Adrienne Rich wrote in “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”:

It is exhilarating to be alive in the time of awakening consciousness; it can also be confusing, disorienting and painful. This awakening of dead or sleeping consciousness has already affected the lives of millions of women….the sleepwalkers are coming awake, and for the first time this awakening has a collective reality; it is no longer such a lonely thing to open one’s eyes. Woman is becoming her own midwife, creating herself new. (11)

The lines sum up superbly the flavor of Home, for it is among other things a symbol of the collective reality of Indian women. Not just that the figural rhetoric used to conclude implies a “before and after”, a narrative of becoming or “coming out”. The description is perfectly in consonance with the narrative that teems with the act of birth and procreation, quite literally also. Also this kind of a temporal movement assumes a series of binaries like sleep/awake, silence/speech, unborn/reborn and oppressed/liberated. No surprises then that the narrative is for most part predicated on such binaries.

However, first and foremost, the very title of this narrative Home makes it best suited for a discussion of women’s search for space and identity. The very title with the suggestion of space serves as the predominant source of metaphor for the identity of the middle-class Indian woman. In fact where the temporal rhetoric of awakening tends to focus on gender in isolation from other systems of stratification, it is this spatial rhetoric of location that emphasizes the interaction of gender with the other forms of power relations based on such cultural categories as race, ethnicity, class, religion, national origin, age and so forth. Instead of an underlying linear narrative of progressive development of
birth, spatial metaphorics posit dynamic and dialogic motion through socially constructed spaces, what Homi K. Bhabha calls in *The Location of Culture*

an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà*—here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth (2)

**Home**, thus, is not just a static essence, but rather a location of over determination. Thus home, unlike its seeming suggestion of security and static comfort, actually suggests fluid and flexible ways of being that posit identity as relational, situational, and interactive— the result of an ongoing process of becoming without origin or end. These spatially based notions presume a creative tension within individual and collective identities between agency on the one hand and on the other hand, over determination by material and ideological conditions—what Louis Althusser in *Lenin and Philosophy* famously refers to as “interpellation” or “hailing” (15)

Thus where the rhetoric of awakening earlier hinted at suggests a linear movement from confinement to autonomy, the rhetoric of location assumes an agency that continually negotiates an identity and actions that constitute it within the limits of social order, as in Manju Kapur's narrative.

Even though the narrative seemingly constructs Indian women’s home within the domestic space, yet the metaphor of space just spoken of, makes Home a historically embedded site, a positionality, a standpoint, a terrain, an intersection, a web, a network, a crossroad of multiple forces impinging upon these women. The narrative thus belying its own inkling of stability articulates not the organic unfolding of identity but rather the mapping of territories and boundaries, the dialectical terrains of center/margin (patriarchy vs women) and the axial intersection of various positionalities (liberal vs conservative). Moreover, such a discourse often emphasizes not the ordered movement of linear growth for Indian women but the lack of a solid ground,
dislocated as she is by gender, class, religious and social inequities, making her own home a space for nomadic wanderings.

The locational metaphor is indeed significant for the project, as it is orchestrated around a vision about location/dislocation of Indian women. Also, it is now commonplace in feminist theory now to refer to the position one occupies, the standpoint from which one speaks, and the location within which one’s culture negotiates. Likewise, Kapur’s narrative is also constituted by this space within a home which upon a closer look reveals axes of difference established by the social order. Subjectivity or identification of women in the narrative thus takes shape at the intersection of different systems of stratification where the circuits of power are multidirectional and complex. Individuals like Nisha are constituted at this point of intersection, they cannot be defined by a single identity such as gender or race or religion.

Such locational metaphor helps repudiate notions of monolithic patriarchy and sisterhood in favor of culturally rooted heterogeneity and idiomatic particularity. This is also what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call for in their seminal collection, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, where they recognize the necessity of locating women in different forms rooted in particular contexts.

However, given the strictly narrow and domestic confines of the narrative, the rhetoric of location is unleashed in only certain forms. That is to say, if migration or exile be considered forms of spatial location/dislocation, then in the narrative, that too is enacted in a microcosmic way within the bastions of home. However it is this very home that is marked by borders and as women live amidst and cross these borders, identity acquires sedimented layers, each of which exerts some influence on the other layers and on their identity as a whole.

Migration happens from the parental home to the husband’s home, it is fundamental and defines the sense of specific location that they are a part of. For a
woman, even the state of exile is permanent and persistent. The day of her birth is concomitant with the birth of many visions about her future. Many of them woven around her marriage manage to reduce the initial years of hers stay at her parents home as just a gateway to her husbands home. Sadly none of the two homes ever fully belong to the woman.

It is precisely at these dilemmas of a woman’s life that Manju Kapur’s latest novel *Home* looks at. The texts present to the readers a canvas crowded with many characters, some of them women with Nisha at the centre of the action. The scenario is built in relation to Nisha’s childhood home and deals very centrally to her relation to her parents and to her to her other relatives. Change however in her life is not an escape from constraint to liberation or not a simple journey from a state of confinement to autonomy. There is no shedding the literal fear and figurative law of the family and no reaching a final realm of freedom. There is no new place, no new home. Neither Nisha’s view of life nor her construction of herself through it is linear, the past, home and parents leave traces that are constantly re- absorbed into a shifting vision. Early experience of separation from parents, difference from family’s viewpoint, pain of losing her love, the loneliness of change and her seething physical pain all lead to an undiminished desire for home and for familiarity.

Only one experience is given a unifying and originating function in the text. That is Nisha’s love for independence which has motivated her and continues to motivate her efforts to re-conceptualize and recreate both herself and home. A careful reading of the narrative reveals the complexity of being a woman for “there are differing temporalities of women” and these substitute the possibility of being “at times a woman for eternal difference on the one hand, or undifferentiation on the other.” For, as Denise Riley says in *Am I That Name*:

> Any attention to the life of a woman, if traced out carefully, must admit the degree to which the effects of lived gender are at least sometimes unpredictable, and fleeting...Can anyone fully inhabit a
gender without a degree of horror? How could someone ‘Be a woman’ through and through, make a final home in that classification without suffering claustrophobia? To lead a life soaked in the passionate consciousness of one’s gender at every single moment, to will be a sex with a vengeance. (6)

Thus what Nisha’s self becomes ironically as the narrative unfolds is precisely what makes home impossible, which makes her self non-identical, which makes her vulnerable, removing her from the protection afforded to those women who do not transgress a limited sphere of movement. Quite literally, it is her involvement with a young man that initially threatens to create trouble in her life. However as the narrative progresses, Nisha’s desire for stability and independence is fiercely destabilized.

