Chapter 3

“‘To build or to destroy’: History and the Individual in

A Married Woman”

Women's status is highest in societies in which the public and domestic spheres are only weakly differentiated. In contrast women's status is lowest in those societies where there is a firm differentiation between domestic and public spheres of activity and where women are isolated from one another and placed under a single man's authority, in the home. Their position is raised when they can challenge those claims to authority. "Literature has always been a handy tool in exploring the gender relations, sexual differences and several matters related to woman's quest for identity in a patriarchal social set up. A reasonably new perception of women for having their own identity has unveiled some of the prejudices at works in the traditional approach to literature hitherto dominated by masculine perspective"(Kavita 178). Accordingly, women may enhance their status by creating a public world of their own or by entering the men's world. Manju Kapur's heroines seem doing the both. Her women characters make effort to create a world of their own at the same time they enter the men's world. Something of a more specific nature and that too with respect to woman characters in the novels of Manju Kapur. Researcher focuses in this chapter on that how much Astha, the protagonist of Manju Kapur's A married Woman has got failure or success in breaking the boundaries and limitations of her pre-defined cultural rules and regulations. Researcher in this chapter also tries to focus on one more thing that does
Asthā really possess the characteristics of the new rebel woman or not, and if the answer is yes, then to which extent? It would not suffice to say that women characters of Manju Kapur, who share major concerns of the broader post-colonial condition, are much different from the characters of other post-colonial writers.

In novels of Manju Kapur women appear in their new form. It seems that Manju Kapur defies the definition of Simon De Beavoir about the woman. Simon has told that a woman "is a womb, an ovary, she is a female - this word is sufficient to define her." Manju Kapur's heroines are the power to take their decisions by themselves. They are struggling to save both their individuality and self-respect hand in hand. Ignoring the so-called primary responsibility of domesticity and children, they move one step forward neither; they want to be neither mere rubber dolls nor they want to wear the tag of a traditional woman. "Manju Kapur's novels offer a fascinating glimpse into the workings of a woman's mind as she struggles to come to terms with her identity in a patriarchal world" (Kavita 179). As in a typical Indian family, Asthā in A Married Woman “was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear” (1). She was her parents’ only child just as Judith to her parents. Asthā’s education, her character, her health, her marriage, these were the burdens of her parents. She was their future, their hope, and though she didn’t want them to guard her so carefully, they did. But Asthā’s mother, “everyday in her temple corner in the kitchen, prayed for a good husband for her daughter” (1). Asthā’s father also took an enormous care for his daughter. This novel begins with Asthā, indicating that she has been brought up and nourished in as usual atmosphere of a middle class
family. She is her parents' only child and also a center of a lot of expectations. Her father always pinches her to do hard work in her studies. But purpose behind it is not to make her independent only. He thinks that if his daughter Astha will "sit for the IAS," (3) she will "find a good husband there" (3). He even slapped her once or twice to shape her his estimate. Manju Kapur brings out her young heroine’s emotions in the following words: “Tears surfaced, but she wouldn’t act sorry, would rather die than show how unloved and misunderstood she felt“ (02). It was their custom to do Pranayam together in the early morning in the patchy grass surrounded by a short hedge outsider their flat. Sometimes Astha’s father took her out for a stroll through the colony in the evenings. It was not only Astha's father who was worried about her marriage but her mother also. The mother thinks and believes that if parents die without marrying their daughter they can't get peace. Astha is a daughter of the traditional middle class parents who are very conscious about her education and marriage. Mother desires to perform the marriage ceremony of her daughter at the right age. She tells Astha, the worth of a woman lies when she gets married and serves her husband like worshipping to God. She describes to Astha: "When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth" (1). And this is the reason that she always insists Astha to pray to God for a good husband. The parents nurture Astha in a way that she can get a perfect match for herself. She is forced to do morning walk and Pranayam with her parents. Perhaps this sort of motivation has affected the psychology of Astha very deeply. She begins to think that getting love is the only aim of this life. She begins to
imagine a "shadowy young man holding her in his strong manly embraces" (1).

The parents worried about buying a plot and building a house in Delhi. In the mean time, Astha became sixteen. She was well trained on a diet of “mushy novels and thoughts of marriage” (8). There is no reference in the novel that at this time of her life, Astha ever displayed any symptom of deviant sexuality. It was then that she saw Bunty, a handsome soldier-boy who frequented his visits to her house. She likes him very much. Day and night she thought of him. She involves in love affair with Bunty, her first object and crush: “Day and night the thought of him kept her inside churning, she was unable to eat, sleep or study. Away from him her eyes felt dry and empty. Her ears only registered the sound of her voice. Her mind refused to take seriously anything that was not his face, his body, his feet, his hands, his clothes” (8-9). She is a prey to inchoate longings to such an extent that she desires almost every boy she sees with a thought in her mind: "would true love ever find her?" (8). Bunty's younger sister is in Astha's school. Both families, Astha's and Bunty's are on visiting terms with each other. Bunty is a student of Defence Academy, Khakvasala. He visits his parent in holidays. Bunty sees Astha's family with his father. This is theirs, Astha's and Bunty's first meeting. Astha falls in love with Bunty at first sight. Kapur describes Astha's feelings: "Hours spent in planning accidental meeting, how to dump in to him in the colony, how to cross his father on his evening walk, how to fall into enough conversation to be invited over, how to borrow a book to prolong the stay, how to fall into a faint, how to die at his doorstep," (9). Astha is overwhelmed by the feeling of love. She is neither able to eat nor
sleep or study. All this happen with her only. Bunty doesn't have any such feelings for her. Therefore, he doesn't make any sign of desire to talk to her or to see her.

Astash has no choice but to be in men's shoes. It is a common belief that it is men's business to follow, plan, woo and make advancement in love. This is inverted in the case for Astha. It is she who makes all the advancement first. She invites Bunty for a movie. She writes him letter when he is in the Academy and starts flirting. They write to each other. But the correspondence doesn't last long. "As the correspondence established itself, so did the mother's suspicions" (12). Astha's mother visits Bunty's family the very night Bunty arrives at his home during the next holiday. Her mother tells Bunty's father that Bunty is distracting Astha. Bunty is asked to do nothing with Astha. Thus, all Astha's fantasies end in tears and with a question "Where was the man whose arms were waiting to hold her?" (15). The parents try their best to acquaint their daughter with Indian culture and tradition. The parents, especially the mother, take every precaution to make sure that their daughter is on right track. The mother is conscious of the fact that Astha is young enough to get married. Astha "has just turned eighteen" (20). The mother shares her anxiety with the father: "There is a time for everything........The girl is blossoming now. When the fruit ripe it has to be picked. Later she might get into the wrong company and we will be left wringing our hands. If she marries at this age, she will have no problem adjusting"(20). Later Astha understood much to her chagrin that it was her mother who was instrumental in showing the seeds of discord in her daughter’s friendship with Bunty. Shortly a suitor came for Astha. When the official gentleman-college, tired
and was stinking with sweat. She was not at all ready to meet the stranger. "Asthा collapsed against the bathroom door, tears falling, crying, crying for Bunty, crying for the lack of love in her barren life, crying because she didn’t want to see a dull stolid man in the drawing room who advertised for a wife and asked about sports" (21). Her mother was terrible upset at this. Both had different wavelengths. Astha remained in the bathroom long after the suitor had left. Manju Kapur sarcastically says, "The bathroom represented her future; she had better start getting acquainted with it now" (22).

