the introduction of this plot clears all confusions.

This relationship suggested itself to me as an interesting means of making Astha mature and change. An affair with a man would have been the classic cliche and so I ruled it out and tried out a same sex affair, I don’t know how successful. I have been not nor is this based on any real life relationship. It is as I said a writers experiment with a lot. (Pandey 6)

Kapur raises the question of feminism in *A Married Woman* by portraying Astha in all her moods and colors. She is presented as a devoted wife to her husband, a docile daughter-in-law and a careful mother. Astha as an educated lady, craves for the individuality of thought and action too and raises her voice of protest at every moment and she does her work only by her own desire and
satisfies herself. Astha finds independence in her various types of relations, in her passion for painting and in active participation in politics.

The wave of Kapur’s cry for feminine sensibility keeps on flowing in Kapur’s third novel *Home* where Nisha, a single woman revolts against the traditional family system, but never crosses the boundaries of morality and social values. The large portion of her life has passed under the shadow of her aunt Rupa, who is also conscious about her freedom and identity. The power struggle among minor characters like Suneeta, Sona and Puja can be glanced at many places but it is totally inconsequential. At the outset, Nisha has to fight against the notions of her mother who considers her daughter a mere helper in the kitchen:

Lala Banwari Lal dies and Yashpal takes back Nisha to please his mother. Now there is less interest in school and Sona expects her in the kitchen all time. Nisha is horrified to discover that “her mother’s idea of a daughter was one who helped her every time anybody ate.” Sona who is always concerned with making her daughter homely and good wife says, “That Masi of yours has ruined your head. What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be useful to her entire life”. (*Home* 125)
The novel *Home* exposes the still prevalent insular attitudes towards the upbringing of a girl child in India. It traces the painful voyage of Nisha, the protagonist and details Nisha’s search for a home which is her search for a place of shelter and security. Unfortunately to women in India, home is not a place of comfort and relaxation and it does not ensure them any emotional security and at times does not provide them any physical security.

Kapur depicts the issues of an ordinary middle class family in Delhi. The patriarch of the family is Banwari Lal, a cloth businessman who lives with his family in New Delhi’s neighborhood of Karol Bagh. Banwari Lal has two sons and one daughter. The elder son is Yashpal, younger is Pyare Lal and daughter is Sunita who is already married to a person named Murli before the beginning of the novel. Murli is a person beyond the status of Banwari Lal as well as money and as Sunita loves the boy she is married to him. The Banwari Lal family belongs to a class whose skills have been honed over generations to ensure prosperity in the market place. From an early age children are trained to maintain the foundation of these homes. The education they received, the values they imbibed, the alliances they made has everything to do with protecting the steady stream of gold and silver that burnished their lives. Banwari Lal is a believer in the traditional ways. His dogma that has been the base of the patriarchal society says that men work out of the home, women within and men carry forward the family
line and women enable their mission for his two sons unquestioningly follow their father in business and in life but their wives do not. Neither does his granddaughter who makes choices considered unavailable to the women in the family.

In this novel, Kapur has addressed a lot of issues which are experienced in a joint family and are often brushed aside to protect the family honor and name. Behind the curtains that maintain the sham of a big happy family, lie secrets that are never revealed. Simone De Beauvoir comments: “the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other”. (Beauvoir 4) Nisha refuses to reconcile with the patriarchal and male governed society and tries to establish her own individual identity, since in the establishment of the society, woman is stamped as the weaker sex, denied full justice, social security, economic liberation and political awareness.

Nisha in Home is a new woman, more assertive, self-assured and a confident person. Having equal footing with men, she proclaims her womanhood in a bold manner and as a young college girl, she wants to apply her brain and power to work as a businesswoman. Kapur wants to represent the woman of the new millennium in its real sense. Hence, Nisha's quest for identity and freedom as a human being significantly expresses Kapur's feministic approach.
The Immigrant (2008) is Kapur’s fourth novel. Unlike her other novels, the setting is different for the subject matter and locale of the focus is shifted from India to Canada but at the core of it, the novel deals with man-woman relationship. Society and family form a group and the social institution stands in the way of the independent existence of women. Kapur has continued her consistent efforts to make her women independent and bold.