Shaped by experiences around her, Nisha too then begins to fall prey, as insinuated by Riley, to the very image of a woman that she is out to rebel against, wanting thus to get married and have her own children. There begins to be seen a silence between the real self of Nisha and her social self. That silence is significant, since as it seems –her independence is precisely what she can deny and indeed must deny in order to benefit fully from the privilege of being the middle class girl that she is. She denies herself her freedom but at great expense to herself leading then to many physical and mental troubles.

Her desire for independence however surfaces again and then takes the shape of a business venture that she undertakes. Learning at what price privilege, comfort, home and secure notions of self are purchased, the price to her self and ultimately to others is what makes this business a personal experience and a political motivation, as Jameson says Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism “ bearing a mysterious charge or effect…which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, a high, an intoxicator.” (27)
It is significant that womanhood is neither marginalized nor essentialised but constructed at various levels of experience and abstraction. There are at least two ways in which women are portrayed in this narrative: the homophobic oversight and relegation of some women to the margins and the centering of some women which has had at times the paradoxical effect of removing women from their embeddedness in their social relations.

In Kapur’s narrative, the trajectory of Nisha’s life or perhaps her continual search for home is what exposes the limits of the position of Indian middle class. Her aspiration for change too is a positive source of solidarity, community and change. Change would incorporate transgression of boundaries, those boundaries so carefully, so tenaciously drawn around middle class identity. Change has to do with the transgression of these boundaries. The insight that Indian middle class identity, a stable sense of self, comfort and home is purchased at a high price is articulated very compellingly in relation to her parents. What gets articulated are the contradictions in that relation, her difference from her parents, her rejection of their positions and at the same time her connections to them, her love for them and the ways in which she is a daughter. The complexity of parent child relationship do not exempt Nisha from her implication in the structures of privilege/oppression, structures that operate in much more complex than the male/female split only. The narrator expresses the pain, confusion attendant upon this complexity.

The narrative recounts the use of threat and of protections to consolidate home, identity, community and privilege and in the process exposes the underside of parent’s protection. Nisha being sent away to her aunt’s place due to Viki’s supposed sexual harassment is one such instance. The rhetoric of sexual victimization or the vulneralibility of young girls like

Nisha is used to establish and enforce unity amongst women. This unity amongst women however takes the form of a mere repressive fiction as one eventually witnesses Nisha’s desires being nurtured and protected by her father.
Manju Kapur’s depiction of womanhood can be analyzed under five phases. Throughout these phases there is an irreconcilable tension between the search for a secure place from which to speak, within which to act and the awareness of, the exclusions, the denials and the blind nesses on which they are predicated.

The first phase begins with the opening of the novel and tracks the developments till Nisha is born, the second involves a vivid description of Nisha’s childhood, the third phase is constructed in relation to adolescent experiences/college life, the fourth phase locates Nisha between her post college and pre marriage phase and finally the last phase is an intense portrayal of her business venture and finally her marriage.

Tabish Khair in his review of this book in Guardian remarks:

Home belongs to what now must be counted as the sub genre of Indian writing in English: domestic fiction, stories of weddings and deaths, arranged marriages and love affairs, cooking and bickering in a joint or an extended family in South Asia or, with signal differences among South Asian Immigrants in the west....Home however carries the reader along with its tender humor, its sparing but its effective use of middle- class English and the subtle retelling of the cliches of North Indian family life. (May 6, 2006)

Home is the story about the Banwari Lal family, a class of people rooted in the market place for generations. Business runs in their veins and even their marriages are a means of securing the values honed for generations. A perceptive chronicle of that microcosm of the nation state, the joint family, this novel explores the complex terrain of a middle class family based in Delhi in the early nineties. “The education they received, the values they imbibed, the alliances they made had everything to do with protecting the steady stream of gold and silver that burnished their lives.”(1)
Such is the principle around which Home is built. For those who rebelled, justice was swift and accurate. “Knives that wounded, and once the damage had been done, gestures that reconciled.”(1)

The Banwari Lals having survived the Partition had come to Delhi from Lahore. Determined to succeed in his cloth business, Lala Banwari Lal was helped by his two sons (for women do not “do service”) and ensured that the Banwari Lal cloth shop became one of the landmarks of Karol Bagh. At eighteen he married his daughter to a boy in Bareilly. Never mind that the husband turned out to be a drunk. that was her” bad karma”. Banwari Lal’s first son fell in love with a pretty customer from Meerut and had a love marriage. A few protestations later, Yashpal was married to his love interest Sona.

The second son, Pyare Lal had a traditional arranged marriage with Sushila who came with a complete “fully stocked kitchen, fridge, cooler, double bed, dining table, chairs and an upholstered sofa set in red velvet.”(13)

Women are transactions. The dowries they bring, the number of children they produce become a part of the profit and loss accounts. With one grandson’s dowry, the family buys a flat above the shop; with another they expand into bridal wear.

Life narrows constantly for the women. The sister that is Banwari Lal’s daughter, aged thirty two has an accident in the kitchen and dies of burns in the hospital. Pitiful yet true, the Banwari Lal household despite their affluence did not deem it necessary to help the daughter who was so badly off.

The daughter-in-law Sona wonders about her mother-in-law “If she cared for her daughter, would she have allowed her to be murdered? Could she believe the lie that her clothes caught fire while cooking? They knew how badly off she was, still they neglected her. If she had a daughter in a bad marriage, she would insist that she come home, she had so much love to give.”(19).
Her child begs his grandfather to take him home. The family suspects that the brother-in-law will "use" the boy to enter the business but respecting the patriarch's wishes they grudgingly let the child stay. Growing up neglected and unhappy, the boy begins to molest his cousin Nisha. Always subject to a discriminating treatment, Viki hopelessly tries to assert his position but realizes that "the blood lines from the female side can only whisper." (111)

Dowry-death, molestation, abandonment, there is some thing scary about the matter-of-factness with which such matters are presented. Kapur writes with affecting insight and sharp irony. She has a delectable gift for the special Indian phrase. Girls must be "married off" when they are of "marriageable age", "the rich in laws are not at all proudly" and "higher studies" are only for a "time pass".

Crisp one liners are used to sum up the world. By the time the teachers had "done with them", even the novels were incomprehensible. Even outside books life is lives by a certain code of signifiers. "I have work near your college, would you like coffee?" becomes her beau's indirect way of taking their relationship forward.