Like any typical Indian parents Astha’s parents too took an enormous interest in reading matter. Her mother told her, “Our Shastras teach us how to live. You will learn from the Gita, the Vedas, the Upanishads” (28). However, Astha didn’t show much interest in those texts with the pretext that her Hindi was not very strong. In the mean time, obviously suspecting something fishy in Astha’s secret life, her boy friend did very well in the exam and like his father went to Oxford for his higher studies. Astha felt very small. Her father was “a minor bureaucrat, who had never studied abroad, whose sole possession, was 280 square yard in the wilderness beyond the Jamuna” (29). Astha felt hopeless. She knew that “it was over” (31). She had become a victim of male passion. Rohan went abroad and Astha enrolled in M A, “bored and unenthusiastic” (31). Astha’s affair with Bunty turns out to be a tragic end. When she enters into the college, lacking behind all her past memories, she again falls in love with Rohan, a professor of her college. She enjoys meeting with him at the same time enjoys physical relationship. Later on, Rohan refuses to marry her after sipping her body and left her alone for higher studies at Oxford University. It is under her dreamy nature, she falls in
love, first of all with Bunty and then with Rohan. Though, Astha is grown up with care and protection but she is crossing the limitations and boundaries of a traditional society. Finally, she agrees to marry with a man whom her parents traditionally arranged for her. Hemant is a foreign returned man who belongs to a bureaucrat family, they settled down in Vasant Vihar, the posh colony of New Delhi. In course of time, Astha gets fade up with this new life and dullness began to taint her. She thinks; “What was she to do while waiting for Hemant to come home? Her in laws were not demanding, for the housework they had help, and supervision, no matter how painstaking, still left her with enough free time to be restless in” (46).

Parents of marriageable girls become upset if they do not get any formal proposals from eligible boys. Before Astha’s parents became panicky, Astha had a proposal from a US returned MBA chap. She was wondering whether she should tell him “though she had kissed a boy, her hymen was intact” (35). The engagement was over and both started dating. The marriage took place on an auspicious day. Rohan had abandoned her, Hemant had married her, he valued her, and he thought her so charming. In their honeymoon in Kashmir, he told her that he was happy because he wanted to marry “an innocent, unspoilt, simple girl” (41). That was fulfilled for he was so sure that Astha was virgin. But asked herself, “Had she been a virgin?” (41). As such thoughts were useless, she decided to stop thinking about the past. Whenever Astha's parents find her deviating from the trodden path of tradition and culture, they guide her and when needed they forced her to follow the trodden path. In contrast, Astha is student of English literature and has grown up in the modern society of Delhi. She is not a firm believer in
culturalism. She is not interested in the person to whom she doesn't know and to whom she doesn't love. But finally her marriage is settled with Hemant, a Delhi businessman and the only son of a bureaucrat. Astha's new family lives in Vasant Vihar, a posh colony in New Delhi. She starts her marriage life with Hemant. They go to Srinagar for their honeymoon. There they come closer to each other. Hemant takes good care of Astha. He does everything that he finds useful in making their honeymoon memorable. He takes endless photograph, wanders "around the tourist spots of Srinagar, hand in hand" (38), admires her poem and painting, addresses her with touching words like "darling", "my baby", "my wife" and "poor baby". "Back in Delhi, Astha submerged herself in the role of daughter-in-law"(43). Her father-in-law and mother-in-law are happy and satisfied with her. Astha has proved herself a responsible, loving, caring and devoted daughter-in-law and wife.

Helence Cixous, the most influential French feminist theorist is of the opinion that in order to resist the phallocentrism or intrinsic male dominance of culture, women have to find their own linguistic space. She thus presents before us the existence of feminine writing, which is derived from the mother rather than the father. That Astha used to write and paint was known to her husband. Reading a poem she had composed, he said, “May be I can help you” (42). All Astha said was, “Really!” ((42). She would have felt that this was another aspect of male chauvinism. Nothing stays forever. Joy, happiness, pain, grief, emotion, excitement and zeal etc. all come and go alternately. After a short phase of excitement, enthusiasm and joy; dullness enters into Astha's life. She is left "with enough free time to be restless in" (46). That wives have to dance to all sorts of tunes of their husbands is not
unusual in the Indian domestic sphere. However, Astha wanted to be different. She tried to make her husband understand that she was an individual and she must get her due respect and she could never tolerate to be a doormat.

Once they returned from their honeymoon in Kashmir, Astha submerged herself in the role of daughter-in-law. In the bedroom, Hemant want her to wear sexy clothes. Barking she would ask him, “What do you think I am? A whore?” (44). On another occasion, Astha was looking at a black thing he offered to her. She asked him what it was. He said, “a teddy”. (44). She asked him in annoyance, “So I am to be your teddy bear?” (44). Hemant was not happy with this reply. Within a few months, dullness began to taint Astha’s married life. She had to wait all day long for her husband’s arrival. As Manju Kapur puts it, “Her future suddenly seemed very pedestrian” (47). She took up a teaching assignment in Delhi and enjoyed it very much. But back in home sometimes she had to wait very long for her husband (who was employed in a bank) to draw his attention to her.

Asth’a’s desire receded. She felt cold, dreary, and distanced from him. She had been waiting for him all day, thinking of their being together, but nothing of this was reciprocated. He was a criminal, destroying her anticipation, ruining her happiness. Astha tries to forge a new identity as a teacher at St. Anthony’s School. She becomes a woman who transforms her occupation of housewife to a working woman. At the same time, she tries to keep a balance between inner and outer spheres. She performs the role of a dutiful wife by serving her husband as every Indian wife does. Above this, she also engages at other work like kitchen, washes clothes and arranges them. Manju Kapur delineates through the protagonist Astha, the position of a
wife consider as subservient to her husband. Astha feels: "Her subservient position struck her. She had no business kneeling, talking off his shoes, feeling ecstatic about the smell of his feet" (50). Hemant, like a typical male in the Orient, didn’t care much to the inmost longings of his wife. Even Astha’s just demand of having a baby was defied by Hemant. She had to repeatedly plead to him to stop using birth control devices. He would remonstrate: “You can’t be so old fashioned (……). With a young wife one can afford to wait” (56). Hemant loved her even after Anu was born to them. However she didn’t like the way he pushed her into the bathroom to have sex with her. He would pacify her saying, “How do you think half the country fucks? You think they have separate rooms? (60). She didn’t like the industry in Noida but Hemant began selling black and white TV’s. Somewhere along the way Hemant’s attitude to Astha changed. It oppressed her very much. Her longing for a better relationship with him did not materialize. He would say, “I have no time for all these games” (66). Every married woman of the society feels that life is more meaningful when she has a baby. Therefore, Astha tells to her husband she wants to have a baby.