There is hardly any doubt in the fact that Kapur’s women from Virmati to Nina gear themselves up to chalk out their own destiny through their independent course of action. Regarding the theme of Kapur’s Difficult Daughters Christopher Rollason aptly asserts as follows

The search for control over one’s destiny, surely the key theme of Difficult Daughters refers to the independence aspired to and obtained by a nation (despite its cruel division by the hateful partition), but also to the independence yearned after (and finally not obtained) by a woman and the member of the same nation.

(Rollason 19)

The same idea recurs in The Immigrant, too for it has nothing to do with the problem of immigrants. Only the concept of revolt and rehabilitation of woman has been placed in a remote and alien set-up and in this novel there is no
east-west clash or the theme of alienation. If a few shreds that remind the reader of the theme of alienation are taken into consideration, that will be misleading and will also tend to overlook the basic subject of man-woman relationship. Brinda Bose in her review in *India Today* states: “This is a novel tale on Indian immigrant existence in North America”. (Bose 76) It is amazing that Brinda Bose too has ignored the basic theme and finds the locale of Canada more attractive than the theme of man and woman relationship. Bose expresses:

> 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, en route to employment in the adopted country that will provide her with the proverbial (and providential) ticket to ride. (Bose 3)

In this novel, Kapur has discussed the two aspects that are important in man-woman relationship: the first is sexual and the second is psychological aspect. But it is the first which overpowers the psychological for in the sexual aspect Kapur has shown pre-marital and extra marital relationship and in the premarital sex, Rahul the boy friend of Nina ignites the fire of sex in her. In extra marital relationship, Nina finds a partner in Anton in Canada, and both the
relationships Nina comes forward by herself. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* rebels openly while Nina’s rebellious attitude is silhouetted in the social façade.

Sex is an important aspect of life but in Kapur’s *The Immigrant*, the female protagonist is bent upon outmaneuvering the male counterpart. Nina has sex with Rahul and after marriage, she finds her husband sexually dysfunctional and then she remembers Rahul:

> Involuntarily comparisons arouse. Rahul with his obsessive talk of sex, endlessly curious about what she felt in what position, this technique versus that. His little virgin he replied, who needed to be educated so they could feel much pleasure possible. That was what love was all about. (*The Immigrant* 91)

After finding her husband sexually incompetent, she thinks of her independent career. She joins Library Science course to get a job in Canada and her husband secretly goes to California to be cured from impotency where he meets Dr. Hansen and stays for a week. The Sex Therapist Marty works as sex stimulator and educator and miraculously who is cured and becomes a changed man now.

Compatibility between husband and wife is indispensable. But in the present novel sex overtakes other factors needed for compatibility between
husband and wife. Both Nina and Ananda want to join the bandwagon of liberal sex. Nina gets a white male partner Anton and Anand gets the white female body of Mandy and both deceive each other. Social, psychological, and ideological factors remain on the fringe while sexual factor remains the focal point. The Immigrant without ‘S’ factor is a travelling guide for those who are intending to go to Canada.

The novel gives a misplaced notion to the activists of Feminism as if sexual liberty has been the ulterior motive of the feminist movement. Nina refers to Lawrence as her favorite author and sex is not a taboo in the west but for Nina open sex at a public place is something new. Nina’s first film in Halifax is “Women in Love”. Being an Indian, she could not digest the behavior of a couple she sees in the theatre hall. “Every so often their face merged, their lips locked in kisses why could not they wait till they get home? How long had they known each other, was this a new love or an old one, clandestine or legitimate”? (The Immigrant 125)

When asked by Nina’s husband about the movie, she does not give an elaborate reply. “It was lovely, though actually “Women in Love” had too much sex for Nina’s taste. She did not like direct evidence of how different her own experience was”. (The Immigrant 125) Sex is a very important part in the life of
human beings but its propriety and relevance in the Indian perspective cannot be ignored.