The patriarch dies, the grand children get married and the home is always full yet each character is a study in isolation. Viki- the dead sister's son, the gentle elder brother grieving over the fate of his daughter, but most of all the daughter Nisha, unhappy in love and thwarted in ambition.

Within the home, amidst the chorus of family voices, intrigues and conflicts, life is claustrophobic. To the world, the family speaks as one voice. Within the home each individual voice may chatter, argue, murmur, complain or question but they all must eventually fall silent in deference to the wishes of the family as a whole. The same makes the family as an oppressive structure of social control, a structure that Plato called for an abolition of.

Amidst all this, Nisha oscillates constantly between the extremes of fierce self-assertion to total submission, between a desire for work and for marriage and
between an experience of difference and solidarity with the family. Finally Nisha reduced to a mere construct of the forces surrounding her, partakes off the collective happiness of her family by getting married to a man she does not love and still feeling contended and satisfied. The last line is strongly evocative of her feeling of her jubilation as she sits for the naming ceremony. “Surrounding her were friends, relatives, husband, family, babies. All mine, she thought, all mine.”(337) The ironic overtones to the feeling of assurance and self-satisfaction she voices are clear.

Returning to the identity of Indian women and her consequent search for ‘home’, it is pertinent to turn to the concept of women within the Indian context. The very word ‘woman,’ symbolizes eternal mystery and enchantment, as if it is not enough that she is flesh and blood but that she must be something higher than what she is. And so she is never asked to participate in the male-dominated work space. Woman perhaps was created only to make the world more beautiful and man more ardent in his appreciation of beauty. The description of man’s creation of woman culminates in the statement “Your femininity is half your womanhood; half is the imagination of men.”

The representation of woman’s identity has been misconstrued by the imposed ideal of womanhood. Her real self always remains hidden behind a mist of illusions, fenced on all sides and forced away from the real world into the seclusion of a helpless and dispossessed life. According to A. R. Gupta in Women in Hindu Society:

In the ancient Hindu Scriptures, we find a great emphasis on the development of a faithful and uncomplaining attitude in a wife. The idealization of the austerities and negations for the welfare of the husband is well evident from different characters of the Hindu mythology, namely Sita, Savitri, Ahilya, Damyanti etc.(217)
Unfortunately it is precisely this ‘home’ that she builds that does not belong to her. However no sleep lasts forever. Her sense of unworthiness causes Nisha to wake up to long neglected pain and asked herself as to why was she never called out in the world of work and why should she be content with the insignificant role within the four walls of my home. Pained by the plight of Indian women, Mahadevi Varma remarks in *Women in Patriarchy*, “She is forced to live only as an exhibition of man’s wealth and as a means of his recreation. No value is attached to her life as an individual and as a citizen.”(227)

Not very different from the ponderings the eternal woman Nisha in the novel too wonders, as to why she should not discover her real self, why should she be always dependent on others. Her rising consciousness however shows her the enormous chasm between masculine and feminine values and that all social norms and interactions between man and woman perpetuate this ruler and the roots of this prejudice spread far back into history.

Young people, in fact women may be impatient with such notions and values and aspects of our tradition which reinforce gender stereotypes. But despite their best attempts, these women like Nisha cannot do much to uproot this colossal prejudice deepening in their heart. One cannot help mentioning here that one of the major reasons for the failure of women to extricate themselves from the clutches of these social evils is the woman’s lack of loyalty to their own sex. After years of women’s movements and seeming feminist uprisings, the truth is that each woman is adrift in her own delicate little boat but there is no hardy vessel to carry them together on board.

An evidence of the same is seen in this family saga at many stages – Nisha is a victim of various social pressures but more than anything else, it is the women surrounding her who fails to tear away the veil of false norms.

The problem of Nisha as also of the other Indian women can be better investigated by looking into the perplexing dilemmas surrounding Hindu women.
Looking into the codes of Brahminical orthodoxy, one discovers that women have been defined only within the confines of their domestic existence, particularly in terms of their conjugal and maternal responsibilities. Worse still, they are not even worthy it seems to aspire to the religious and secular practice of renunciation. The practice considered essential to the practice of Moksha or freedom from the everlasting cycles of birth, has been ordained traditionally only for Hindu men of the twice born castes in the fourth stage of their life but denied to women, irrespective of their caste or stage of life.

Not to say that Manju Kapur is seeking to institute a new ideal of female renunciation to correct the centuries old imbalance that has existed in Hindu religious practice. Instead the author, paradoxical though it may seem, by offering us a tale about the family, home and marriage is trying to identify the need woman have for other homes or worlds, alternative planes of existence to the ones solely rooted in domesticity.

Katherine Young in an article titled, “Why are Hindu Women Traditionally Oriented for Rebirth Rather then Liberation?” has discussed the reasons traditionally for the denial of salvation to female sex. Unlike a Hindu man who can expect to experience life both inside and outside home, a Hindu woman is socialized entirely around what Young points out as “maidenhood”, “marriage” and “should the husband die first ....widowhood”. A biased gender dynamic underlies Brahmin cal Hinduism where the male sex is privileged over the female in almost every sphere. The association of the male sex with spirit and meditative principle(Sankhya Yoga according to which male principle is Purusha and female principle is Prakriti) and of the female sex with matter and energy reveals the dichotomy that has successfully shaped and differentiated the sex roles and life cycles of men and women in Hindu society. It is clear that it is women’s secondary status in the gendered hierarchy that dictates women can achieve Moksha only through domestic sphere and only by serving the needs of the husband and the family.
Within such a society, woman’s highest virtue lies in her invincible attachment and service to husband and in her moral obligation to fulfill the demands of marital bond. Marriage itself remains a predominant goal for most young women and there are even specially sanctioned rituals through which maidens can hope to gain a husband and by extension, a respected and an accepted place in the society.

The irredeemable lot of women becomes further pitiable when one realizes that despite the fact the woman is projected as the goddess figure in the home, in practice the home never belongs to this woman and in practice husband is the central signifier through whom her own physical/emotional/spiritual fulfillment is deemed possible.

Set in Delhi of the 1990s, Manju Kapur’s third novel *Home* exposes many such problems that plague a woman’s life. Though the novel has a narrative style that is deceptively regressive and simple, yet upon a closer reading, one sees many articulations of protest in the narrative. These can be understood better by looking at the certain aspects of the narrative.