Manju Kapur gently digs at the Indian attitude of preferring a baby-boy to a baby-girl in the novel. When her daughter Anuradha was four, Astha conceived again. Her mother brought in a poojari to perform special pooja to propitiate the gods to grant them a boy for Astha. However Astha thought that the baby was going to be another girl. Hemant encouraged Astha saying that they could try again until they got a son. Astha’s answer was very curt: “But Hem, I do not wish to go on trying and trying until we get a son” (68). As the seniors in the family had expected, the baby was a son. He was christened as
Himanshu. Now Astha got all that she wanted. She felt satisfied for “she had partaken of the archetypal experiences marked out for the female race” (69). Like a typical Indian father, Hemant wanted Astha to take care of the baby. As the text says, “The last thing he wished to bother about was taking care of a child” (70). He said that it was her job and he had nothing to do with it. He said firmly, “It’s woman’s work, hire somebody to help you, or quit your job” (70). Astha was struck dumb. He turns out to be a busy man who gives more emphasis on his business for building up their future. He refuses to help her in nourishing and upbringing his son Himanshu. Therefore, “between Anuradha’s birth and Himanshu’s, Hemant changed from being an all-American father to being an all Indian one” (70). Such indifference attitude of Hemant developed disharmony in their marital life. This discontented relation leads to defiance and restlessness and collapse of the institution of marriage. Sharma & Maheshwari assert, “her temperamental incompatibility with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of ‘mother and father’ for her children.” (Sharma & Maheshwari 143). In the mean time, Hemant’s business prospered and he travelled to South Korea and Japan. Gradually their house started acquiring the gloss of a house with money. But such things didn’t make Astha happy. She was now "virtually a single mother "(71).

Asta has to manage and perform every duties and responsibilities of a wife, mother, daughter and teacher without getting any help from Hemant. Above this, Hemant blames his wife for mismanagement, incapability and wastefulness as well. Sometimes she feels like resigning from school because she has to manage single handedly with her problems – husband, children,
household responsibilities and job as well. Therefore, the novelist delineates, “between her marriage and the birth of her children, she too had change from being a woman who valued independence. Besides there was the pleasure of interacting with minds instead of needs.” (71-72) When Astha returns home after the operation of her nose, she could not find the same care and attention from Hemant as he had been in the hospital. She realizes that her children spend more time with their grandparents. When she complaints to Hemant about her children, he responds if the age old parents are happy being with children; let them spend together. The novelist delineates a woman without her children around and lack of understanding from her husband build the feeling of loneliness, isolation and restlessness to her mind. Thus Astha claims, “what about me? As it is when I am in school Himanshu is upstairs. When I come home I want the children. I hardly have you, I should have them.” (78) Therefore, Astha finds her own remedies to relief the feelings of insolence and loneliness in writing poems as well as involvement in sketches. Through her poems and paintings, she expresses her anguish, grief and suffering in various situations. Astha reflects the hard and struggle life of a woman who live in bondage with no gratitude and identity as well. However, “This has always been a man’s world” (Beauvoir 93) is true to a woman who has to live according to the decisions made by man.

Due to some tension or other, Astha had a terrible headache. She had to be operated on, yet the headache returned. In the mean time, she had composed some two hundred poems. These poems talked about her experiences endlessly replayed. She found temporary relief in her scribbling. However, “discussing her feelings with Hemant usually led to argument,
distance, and greater misery” (79). Her poem, “Changes” very beautifully presents her pain, longing and determination:

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

On reading it, Hemant stared at her. To these lines sounded very bleak. Making a cursory glance, he said, “There is not one happy poem here” (81). He also noticed that the person behind those poems was a positive neurotic. Astha protested that the poems were not about her. Hemant looked doubtful. Sometimes reduce to a nervous wreck; Astha took out her anger on her children. She is suggested join a school as a teacher. Gradually, the job brings changes into her life. She tries to adjust herself in her surroundings. It is after her appointment in this school, her personality began to explore. She comes in contact with new phases and areas of life. And when she begins to take interest in external affairs, she comes to know about the boundaries and limitations existing around her. Shalini R. Sinha states: "But this new career of hers, though vetted and approved by her family, is never allowed to come before her other more important roles - that of a wife and a mother" (196).

Through the protagonist Astha, Manju Kapur reveals that woman still upholds the position of inferiority in spite of her quest for equality and a worthy member of the patriarchal society. Astha is very emotional when Hemant refuses to keep her father’s books with them. Instead, he makes the
decision to donate it to a library. Astha claims to her mother for agreeing his words but her mother added, “It is Hemant’s house, and he said there was no room” (87). Astha gets angry with her husband as he has not consulted her before taking up any decision. She expects equality but Hemant plays the role of primary position in patriarchal family. She exclaims, “Then who am I? The tenant? We could have found room, we could have built bookshelves, done something, we could at least have discussed it” (87). Again, in course of time, when Astha’s mother sells her plot, she delivers the large amount of money to Hemant’s hand instead of her daughter. When Astha asks why it is to him, her mother says, “He is a man, he know about money. He will invest it for you and the children” (97). Such attitude of Astha’s mother exhibits woman regards as a subordinated figure of a man. Manju Kapur reveals Astha is a woman of today who raises voice for equal treatment with man in society. Though Astha accepts her duties at home but she wants to participate in any decision taken by her husband either in management or investment. Thus she expresses, “Really Ma, don’t you think women can be responsible for their own investments?” (97).

The school, in which she was working, organizes a workshop with the help of an artist Aijaz Akhtar Khan. He was the founder of "The Street Theatre Group". Aijaz teaches history and it is during holidays he performs plays in school, slums, streets, villages etc. purpose behind these all things is just to generate social awareness .Like the blowing of gentle breeze on a warm humid day, Aijaz Akhtar Khan entered into the uneventful and arid life of Astha. He was the founder of The Street Theatre Group. He held a number of workshops for students and others to create awareness about communal
harmony. But Hemant sarcastically said that Aijaz Khan and his troupe were “culture-vultures” (103). But Astha shortly was carried away by the good work done by Aijaz Khan and even agreed to write a script for a play on Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi controversy. She titled it Babri Masjid: Fact, Fiction and you. Astha loved looking at Aijaz on stage, “allowing herself frequent covert glances” (112). Aijaz was a good artist and he appreciated Astha’s drawings very much. Such thought about his accidental touch on her knee. She had some sleepless nights. All of a sudden, “her life seemed less constricted” (115). Aijaz is a history lecturer and founder of such theatre group. He is a man who motivates and awakens Astha’s social spirit and socializes her thinking. She also finds new taste engaging in social issues. When she writes the script on the burning issues of Babri Masjid and Ram Janmabhoomi to be dramatized in school, her intelligent and talented mind is appreciated by Aijaz. But, she does not get such gratitude from her husband even if he knows his wife is a writer as well as painter. Therefore, Ishwar states, “She feels somewhat suffocated, exploited and unnoticed at home. It is Aijaz’s trust which motivates her to think out of the house. He makes her think about the ongoing socio-political activities which become her future interest” (Ishwar 2).

Aijaz is deeply involved in workshop organized by the theatre group despite of her husband’s annoyance. During the workshop, a tender feeling developed between Astha and Aijaz. On the other hand, Aijaz and his troupe members are dragged and murdered while performing a play on Babri Masjid Ram Janmabhoomi controversy. The death of Aijaz motivates and leads Astha to emerge as a social activist and starts taking part in rallies for justice, in
spite of much resistance from her husband and in-laws. Besides this, Astha is busy in painting for the donation of an exhibition set up in memory of The Street Theatre Group. Hemant tells her to give up her job as she gives more time on painting and nothing else and even forgets the responsibilities of a family. He further tells Astha, her working never brought enough money at all. But, Astha who seeks for self independence and self fulfillment in return expresses “I want something of my own.” (148) She wishes to make enough money out of her painting in order to rent her own studio one day. Like Woolf asserts in her book *A Room of One’s Own* “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” (Woolf 13)