Another aspect of sex has also been discussed which is nothing but sexual satisfaction. Nina does not derive sexual satisfaction from her husband Ananda. After getting treated by Dr. Hansen, Ananda has satisfactory sexual relations with his wife Nina. But it is surprising, in the Indian context, that both are drawn towards extramarital sex. Nina gets a sex partner in Anton and Ananda gets Mandy. In *The Immigrant* Kapur has depicted a new angle in the concept of sex. Her characters exchange sexual partners which leads to the suspicion whether she propagates novelty in sexual relationship or supports adultery. Both Anand and Nina’s actions throw sufficient light on this aspect. Kapur describes the new relationship as

> Library school assumed an excitement for Nina that she had not anticipated. Everybody was so nice and friendly. By now she and Anton had fallen into a bantering relationship. They were both married and to keep things clear, she made frequent references to his wife and her husband. (*The Immigrant* 252)

Ananda’s attachment with Mandy may be seen in the following words, “For the four days that Nina was going to be away he would spend every night with her. He would show her his apartment. He would take her out for dinner.
Now he had to go”. (*The Immigrant* 253) Consequently, one finds that both are having extra-marital relationship and both betray each other. Again, Nina seems badly hurt and she returns to Canada after performing the last rites of her mother. She finds “a wavy blond of hair next to her pillow”. (*The Immigrant* 327) and “the hair explained much the distance, the silence, the ticket for two months in India, his strange indifference interspersed with tenderness, the shifty look that skittered about her. She did not blame him. His body spoke, when his tongue could not”. (*The Immigrant* 328)

In this novel, Kapur beautifully portrays the psyche of the immigrants. She analyses their thought process so sensitively that the reader begins to equate herself with her characters. Time and again, people in a foreign land languish for their motherland so much so that even things they used to condemn or despise during their stay in their native country often tempt them. Kapur not only in *The Immigrant* but in her other novels also deals with parochial as well as some universal issues, relating to the middle-class Indian society. In particular, she takes up the cause of the females who are victimized on account of conservative and traditional mind-set of the Indian masses. Whether it is Nina’s mother who is uneducated, religious and simple or it is Nina educated and cultured, they both meet the same oppressive treatment.
Kapur’s latest novel, *Custody* was published in the year 2011 and Kapur emphasizes the concept of possessiveness as a symbolic metaphor in the Indian patriarchal society. Her narrative deals with marriages that collapse and she also talks about the social hypocrisies and battles for children that comprises of anguish and conflict. In the recent times, the influence of colonization, invent of globalization, setback for communism and nationalism have much contributed to the idealization and limitation of this type of families. These families can be construed of the gender models and codes one could find in great Indian epics like *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana*. The model families in Kapur’s *Custody* demonstrate the common allegory that conceives the family as a single unit for reasons such as emotional bonding and social status. They also have the normal social constraints like oppression, domestic violence, possessiveness and disintegration. In the patriarchal family, the role of human beings has been conditioned to manipulate, exploit, abuse and submit others through the norms prescribed by the society.

Kapur’s story takes place in the 1990s and the families belong to the Delhi upper-middle class. Married to Shagun, Raman spends long hours working for a successful company that manufactures soft drinks. This is the dawn of globalization and rising Indian enterprises are projecting their business round the country and abroad. Raman is the stereotype hard-working man, the main source
of income who is married to a beautiful wife. Kapur presents him in the traditional role of father and husband, the head of the family who goes out to the world to struggle and make money, who has to be taken care of when he comes back home, but also who does not care much for his own wife or children. For him, his professional career is more important than them.