Teresa De Lauretis has very aptly remarked that narrative is universal and there is no escaping it and therefore groups (say, of women) oppressed by certain uses of the narrative should look within the narrative to turn its figures and operations against narrative determination. She notes in *The Narrative Reader*:

> The most exciting work in cinema and feminism today is not anti-narrative ....quite the opposite. It is narrative....with a vengeance, for it seeks to stress the duplicity of that scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it, the contradiction by which historical women must work within and against [narrative].(3)

Manju Kapur’s novel too seems to echo the above statement, in that contains or at least attempts to entail many silences, ruptures or multi-narratives. A look at basic aspects of the narrative fiction will facilitate better understanding.
of the multiple narratives immanent in the text as also of the historical and cultural specificity of the Indian women.

But before undertaking any analysis, it must be brought to mind that the task of the reading the narrative of the texts herein is closely linked to the idea of these writers belonging to a particular nation. It must be mentioned here that the term ‘nation’ is not being used restrictively; rather the concept will be used with attention to transitions, ambivalences and obscurities such that significant recesses of national culture with alternative constituencies of people may emerge. The above statement has two implications. One, developing; knowledge of acting in a dispersed global system may lead to departure from ethical home truths that the project seeks to unravel.

Two, the risk of departure may well be balanced by the advantages of an accumulative understanding of the processes underlying the narratives. The idea is not very different from what Homi K. Bhabha says in the introduction to The Location of Culture:

It is the trope of our time to locate the question of our culture in the realm of the beyond. At the century’s edge we are less exercised by annihilation – the death of the author – or epiphany – the birth of the subject. Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and the controversial shiftiness of the prefix ‘post’: postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism………(1)

Returning to the representation of self and identity in Manju Kapur’s Home, the ‘self’ that she envisions through her narrative, is a construction and does not represent the identity that she is expected to project to the outside world. That is because the social identity of women, unlike their self representation is influenced by the other/dominant masculine structures. The process of unmasking
their selves for such women writers therefore signifies a journey from silence to speech to retrieve that which has been repressed or exiled. This reclamation of the lost consciousness enables the creation of a world of possibilities out of the experience of the displacement of the real self.

The story of Home unravels the nexus between social identity and self representation by splitting or doubling the ‘I’ into myself and her and this split then becomes the emblem of feminist striving to overcome the patriarchal forces both within and without them so that the masks can be effaced off the faces.

According to Sally Robinson in Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self Representation in Contemporary Women’s Fiction “Women’s self representation [in home as well, by the same token] , ....proceeds by a double movement: simultaneously against normative construction of women that are continually produced by hegemonic discourses and social practices and towards new forms of representation that disrupt those normative constructions .” (5) In addition and more importantly, the narrative, by describing the exiled existence of women, shows how the nature of their exiled existences reflects the relationship between their social identities and self representations.

Home traces the shadowed existence of women, virtually living in corners. Amidst these women is Nisha, who refuses to lead a cloistered existence even at the cost of being severely criticized by her family. At times, it seems that Nisha’s self representation is an imaginary existence and therefore may not represent her identity as it really might be within an Indian patriarchal home. However in feminist terms, the family’s anger towards Nisha shows that women living within patriarchal culture are to remain subjected to the discursive and social practices that requires their obedience and silence.

As Robinson says:

To speak as a woman against these contradictions, means to disrupt the prohibitions against women’s speech and thus, to challenge male
privilege and masculine hegemony over the place of enunciation. It is in the process of speaking that [a woman] becomes an [individual] and occupies different positions marked by gender....class and other cultural differences. (12)

Also in being the only rebellious woman in the family, Nisha places herself on the margins as an outsider to the patriarchal structure, that proximates an exiled existence. As Nisha identifies with her self representation, the position of marginality in her case is turned into a position of empowerment that ruptures the normative representation of heterogeneous individuals as homogenous women.

Nisha’s empowering marginality is juxtaposed to the marginality of the other women in the family. Kapur begins the story with an elaborate description of the handicapped contours of Rupa’s and Sona’s life owing to their inability to procreate. “Mrs. Sona Lal and Mrs. Rupa Gupta, sisters both, were childless. (2)............Rupa was supremely lucky, she only had her husband and father-in-law to deal with. She was not subjected to sneers and taunts; she was not the only barren woman amongst myriad sisters-in-law whose wombs were bursting with perpetual pride.”(3)

The women of this home are tied to the ideologies of gender, yet the callousness with which they are appended to the corner of the home, puts the women simultaneously on the margins of the patriarchal culture. This patriarchal marginality fractures these women’s subjectivity, unlike the self chosen exiled marginality of Nisha that the latter articulates through protest. The narrative as already discussed comprises of five episodes. In the first phase, the first group of women i.e. Sona, Rupa and Sushila and their struggle for authority which is dependent further on their ability to produce children, wear it as a mask of power that in reality, turns out to be a façade because it belongs not only to the woman but to the man she is married to.
This dichotomy is further symbolized by their physical fetters in the form of the train of goods that each owns, all of which become subtexts that convey servitude, submission and suffering though apparently connoting opulence, power and status. The internalized condition of feeling powerful even within an obscured existence is underscored through the unhappiness and discontentment of Nisha. So much so Nisha’s attempts at leading unmasked existence torment her to the point of severe physical troubles, perhaps because of a lack of fulfillment.

Nisha’s physical suffering out of a sense of psychological barrenness acts as a foil to the psychological death of other women in the narrative. Ironically Nisha’s experience as an independent woman weakens her and eventually destroys her. Her, plight perhaps is an indicator that female experience of uninterrupted freedom ceases to be constructive when it is isolated from social systems and discourse. “Now a prisoner in her home, she played the part of the king in chess. She needed to be protected, as without her there could be no game. The moves concerning her were carefully planned, but she herself was powerless, quiescent, mute, and waiting.” (218)

Her freedom comes at the price of perennial loneliness and the stifling of her desires and more importantly, it fails to dismantle the patriarchal order and envision the possibility of change in socially gendered relations. Her freedom ironically becomes a mask of desolation and deprivation. She crumbles as her desire for social inclusion wins over her identity as a single independent woman. The following lines capture the mood of Nisha’s father regarding her marriage “Still it was his duty to see that she married. Her fulfillment lay there, no matter how successful her business was.” (296)

The third and fourth episodes of the narrative describe the proceedings of Nisha’s business and marriage. The final stage where she knowingly yet not completely unwittingly exiled her self and hence sacrificed her freedom and creativity to find social acceptance. But the knowledge of this willing exile becomes the cause of profound pain.
The description of the mother-in-law upon the death of the patriarch Banwari Lal has inserted in it the images of the marginality of woman. “They smashed the glass bangles on her wrists; her scrawny, loose-fleshed arms were now bare of color except for two thin gold bangles. They pulled off her toe rings, they unclasped her mangal sutra, they removed all the colored saris from her wardrobe and left the white. She insisted this be done. The whole worlds should recognize her for what she was, a poor old widow, as insignificant and colorless as the clothes she wore.”(120)

The description has inherent in it the images of hegemonic attitudes to women. It ingeniously effects a series of exclusions and absorption of the manifold voices and persona of the female other to produce the single self of the authoritative male inscription.