Shortly Astha heard that Aijaz Khan was engaged to Peeplika Trivedi, a woman living in Delhi, “sufficiently isolated from conventional society to believe her choice of partner concerned only herself” (117). Pipee’s mother was horrified when she learned that her daughter was marrying a Muslim. Having been a postgraduate in Economics, she joined an NGO run by three women, dealing with alternative education for slum children. Pipee had a lot of hair, it sprung up all around her head in waves and curls and frizzes. Aijaz loved it, “loved it almost as much as he loved her breasts, large and full of give” (123). They married in September 1988. No relatives were present from either side. A year later in 1989, Aijaz and The Street Theatre Group travelled to Rajpur fifty kilometer outside Delhi to put up a play there. Rajpur was a sensitive area and Pipee didn’t want her husband to go there. Three days later, Aijaz Khan and his troupe were burned alive in their van. It is very obvious that Astha also participates in it. Astha’s participation in the workshop begins her journey of breaking all the boundaries one by one. It is
in this workshop, she meets Aijaz. And her old instinct i.e. search of love, arises here. Now she is a mother of a son, Himanshu and a daughter, Anuradha. Even though, she is fascinated by the multifarious personality of Aijaz. It is other thing that Astha doesn't get chance to flourish this relationship. As soon as the workshop finishes, everything seems to be over. But there is something concealed in the heart of Astha. This is exposed when Hemant shows Astha the news related to murder of Aijaz in paper. "Asth could not read further for the tears in her eyes…..She turned away her head to cry some more" (139).

Reading it in the newspapers, Astha wept openly. Noticing it, her husband, said, “Why are you crying? What was he to you?” (139). When she went to school that day, “numbly Astha put on a white sari” (140). Usually Indian women wear white when their husband passes away. Four days later, a massive procession was organized in Delhi to the Prime Minister’s residence to present a memorandum to him to put an end to communal orgies. Astha was very much in the procession and to his chagrin, Hemant saw her. Whenever found time, Astha painted her inner feelings and even made some money by selling them. Her painting on Yatra fetched 20,000 rupees. There were also good reviews about her paintings. Shortly Astha made a trip to Ayodhya to study the communal situation there. It was there she met Pippa for the first time. She was attracted to her hair instantly. Hemant sees her emotions in the poem as an attack on male dominancy. But she gives up writing and continues rather sadly to draw sketching with the soft pencils and colored charcoal. Hemant makes her understand several times that she is married now and her responsibilities towards family are more than other responsibilities. Later on
during a communal riot her friend Aijaz Khan dies. Astha feels it from the heart. When Aijaz dies, she cannot stop her tears and sentiments:

Hemant, watching her immediately lost his temper. "Why are you crying?" he demanded. "What was he to you?" "Some murderers trap and burn a whole theatre group in a van and you ask me why I am crying?" "This kind of thing happens all the time; I don't see you wasting your tears." "I can't weep for the whole world, only when it means something to me. Maybe I am deficient, but I knew him, he was always working for everybody's good, even the children loved him. And he has been burnt to death. Isn't that reason enough?" She sobbed rocking to and fro with rage and grief (139).

After marriage, Astha's life was running very smoothly. But it is the entry of Aijaz which has given birth to repression and anguish in her life once again. Astha has a strong desire for sex and physical relationship from the very beginning. And her husband, Hemant doesn't seem to be aware of this fact. So, when Aijaz dies, it is the power of the hidden love dwelling in the heart of Astha, which takes her to the condolence meeting held at Constitution Club. Astha "put on a white sari" (140) and goes "straight from school to meeting" (140) with the purpose of being at least "with people who felt as she did" (140). Astha says to Hemant, “I need more space” (156) and asks the room which belongs to his sister Sangeeta so that she can work peacefully but Hemant refuses to give her demand. Thus, Astha becomes very angry and “finally she steeled herself, she shut the door, and if disturbed too often locked it. In this way a certain uneasy privacy was granted her” (157). In the domestic space, Hemant behaves like a typical hyper masculine. In other
words, he is a proud member of a patriarchal society dominated by machismo and heterosexuality. The postcolonial notion of hyper masculinity is brought to the surface in colonial texts like *The Home and the World* authored by Rabindranath Tagore. In the text, one of the lead characters, Sandip thinks aloud, “We are men, we are kings, we must have our tribute. Ever since we have come upon the Earth we have been plundering her; and the more we claim her, the more she submitted (......). The one delight of the Earth is to fulfill the claim of those who are men (......). Likewise, by sheer force of our claims, we men must have opened all the latent possibilities of women (Tagore 152). As the earth is conquered, women must also be conquered. If a man is successful in conquering his woman, then his morale will be very high. Otherwise he will feel very shaky. In other words, as Ania Loomba observes in her classic text *Colonialism/Post colonialism*: “(.....) female bodies symbolize the conquered land” (Loomba 152). Hemant’s attitude to his wife is nothing short of this.

Above this, she is also sick of her frequent sacrifice for family but now “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.”(168) Astha is a woman who seeks a space of her own and also desires to enjoy her life not only within the house but also outside world. She is decided to go to the meeting of the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch to make protest and demonstrate outside Rashtrapati Bhavan as an anniversary of the massacre and to condemn the decisions of building up the temple of Lord Ram at the place of Masjid. But, Hemant is against her wishes and tries to stop her. He claims, “You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home, and not on
the streets” (172). She also wishes to meet Aijaz's wife but in vain. She takes an active part in procession, rallies or Mach related to Aijaz, forgetting the rules and regulations of a middle class family. In other words being a woman of 21th century, she doesn't care for such limitations. She crosses all the thresholds in order to fulfill her duties related to Sampradayakta Mukti Manch, a forum set up in memory of The Street Theatre Group. She ignores her responsibilities not only towards her husband, children and family but she doesn't care for her health also. She ignores the warnings of her husband, when he says: "You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home, and not on the streets" (172).

Asthा want to live her life in her own ways. She thinks that she is a woman. And a woman is made to do a lot of sacrifices. But she, being a modern woman, doesn't want to sacrifice her dreams, pleasures and freedom in the name of family. She is fed up with the ideal of Indian womanhood. She blames and complains whole society and nature that why it is so? Most of the time, she ponders that she is a woman and tries to compare her situations and conditions to that of Hemant. On the New Year's Eve, when Hemant asks her: "Where are you going? I am free, you know that" (172). Astha wonders on his demand and thinks that "if there would ever be a day when she could feel that same right to complain that Hemant did" (172). Actually, Astha reaches on the turning point of her life when she meets Aijaz. Previously, she mutely succumbs to the will of her parents, but when Hemant discards her views on poetry and paintings, she turns into a protagonist and writes a poem:

The eventful release from pain

In the tearing relentless separation
From those in habit loved
Can come so slowly
It seems there will never be a day
Of final peace and tranquility (180).