In the normative patriarchal family, which is modelled on the families of the great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the household functions as a producing and reproducing unit: the husband produces and goes out into the public sphere and the wife gives life to children and takes care of them at home in the private sphere. The head of the family is also the one who controls his land / property and others, as Uma Chakravarti argues:

> The domestic ideology outlined here encapsulates within itself codes of duties and responsibilities … but the hierarchy of power and of exclusions is quite clear. The central figure in the structure of the household is the young householder, a male, who inherits the land, contracts a suitable marriage, delegates authority to the wife and buys things for her. (Chakravarti 258)

Kapur presents through Ishita, Raman’s second wife, that some women may be fully satisfied being guardians of their family. But Shagun’s fortitude, like that of so many other women, is different. She has never been able to conduct her
own life. For her, everything has been decided by parents, family, cultural customs:

She had wanted to be a model, but her mother was strongly opposed to a career that would allow all kinds of lechery near her lovely daughter. “Do what you like after you marry,” she had said, but after marriage there had been a child. Then the claims of husband, family and friends made a career hard to justify, especially since money was not an issue. (Custody 11)

When the reader follows the story from the beginning, he can easily identify that a marriage like this is bound to fall apart. In fact, this is what happens when Shagun meets and falls in love with Ashok. Raman finds it out with the help of a detective and he is so infuriated that he is resolute to take his revenge at whatever cost. If he has been the one to have an extramarital affair with another woman, Brahminical puritans will have consented it and justified his conduct, and will have denounced the wife. But as it is the wife, Shagum, who walks out of a domineering marriage and that is more equal and democratic, her honest deed and contained interrogation of patriarchal ideologies seem to need a violent reaction by the dethroned and dishonored hero who willingly causes unnecessary pain to the lives of the members involved, especially Shagun and the children. So, Raman instantaneously rejects Shagun’s request for divorce and he refuses any agreeable compromise to resolve the matter.
Owing to his childish attitude and his wounded-male ego he lacks good will to solve things rationally and avoid the suffering of the children, although he insists that he loves them a lot. One wonders what kind of love this is, and concludes that it is egotistic and self-centered. Following the narrow-minded custom of the male dominated family, he performs the role of the ‘dispossessed’ male, of the great epic Indian hero, such as the ones represented in the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*, for this is really the context in which he has morally been brought up. To uphold this argument Uma Chakravarti writes:

> *The Ramayana* became the hegemonic text par excellence, and far outweighed the *Mahabharata* in terms of constructing normative codes for all sections of society but especially for women… In sum, the *Ramayana* constructs the normative family, suggests dangers to its material and affective interests from women, the lower orders and outsiders. (Chakravarti 271)

The oppressive moral values and codes of conduct also affect Ishita. She is brought up in a traditional family which follows the hegemonic Indo-Aryan normative codes of morality where Palriwala observes:

> Marriage continues to have material, social and symbolic meanings and consequences which are asymmetrical in terms of their implications for females and males in at least three significant ways. Firstly, selfhood, respectability and status are tied to wifehood and motherhood in more exacting ways than they are to being a husband
and/or father. A single man or a man without children is seen as unfortunate, but a woman in a similar situation is inauspicious, possibly dangerous. (Palriwala 400-401)

Ishita has an arranged marriage and she leads a very happy life, but soon her husband and in-laws discover that she cannot conceive and things change for her. Despite the many painful and tedious medical treatments she undergoes, she feels small and psychologically distorted:

Smaller than the ants on the ground, smaller than the motes of the dust in the sunlit air, smaller than drops of dew caught between blades of grass in the morning was Ishita as she sat in the gynaecologist’s office. (Custody 65)

Therefore “asymmetrical” are the negotiations and terms of marriage in these families based on material acquisitions. Even Ishita’s mother says, “For us money is not as important as family. But beta, it is essential that Suryakanta have a child. As the only son, he has to make sure that the bloodline of his forefathers continues”. (Custody 69) She continues further, “She could not conceive, whereupon SK had decided he could not love her”. (Custody 127)