The narrative gradually homogenizes the representation of women through their exclusive love home. The following lines are evocative of the predicament of women “This is the life of a woman: to look after her home’ her husband, her children, and to give them food she has cooked with her own hands.”(127)

An elaborate description of home chores throughout the narrative with recurring images of women cooking, serving and giving birth can be seen as illustrative of the processes of cultural and social dictates and significations inflicted on women as requirements by the patriarchal ideology.

An important part of the narrative is about the illness of Nisha, which on the physical level, as the narration of her life script reveals, is the manifestation of her pent up psychological pains and anxieties that she has been carrying within herself in her desire for freedom. Nisha’s scarred, shriveled and shrunken body becomes the text on which is inscribed a life that destroys without creating or rejuvenating her in any way. “Nisha’s nights were now ones of restlessness. As she tossed and turned on her bed, her hands absently crept around the itchy patches on her skin. First behind her knee to explore that damp, prickly area: next
to her ankle bone to soothe the greater uneasiness that lurked beneath the surface. She pulled her foot up and rubbed lightly. Rub, rub, but the skin refused to be satisfied.”(217) The description of her seething skin troubles, even as it reveals her suffering, also acts as a revolutionary language, as transgressive language that threatens to unhinge patriarchal hegemony.

In the entire narrative, there are many phases when, Nisha steps out of her masked identity. This enables her to see herself not as a woman with power but as some one who has coerced herself into complying with the self-negating demands of the patriarchal structure to find acceptance to a point that her strength has been sapped out of her. Her only consolation, at the end of the narrative is to find a way to convince her self for she refuses to recognize that it is these dark and suppressed emotions that are the reserve of her creativity, wisdom and strength that can enable her to transcend and may be transform existing gendered structures.

It is only by fully identifying herself with this ‘other’ that she can overcome her internalized oppression and acquire a new self/ worldview. To put it in the words of Judith Butler in Gender Trouble:

This task, is confounded to say the least, when the demand that women reflect the autonomous power of masculine subject/ signifier becomes essential to the construction of that autonomy and, thus, becomes the basis of a radical dependency.(61)

The process of unmasking her self, even as it liberates, also fosters a conflict, between a known social identity, and an unknown individual identity. The unmasked existence for women like Nisha as always happens in Indian society is fraught with tensions , as it has the potential to lock away the subject in isolation and despair but in this alienation also lies the potential for critical innovation and female strengths.
The small corners of the home that the women hold on to as a supposed source of empowerment is portrayed as a hindrance that women need to overcome in order to efface their socially gendered identity and locate their unique individual identities. The desire to unveil the ‘face’, thus entails a search for the authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is...superfluous, fake and corrupted seeming thus “the subject and the present it belongs to have no objective status, they have to be perpetually(re) constructed.”(Dollar, diss,U)

Amidst the narratives of exiled and displaced selves of the married women, Nisha’s story exposes the struggle of a young unmarried woman’s need to be herself in the midst of her parent’s counteractive efforts. The frustration ensuing from this struggle takes the form of her business venture where she aims to project herself as she is by rupturing the culture’s master narratives. She at least temporarily subverts the parental control by opting for a lonely existence that emblematically is a self chosen exile.

“Nisha didn’t care what people said or thought. She watched Goodlass Nerolac take tempo loads of their paint drums away, as her uncle supervised. He was doing this for her, and in a rush of gratitude she vowed never again to be a burden on her family.”(290)

However what is interesting is that in the entire narrative, most of Nisha’s suffering stems from the social structures of oppression in the midst of which her father plays a role that is supportive and encouraging. He makes sure at almost every stage of his daughter’s life that she is happy. “Yashpal wondered at the bends in the trajectory of his daughter’s life. She sat in front of him, hands clasped, eyes alive and begging. It was possible, of course it was possible, they commissioned suits from just the kind of set up Nisha was describing.”(286)

Even when a suitable bridegroom is being hunted for Nisha, her father makes no haste in marrying the daughter off. “Yashpal paid attention. His
daughter was too precious for him to throw away on someone she was uneasy about.” (223).

Does it imply that Nisha’s suffering has nothing to do with patriarchal order? Is Kapur’s portrayal of her father as a rather likeable figure enough to suggest that? That Kapur does not present the male figure in a very detestable light far from showing her ignorance of patriarchal oppression reveals her cognizance of various other oppressions. In fact one, may her take recourse to Mary Douglas’s following remarks about women writers in Purity and Danger. Scorning structuralist attempts at over-simplified dividing or demarcating she says:

Ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (4)

Despite her father’s attempts at resurrecting her life, the paternal home in this context is the site for sexism and other damaging social practices which nobody can alter or change. Exile therefore, becomes a metaphor in the women’s considerations of their true identity through which she intends to interrogate and dislodge the patriarchal codes of womanly existence. A self chosen exile, thus, signifies the desire to feel at home and Nisha’s story explores the meanings of security and contentment that such an exile may provide.

In his role as a guardian, her father projects to the world, her image as an ideal daughter and an ideal wife to be – a mask that Nisha ultimately wears to fit into the patriarchal mould. The male subject defines the female object and puts her into circulation according to his desire to maintain control- or mastery- over the discursive space.
But the mask that she consciously wears, buries beneath itself physical and emotional desires that she has been taught are shockingly inappropriate to declare to the world. Such is her gradual yearning for acceptance that she subtly begins to deprive herself of her own, real self.

The representation of Nisha as a result of her dealings with the people surrounding her nuances a form of imperial move that Nisha threatens by living on her own terms. As a result she is constantly seen sifting between exiled spaces and enclosed spaces. These oscillating patterns of existence makes the parameters of home and exile very fluid and the repressed self finds a home eventually in a temporarily created solitary existence.

However these self chosen exiles do not last long and her attempts at remonstration are only half hearted. Such is the dominating and subaltern zing effect of patriarchy and the oppressive social customs that she ultimately succumbs to them for she realizes that she can do nothing to rectify them.