Despite having innumerable engagements, she manages to peep out of her marital home into the land of illicit relations. In the company of Pipee she also realizes the national issues and participates in Ram Mandir and Babri Masjid issues and casts aside the family issues. She neglects her family responsibilities in too. Hemant tries to stop her but she never commences on his path. On asking she tells Hemant that she is going to demonstrate outside Rashtrapati Bhavan. Hemant tries to make her remember her sacred obligations: "You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home, and not on the streets. You also forget that this is New Year's Eve and we are going out" (172). Her whole family is disturbed and each member of the family opens his/her mouth. In spite of being the mother of two pretty children; Anuradha and Himanshu, she wishes to be liberated from family without caring for children and husband. Her mother-in-law also issues directions which in turn make her aghast. She says:

You know I never try and stop you from doing anything. Even when you neglect the children, and are busy in your painting and meetings, I do not say anything. I am not the type to interfere. I am glad my daughter-in-law does not feel she has to sit at home. Till I have the use of my hands and feet I will help you, but it is my duty to point that you are going too far. (187)
Above all this, Astha has decided to go to Ayodhya as the Munch insists to deliver a speech on the public meeting in spite of her husband and mother-in-law’s constraint attitude. She also has a strong desire to be part of social issues and to graph her course as a social activist to fight against old oppression and suppression of patriarchal society. Her visits to Ayodhya give a new dimension in her life. There, she meets Peeplika, the wife of Aijaz. During their stay, they visit various places and temples and establish a new relationship called lesbian relation. Ashok Kumar asserts, “Asta likes to have a break from dependence on others and proceeds on the path of full human status that poses in threat to Hemant and his male superiority. Although, she finds herself trapped between the pressure of the modern developing society and shackles of ancient biases she set out on her quest for a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship” (Kumar 134). Astha falls in love with Pipeelika. She finds satisfaction around the arms of Pipee. Unlike her husband, Pipee seems to be more understanding, loving and caring towards her. Therefore their few meeting established a physical relationship and they become uneasy and restless if they don’t meet for one day. Such relationship between them explores clashes between Astha and her husband. However, their relationship rebels against man’s attitude and his superiority by exhibiting their quest for freedom as well as asserting self independence in a male dominated society. Astha refuses being close with Hemant after she found condom from his bag and instead show more interest in Pipee. Manju Kapur has well portrayed the irritation, anguish and travails of Indian middle-class women who are at a loss to condemn social conventions and traditions. Although she tries her best to find her place in family and society, she reaches
nowhere because of her moral imbalance and unnatural wishes to be in communion with Pipee, the widow of Aijaz Khan. Mithu C. Banerji says:

However, occasionally Kapur's rendition of a lesbian relationship sometimes distracts the reader from the tensions of the situation and the core sensibilities of the characters. Nevertheless, A married woman is a well balanced depiction of a country's inner development its strengths and its failures-and the anguish of a woman's unrest, which is as complicated as the social political upheaval going on around her (Banerji).

Asth a reaches on the extreme in every new engagement. She involves in the love affair with Pipee. And this new engagement becomes an origin of new clashes between Astha and her husband. She notices sincerely of whatever Pipee says. Astha and Pipee both are living under illusion of making themselves free from male bondage but when their freedom is weighed on the scale of morality, values and maintenance of family peace, they stand nowhere. Their remaining identity turns into naught. Astha never takes for granted any comment from Hemant for Pipee rather she irritates:

She refused to engage with on any issue, he was capable of nothing but he very crudest understanding. Instead she related the whole to Pipee who said that men were so pathetic, so fucked up themselves, they only understood the physical, and in this way she felt soothed (219).

Asth a began to ponder over such differences frequently. And it was this which has made her totally rebel. She doesn't want to follow the rules and regulations made by traditional society. She doesn't want to live a conservative life. Astha belonging to a middle class family has never cared
for its boundaries. She was always involved in those things, which has never been considered respectable for a middle class woman either it is the case of before marriage or after it. In order to fulfill the object of delivering a speech from the side of Manch, she gets ready to go to Ayodhya. And it is the first time, when her mother-in-law objects her: “It is not a woman's place to thinks of these things” (187). But she doesn't care even for her mother-in-law suggestions. According to conventions, being a wife of a husband, it is not proper for her to run around, abandoning home, it is not proper for her to run around, abandoning home, leaving the children to the servants. But she does all these things and that is also without a mark of any regret. The novel possesses two major woman characters: one is Astha and the other is Pipeelika Khan. It is in Ayodhya, Astha meets Peeplika Khan, widow of Aijaz. She feels somewhat attracted towards her. She likes the way she soles, whole at that time she is not aware of the fact that she is the wife of Aijaz. She comes to know about it later. Well, when both of them come back to Delhi, they begin to meet again and again. And suddenly, one day Pipee asks her “Have you ever been in a relationship with a woman?” (219) at this question, Astha feels uneasy and doesn't answer. It is something strange for her; because from her very childhood, she has imagined about the manly embrace. She was also involved in love affairs but it was all with boys. She has never saw woman from this point of view. But how long, she can go away from it, if she lives in company of Pipee and feels attracted towards her. In case of Pipee, she is not habitual but familiar with lesbian relationship. When Astha throws Pipee’s question back to her, she informs her that she had enjoyed it before her marriage, during her school days. From such
conversation, a lesbian relationship began to develop between these two women. The “two women crossing social boundaries to find solace and understanding in each other arms” (Banerji). Both Pipee and Astha were suffering from a big gap in their lives. And by making relation to each other, and coming close to each other physically both of them try to find out a perfect partner in form of each other.

Among all, the closest for Astha is the character of Pipee. The relation she makes and develops with Pipee is strange and awkward for her. Even though, she continues with it. Her intimacy and closeness with Pipee is beyond expression. It can be judged by the fact that the information and feelings, which are so secret to her, she, shares them with Pipee. Whatever Astha has shared with her diary in her adolescent age, she felt hesitated to share that with her husband, Hemant. But when she opens all the secrets of her life towards Pipee, there is not a single mark of hesitation between them. As soon as time passes, their relation becomes more and more demanding. Pipee wants Astha totally committed to her but Astha was not ready to break up her relations with her family. Jaya Chakravarty writes about Astha's bewilderment: ".....Asthra realizes the fertility of her sexual forays with Pipeelika even though she is in love with her. But Astha is not keen to leave her husband and family and this complicates matter……"(Chakravarty 205-206).

Asthra want to sail in both boats, keeping these two important parts of her separate from each other. Astha has got a soul mate in Pipee. But she finds that if she does so, it will be one sided only. Astha is a married woman. She has her husband, her children and her in-laws. Astha's or a married
woman's whole world is her family. It is too limited in comparison of Pipee's worlds. Pipee world has no limit at all. It is the world of a journalist. As a boy is attracted to girl in the courtship period, Astha was drawn to Pipee. As both their hearts were empty at that time, it was rather easy for them to come closer. It was not difficult for Astha to transfer her attraction from Aijaz Khan to his widow. Astha sat in a daze after reaching home from Ayodhya. She couldn't believe that she had met Pipee and had been with her for many hours. Next morning, when she unpacked her husband’s suitcase, she saw a condom. She stared at for a long time. Its implications ran through her head. Conflicting thoughts ran through her mind: "Who had he slept with, he who was never in any place for long, it could not be that he was in love — or had a relationship — or maybe he did. Some women might travel with him, how would she ever know? May be the distributor had supplied him with someone, she had read somewhere that women were often apart of business deals" (212-213).

The renowned feminist Luce Irigaray, talking about a distinctive feminine discourse, wrote in her text, This Sex Which Is Not One, that

Her (woman’s) sexuality (...) is plural (....) woman has sex organs more or less everywhere She finds pleasure almost everywhere (.....) the geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined-in an imaginary rather too narrowly focused on sameness. (Irigaray 28)

As Astha had a substitute-husband in Pipee, she didn’t create any scene at all in the condom-episode. Rather she thought that if her husband had an
extra ‘other’, a kind of Old Testament tit-for-tat attitude. Both Pipee and Astha seem to be aware of this hidden truth. They started meeting each other quite often. Both became very chummy friends. Astha began to open her inner fears and anxieties to Pipee. It was hard to explain her life, “especially when she herself barely understood it” (217). As Hemant became very busy in the corporate world, it was not difficult for the two buddies to come closer. Pipee put her hand on Astha’s and pressed it gently. Astha blushed with pleasure. They were going to be “ants together” (217). An element of secrecy entered their relationship and gave it an illicit character. It may be noted that the restlessness that Astha and Pipee felt was due to the stigmatization and surveillance of such sexual ‘perversions’ in the nineteenth century; doctors too termed it a disease. However at the same time, there were attempts to make the same sex desire as completely natural. Foucault makes it clear in his *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I*:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and ‘psychic hermaphroditic’ made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of ‘perversity’; but it also made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘neutrality’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (Foucault 101).