Kapur reflects on these oppressive and gender-discriminating norms that a sector of Indian society still follows. Another example confirms that this kind of family is a political combat zone of subjugation over possession with Ishita’s in-laws: “For us the girl’s qualities were everything. You know we asked for no
As a result their reaction is that if the woman does not have ‘the right qualities’ to have children, the procedures for mutual-consent divorce has to begin and a cash pact has to be agreed. Ishita does not seem to learn much from her distressing and degrading experience: “The mother began to call her shameless, the sisters refused to talk to her, the father and SK avoided her”. (Custody 72) Ishita is the only character in the story that does not progress as she represents the kind of human being in real life who disregards her past experiences and does not take them as lessons from them. Draupadi, in Mahabharatha, challenges social norms by having five husbands and Ishita by not having children. However, Draupadi accepts the situation but Ishita is a casualty of her embarrassment.

Life gives her a second chance to work as a social worker in Mrs. Hingorani’s NGO and she also considers adoption. Her psychological fragility and her steady exposition to the faint ideology regards that women are procreators and guardians of the family, community honor and purity. This makes her hate herself and her own sexuality, “If only she could tear out her whole reproductive system and throw it on the road. She hated her body, hated it. Everybody in the building must know why she had come back. Return to surrender”. (Custody 127)

In a second attempt Ishita marries Raman and thus returns “to the status so rudely snatched from her”. (Custody 303) The status of wifehood and motherhood which endows her with legitimacy and her marriage to Raman
elevates her to her husband’s social position, just like the women in the great Indian epics who get access to power and family honor through their connection with men. Even their love is expressed in material terms: “At jewellery counters unfortunately love needs to be translated into rupees. They settled on a mid-range one for 30,000. On Ishita’s hand true love sparkled”. (Custody 302) Uma Chakravarti writes: “It has been argued that all the women in the epic hold one thing in common their worth is defined and mediated through a man’s worth”. (Chakravarti 268) Ishita’s union with Raman empowers her and gives her strength to fight for the household’s common target the custody of his children.

Kapur has taken writing as a protest, a way of mapping from the point of view of a woman’s experience. She negotiates different issues emerging out of a socio-political catastrophe in India. With much enthusiasm to change the Indian male perception, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer, and perish for their triumph. She is shocked at the growth of fundamentalism and the religious zealots to uplift and elevate the country by a crusade and establish paranoia by presenting evil as a historical necessity.

Almost all the female characters of Kapur are educated, aspiring individuals caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become
intolerant of them. They struggle between tradition and modernity and develop
the awareness of the New Woman, who has a voice of her own. It should not
surprise the reader that Kapur’s *Custody*, finishes with the sentence as Ana Garcia
Arroyo observes: “In the mean time victory lay with the possessor”. Kapur’s *Custody* (not to be confused with Anita Desai’s *In Custody*), seems to put
the emphasis on the concept of ‘possessing’, as a symbolic metaphor on which
the normative patriarchal family has subtly laid its foundations. “To possess”
means to have as property, to own; but it also refers to gaining influence,
dominating and controlling over lands and peoples; over bodies and minds.
Vigilantly, like a sentinel, the possessor has to guard whatever is being kept on
hold; that which is confined in custody. In this particular story of *Custody*, Kapur’s
narrative deals with marriages that collapse, social hypocrisies and battles for
children that intertwine with anguish and conflict in order to depict a worldwide
(and not only Indian) reality of the politics of possessiveness and unequal power
relations in patriarchal families. (Garcia 41)

The feminine receptivity and feminine accessibility in the novels of Shashi
Deshpande and Manju Kapur have been discussed in this chapter and the
previous chapter. The ensuing chapter evaluates the feminine sensibilities found
in both the novelists.