“Alternatively, suppose she were to tell her parents she didn’t want to get married? There were such people in the world. But where? Nobody in her social circle, simply nobody, had not married. They were without children perhaps, but not married? Her memory could only dredge up a few teachers in her college, objects of pity, sympathy and secret speculation.”(218) The socially upright self that Nisha is expected to live up to and her true self remain forever in conflict and her struggle to dispel the former remains unsuccessful even till the end of the story.

The last phase of the narrative revolves around her much awaited anticipation for a change in the pattern of existence as a result of her marriage. Although the story ends seemingly on a note of happiness as for the attainment of “a new home” is concerned, yet there are questions that remain. “In the next few days Nisha figured out what compromising half the female population in the house entailed. Her mother-in-law claimed her attention morning, noon and night,
in the kitchen, in the bedroom, in drawing rooms, theirs and others, as visitor and visitee. She received and gave attention, care, concern, and food, with little time left over for anything else." (323)

The narrative presents mixed visions of bondage and freedom. Yet despite their contrary, and sometimes paradoxical and ambiguous, significations, the narrative in totality is crucially connected to the processes of desire and fulfillment. At times this desire manifests itself in the form of leading an exile within home and at times being at home with the much exiled self. In a review posted on Feedsfarm . com, the blogcritics state, “Home, quite fascinatingly, if not very eloquently, shows the choking closeness and the destructive limitations of Indian family values. It is a closet dark world where any hint of individual expression is swiftly trampled to death to be quickly substituted with deadened conformity.” (23 Aug 2006)

Clearly then in this narrative, the oppression of women derives more from the social orders of existence than just the power of men. In this vicious scheme of things, woman is seen as deemed to be doomed. Destiny, fate and other karmic influences transcending time and space are seen as important determinants of woman’s fate. Abundant evidence of such a helpless and irredeemable picture of women are to be seen in the narrative. “Nisha was a mangli. A mangli, destined to marry unfortunately, destined for miser unless a similar mangli could be found, with a similar fate and horoscope.” (140)

So much so when the daughter of Banwari Lal household dies, even that is ascribed to her bad stars. Later too Nisha’s troubles in the “marriage market” are attributed to her unfavorable stars. “But at the end of it all, Sona silently consoled herself by thinking that her daughter’s resemblance to Suriya might counterbalance her bad stars in the marriage market.” (151)

The struggle of Indian women thus is not just against men but they are further debilitated by being seen as the victims/ instruments/ signifieds of a
process that is divinely ordained and therefore beyond change. This is what makes their lot even more pitiable than their western counterparts. The narrative is replete with allusions to such rituals and streams of thought that are enough to dwindle the existence of women to very insignificant proportions.

Amidst an existence that discourages all forms of creative and intellectual pursuits, ("Let her do English Honors, not too much work, reading story books.........it would do nicely for a girl waiting to get married.", 141) There is only one thing that renders meaning to their life: marrying and creating families. Unfortunately women who are seen as a part of the circulation system where their only ‘productive’ function is to create families, incidentally never seem to have homes of their own.

The narrative begins and ends with images of women giving birth. In a case where they fail to, it invites disgrace. Sona’s mood of self-congratulation upon her giving birth to Raju is an evidence of the same. “The mother of a son, she could join Sushila as a woman who had done her duty to the family, in the way the family understood it. Gone was the disgrace, the resentment, gone with the appearance of little Raju, as dark and plain featured as his father, but a boy, a boy.” (49)

In fact so extensive is the use of such images, that it calls to mind the following lines by Adrienne Rich in Of Woman Born:

Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life, we require not only control of our bodies...we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporeal ground of our intelligence. (21)
Sadly that does not seem to be the case with Indian women who are made to believe all their lives that all begins and ends with marriage and child birth. However Kapur seems to be haunted by the idea of the “corporeal ground of our intelligence” and in the process initiates narrative images that are cruel and prescriptive.

“As she itched she wondered how the scratching could peel her skin off in layers while the hair remained intact. At least one unsightliness could cancel out the other. Her body began to haunt her dreams.(230)……Nisha was alone in a scratchy, burning, oozing, bleeding world.”(233)

With such descriptions she places body at the center of a search for a female identity and merges the theme of otherness and body. After all the most visible difference between men and women is the difference is the difference in their bodies.

However the study of biological imagery is useful and important as long as we understand that there are factors other than that involved construction of woman’s identity. Ideas about the body are fundamental to understanding how women conceptualize their situation in the society; but there can be no expression of the body which is unmediated by linguistic, social and literary structures. Judith Butler says in Gender Trouble:

But the body is itself a construction, as are the myriad bodies that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender.(12)

Another facet of this narrative also seems to deal with the psychoanalytic concept of ‘differentiation’, the process by which the child comes to perceive the self as separate and to develop ego and body boundaries. This takes place in relation to the mother. Particularly for the girl child, this process is built on a feeling of sameness, continuity and identification with the mother. The western theorists have cited female friendship in contemporary
women novels and mother daughter relationship. This kind of a keen interest in
the psycho dynamics of female bonding in fact has been a perennial feature
also of Kapur’s writing.

In her previous two works Difficult Daughters and A Married Woman,
similar kinds of processes were fore grounded. But while there has been this
kind of constancy, it has also manifested itself with apparent dissonance and
discord between the mother and daughter.“Nisha stared at her mother in hatred.
What a low mind she had. She wanted to get rid of her, get rid of them all.
‘What do you know about what I prefer?’ she demanded” (299)Similarly
ambivalent feelings are reciprocated by Nisha’s mother too, “Sona objected:
working was all right as a time pass but if she started making such conditions
who would take her?”(297)

The text also brings out class as an interesting determinant of gender. One
of the major reasons of women’s oppression at least in India derives from the way
they are implicated within systems of exchange. Theorists like Spivak also have
emphasized the materialist grounding of all personal, emotional and aesthetic
experience. Santosh Gupta has commented about the same in his essay Gayatri
Chakroverty Spivak: “Problematising/Speaking the Margin” in Contesting
Postcolonialisms. He remarks, “Gender politics is as much under the networking
of market, for, Spivak, finds the labor market determines gender value.”(75)

Home is the unit of analysis in this case and class position of that unit is
determined by the occupation of the head, which in this case is the patriarch and
his sons. In a home some people have a class position determined by their own
occupation while others have it determined by the occupation of some one they
live with.