Hemant caught a whiff of this extra, unusual interest in his wife’s life. But he was not unduly perturbed about it. If Pipee had been a man, Astha would have found it impossible to stray so far down the road of intimacy.
Hemant once commented that women were “always mind-fucking” (218). On the other side, Pipee brainwashes her by saying that true love cannot be felt at bodily level only but it should ensure union of souls, emotions and ideologies. Thus, she feels, “men were so pathetic, so fucked up themselves, they only understood the physical, and in this way she felt soothed.” (219). Hemant too was kept in the dark about his wife’s sexuality/sexual aberrations and Astha felt angry with Hemant for making that comment. She asked herself, “Would he prefer her to be like him, with condoms in her suitcase, which a friend had put there by accident?” (219) she narrated the whole episode to Pipee who comforted her saying that men were so pathetic, so fucked up themselves, “they only understood the physical (…)” (219).

The heterocentric/andocentric structure of society divides it into bipolar binarities like self/other, culture/nature, mind/body, reason/erotic, heterosexual/homosexual and so on. The heterocentric society directly and indirectly through cultural practices, and religious ceremonies teach and imbibe into the people that the sexual activities of queers and lesbians are unnatural and morally depraved. Till a few years ago, both in the Western and in the Eastern cultures, sexual activity was a repressed phenomenon. There were plenty of governing mechanisms of cultural laws to regulate sexual codes of conduct. Reason was the yardstick of the Western society, where as Jyotirmaya Tripathy observes, “to denationalize is to dehumanize, naturalize, and animalize” (Tripathy 285). As a result of such a parochial and biased thinking, queersahd to undergo an untold suffering. Such regulative codes of conduct are dismantled in the past few years. Deviant sexual practices are no longer considered perverse, at least in the West.
In the East too here and there, different styles of sexual practices are viewed as a threat to the ‘Sovereign-Father’ who manipulates power mechanisms. Anything other than man-woman relationship is viewed as bad marriage. The patriarchy felt very strongly that sexual purity and respectability were very essential to maintain and preserve the social order. This is precisely why Pipee’s desire for Astha would be viewed very seriously if known to the outside world. So they operated in secrecy. Once whey they were sitting in a café, Pipee asked Astha whether she had ever been in a relationship with a woman. Astha felt uneasy and didn’t answer. Then Pipee talked about her being seduced by another girl when she was a college girl. Her name was Samira. Pipee asked Astha, whether her husband had affairs. Astha answered that she didn’t know anything about it. The thought of condom was “coming up in her mind at every point of sadness in her life (...)” (220). Pipee said gloomily, “There is no escape from jealousy, is there? We are all embryonic Othello” (221). Astha felt an underlying tension whenever she was talking to Pipee. Once Pipee took Astha to her figure, on her way back home in her scooter, Astha felt lost and confused. The image of the two of them in the mirror was often returning when she thought of Pipee. On another occasion they met in Astha’s bedroom. Pipee pressed Astha’s fingers into her mouth and sucked each one gently before letting go. Astha hardly dared to breathe. That night when Hemant started his sex routine, Astha said for the first time in her married life that she didn’t like it. Astha’s meetings with Pipee increased. They phoned up at least five times a day. Astha “started to fantasies about touching her imagined her hair between her fingers,” her skin beneath her own, her hands on the back of her neck” (225).
As they drove the streets of Delhi in Astha’s car, “Asta learned against Pipee, with her arms around her waist” (227). As Jyotirmaya Tripathy observes elsewhere that their sexual conduct show “that an alternative exists and that is not less enjoyable, that sexuality does not mean pulverization of the female principle, and lionization of a dominant male. It proves that sexuality is a pleasure, not a power structure” (Tripathy 290).

When Hemant desires to make love with her, Astha tells him, “Do I have to give it just because you are my husband? Unless I feel close to you I can’t- I ‘m not a sex object, you have others for that.” (224) Verma comments, “For Astha a marital life meant participating in all activities, discussing all issues with her husband but for Hemant this relationship meant physical relationship and just fulfilling the need of his wife” (Verma 56). Her association with Pipeelika gives a new turn to her quest for identity and self fulfillment. There is a conflict between the roles and responsibilities of a wife, mother, daughter in law and that of a lover. Astha is also trapped in dilemma between her desire for freedom and her obligations toward family, whether she should stay within the traditional family or she should run away for self independence. But, Astha realizes a large part of her life belongs to her children and recognizes her traditional and social responsibility as the wife of Hemant. Therefore she feels, “A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth were the necessary prerequisites of Hemant’s wife” (231).

We can surmise that one of the reasons why Astha longed for Pipee more than her husband is that she didn’t get sexual orgasm whenever she had sex with her husband. Astha was frequently going to Pipee for her sexual
needs. It is a common knowledge that “sexual satisfaction” as Joseph Bristow observes, “is a fundamental human need” (12). Astha found a satisfaction that she didn’t get from her husband. Whenever she approached Pipee, her heart beat faster as a girl’s heart beats faster whenever her lover subjects her to closer bodily scrutiny. If Astha could not meet Pipee, she “felt terrible the whole time” (230). Once they were standing together in Pipee’s apartment. Pipee closed the door. Slowly Pipee put her arms around her. She could feel her hands on the narrowness of her back, on the beginning spread of her hips. Gently she undid her blouse hooks, and her bra, looking at her face as she did so and slowly she continued, feeling her back with her palm, coming round up towards her breasts, feeling their softness, especially where the nipples were, feeling them again and again, in no hurry to reach any conclusion. They were enclosed in a circle of silence, the only sound, the sound of their breaths, close together and mingled (……). Pipee took her time, touching every crevice of her body with her mouth (……). In between they talked, the talk of discovery and attraction, of the history of a three-month relationship, the teasing and pleasure of an intimacy that was complete and absolute, expressed through minds as much as bodies (231).

Having chosen an alternative form of sexual identity willingly, Astha wouldn’t mind to, “to destabilize the entire system of sex regulation, that undoes binary oppositions such as gay/straight” (qtd. in Stuart 345). Astha the married woman knew pretty well that the heterocratic society distinguishes man from woman. Man is one who penetrates with his phallus and the woman is one to be penetrated. In this binaurally opposed mindset, lesbians have no place and they will never be tolerated as they are seen increasingly defying
the definition of man and the grammar of man-woman relationship. Astha’s taking the stance as a lesbian vociferously against heterosexuality, and its normatively and institutionalization. Her stance “challenges”, in couple of borrowed phrases from Jyotirmaya Tripathy, “heterosexual master identity, its logic of domination, its demonization of other sexual practices, and its rejection of sexual diversity” (Tripathy 290).

As days went by, a great change came upon Astha. She was in a state of continued war with everything around her and her self. She could never truly find peace with herself. She was caught somewhere between accepting society’s view of her and coming to understand creating a space for her as a lesbian by making Pipee the steady sweetheart. Through this process she released herself from obsession with the male partner, her husband. She was clearly in love in love with another woman much against the tradition-bound society. It was quite likely that she would continue this secret relationship until Pipee would go away from her life. Sexual psychologists like Freud have shown that sexual instinct is far more complicated than is generally understood. There is a widespread belief that achieving sexual satisfactions is, as Freud has put it, “analogous to the satiating of hunger, a straightforward function of the human body” (qtd. in Glover, David and Cora Kaplan xvii). Astha was not without tension as she happened to be a mother and not single and unattached like Pipee. Very often she wished that she were like Pipee, “alone and free” (231). She was conscious that she was a wife too. However, not much was required there. Hemant could not conceive that his wife was fast becoming a lesbian. According to Koedt et al, a lesbian is a woman who “acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and
freer human being that her society – perhaps then, but certainly later – cares to allow her” (240).

As Manju Kapur puts it, “A willing body at night, mouth were the necessary and prerequisites of Hemant’s wife. Hemant began to notice that his wife was not there whenever he had sex with her Astha said to herself, “Let him watch (…) he who had not looked since the early days” of marriage, was now looking and found that what he saw did not add up” (233). The fact remains that she is spellbound by Pipee. She easily swallows her direction and acts accordingly. On the other side, Pipee tries to separate Astha from her husband who neither appreciates nor understands her in order to give a full commitment to her love. Astha wants to move these two passages keeping in balance side by side, without giving up either one of them. But as a wife and mother of two children, Astha tells Pipee; “I love you, you know how much you meant to me, I try and prove it every moment we have together, but I can’t abandon my family, I can’t. Maybe I should not have looked for my happiness, but I can’t help myself. I suppose you think I should not be in a relationship, but I had not foreseen…I’m sorry I am not like you” (242).

Pipee makes her feel that away from her home she can lead a fuller life because she has already potentials so she can never do anything wrong. her children scream when they get poor marks but she does not pay heed to the future of her children. She is never interested in joining the parents meeting of their school because it is time consuming. When again she decides to go on Ekta Yatra, Heman loses temper. Astha says:

I was running off on a wild goose chase, neglecting my family and burdening his poor mother with my responsibilities. I had no sense of
what was fitting for a woman; I had bothered to ask him whether it was appropriate or convenient. Every since Aijaz, and met Pipeelika Khan, I had no sense of home, duty, wifehood or motherhood (248).

On the other hand, when Astha gets all the comfort and affection from Pipee that she doesn’t receive from Hemant, she thinks, “…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” (243). Therefore, the marital relation of Astha and Hemant turns out to be devastated. Astha realizes herself as a faithless wife and accepts the miseries that come to her life. Therefore, she feels, “When she was with Hemant, she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed nothing, with whom for that very reason it was soothing to be with. Her body was his, when made love it was Pipee’s face Astha saw, her hand she felt. She accepted the misery of this dislocation as her due for being a faithless wife” (287). Astha is on the verge of taking decision about her life with Hemant, her conventional marriage and traditional family life for Pipee. She decides to abandon her home, husband, children so that she would be able to live her life on her own term. But, Pipeelika receives a letter from her brother Ajay who is staying in America. The letter is about sponsorship registration of PhD in an American University. Pipee informs to Astha that she is leaving India for her further studies in America. Astha feels that her life is again deceived but significant. Thus, Astha returns to her own conventional married life. Rajput asserts, "Asth and Pipee both are living under illusion of making themselves free from male bondage but when their freedom is weighed on the scale of
morality, values and maintenance of family peace, they stand nowhere” (Rajput 117).

Kapur shows that in Indian patriarchal society where tradition is so strong a woman fails to get out of such bondage and carve a separate identity of her own. Thus, the two women Astha and Pipeelika ultimately compromise and find their own ways, knowing that they cannot have a future together. Astha, in her quest for self identity and full independence in life comes across various stages through various relationships and even enters the socially forbidden relationship i.e. the lesbian relation. But, she fails and turns back to her own conventional married life after realizing that a woman’s real position lies within the family. Therefore, Astha represents the image of new woman who longs to have her own space in the traditional patriarchal society.

In the novel in reference, both Astha and Pipee register their protest against their subordination under patriarchy by choosing ’weird’ tracks. Their behavior is a slap on the face of the society that has a polarized mindset. Through their uncommon acts and practices they refuse to become objects of submission and adoration. They wouldn’t mind to be treated as freaks. As Wendy Lee-Lampshire points out “(….) whether elevated or denigrated, dominating or dominated, typical historical stereotypes of women as whore, other, hysterical, tomboy, dyke, coquette, dutiful daughter, or heroine (…..) one thing is common; cross- culturally – lack of subject hood” (Lee 418). Pipee and Astha protest against this image in their own way. Both are surviving. What is interesting is not the fact that they survive, but how they do so, and their journey of self-discovery toward psychological freedom. The heroines take the uncommon path (lesbianism) – hitherto a taboo and socially
unacceptable relationship in the Indian context. Their actions might prove to be liberating and affirmative of their identity. They don’t seem to be bothering even if they would be put into a zone of exclusion. Such a change of attitude in them moves us to understand that it is possible to transcend established reality and convention. Both the heroines (Pipee fully and Astha partly) would miss their womanly destiny in order to choose independence. “The defensively erected sites of brutally anxious will to power over the interpretation of self-hood (paradigmatically male in a patriarchal organized social regime) will to power that acts out the structure of a much more specific erotic/erotophobic project as well: the project of paranoia” (qtd. in Edelman 734). Manju Kapur thus through her narrative constricts feminocentric protest against the heterocentric, homophobic, and phallocentrically glamorized patriarchy and in doing so she is rather constrained to present her heroines as lesbians.

Of course Astha has always broken her boundaries throughout her life but this she is not so strong woman. She doesn't find herself bold enough to leave her marriage and live with Pipee. So ultimately their relationship breaks up. Pipee leaves for the USA for her higher studies in the very same way as once Rohan has left in Astha's earlier days. Astha's decision of living back with her family as not under the pressure of conservative ideas of society. Astha is the woman of 21st century. She has calculated that where she will get more freedom, honor, economical safety, and power of taking her decisions by her own self. Astha legally belongs to the place of her husband, and she has a lot of rights there. But if she chooses to live with Pipee, she will have to love there on her own risks. Because loving with Pipee, there is no legal
rights and security on the part of Astha. It may also be assumed that Astha's life is a search for totality of experience in which one's body and spirit are simultaneously satisfied. In all her affairs with men she finds that her body is the fulcrum of those relationships and her spirit remains unsatisfied. Her lesbian relationship with Pipeelika can be regarded as an experiment in which she fails again. Therefore, she is disillusioned with all human relationships and ultimately gets solace in the world of art epitomized by the painting exhibition organized by her husband.

Asth is really very courageous, smart and intelligent woman. She possesses almost all the characteristics of a 21st century rebel woman. And Manju Kapur, though the character of Astha, has proved that increasing education, better job opportunities and awareness of right bring the woman out of their threshold, so that they can take care of their individuality and self-respect. At the same they should be conscious of the fact that their postmodern sensibility and self-centeredness may mar their life as well as of their family. One's freedom ends where one's responsibility begins. It is a universally known fact that humans are sexed beings; there is sexual difference; there is sexual mystery. Authors and artists work on the mystery of human beings. Until recently both in the Western and the Eastern literatures, art and movies, women were not considered human beings or seats of consciousness.