Most Indian women fall in this lot. Even in a case where they might be
contributing, it is seen as unnecessary waste of time. Sona’s opposition of her
daughter business reflects just that “Sona was not pleased at this new development
in Nisha’s life. ‘She is going to get married, why waste time and money in all this?’ a business was not like teaching, resign able when the bridegroom reached the door.”(290)

The same calls to mind Ashish Nandy’s remarks about unquestioned dominance of men which was in a large measure an offshoot of colonialism. He remarks in The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism:

Colonialism, too, was congruent with the existing Western Sexual stereotypes and the philosophy of life which they represented. It produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity.(4)

Strangely most of the women in Home do not regret such class/ colonial oppression and therefore constantly engage in a power struggle with the other women. The wide gulf that separates the two sisters, Sona and Rupa in the narrative can be explained in the same way. Women’s role in the family as also her social and economic life- chances are a derivative of the socio- economic position of the husband. Sona’s big airs, her condescending attitude towards her sister and her sister’s occasional discomfort with her better destined sibling are for the same reason. The same can be gauged from these lines. “Envy drove her thoughts again towards a future where they too could pay off the tenant, give their plot to a builder, and live in splendor. Why did her sister always have all the luck?”(186)

Apart from that Sona looks down upon her own sister since she has a dark skin and is therefore not pretty. Woman’s destiny and merit, it seems is directly proportionate to her skin color. Their complexion, it seems has a destiny of its own. It can make or mar their lives. The narrative abounds with allusions to the less or more fairness of various women and their perceived images. A truly Indian fixation (on fair skin), Kapur depicts its many repercussions with absolute fidelity.
to fact. Sona wonders to herself “Given Rupa’s dark skin, she was considered to have married as advantageously as her circumstances allowed.”(16)

Later when her own daughter develops some skin problem, Sona bitterly remarks “Your skin will become so black as a buffalo’s, then nobody will ever marry you.”(229) No wonder then, the narrative offers us a detailed insight into the peculiarities of Indian women’s suffering. The emergent picture then, is of a class of women, whose life prospects are determined by myriad factors ranging from strict patriarchal codes to the degree of fairness.

The depiction of their identity would have been incomplete without mentioning the big monster that threatens every Indian woman’s life. Many references are made to the dowry system prevalent in India. The concluding remark at the end of the naming ceremony of Nisha is significant in this respect, “With this gold, Nisha’s dowry was begun.”(41)

As a result, home for women acquires a meaning and function as site of personal and political struggles, a meaning that works against the notions of an unproblematic geographical location of home in Kapur’s narrative. Illusions of home, for these women, are always undercut at every stage of the narrative by the discovery of hidden struggles.

A lot of narrative space is consumed in this book by vivid description of the architectural lay outs of the shop, home, its various rooms etc. many chapters are devoted to the delineation of the same. Architectural layouts of the rooms, it seems should provide concrete, physical anchoring points in relation to which these women see and identify their self. However the very stability, familiarity, and security of these physical structures is, ultimately undermined by the discovery that these homes and buildings, conceal rather than reveal obscured gender struggles. As a result these homes destabilize any notion of coherence or identity related to it.
Returning to the basic narrative issues in *Home*, can one identify a consistent position from where the narrator speaks? Is she with Sona, confident that everything can be explained, or with Nisha, whose outbursts echo Hamlet’s “words, words, words” with a similarly nihilistic effect. In fact one sense a shift of interest over the course of fiction. Aamer Hussain remarks in his review of *Home* in *The Independent: On Sunday*:

> There are times when the reader is aware of the authorial disdain for the character’s lack of intellectual and aesthetic fiber. There are also, When Nisha becomes pregnant, moments of haunting tenderness. Even in the contested tranquility of home, you can’t take a thing for granted. (May 19, 2006)

In order to keep focus on the textual situation, I focus on the ‘narrator’ than Kapur. The narrator has an extensive tonal range. He/she speaks matter-of-factly, sings, orates, casts doubt and speaks ironically. The narrator takes a stance of omniscience one moment and is quite in the dark the other. In his speculative role, he shares some of the characteristics of all the characters.

In recent narrative theory, the term focalization is used instead of the more familiar ‘point of view’ to clarify the distinction between seeing and telling in the act of narration. For critics like Gerard Genette, the angle of vision from which the story is narrated does not necessarily belong to the narrator. For instance the Karva Chauth Katha and Vat Savitri Katha do not necessarily present the vision of the narrator.

Tracing this relationship is a useful way of raising interpretive questions. One can identify with greater precision the values, beliefs and the cultural assumptions that inform the text. Apart from employing such narrative devices, Manju Kapur also attempts to depict a complete female identity as he expresses her heroine’s consciousness through an extraordinary range of narrative devices. Psychological development and the dramas of inner life are represented in dreams,
visions and even religious rituals. "That night she dreamt of Suresh. Suresh of the red mouth, unshaven look, gold chain, and hirsute chest, lean, slender, with liquid, loving eyes. He was lying on a sea of lotuses."(328)

Unlike the psychological, the sexual experience of the body are expressed rather directly as in the Indian context, the latter always has precedence over the former. Kapur depicts well the Indian attempts at controlling the sexuality and even the fantasies of women by other women. Sona’s outburst at the discovery of Nisha’a affair is indicative of the same and so is the reaction of the family “The easiness between her and her family evaporated. She moved like a guilty thing among them, worse than the dirt under their feet. She was not allowed upstairs.”(199) Thus the feminine heroine grows up without any female solidarity, where women in fact police each other on behalf of patriarchal tyranny.

Words matter. One can simply list the key words of the text and recover it in epitome: childless, marriage, barren, family, fate, patriarch, mother- in-law, cooking, festivities, fair skin, beauty, womb, fecundity, dark skin, fasting, karma, woman, growing, weddings, brides, dowry, groom, wife, mother, hating, loving, infants, and god. The words resonate singly and in clusters; one can trace structural patterns in the repetition of certain words. One can set up cluster of words in thematic opposition: rich, poor; fair, dark; barren’ fertile etc. However the Derridean reversal / deconstructive reading claims to undo the hierarchy set up in such pairs by showing the first privileged term to be dependent on the second which it can never completely exclude.

Even Spivak, insists in her essays on deconstruction of the main terms. As a deconstructivist she recommends the reversal and displacement of such hierarchies for what is at the center often hides a repression. But against all these, one must set the one word that resonates or toils most emphatically through the text and is repeated more than any other, marriage, the subject of every single chapter.
Amidst this colossal chaos of word hinging primarily on a women’s search for homely bliss, it is incidentally never achieved. Even at the end, the picture of Nisha with her twins in her lap has in it the Freudian wealth of rationalization. Life for Indian woman revolves around such negations of “self”.