As the feminist theoretician Josephine Donovan observes, “They are objects, who are used to facilitate, explain away, or redeem the projects of men (...) women are the objects, the scapegoats, of much cruelty and evil” (Donovan 214). Feminists challenge this viewpoint. As a result, there has
been a tremendous shift in femininity in the past couple of decades all over the world. This is mostly due to the emergence of feminism and its close links with postmodernism. Women, by and large, come out of the restrictive femininity of Victorian patriarchy. Manju Kapur in her second novel *A Married Woman*, like a few other contemporary Indian authors, attempts to re-imagine femininity. Astha the protagonist, while living the life of a conventional wife to her husband Himanshu and a typical Indian mother to her daughter Anuradha, is steering a path of independence, which under normal circumstances an Indian mother wouldn’t dare to do. In order to escape from the tedium of married life, she tries to reach clumsily for a heightened sensational experience of life. The novel, in the borrowed expression form David Glove and Cora Kaplan’s *Genders*, with “its sub textual celebration of lesbianism” (Glover, David and Cora Kaplan 31), tries to destabilize the very concept of gender and deconstruct the very concept of the Indian middle class morality and Sita - Damayanti prototype female models.

Till a few years ago, and of course even now in many societies, man-manly love or woman-womanly was condemned in no unequivocal terms. It was deemed contrary to nature and therefore had to be stopped. Homosexuality/lesbianism has been under serious surveillance and found to be a threat to the very order of the society. However Western philosophers like Foucault were very impatient with what he (Foucault) terms as the ‘repressive hypothesis’ of such limited/limiting discourses. In his classic text, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1 : An Introduction*, Foucault traces how in the past 200 and odd Years, the politico-socio structures have derived power
by operating complex discourses surrounding sexuality. Firstly Foucault identities an “era of biopower” (Foucault 140) by which he means “an explosion of numerous and divers techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and control of population” (Foucault 140). In this era, Foucault describes, how the feminine body was analyzed and discoursed that it was thoroughly saturated with sexuality. As Joseph Bristow point out in his text *Sexuality* : “This ‘hysterization of women’s bodies ’ served multiple but related functions: the maintenance of an ‘organic communication’ with the social body, with the family, and with children” (Bristow 175). In the patriarchal set up, the role of woman and the pedagongization of her sex role has been clearly chalked out. Any deviant sexual practice is declared contrary to nature and so has to be stopped. Woman loving woman is considered not a healthy attitude and such couple are constantly under press to snap their ties.

The sexual conduct between man and woman is more or like master-slave relationship or capitalist versus proletariat binary. This Victorian attitude is very much resented by the feminists in the later part of the 20th century. Feminists, especially radical feminists in the West, have demonstrated that they can have a satisfying sex-experience male less. They wouldn’t mind the companionship of male, if the male is a pro-feminist, otherwise they can jolly well manage their affairs male less. If pregnancy and childbirth hamper their independence in any way, well, they wouldn’t mind saying an emphatic ‘no’ to it. Manju Kapur’s women characters Astha and Peepilika have demonstrated in the novel A Married Woman that the male is not all that important in their life. They seem to derive more sexual pleasure when they are they are together than when they are with their male partners.
Like most of the second-wave feminists, Manju Kapur thinks that woman’s oppression has cultural rather than biological roots, and women’s cultural production like the novel in reference is central to ‘consciousness raising’ and thus to social change. What she aims at in her fiction is to decanter the straight, male, cultural authority. Postmodern Feminism has made this new postmodern pluralism possible. It has opened up among other things, a fictional space within which the culturally marginalized women could assert their own subculture specificities. Ashok Kumar says:

Manju Kapur has exposed a woman’s passion with love and lesbianism, an incompatible marriage and ensuing annoyance. With passion to revolutionized the Indian male sensitivity, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer, and perish in for their triumph. She is stunned at the intensification of fundamentalism and the augment of religious zealots to uplift and elevate the country by a crusade and establish paranoia by presenting evil as a historical necessity (Kumar 165).

It may be remembered here as Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt observe in their text *Contemporary Cultural Theory* that “Women’s resistance to patriarchal oppression is very probably as old as patriarchy itself (...)” (Milner 129). However, in India, feminism has never been radical until 1990’s. In the 1990’s and thereafter, a series of ‘gynocentric’ literature from the pens of Indian feminists have helped develop a typically Indian sexist culture. The gynocentric text of these feminist authors do not car a hoot for the Indian ‘linga’ concept, which eulogizes the phallus from time immemorial. D.H. Lawrence’s text *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* may celebrate the penis of Oliver
Mellors and even help transform masculinity into a mystical religion as in India, but texts from Arundhati Roy, Shobha De and Manju Kapur Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt “how andocentric cultures constructed persistently negative images of women” (131). Manju Kapur’s novel, *A Married Woman* carries in its body, in its flesh, the marks of the gender. The feminist- novelist doesn’t believe that a man and woman are identical. As the feminist Helene Cixous, dwelling at length about the way women and men are different, puts it in the following manner:

Our differences have to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same. Our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories. the way we make love-because it isn’t the same-produces different sensations and recollections. And these are transmitted through the text (Cixous 230).

The novel *A Married Woman* is heavily plotted. It traces the life of Astha from her young adulthood through her early middle years. In the process she dates with a couple of young men of her own choice like her western counterparts, marries a man of her parents’ choice and discovers the joys of intimacy with her husband, begets children, yet grows distant from him, and struggles to become a painter. Much against her husband and her other family members she becomes a social activist, and falls in love with a woman, and finds herself-sort of, more. In the good old days and also now same-sex relationship has been viewed with horror. "Much unnaturally and filthy lust is said to be committed daily in the remote closets of these darksome (bathhouses) : yea, women with women; a thing incredible, if
former times had not given thereunto both detection, and punishment” (qtd. in Ania Lomba 155). What strikes the most is the boldness with which the protagonist Astha shapes her own present and future without minding least for her kith and kin especially in violation of her wifely devotion.

*A Married Woman* is the story of an artist who desires for her career amid every now and then extramarital relations ‘challenges the constraints of middle class existence’. Although Astha, a married woman of a middle class family does not face so many challenges as Virmati has faced, her life becomes a black cave when she desires to write poetry, make sketches and participate in Ayodhya Movement. Her childhood is the peaceful duration of her life. At her young age she falls in love with boys Bunty and Rohan and after her marriage with Aijaz. In fact, Hemant her husband finds no place in her life. His condition is worse than that of rubber stamp because whether he permits, or not, if she decides to go, she goes irrespective of her husband, children or mother-in-law's bothering about her. Satendra Kumar says: "A *Married Woman* is a well-balanced depiction of a country's inner development - its strengths and its failures- and the anguish of a woman's unrest, which is as complicated as the social and political upheaval going on around her" (Kumar Satendra 88). Astha the protagonist of Manju Kapur’s sensational novel, *A Married Woman* tries to prove that educated, cultured and city-bred women in spite of their Indianess are in an increasingly stronger position to take control of their intimate lives with me than before. By showing that the male-female stereotype rules are being deconstructed day-by-day in the postmodern world, Kapur also highlights the sociological pressures that exert on Astha that gradually enable her enjoy sexual pleasure.
on her own terms. "She saw herself as a bird pecking at a few leftover crumbs from the feast of life" (242). In the end, Astha reaches nowhere. Ultimately, she has to come back to her family and readjust herself in ancient traditions. Christopher Rollason says: "The women in India have indeed achieved their successes in half a century of independence; but if there is to be a true female independence too, much remains to be done (Rollason 9)."
Works Cited