The singular achievement of this book however lies in its detailed depiction of what happens to an Indian woman when she cuts herself off from the society or in fact is cut off by it? When Nisha meets Suresh, she is unaware of the extent to which a woman is created by the society and of how much she needs it. Subsequently she finds herself incarcerated in the home, lacking society and lacking family, she eventually gets choked by the conflict of wills that arises with appalling inevitability. Freedom ironically begets bondage. Her health as also her dealings with other members begin to deteriorate Frantz Fanon expresses this absence and loss in Black Skin, White Masks in these words. He says:

> When it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire... As soon as I desire, I ask to be considered. I am not merely here and now, sealed into thingness. I am for someone else and for something else... I occupied space. I moved towards the other... and the evanescent other, hostile, but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea. (112)

However it seems that the method of the narrative is not essentially congruent with the story. Where the subject is about the many compromises the woman has to make leading a life of fits and starts and punctuated intermittently with silence, the narrative voice on the other hand is un frighteningly steady and sure. It fails to capture the despair and disappointments of these women in search. But on a closer reading it seems that even this novelistic device has been used deliberately to convey an Indian woman’s ability at self evasion. Such complete is her surrender that is difficult to discern any traces of disagreement. The language of her communication and her inner world are two things apart.
Strange though it may sound it is but true that the noises and intrigues on the surface are belied by a quintessential silence. According to a motto of Longfellow there are three silences: the first of speech, the second of desire and the third of thought Nisha, Sona and the other women are ensnared in the second one.

However for those who might think that Manju Kapur’s novel is not characteristically feminine in the sense that women never openly protest and men never mistreat them, it may be understood that the author represents the characters as so completely indoctrinated in patriarchal ideas that women speak and think the way men want them too. On a closer reading however the very characters, the situations and the narrative structure that she employs based on recognizable feminine archetypes can seem to subvert the surface acceptance.

Nisha’s marriage is a typical example of the woman’s archetypal enclosure in the patriarchy. Matrimony is at once the inevitable destiny of the average Indian woman and the weapon with which she is bludgeoned into accepting male hegemony, the retardation of her emotional and intellectual identity and the stifling of her attempts at selfhood.

Archetypal images of suffocation abound especially in the last two chapters, especially in the depiction on Nisha’s relationship with her husband. She can respond to him only when she is pregnant, since Arvind is different then, gentle and vulnerable.

Earlier in the novel, archetypal images of religious rituals only serve to accentuate the submission of women. Karva Chauth Katha and the Vat Savitri Katha are indications to these women that there is no easy escape from the roles ordained for them. The two stories, it is interesting simultaneously reinforce as well as effect ruptures in the patriarchal order. Seen from one angle they set the ideal for an Indian woman who should live and in the institution of marriage.
The wife in Karva Chauth Katha and Savitri thus seem to have internalized marginalization and contribute considerably to the perpetuation of gender inequality. However a closer reading, particularly of the Savitri Katha reveals at least one such choice that the woman exercises which is even denied to the characters in the novel. That is the freedom to choose her own husband which remains an unthinkable ideal for Nisha in the narrative. Also both these women in these tales, by the sheer power of their prayer and dedication manage to turn the course of destiny as well. The thought is oddly uplifting when compared with the fatalism and passivity of all the characters in the novel, for instance in the narrative, the element of tiredness and disgust, the bearing of many types of burdens while playing an ideal Hindu wife, the discard of one’s self hood and identity ultimately weaken Nisha.

Women’s multi-layered marginalization through patriarchy, class inequalities and even imperialist ideologies is amply reflected in this narrative too. Ideologies of imperialism find expression through the roles of the colonizer and the colonized.

A corrective about the same is offered by Homi K. Bhabha in The Location of Culture. He remarks:

My reading of the colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the processes of subjectification .(95)

The struggle is not limited to simple rights and duties but extends to the issues related to work, economic position, individual liberty, child birth etc. The man as a colonizer in this narrative may have desisted from using physical violence (though in Sunita’s case, it is a possibility) but use more lethal weapons of power.
By inkling at such and many more things, the author brings under the canopy of the novel a multitudinous range of issues that includes their education (references to Rupa Masi’s home as a better place for study and her college education), financial independence (the success of Nisha’s creations), desired control over her sexuality (unfortunately eludes Nisha right from her childhood with the suggestions of incest) and freedom of choice (remains an unfulfilled ideal).

More importantly it seems, in the hands of Manju Kapur that she does not coerce her male characters to be chauvinists of an extreme kind or her female characters to be too rebellious. For instance, in this home, Nisha’s father is a greater support to her than her own mother. This might have something to do with the helplessness of women to be otherwise but more importantly, is speaks On Kapur’s part, of an attempt to collaborate rather than segregate minds of men and women, which for me, then is the defining aspect of Indian women’s narrative the when compared with their western counterparts.

Ironically however it calls to mind Gayle Rubin’s following lines in The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex” where she says:

Men and women are of course different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and woman are closer to each other than either is to anything else…the idea that men and women are more different from one another than either is from anything else must come from somewhere other than nature. (179)

Despite the text’s attempt at inscribing self and identity of women, the novel apart from fleeting subversions fails to guarantee it to our women. as a result there is an intense struggle for space in the home , quite literally that prevents Home from disappearing in to a metaphor. And that is what they also get.
That is to say, only literal space, which demolishes rather than constructs their self. No wonder Nisha is keen on leaving the oppressive Karol Bagh House. The huge house with its unfriendly rooms and hostile demarcations holds absolutely no promise of life. It can enshrine no true happiness.

Her existence as a result continues to be an exile within her home even as one makes a wish that she had at least tried to regenerate her self. A redemption, or should one say solace she seeks at the end when the novel takes a full round to culminate in the picture of a woman awaiting motherhood. What guarantee of happiness it holds for Nisha or her off springs one cannot say. After all the picture of motherhood one has seen in the novel whether it is Sunita’s mother, or Nisha’s mother is of some one who can only direct her daughter only up to matrimony and not beyond.

In contrast, the version of motherhood offered in most other Indian contexts eulogizes sacrifice. In the words of A. R. Gupta:

The great Hindu epic Mahabharata states that the mother excels in her greatness ten fathers. There is no guru like the mother. Thus the mother comes to be the symbol of sacrifice....she gets a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can offer. Each infant borne and nurtured by her safely into childhood especially if the child is a son is both a certification and redemption of her selfhood and identity. (220)

Such a woman has to tread strange and tortuous paths and at times, fight the social order. She lives constantly on the fringes, neither totally at home nor completely in exile. She is Sujata, the woman at the centre of the second chapter.